

Interview with Teresa Hernandez Schwartz

Interviewer: Nora Murphy

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Teresa Hernandez Schwartz (Interviewee): Mashed potatoes and gravy. Uh, Andy always comes and has dinner with me on Sunday.

Nora Murphy (Interviewer): I hope you're not doing Thanksgiving dinner by yourself.

THS: No. [NM laughs] Andy's cooking the turkey and ham. Yeah.

NM: Oh, good.

THS: And I'm, uh, I'm just gonna help the girls.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: But Anna showed up with, um, breast cancer.

NM: Really?

THS: Mm-hmm. So, she's going on chemotherapy.

NM: Oh, my gosh.

THS: I don't think she's gonna be much good for us, but, uh, and then I'm supposed to go on the 12th and get this taken out, the cancer. They hope they can get it all out.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: If they can't – if they can get it all out the first time, I'll be there and it's just no time at all, but if they can't get it out, then I'm gonna have to stay for about four hours –

NM: Oh.

THS: Till they get everything checked and make sure, and then go back in again and see if they can get some more out, but...oh well. That happened before with this.

NM: Oh, the skin cancer, yeah.

THS: They took one out about that big.

NM: Really?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Wow.

THS: That hasn't been a year [murmurs].

NM: Where do you go for that?

THS: I went to Overland Park.

NM: Oh, you did? Oh.

THS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Uh, now, this time I'm going to Topeka.

NM: Oh.

THS: They said I could go to Overland Park or go to Topeka.

NM: Oh, okay. I'd rather go to Topeka, it's a lot closer.

NM: Right. Yeah, me too.

THS: Andy's going – Andy will always drive, but it's so much closer than – than Overland Park.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Then you gotta walk in and you gotta go clear down this hall, and he insists on taking me in a wheelchair. He will not let me walk. And so then we get the elevator and go, I don't know how many floors.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So...but, I'd rather not go, but –

NM: Well, you –

THS: I ain't got much choice.

NM: Gotta get certain things done.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Taken care of. Right?

THS: Uh-huh. Right.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But I – you know, I still – I still do laundry and cook and –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: I don't cook every day, 'cause Anita, the – she likes salads and stuff like that. She'll rather eat salad. [Telephone rings] Excuse me.

NM: Oh, sure.

[THS has telephone conversation until 3:17]

THS: I have an appointment with – excuse me.

NM: Yeah, sure.

THS: With internal medicine at 10:30 on – on Friday, and then I have one with Dr. Costello, the heart doctor, at one o'clock, so...

NM: Oh, the same day.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Which will work out really good.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Because Anita's off on Fridays. So, she'll take me.

NM: Oh, that's perfect. Yeah.

THS: When she can't, then Andy will take me, but...

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Uh, he's so busy out of town all the time. He –

NM: Is he the one that fixes the electrical transformers?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Boy, he must have had a busy year.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Storms everywhere.

THS: Yeah, he won't go anymore.

NM: Oh, he won't.

THS: Mm-mm. He told, well, he's been there since he graduated from high school.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And he's going to, uh, retire in four years.

NM: Really?

THS: So he's – he's pretty much on his own, you know. They let him go ahead and – but he told 'em, he said: "I don't wanna go anymore –"

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: To all them places where the electricity, they need to work on it. The last time he went was, uh, to South Dakota, I think. And before that, he went to New York. But he said: "No more, Mom." It's – it's, you know, the conditions are so bad. And you work clear down into the night.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: In the cold and the rain and everything.

NM: The worst weather there is – there he is.

THS: "So I told 'em, I said: 'I'm not going.'"
I said: "What are they gonna do, fire you?"
He said: "No, they said 'Alright.'"

NM: Okay.

THS: I says: "So you're getting big enough now that you can make your own schedule."
He said: "No," he said, "I just told 'em I didn't wanna go anymore, you know. I'll stay here and do the works."

NM: So he – they let him use – do the local work?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Yeah. Kansas City, and I guess right now he's working in Topeka.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But he does go to Wichita and Dodge City and all of them, but going out of this – and Kansas City, you know, Missouri and them, but not far away anymore.

NM: Yeah.

THS: But –

NM: Well, I've been thinking about La Yarda.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: And I've got a question for you.

THS: Yeah?

NM: So, I read something about La Yarda, and it said – it suggested that, um, if you were, like, a laborer on the railroad tracks, you've probably lived in a – a – what do you call 'em, a boxcar that moved back and forth with your family?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: But if you were more of a supervisor, or a foreman, then you stayed in these, uh, like, La Yarda. Is – was your dad, like, a foreman or a supervisor?

THS: No. No, he was just a railroad worker.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Um, I was born in Topeka, and in Topeka they had these little houses for the workers. Uh, they called them the Santa Fe houses. They was just little shacks made out of wood and – and dirt floor. My mother used to say that she had to get up every morning and water the – the floors so they wouldn't be so dusty.

NM: Ah.

THS: Mm-hmm. And I remember her telling me that when I was born, we didn't even have a bed.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: She put me in a cardboard box. [NM laughs] And she said one night I got to crying real bad, and she didn't know why, but when she picked me up, there was a mouse running in the box. And she said I had blood on one of my fingers.

NM: Oh. Oh, no.

THS: So, when my dad got a chance, they had just built these La Yarda.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And there – there was brick houses, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh, you know, the floors was concrete and all that.

NM: Concrete.

THS: And – and so, um, he got a chance to come down here. And so, he jumped at the chance.

NM: Oh.

THS: But, no, he just worked. And in the wintertime they drove them little [laughs] – I – I can't remember what they called 'em in English, but there was this little deals that they all sat in the thing to go fix – they didn't even have a thing over 'em or anything.

NM: The things where you pushed down and the other guy pushed down, and you went back and forth like that?

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh, I don't know what those things are called, either.

THS: They – they, uh...so he got a chance to go, come down here, and, uh, then we had a better house. I mean, we had a better place to live than live on the dirt floor in the little old shack.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Made out of wood, you know, and...but that's how they all lived. So then when my dad got a chance to come down here, then my brother came down with his family.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then my brother-in-law came down, him and my – my, um, sister.

NM: Your brother was an adult by then, and you were still a kid?

THS: My – my brother, he was already married. He had a bunch of kids.

NM: Oh. You were, when you were small –

THS: That was the oldest one.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Yeah, that was the oldest one.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Uh, so, they came down with – with his wife and his kids, I can't remember how many kids he had. He – he probably had about four. Something like that. And my sister and her husband, they never had any kids, so...

NM: Oh.

THS: So they, uh, all came down, and they all worked for the railroad. And then my brother-in-law was drafted into World War II.

NM: Mm.

THS: So, he had to go fight in Germany.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then my brother had – not the one – the oldest one. Uh...he was the fourth one. He got to go, he went into the Air Force.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And – and, uh, he was, till the – till the war ended, and then they came home.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then my brother got a job in Topeka, in the Santa Fe shops. Somebody told him about that. So, he got a job there, and, you know, he advanced himself.

NM: Mm.

THS: And, uh, they bought a little house, a one-bedroom house. They had fourteen kids.

NM: Oh, they did?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Now, which brother was this?

THS: My oldest brother.

NM: What's his name?

THS: He was the oldest. Uh, Pete.

NM: Oh, Pete. Okay.

THS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And so, um, then they went back to Topeka, and then my brother-in-law, when he came back from the service, he got a job up there, too.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: So, he went on back 'cause it was better to be working inside the shops than it was out on the cold, you know, winter. 'Cause it was – my – my dad used to say to my mother, would they all fix them a tortilla with beans on 'em, you know, and – and, um, my dad used to say it was so frozen, you couldn't even bend it. He said they made a fire to try to warm 'em up to get something to eat, 'cause they was out in the middle of nowhere, you know.

NM: And doing hard work.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Yeah.

THS: So, but – we all survived. And I was gonna tell you about that fountain. I think – we still think one of them guys threw that little snake in there [NM laughs] because there wasn't much water. It was just drain water. They had a floor underneath it, and then the pipe went clear down.

NM: Yeah.

THS: I don't know where – unless the water we drank, the one that went clear down, but we think them boys for orneriness threw. Yeah.

NM: Threw a snake down there.

THS: Well, it was just a little bitty snake about that big [NM laughs], and a little frog, you know, so...something that they could catch. They wouldn't catch a big one, you know. But anyway, there was just about that much water, 'cause there was a board underneath there in the tin.

NM: Oh.

THS: So, it kept the rainwater up in there, but...it, the pipe went down deep.

NM: Funny.

THS: Oh, they was just ornery boys, yeah. They was wanting to play football, always wanted to play against the girls [laughs]. They didn't wanna have girls on their team.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: They just beat us around [laughter]. We got to where we wouldn't want to play with them.

NM: [Laughs] Well, what would you girls play?

THS: Huh?

NM: What did you guys like to play, with the girls?

THS: Well, they either, uh – we played basketball, we played, you know, we played baseball.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: You know, and all that. Yeah, all the kind of sports, but we always – they always wanted us to play, and they always wanted us to have our own team, not – not with them in it, you know.

NM: [Laughs] They wanted to win.

THS: Yeah. So...but, we – we walked to school. Uh, we went over to Central at, uh, 9th and Kentucky.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: It was three buildings there.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And we – that's where we – we went to, we went to New York School and then we went on up there.

NM: Were there other, um, well, that was Liberty Memorial High School then, right? Were there other high school – there was no other high school in town.

THS: Yeah.

NM: So, everybody in town went to that one high school.

THS: Yeah, the one over on, uh, Massachusetts Street. But this was junior high school.

NM: Oh, that was junior high.

THS: Uh-huh. Yeah. We had a building in each corner of the – Kentucky, 9th and Kentucky.

NM: Did they call it Central Junior High then?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Yeah. And when we – when the bell rang, we had to rush if we was upstairs on the second or third floor. We had to rush all the way down and get across the street to go to another class.

NM: That sounds a little dangerous.

THS: If there was – if there was cars coming, we would be late, and then we'd get in trouble.

NM: Oh.

THS: Yeah, 'cause we was late. To gym, we had to get down that other building, we had to – this was one building, and on the other side was another building, and then on the other side was another building.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: They wasn't even close. I mean, you had to cross the street for all three.

NM: Right. That's a strange configuration.

THS: And gym was clear up on the very top of, uh, one of the buildings. Uh, that was the one on the north side. The office was downstairs, and you – when the bell rang, you had to run to get up there, 'cause if you was late, you were in trouble.

NM: Mm.

THS: You had to stay –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: After school, and do what – what they was gonna do that day in gym. Yeah.

NM: Well, thinking back on your childhood, did you have a favorite teacher or, were there different grades?

THS: We had [laughs] Mrs. Six. We – we was the only class – I don't know why they done this, but we was a class where the Mexican kids and all the colored kids was. That was history.

NM: Oh, history.

THS: We was, uh, on the very top of the building on this side. Uh, and we had a lot of colored kids in our class.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Well, they would get up and dance and sing, you know, kids. Get up and dance and sing, and she would say: "Now, listen. If you kids will behave yourself, I'll give the whole class an A!" [Laughs] Them kids would do that every time, so they could get an A. [NM laughs] She was an older teacher. Her name was Mrs. Six. She had a son named Fred Six here in town.

NM: Oh.

THS: He done a business of some kind.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: But, yeah. She was – she would tell us.

NM: Oh, isn't that funny.

THS: We – we – us girls never, you know, we had a couple of boys, but they didn't, you know. But you know how them colored kids will be dancing and singing, and they would be doing all that, and then she – she'll pound on her desk and she'll say: "Now if everybody stays still, don't make any noise, I will give you an A." [Laughter] And she would! We all got A's in her history class. I always remember her. She was – she was such a nice teacher. Like I said, she was an older teacher and –

NM: Mm-hmm. What about in elementary school? Did you have a favorite teacher in elementary school, in New York School?

THS: Uh, Mrs. Dawson. She was a sixth-grade teacher at New York School. We all went to New York School, 'cause –

NM: Sure. Yeah, you were in the neighborhood.

THS: So, but yeah. Mrs. Dawson was the one that was –

NM: She was your favorite?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: 'Cause she – she kind of looked after us, you know, you can tell.

NM: Yeah.

THS: You know. She was an older teacher, too, and she – she lived – actually, she lived there in the – in the New York School area. I think she lived on Connecticut Street somewhere.

NM: Oh, so she was in the neighborhood.

THS: Mm-hmm. She was in the neighborhood.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But, no, we went – then, of course, then they made, uh, Cent – they made... Well, after they – they, um...they did away with them three buildings on Kentucky Street. Then they moved Lawrence High up there.

NM: Oh, right.

THS: Or Lawrence High was a...yeah, Lawrence High was used to be there.

NM: Right.

THS: And then they moved it to high school. And then, uh, they put, uh, Central in.

NM: So, when you went to high school, did you go to Massachusetts Street, or did you go to – like, Lou –

THS: I went to Massachusetts Street.

NM: Oh, you did. Okay.

THS: That's where Central – that's where Lawrence High was at.

NM: Right, that's – yeah. Okay.

THS: And that's where I – that's where I went. That's where most of the kids went. And then of course, then there was – they moved it up there to – to where it's at now.

NM: And did you have a favorite teacher in high school?

THS: Uh, not – not really, you know, um, it was so big.

NM: Yeah.

THS: That you didn't have a chance to – to, uh, 'cause, that's where the high school was at, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So you didn't really, you just, well, at Central we used to change every hour, too. But up here we didn't have to, because it was all in the building.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: We didn't have to cross the street to go to Central.

NM: That was a very odd configuration, crossing the street. Preteens.

THS: There was three or four of us girls always late. We had to run up them stairs. Oh, to get there in time. And if for some reason there was too many cars coming down Kentucky Street, we was out of luck.

NM: Oh, yeah. Hmm.

THS: But, no. We, uh – we all went, and [laughs] we went to, uh, high school, there where Central is at. And we all took Spanish, because we thought it was gonna be an easy, [NM laughs] an easy class to take, you know. We was sure we'd get an A.

NM: Sure.

THS: But, when we got – when we started there, we found out that it was an entirely different Spanish. It wasn't the same Spanish that we was talking – that we was taught, you know, to speak. It was a different – it was a high-class Spanish.

NM: Like what they speak in Spain, that kind of Spanish?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Oh, that's very different.

THS: Yeah. And so, um, only one girl, and that was Lupe Chavez, she was the only one that passed that class.

NM: Oh, no.

THS: All the rest of [laughs] you know –

NM: The Mexican kids...failed Spanish?

THS: They would make us get up there on top of the – in front of the class and speak Spanish. Well, we used to speak Spanish the way we was taught as kids.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Not the – not the way they wanted it out of the book.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: So they would tell us: “Now, if you don’t speak it the way we tell you to, we’re gonna flunk you.”

NM: Oh, my goodness.

THS: Mm-hmm. But they did, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: We never got past that.

NM: Now, did you speak Spanish at home?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: And did you speak English at home as well?

THS: No.

NM: No?

THS: I didn’t speak English till I went to school.

NM: Really?

THS: Till I went to New York School.

NM: Really?

THS: None of us did.

NM: And how did – how did you do?

THS: Well, we had to –

NM: Must’ve been a struggle.

THS: Yeah, we had to learn Spanish – I mean, English.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: One thing about it, though, [rustling, NM moves recorder closer] the teachers was very, uh, they had a lot of patience with us because they knew that. And they helped us out the best they could.

NM: About how many kids in your class were, um, from La Yorda? Were there a lot?

THS: Uh, well, there was all different classes because, like, us, now, I was – me and my brother Jesse was the only ones that, uh, you know, was old – was young enough that we had to go to school.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Now the others had already grown up. ‘Cause see, my mom and dad came to the United States, and then they – they went back to Mexico. So, um, let’s see that was... They went back – they came; he brought the whole family with him. Then they went back to Mexico, because they had sold the hacienda that my grandfather, um...

NM: Yeah.

THS: And, uh, then they buried the money because they was coming and killing all of – all the, uh, I don’t know whether it was Pancho Villa or – or one of the others, was coming along and killing all the men that had any – any, uh, property – that had any money or anything.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So what they did, they sold it when they heard they was coming, and so they buried the money. So they came to the United States, and then when everything was settled, they decided to go back and dig the money up. But the money wasn’t worth the paper it was printed on.

NM: Oh.

THS: Because it had changed government.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, uh, they came back – they went up there, and they had – they had Pete, Chole, Carmen. They had three kids.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And my dad left 'em up there. He came down – he came down, back to Topeka, with my grandmother. And so, he left my mother up there with the three kids. Well, he never sent them any money to live on or to eat on.

NM: Wow.

THS: My mother said that the only way they got to live, 'cause in Mexico they have a – well, all the Mexican people [murmurs], which I don't.

NM: They did what?

THS: You – you go visiting and they give you something to eat.

NM: Oh, yeah. Sure

THS: You know, bread, or they give you, uh, something, you know. Whatever they got in the house, they'll give you, you know. And so, my mother used to take an apron and they would give her a piece of bread, a little loaf of bread, or – or some avocados or something. She – she wouldn't eat it. She would put it in her apron.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then she'd take it home to the kids.

NM: Feed the kids, wow.

THS: That's the only way they got anything to eat. And my oldest brother Pete, oh, he was so mad all the time because Dad had left them up there. He said he went to work for this farmer one time, worked from sunup to sundown, picking watermelons. And at the end of the day, he thought they was gonna give him some money. They gave him a watermelon. Oh, he was so mad.

NM: Oh, my goodness. Wow.

THS: I said: "Well, Pete, at least you had some watermelon." [Laughs] Oh, he was mad. He was always mad at my dad because he'd done that.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: You know.

NM: Your dad thought he would return with all this money, so –

THS: Yeah.

NM: Your dad probably thought he was doing a great thing.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Yeah.

THS: But he didn't. He left 'em up there for a year.

NM: A year?

THS: Yeah, and so my, uh, other brother was buried – I mean, was born up there.

NM: Mm-hmm. Topeka?

THS: No, in Mexico.

NM: Oh, in Mexico.

THS: Yes. See, they took three kids up, and then they came back to the United States. And then he decided to go back. Well, that's when he left my mother up there, and she was pregnant, so she – she had Chino up there, and then they came back. Well, during the time they was here the first time, they had Joe. He was born in Kansas City. And then they went back and then they came back a second time, and then, uh, Jesse and I was born here in Topeka.

NM: So, when you dad left your mom, he left her where, in Mexico, or in – ?

THS: Mexico.

NM: In Mexico. Oh, 'cause when you said up there, I thought you meant Topeka.

THS: No. No, he left her in Mexico.

NM: Oh. Oh, okay.

THS: Without sending her any money or anything.

NM: And where did he go?

THS: If you get hot, we can turn that down.

NM: Oh, I'm fine. Where did he go when he left her in Mexico?

THS: My dad was – well, all the men in Mexico, think that they're something big, and – and they all run around on their wives, you know.

NM: Oh.

THS: Every one of 'em does that. I – I always remember when I was, you know, real small, my dad would come home from work. One thing, he worked every day.

NM: Yeah.

THS: He never missed a day. But on Saturdays, he would come home, take a shower, eat supper, and off he would go.

NM: To go partying?

THS: I – we don't know where he went.

NM: Wow.

THS: Till eleven, twelve o'clock, he'd come home.

NM: Oh.

THS: My mother stayed home. She never once said anything about where you go, but it basically, when we grew up, we knew that all these men, Mexican men, run around, you know.

NM: Oh, uh-huh.

THS: But my dad did a little more than run around, I guess.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, um, when he went – when he went, they went back to Mexico and he left her up there, well – he was just here with my grandmother.

NM: He was here in Kansas?

THS: In Topeka. In Topeka.

NM: Oh, he came back to Topeka.

THS: Yeah, they came back.

NM: And he knew that they didn't have the money.

THS: Yeah.

NM: And he didn't send your mother any money.

THS: No.

NM: Wow. That's stressful.

THS: Yeah. Eventually he, uh, after a year or so, then he sent her some money. And then she came back with, uh, three kids.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: My oldest brother Pete, he was so mad.

NM: Mm.

THS: Because he said he left 'em up there without anything.

NM: Mm-hmm. But nobody said anything to him?

THS: No. My grandmother was with him.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: My dad's mother. Yeah.

NM: And you would think she would say something, but didn't. They just accepted it. That was the way men are.

THS: That was the way men...

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Mm-hmm. And my – my, uh, when they first came down, my aunt's husband had left her up there with two girls. And they wouldn't let her across the border, because she had no means of taking care of herself.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: You know. So, my dad brought 'em over as, uh, my aunt and the two girls as – as his daughters. They're on the passport as his daughters. He brought 'em over. So, then they all settled in Topeka.

NM: Did you have an idea in your head that you wanted to marry outside of the Mexican community? No? It just happened that way.

THS: It just happened that way.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Mm-hmm. We used to go – a whole bunch of us girls used to go to the Meadow Acres in Topeka dancing every Saturday night with the Forbes – the Forbes Fields was just right down the road from there.

NM: Oh, okay. Forbes Field, yeah, yeah.

THS: And all them Air Force guys used to go to the, uh, Meadow Acres. It was just a block or two from the Meadow Acres. So we'd go, a whole bunch of us get together in the car, and we'd go up there. Just to dance, you know, and about a half an hour before the dance was over, we all – we would sit over close to the door. We would all disappear. You know, they was up there, drinking on the – at the bar, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, we would all disappear. We'd –

NM and THS: Go home.

THS: So, we was tired when we got home. So, one day I was walking across the park from church and Leo caught up with me and he said, uh, he got to talking. He was really a talker. He got to talking, and then he said:

“Would you like to go have a cup of coffee?”

I said: “All I want to do is go home and go to bed.” I mean, I – we had been out till one o'clock in the morning, you know, and then get up and go to church at 9:00.

And so I said: “No, I don't want a coffee.” I said: “I want to go home and go to sleep.”

So the next Sunday, then, there he comes again.

I said: “No, I want to go home.” [laughs] “I'm tired. I don't want any coffee.”

So then the third Sunday, he came again and I thought: “Well, he's not gonna leave me alone till I – you know – till he really knows that I'm not going.” So he started, you want a cup of coffee and I thought: “Oh, gosh. Maybe if I go have a cup of coffee, he'll leave me alone.” All I wanted to do is go home and go to sleep, you know.

NM: Right.

THS: 'Cause I had to go to work the next morning. I mean –

NM: On Sunday?

THS: On Monday morning. No, Monday morning.

NM: Oh, Monday. Sure.

THS: So, he said: “Well, what – you don't want to go to the drugstore there.” The Rainey's was there at the corner.

I said: “No, I don't want to go to the drugstore.”

He says: “Well, how about going to the Deluxe Café?”

And I says: "Well, all right."

So we went over there and then he started asking questions: "Are you working?"

I said: "Yes."

I said – he said: "Where do you work?"

Big mouth me, I said: "Right behind here, at the Independent Laundry."

He says: "You do? How long have you been working there?"

I said: "Oh, I been working there for a couple of years."

NM: What was it called where you worked?

THS: Independent Laundry.

NM: Oh, Independent. Oh.

THS: Uh-huh. Yeah. I worked with Jenny Garcia folding sheets. We could really fold sheets. Oh, my. We could – and it was so hot in there. You know, so the next morning I come – 'cause I had, you had to come through the room where – to go across the street to drink coffee, to where they sorted out all the clothes.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: There was a couple of older women back there. And the minute I stepped to the door to come through the big deal, they said: "Ha, ha, ha, guess who's out there?" [NM laughs] I didn't know who in the world they was talking to, 'cause there was a bunch of us, you know, going over there for coffee. Well, who should...there he sat. With his friend Gene.

I said: "Oh, gosh."

He said: "I come to take you for coffee."

I said: "I only got fifteen minutes." [Laughs] So, 'course Jenny and I and all them girls was going over there for coffee anyway, you know, so we went over, him and Gene went with us, and we had coffee. And they paid for the whole bunch.

NM: Nice.

THS: So, then the next morning, there him and Gene was out there again. So, there we go for coffee. Then the third morning, he was there by himself, 'cause they worked shift work at – at the Color Press. And Gene had to stay over, 'cause the guy that was supposed to come in didn't come in on time, so he had to stay.

NM: Where were they working?

THS: At the Kansas Color Press.

NM: Kansas Color Press. Okay.

THS: It was right there on Haskell.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Uh-huh. So, from then on, he was there every morning till he changed shifts. Then when he changed 'em he says, I told 'em: "He's not there today." Well, the ladies would let me know: "He's not there today. You know, he's not there today." Well, we knew – I knew he had changed shifts to days, 'cause they had to be at work at eight o'clock to four, so...

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Then after –

NM: Now, did he go to those dances out in Topeka?

THS: Then he got to –

NM: Is that when he originally saw you?

THS: No, uh-uh.

NM: No? How did he happen to see you then, if you, 'cause you said you were coming from dance –

THS: He went to church.

NM: Oh, oh. So, you went to Mass –

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: And then you went –

THS: Yeah. We used to sing up in the choir.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh, you went to church. And is he in the choir too?

THS: No, he didn't.

NM: No, but he saw you.

THS: Uh-huh, yeah.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Yeah, just the Mexican people.

NM: Oh, I thought maybe he bumped into you at that dance.

THS: No.

NM: Okay.

THS: No. He had just gotten out of the Army.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: I used to hate [laughs] he used to have his shoes so polished, you could see yourself in 'em. I thought that was just...oh, gosh. How can he do something like that, you know?

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And his uniform was just so – so clean and so nice, you know.

NM: Did he still wear his uniform?

THS: Um...well, yeah, 'cause he was still, um, in Fort Riley.

NM: Oh.

THS: Uh-huh. See, he went into the Army at, uh, in Missouri. Can't think of the name. And he was there for quite a while. He was in the Korean War. And then from there, they said they needed him over in Louisville, 'cause Kentucky and the U.S., and the...um...oh, 101st Airborne.

NM: Oh, okay. 101st Airborne.

THS: Yeah. So they shipped him over there, but he wasn't in the Airborne. He was – he went into the Army.

NM: Oh.

THS: And then they shipped him over there, and then he came back. They shipped him, after a year's time they shipped him back to, uh, Fort Riley and then he was there at Fort Riley for quite a while.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: So then –

THS: But this – but this was before we ever started going out.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: I used to see him in church with his uniform, you know [NM laughs]. I – you know, I didn't know who he was or anything like that, you know, so...

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: But anyway...I think we got married about a year and a half later.

NM: Mm.

THS: And, uh, one day he drove up and he said: "We're gonna go to church."

I said: "Oh, we are? What are we going to church for?"

He says: "You'll find out." Well, he had made arrangements with Father Tao and Mary Tao, that they were supposed to bless the engagement ring before he put it on my finger.

NM: And you didn't know?

THS: I didn't even know he had it.

NM: Wow.

THS: He didn't tell me. He said we were just going to church. And I used to work for Mary Tao at the parish house.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: I used to clean the – the house.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: And put – take flowers off the altar and, you know, I did a lot of work there. When I was still going to high school.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, um, that was quite a ways back, you know.

NM: Right.

THS: Before I went to work in the laundry. Yeah, I worked for her for years and years. Uh-huh. In fact, she kind of took me under her wing. She just, you know, uh, do a lot of things for me.

NM: Right.

THS: You know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh, eventually there for a while I worked after I left high school. I worked there for a couple of years, you know, in the daytime.

NM: Oh, really?

THS: Till I went to, uh, work at the laundry.

NM: Were you, like, the parish secretary or something, or – ?

THS: No, I just cleaned the house and –

NM: Uh-huh. Took care of things.

THS: And done – done errands for her, you know, and for Father. And, uh, she used to pay me real good. So then when, um, when I went on to church, I didn't know, but my parents was in there. My mother and dad was sitting in there, and so was his mother. Yes. So I – I walked into the church and Monsignor flagged at us to come on up, and so we went on up. I still didn't know what we was there for. Anyway, he takes the engagement ring out, and Father blesses it. Then he puts it on my finger.

NM: Wow, with everybody watching?

THS: Hmm? Yeah.

NM: Goodness.

THS: Well, just, there wasn't anybody there in church. Just my parents and – and, uh...

NM: And his parents.

THS: And his – and his mother. His dad was already gone.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Just his mother.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And his younger brother, 'cause he drove his mother around everywhere.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: They lived there on 1321 Tennessee.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: So, they was pretty close to the church.

NM: Yeah, it's right – right next door, yeah.

THS: But anyway, uh...that's why – and I still got the paper that Father –

NM: Oh.

THS: Father, uh, Tao wrote, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: To get the – now, I didn't even know where he'd got the engagement ring or what. I mean, he put it on my finger and Father blessed it.

NM: Isn't that great?

THS: You're talking about being surprised.

NM: Yeah.

THS: You know.

THS: But, anyway...

NM: That's a good story.

THS: About a year later, then we got married.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: 'Course, my mother didn't like him.

NM: No?

THS: My father didn't like him. And *his* mother didn't like him. His mother said he had to marry me because I probably – he got me pregnant.

NM: His mother didn't like him, or his mother didn't –

THS: His mother didn't like *me*.

NM: Oh.

THS: His mother didn't like me.

NM: Was it a Mexican-German thing? German-American?

THS: Well, not really.

NM: No?

THS: Us, 'cause she didn't have any money. She – she ran that – the way it happened was that his father, uh, passed away; he was forty-some years old. He had a heart attack. They lived in this great big house on the road to Leavenworth. It had fourteen rooms.

NM: Oooh.

THS: A maid's room. Yeah, she had a maid. She had a maid for the kids and a maid to do the cooking.

NM: Gee.

THS: Uh-huh. Fourteen rooms they had in that house. And, uh, it was on the way to Leavenworth, just going from Basehor on down. Uh, so, um, she – she went around and told – telling everybody that he had gotten me pregnant. We didn't have – we was married three and a half years before Andy was born.

NM: Oh.

THS: You know.

NM: Yeah.

THS: It – but...I just, you know. Anyway, when – when his father passed away at 47, Joe was going to St. Benedict's. He was the oldest.

NM: Oh.

THS: So, he came right home and took over the farm.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: He just, I mean, he actually took it over. I mean everything, you know.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And so, he used to tell the workers, cause he had quite a few workers.

NM: Yeah?

THS: Yeah, for him. Um, used to tell the workers that him and – and, uh, Leo was partners. And two brothers was partners.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Well, then Leo finds out that, uh, he paid the far – the helpers more than he paid him.

NM: Oh, no.

THS: And then he finds out that he was keeping him out of the Army because he wanted him to stay and work at the farm.

NM: Oh.

THS: You know.

NM: Yeah.

THS: At that time, if you had – if you was a farmer, you didn't have to go into the service.

NM: Mm.

THS: You know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Or if you ran something that, you know, you was – had to do with – with not being able to, you know, people. You know, like –

NM: Somebody depending on you, yeah.

THS: Yeah. Anyway, Leo got mad, and he went and enlisted in the Army.

NM: Oh, gee. I bet his brother was mad. [Laughs]

THS: He was. Joe was mad. And then, he sells – he sells the farm.

NM: Really?

THS: Yeah. Well, him and this guy from, a lawyer from Kansas City, was in it together. Uh...one of them owned all the stock, and the other one, the house, and the thing. Whatever they

had on the farm. Anyway, Joe goes and sells everything. And, uh, of course he had to give half of it to the guy in Kansas City.

NM: Yeah.

THS: But, uh, you know, they had got the money from to buy this – this farm.

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: To begin with, his, uh...his grandfather gave his dad money to marry his mother.

NM: His grand...Oh, okay. Okay.

THS: She – she was, she had polio.

NM: Really?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Okay.

THS: And so, he gave him enough money to buy a farm.

NM: Wow.

THS: His dad, Leo's dad, that was married to his mother.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Gave him enough money to buy a farm.

NM: Okay.

THS: 'Cause he was rich. He – he was one of the first representatives in the state of Kansas. His picture's in the courthouse.

NM: This is Leo's grandfather? Wow. Okay.

THS: Anyway, um, can you imagine him marrying that little old Mexican from La Yorda? [NM laughs] Anyway, uh, Joe goes and sells all of this. He builds himself a new house, buys himself a new car, buys himself a milk truck to deliver milk around there. Leo, nothing. Then he gets \$1500 and moves his mother to Lawrence and, uh, pays \$1500 for that rooming house on – on Tennessee.

NM: The poor mother must have been –

THS: Yeah.

NM: Devastated.

THS: And, uh, that was it.

NM: Wow.

THS: So, about, we was married about five years, I think, when all his sisters came down and asked Leo if he would go with them to court, to sue him.

NM: Oooh.

THS: Because that money should have been divided equally among the girls. There was, uh, three girls.

NM: And to the mother.

THS: And to the mother.

NM: Gee.

THS: Leo was supporting his – he was shining shoes on the weekend in the Army to make enough money to send her, so she could pay her gas bill.

NM: Wow.

THS: In that big rooming house.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And Joe was sitting up there in Basehor.

NM: What a selfish man. Wonder what happened to him?

THS: I don't know. But he was buried. He was not buried, he was married, you know, he married Anna, I mean, Edna up there.

NM: Oh.

THS: And when we got, Leo and I got married, he wouldn't let her come.

NM: Really?

THS: He would not let her. He came.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: I don't know why, because him and Leo didn't get along.

NM: Was he the brother that came to see the engagement ring?

THS: No.

NM: A different brother?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Yeah. Yeah, his younger brother.

NM: Oh.

THS: In fact, they still come over.

NM: Really?

THS: Him and Ruthie.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: She's got money left and right.

NM: Really?

THS: You know, when she – when she comes – they came this summer. They had – they came, and the girls had a picnic up in front; they invited the neighborhood.

NM: Uh-huh?

THS: You know, everybody has a good time when they do that, you know. And so, um, but he came, the girls came, and they was here for – on a Sunday afternoon talking to Leo. They was outside. I didn't know what they was talking about. I – I didn't care. I thought they had –

NM: Sure. Yeah, his sisters.

THS: None of my business. Anyway, when he come in, he said they wanted to take Joe to court.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And sue him for that money. Cause it should have been divided equally among all of them.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: All the girls, and it wasn't.

NM: Right.

THS: But Leo told 'em no.

NM: Really? Said forget it?

THS: They – they wasn't very happy with him, but he said he wasn't. He said: "I got my house." He said: "I got my kids. I don't need any more. I don't need anything he's got."

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Was what he told 'em.

NM: Yeah.

THS: So...but then after a while, they kind of all when Mary died; she left him some money. And, uh, then [murmurs] passed away here not too long ago, just a couple years ago was when she passed away in Emporia. But, uh, you know. It happens, I guess, with families.

NM: That rooming house thing's very strange.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: So, she was in charge of the rooming house and she had to run this thing, and – ?

THS: No, she charged 'em, but they were Chinese.

NM: Oh. [Laughter] You have so many twists and turns in your story.

THS: They – they was all Chinese.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: That she rented to.

NM: Okay.

THS: Yeah, Leo had a room upstairs, you know, where he slept and stuff.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Ed slept on the couch down in the dining room.

NM: Oh.

THS: And Clara slept in the bedroom with her mother, you know, different beds, but they slept in – yeah, so she could rent ‘em up there. But the only reason that they didn’t give her so much money was because they fed her.

NM: They fed her? The Chinese food?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Wow.

THS: And she couldn’t get around very good, you know. She did get around –

NM: Right.

THS: ‘Cause she come one day, went out with Leo and picked strawberries out there, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Yeah, she could get around, but not that good. And – and so, uh, they – they would feed her. They would cook. They didn’t have a stove upstairs, so they cooked down on her stove.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And they would just make enough food for her, too.

NM: And where did all these Chinese people come from? I mean –

THS: They were going up to KU.

NM: Oh, they were at KU. Okay.

THS: Students.

NM: They were students. Interesting.

THS: And of course, they didn’t have very much money, either.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: You know. And one time, they sent her a whole bunch of stuff from China.

NM: Oh.

THS: You know, their mothers. I guess they told her that she was so nice about [murmurs], so they sent her some good luck charms and stuff like that, you know.

NM: Uh-huh. Oh, that's really funny. Good story.

THS: But no, they cooked, 'cause she was the only one in the house that had a stove downstairs.

NM: Sure.

THS: So, they came down and cooked, and while they was cooking, they knew she couldn't get around very good, so they – they fed her.

NM: Made enough for her, too.

THS: Mm-hmm. And then, of course, then they was students, so they didn't have much. I guess their parents did, up in China, but, uh...

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: You know, whether they send 'em money or not, I imagine they did. But they wasn't gonna tell her that.

NM: Yeah.

THS: You know. They was glad they was getting a place to cook and all that. And they would do the dishes and everything.

NM: Yeah. Huh.

THS: They would go to the grocery store. Of course, Leo did too. Leo went to the grocery store for her.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But, uh...and he helped to pay for the gas bill, 'cause the gas bill was terrible.

NM: Oh, it must have been terrible. Those big drafty houses.

THS: There was – it was...

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But anyway, um...that's the way things... You know, like I say, we never had – we was pretty near going crazy 'cause we thought we was – he wanted kids, and I wanted kids. I wanted ten kids.

NM: Oh.

THS: [Laughs] He wanted that many, but then after I had the girls, the doctor said, you know, he says: “You’ll either – ” He called us both in to the doctor’s. He says: “You’ll either lose her, or lose the baby.”

NM: What did you say?

THS: He, Dr. Herman called us both in, after I had the girls.

NM: After you had the girls?

THS: Yeah, and he told us, he said: “Leo,” he says, uh, “if she doesn’t have a hysterectomy, she’ll – if she gets pregnant, she’ll either die or lose the baby.”

NM: Oh.

THS: “So which would you rather have?”

NM: Wow.

THS: Leo says: “We’ll just go ahead,” at that time you couldn’t; you wasn’t supposed to have a hysterectomy.

NM: Yeah, it was unusual. How old were you?

THS: I was probably about 27.

NM: Oh, no. Oh, that’s too bad.

THS: I had the boys. The boys are eighteen – eighteen years apart. And – I mean, not eighteen years, but four. And I say eighteen – eighteen months apart.

NM: Eighteen months apart.

THS: Then the girls – the girls was four years apart.

NM: Four years apart, okay.

THS: And Richard.

NM: Well, you have a great family.

THS: Yeah. But that was it.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: But, you know, we – we had the two boys, and we had the two girls.

NM: Yeah, you had two matched pairs. That's great. Great, beautiful family you have.

THS: I remember Dr. Herman. Dr. Wilcox was in there, and he was delivering babies. And he says: "Oh, my gosh, there's another one coming." 'Cause at the time you didn't know. You didn't have no sonograms.

NM: Right.

THS: And the only reason the doctor kept telling me I was gaining too much weight 'cause I was eating too much, and I was...uh, I was – had, he could hear a real strong heartbeat. That's because one of 'em was this way, and the other one was this way.

NM: Wow.

THS: And he kept putting me on a diet, and kept telling me: "You've got to lose weight. You've got to lose weight."

So then when Dr. Wilcox, they was in together, him and Herman. And, uh, Dr. Wilcox was delivering me. He got one out and then he turned around and he said:

"Oh, good heavens, put her to sleep. There's another one coming."

And I could hear Dr. Herman say: "Can I go tell – can I go tell Leo? Can I go tell Leo?"

[Laughter] And Dr. Herman – Dr. Wilcox says: "That's alright, you go tell him."

So he went out there laughing, and then he come back laughing, and he says:

"You know what?" He says Leo was pretty near asleep. 'Course he was working the midnight shift.

NM: Oh.

THS: He said Leo was pretty near asleep and he said:

"I told him to get up," so he said, "he got up, he sat up, and he said: 'What's the matter?'"

I said: "You just had two babies."

And he said: "He looked at me, didn't say a word." He said he looked down at the floor and just stood there for a while.

And then he said: "But I only have one bed." [NM laughs]

He said: "I told him we'd keep 'em here long enough for him to go home and make another one." And he did. He made the little beds for 'em.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And he used to sit here and read, and he'd put one foot under one leg, under one of the legs of the bed, and the other one on the other leg, and he would read and he would push one and then push the other one while I got the meals done, you know.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And the laundry and stuff like that.

NM: Isn't that great?

THS: Yeah, he used to love to read.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And he kept the girls happy that way, because you know, he made them little beds no bigger than that.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: In fact, when Rita's granddaughter came, they asked for one. I don't know whatever happened to the other one.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: But he had made –

NM: Yeah. Yeah. What do you know?

THS: He loved to work with wood and plant a garden and everything.

NM: Mm-hmm. Well I'm gonna have to get going, Teresa.

THS: Well, sorry that we didn't get too much [murmurs].

NM: Oh, you always have good stories.

THS: You know, it's, uh...I don't remember, you know, too much anymore, 'cause I'm getting up in years.

NM: You have a pretty good memory.

THS: But I do remember walking to church in the snow.

NM: Oh.

THS: We had to go to church. Raymond says: "I'll give you a truck, I'll give you a ride in the back of the truck." He had this great big huge truck. We climb in, and can you imagine how cold it was?

NM: Oh, no. [Laughs]

THS: He used to take us to Minnesota to work in the vegetables, too. In that big truck.

NM: Wow.

THS: Four families.

NM: That was in the summertime?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Yeah. That must have been fun, a little bit fun, huh?

THS: Well, it was, to a certain extent.

NM: Rough.

THS: But we had to, uh, we had to, uh...we had to work.

NM: Oh.

THS: And to get a shower, we had to go jump in the lake. We had no other way to take a shower.

NM: In Minnesota, I bet that water was cold.

THS: It was. [Laughter] And none of us knew how to swim. Now Raymond might've, but none of us.

NM: Oh boy.

THS: But we had a good time.

NM: Yeah. Did you ever learn how to swim? No?

THS: I didn't, but Leo did. Leo and the boys, he used to get the whole neighborhood in the pickup truck, in his old pickup truck. Went all over to Lone Star Lake to swim.

NM: Oh, fun.

THS: Yeah. Take 'em all. Neighborhood.

NM: Yeah.

THS: You know.

NM: Whole neighborhood.

THS: The guys come in -- Andy: "Mom? Dad?"

I said: "No, don't call Mom. Talk to your dad." He had an old pickup that just went [imitates putting noise] all the way to the lake.

NM: All the way to Lone Star Lake.

THS: But he had the back end full of girls and boys.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: That asked their mothers if they could go, you know. Of course, Leo knew how to swim real good. I didn't. I – I still don't. I still don't like the water.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: You know? I did in Minnesota, 'cause we had to take a shower [laughs]

NM: Right, sure.

THS: Or you'd never get a shower.

NM: What did they have you picking there?

THS: Um...carrots and potatoes and onions.

NM: Mm.

THS: And, uh, we lived in a garage.

NM: Really?

THS: Mm-hmm. Four families. One in each corner of the garage.

NM: Was it hot?

THS: Uh-huh. And, uh, uh...they had – the ladies had to cook outside.

NM: Did they have a cement floor, or dirt floor?

THS: Dirt floor.

NM: Oh, gee whiz.

THS: Yeah. Oh, we had some – in California, when we had to – to work in the peaches, we, uh, we lived in a tent. My mother cooked outside.

NM: You did?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Was that for, like, a summer, or...when – ?

THS: Well, that was just till the harvest was over. We – we picked peaches and then we picked apricots.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then when that was done, then we went over to pick grapes. Over to –

NM: Did she take you out of school?

THS: Huh? Yeah. They made me go to school.

NM: Oh, they made you go to school there.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: So, you left New York school just to go to California for a while?

THS: Well, when I came back, I went back to New York School.

NM: New York School, yeah.

THS: That's the only way that the boys would make any money to get clothes for school. Nobody hired 'em.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Nobody hired Mexican kids.

NM: Mm.

THS: And when we went to – to Minnesota, you know, like I say, four families made.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Went because they had to have enough money for school.

NM: Right. Yeah.

THS: But...it was fun, though. You know, a whole bunch of kids together.

NM: But hard work, very hard work.

THS: Yeah. We was so tired by the time we got in that garage, we didn't care.

NM: No. Hard to play.

THS: We wanted to sleep.

NM: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

THS: And no, I had to go to school in Cucamonga, and I didn't like that. I had to get on the bus.

NM: Where's Cucamonga?

THS: In California.

NM: Oh. [Laughter]

THS: Yeah. That's a town.

NM: Okay.

THS: The gates would – they had great big old fences, the gates would open, the bus would go in, the gates would close.

NM: Mm.

THS: And you – they would open when the – at the end of the day when the bus was loaded up again.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: They'd go and drop you off somewhere. Then you had to walk.

NM: Yeah. Hm.

THS: And if you got there early enough, if you woke up early enough, you could have cactus for lunch.

NM: Cactus?

THS: Mm-hmm. But if you didn't get up early enough, they was all gone.

NM: Oh.

THS: Was a time my mother – my mother used to get up at daylight to go out there, and there's a whole row of cactus behind the houses where the – the boys went and picked grapes.

NM: Yeah?

THS: And, uh, if they got there early enough, if my mother got up early enough, we'd have cactus for supper besides beans, you know. So, we ate cactus.

NM: How do you prepare cactus?

THS: My – you take all the stickers out with a little paring knife.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And then you cut 'em.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And then you, uh, put 'em in to boil, and then you put 'em on a skillet with some cilantro and onion, and you mix 'em up and they're the best things.

NM: Are they really?

THS: With beans and tortillas. Oh boy.

NM: Oh, my gosh.

THS: That's all we ever had to eat.

NM: Uh-huh. Cactus, beans, and tortillas.

THS: Except when the gypsies came. Then we had olives because they – there was a whole row of olives in front of the houses. And so they'd come and they'd pick all the olives out and put in a great big old, uh, tubs.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And cooked them all night long. And so, we was kids, you know, and they was all dressed like gypsies, and they drove, and they came in on buggies just like you see in a book.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Uh-huh. And they would come in and they'd pick all them olives off, the farmer didn't care. They'd pick 'em all up and they would start cooking 'em all night, and – and then the next day they would ask us if we wanted some. Of course, we didn't have anything but beans and cactus [NM laughs].

NM: Sure. But – but you didn't know how to cook, um, olives, but they did.

THS: No. No, they had great big old pans. And I don't know what they put in 'em. But they built a fire all night till one day it rained up in the mountains and the water came down. It came down where the – their tents, where their little wagons was, and their tents, and their tubs, and it just took the whole thing.

NM: Oh, no.

THS: That was the last time we seen 'em there.

NM: Mm. What a disaster.

THS: We didn't see 'em there anymore.

NM: Yeah. How – how many years in a row did you go to California?

THS: Pretty near every year.

NM: Really?

THS: Till we got up into, uh, I think I got up into junior high.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: When we came – see, we had a pass. My dad got a pass. We could go anywhere the train went.

NM: Oh.

THS: Without having to pay.

NM: Sure.

THS: And so, my sister had got married up there.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: First we went 'cause my aunt was up there. And then, uh, my sister got married up there, so she used to tell us: "Come on down." And – and behind her was a orange grove. All we had to do was just go about from here to that white pickup, and get oranges for breakfast.

NM: Oh, nice.

THS: Then there was, uh, row of English walnuts.

NM: Mmm.

THS: And after they went through and harvested them, we could go over and pick all we wanted, and there was a place right across from my sister's house. And we could go sell 'em there.

NM: Really?

THS: Oh, we done it all.

NM: You had – you had it all figured out.

THS: Yeah.

NM: All the angles.

THS: Well, because, you know, with that pass, we could go anywhere.

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Yeah, you were lucky to get those passes.

THS: In fact, the whole family, my brother and his kids, and my brother-in-law and my sister, we was all going to California to live.

NM: Mm.

THS: When we got to Needles, California. There was no air conditioning in the car, so we got to Needles, California, my brother-in-law [murmurs] jumped off – off the train and he says: "Whew! I wanna go down and get some air." He got – jumped down, jumped back up, and he says, he told my sister: "Let me tell you something. If it's this hot where we're going, I'm coming back tomorrow." [Laughs] But they didn't. They stayed and worked for that summer, and then they all came back.

NM: No incentive to stay there. Yeah.

THS: No.

NM: Too hot.

THS: It was a beautiful place, you know, but...

NM: Mm.

THS: You could see a lot of stuff, and –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And my, uh, brother-in-law in California worked in the – where they bring all this, uh, garbage for the pigs they had.

NM: Oh

THS: They had pigs' pens.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And, of course, um, there would be all kinds of silverware and everything, that people would just drop it in, you know, accidentally.

NM: Sure.

THS: But it would be in there, and he'd pick it all up and bring it home and polish it up and take it up, and make extra money.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Besides what he was getting to feed the pigs and stuff.

NM: Yeah. Resourceful.

THS: In fact, I still got some up there.

NM: Do you, really?

THS: My mother left, uh-huh.

NM: Oh, wow.

THS: Sterling silver. All the kids can do whatever they want to.

NM: Sure. That's amazing. What a great story.

THS: Uh-huh. It's a – it was a tough world, but...

NM: Mm-hmm, yeah.

THS: You know, and then when I married Leo, it was entirely different, you know, 'cause he worked all the time.

NM: Oh, he worked very hard.

THS: And then I worked, too, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: After I left the laundry, then the kids, he wouldn't let me work till they got into high school. I mean junior high, the girls. Yeah. He said no. And so, I stood and I – I – done laundry for people. I done the shirts for Butch.

NM: Yeah.

THS: 'Cause he worked at – in the grocery store.

NM: Okay.

THS: I ironed all his shirts and washed 'em.

NM: That's a lot of work.

THS: I babysat. I done everything I could to give us extra money.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And then...then I went to work at the – when I worked at the laundry then. And then, uh, he went to work for the City. And his legs was getting really bad, so I told him, I says: "Give it up." You know, I'm still working. I was working the Presbyterian Manor there.

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: I said: "Just give it up. I'm working, and you can draw your Social Security." So that's what he did

NM: Yeah. Good.

THS: But he was always mowing grass.

NM: I know.

THS: Cleaning garages for people, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Just doing everything. Him and the boys. The boys all know how to work.

NM: Uh-huh. That's right.

THS: 'Course Richard, all he does is sit in the chair and –

NM: Work on the computer? [Laughs]

THS: And make money. Yeah, he had a full knee replacement yesterday.

NM: Oh, really?

THS: I thought I wouldn't call him maybe till tomorrow, until he got a little more rest.

NM: Yeah, good idea. Well, I'm gonna have to get going, Teresa

THS: Yeah, I don't know about a knee replacement, 'cause he sits in a chair all the time, working on the computer.

NM: Yeah, that's kind of funny.

THS: Not – not unless he – he hurt it, uh, taking the scooter to the swim –

NM: Does – does he go to the gym and exercise at the gym – [tape cuts off]

END OF TAPE