

## **Interview with Teresa Hernandez Schwartz**

**Interviewer: Nora Murphy**

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**Transcriptionist: Emily Raymond**

Teresa Hernandez Schwartz (Interviewee): The – the, the houses of La Yarda. Um –

Nora Murphy (Interviewer): Oh.

THS: I've got it upside down. That was taken –

NM: It's all water.

THS: Yeah, there's a – there was a fence there, and that was, a farmer planted corn right behind there. Was pretty close to the bottom – to the back end of the – of one of the rows of houses. The other, where we lived over there, they didn't have any fence or anything.

NM: So, you lived, like, over here, and this is the edge of the river, or...?

THS: No, we lived, now this is where all the, the men used to plant their gardens.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Uh-huh. And, are – the houses are right here.

NM: Oh, where the water is now?

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: See, all that was full of water. Uh-huh.

NM: Oh, so they took the photo after the flood.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Well, I think that one was taken when it was filling up with water, because you couldn't see any of the – of this after.

NM: Oh, wow.

THS: It was filled up.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Yeah. When we came – went in the next morning, we – our road had – had washed out, uh, right away when the water started coming in, ‘cause it was coming in so bad that it just, the road just caved in.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Where we used to come in and out. So, we had to go around that way, and of course when we went around that way, that was when all the water was coming across there.

NM: Oh, dear.

THS: We had to go around there when my dad and I went to get the chickens, because my mother wanted her chickens out. So, we put ‘em in a cage and he got up in front. He’s a big man, so, you know, um, he was able to hold on and – and, uh, I was in the back, and the cage kept going sideways and he kept saying: “Hold on, do not let loose,” because the water was rushing over [murmurs].

NM: Oh, gee. Scary.

THS: Everything was just full of water.

NM: Where were your other – your brothers and sisters?

THS: Um, my brothers and sisters, they used to live there, at one time or another. My sister and her husband, and then he was drafted into the service, World War II. And so, he left her there, you know, because of my folks being...

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then my – my brother lived on down to the other – of the other end from where we lived. My sister was across from us, and, uh, so my brother lived over there with his kids, and then he got a job at the – at the shops in Topeka.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Instead of working out on the railroad, you know, in the cold winter and everything. My, uh, my dad used to say that, uh, when they came, we got ready for lunch, they would build the fire. But he says there, that – we called them tacos, ‘cause you know, just the tortillas with beans in it –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And pepper.

THS: And he said they was so frozen that you couldn't eat them.

NM: Oh.

THS: Move 'em, you know. They had to put 'em on the fire to get 'em thawed out before they could...eat any lunch at all, yeah, 'cause they carried it in their lunch pail. And they was out on them little, the kids called 'em pushy cars, but they really wasn't. That was some kind of a little deal that they, uh, had a motor on it, and they would go up and down the railroad tracks.

NM: Yeah. Well, let's start at the beginning, as though you'd never told me anything about La Yarda. Like, did you say that you – you moved there when you were two years old?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Where did you move from?

THS: We – I was born in Topeka.

NM: In Topeka.

THS: In Topeka they had the – the Santa Fe houses. My dad worked for the Santa Fe there. Um, he worked for the – for the Santa Fe and they had little houses, but they was made out of wood and the ground would, I mean the floor was dirt.

NM: Mm.

THS: There was – I remember my mother used to get up in the morning with a little pan and water in it and sprinkle it so that all the inside of it, so that it wouldn't get so, you know, uh...

NM: Dusty?

THS: Yeah, dusty.

NM: Oh.

THS: Mm-hmm. Because, you know, it would get real dusty and so she put water on it, and that way it would kind of settle down.

NM: And you remember that?

THS: Yeah, mm-hmm. I was two, you know. I could remember. Them talking about it.

NM: Well, when was your birthday? Which year?

THS: January the 6<sup>th</sup>.

NM: January 6<sup>th</sup>. What year were you born?

THS: 1930.

NM: 1930.

THS: Yeah, I'll be 90 in Dec – in January.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But anyway, so this was better housing over here.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So my dad asked for a transfer, and he came up – we came over here, I was two years old. You know, I – there was so many kids in that little space, that you got to learn a lot of talking and everything from all them little kids. 'Cause it was just...kind of a circle. And – and once in a while they would put water all over that dirt so they could have a dance there.

NM: Are we talking about La Yarda here?

THS: No, we're talking about –

NM: In Topeka?

THS: Topeka.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Before we moved down here.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Uh-huh. And they used to, uh, have dances right there.

NM: Oh.

THS: They would fix Mexican food, you know, just like a fiesta, only it wasn't quite a fiesta 'cause there wasn't very much room, yeah. [NM laughs] But I learned to talk from them little kids there.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: I was going on three years old, really, when we moved down here. I was still two, but then we moved to La Yarda because they had, you know, the houses down here was concrete.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh, uh...there was two rows. And after we moved there, they – we just had been built not too long before then. Uh, we...Mr. Romero, which was my sister-in-law, that's her right there, she married my brother Jesse. They was the ones that passed away here in January. Anyway, they moved from Quenoma. They used to live in Quenoma. **NOTE: Possibly she means Quenemo, which is southwest of Baldwin?** He worked for the railroad, too.

NM: Where is Quenoma?

THS: Quenoma is –

Formatted: Spanish (Spain)

NM: Quenoma.

THS: Way up on the other side of Baldwin somewhere.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Uh-huh. But that's where they moved, because they had better housing down there, too. I don't know what kind of housing they had over there, but they had eleven kids in their family. And so, each one of us got four – four rooms.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: You know, and – and –

NM: Each family got four rooms?

THS: Each family got four rooms.

NM: Okay.

THS: There was three – three, four rooms on one side, and three or four rooms on the other, so they got, you know.

NM: Like two rectangular buildings facing each other.

THS: And then the Ramirez moved in there. And then the Garcias moved in there. And we moved in there. And, uh, let's see, who else? My brother Pete moved in there with all his kids. And then like I said, Lucia moved in there. And, uh, let's see who else...uh...oh, they kept moving in and out. But the Romeros and us were the only ones left in La Yarda when the '51 flood came.

NM: And you're the Hernandezes.

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Okay.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And the Romeros. All of the rest of 'em had already moved and got houses on New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

NM: Yeah, uh-huh.

THS: But the Romeros, they had eleven kids, so, you know, it was hard for them to get out and –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh, and my dad never even thought about moving. He just, you know. Actually, I was the only one left. All the rest of 'em had already moved out, you know, the girls.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: We had three girls and, uh...four – four boys. Three girls and four boys.

NM: In your family?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Mm-hmm. And were you the youngest?

THS: I was the youngest.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

NM: So when you moved to La Yorda, um, um...there were, like, seven other families living there?

THS: Uh, they wasn't all full yet, 'cause they had just built the – the Santa Fe yards –

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Not too long before that. So, they started moving in, coming from different little towns, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And they all worked for the railroad.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: You know, so, when they moved for the railroad, they could get transferred wherever they wanted to go.

NM: Right.

THS: So, when they seen that, uh, they got the houses there, uh, they decided that they wanted to move to, you know, here to Lawrence, so –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Um, I think it was us and the Romeros that moved in there first. And then came the Garcias, and then – there's a bug going in there [laughter]. Let's see, what, I don't want to do that with that – with that deal, because –

NM: Oh, this bug here?

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh. Want me to just put him outside?

THS: Just throw it out. Fritz will eat it [laughs].

NM: Want me to give him to Fritz?

THS: No, just, no, just throw it on the floor.

NM: Okay.

THS: He'll pick it up. Yeah, he'll pick it up. He – the minute I get up, because I have problems with my hand since I broke it. And, uh, the minute I get up he'll run over.

NM: Oh.

THS: Pick up all the crumbs that I've dropped on the floor.

NM: The crumbs.

THS: He does it no matter where I'm sitting. And he can't see very good, he's – he's going blind, he's a diabetic.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And he's got cancer.

NM: Oh, gee.

THS: In two places, so –

NM: Wow.

THS: They only gave him three months to live, but he's already lived over the – he doesn't seem to be –

NM: Must be something in the water.

THS: Must be.

NM: Pretty good.

THS: But anyway, getting back to –

NM: Yeah, to La Yarda.

THS: Yeah. Okay, then.

NM: So, were you all from Mexican families, like was your dad from Mexico?

THS: Yeah.

NM: Or your mom from Mexico?

THS: Yeah.

NM: And how did they get here?

THS: My mom, my dad...my dad's dad, he – he was...he owned the – the hac – the hacienda, I guess. Um, that's what they call it. A farm.

NM: Okay.

THS: You know. He – he had 300 men working for him.

NM: In Mexico?



THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Wow.

THS: That was my grandfather.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, my grandmother, my mother used to say she had a – a maid for the birds, the canaries; a maid for the kids; a maid to cook the food; a maid to clean the house; a maid to, uh, water the outside, you know, the dirt. He – they – she had a maid for everything.

NM: Gee.

THS: In the fall when the harvest came in, uh, my mother said she used to sit and, uh, um...for three days, and divide all these, um, food, all this corn and – and beans and everything that they had grown.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Divide it among all the workers.

NM: Wow.

THS: Besides, they got paid, you know, every, so many – every so, I don't know how often, but they did get paid.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Anyway, then my grandfather died, and my dad, since he was the oldest, he had a younger sister and a younger brother. But since he was the oldest, he was left in charge of the hacienda.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: When the government was changing governments, and they was coming through, uh, they could – my mother couldn't remember, or my grandmother, if it was Zapata or Pancho Villa, or which one was coming through, and they was killing all the men that – that owned anything at all. So, they decided to come to the United States, and they sold the hacienda where they lived.

NM: Mm.

THS: They sold it and buried the money. And they came to the United States. So then, after everything had settled, my grandmother said that they went back to – to Mexico, to dig up the money. But the money wasn't any good any more. It had already changed –

NM: Oh, devalued? Oh, wow.

THS: So, since they didn't have anything, then they moved back to the United States.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh, my aunts, three – my aunt had two girls and her, but they wouldn't let 'em come across the border, because they didn't have no means of taking care of themselves, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Nobody working, so that they could have money.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then, um, my dad brought 'em over. He says he didn't want to leave 'em up there. So, he brought 'em over as his daughters. So, he brought over five daughters, 'cause there was two of – of my sisters that was, you know, had been...

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Um, in Mexico. Anyway, um, so, but when he – they went back to Mexico, it was just my – my mother, and my dad, and all them, you know, the two girls, my two sisters and my brother was the only ones that went back. Well then, when they went back, they had my other brother up there. And then they came back and they had my brother Joe in Kansas City and then they had us, my brother Jesse and I in Topeka.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So, they came back and they – they didn't have anything, I mean, they just had to start over again.

NM: Oh, goodness.

THS: 'Cause everything was already gone.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh –

NM: So, they got jobs in the railroad right away, your dad did?

THS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. He got a job right on the railroad. And then my – after years, after my, uh, before my brother-in-law went into the army when they drafted him, World War II, uh, they was all – they moved here through Lawrence, my brother and my brother-in-law.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, they was working for the railroad, and then they got a better job in Topeka working at the Santa Fe shops. So, they moved back to Topeka.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So actually, during the '51 flood, there was only us and the Romeros left in there, Everybody had already bought houses on New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

NM: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

THS: But not all the Mexicans that lived on there lived in La Yarda. No.

NM: Where else did they live?

THS: Like the Chavez, Chavez didn't. Now Peter Romero and his family all lived there.

NM: They lived in La Yarda.

THS: They were still there when the '51 flood came.

NM: Mm-hmm. Were there people living in the boxcars?

THS: Mm-hmm. Well, when – when my, uh, folks came over, even though they had a – a...oh, uh, passport to come across,

NM: Mm-hmm?

THS: They came in a boxcar.

NM: They came in a boxcar, but they didn't live in the boxcar when they –

THS: No. Well, in Kansas City they did.

NM: Oh, they did?

THS: When Joe was –

NM: In La Yarda there?

THS: And my uncle lived in, uh, in – in Pauline. He lived in a passenger car. Yeah. 'Cause I used to go visit him, you know. They had a daughter just about my age, and she passed away years ago in California, but...they lived there till they moved to Topeka.

NM: Now, why would the railroad have somebody living in the passenger car?

THS: Well, because they didn't have any houses for them to live in.

NM: Oh.

THS: Uh-huh. So, that was the closest thing they could find, so I remember going through there and they had curtains. They had a room and then they had curtains. Then they had another room and curtains. And that's the way, mm-hmm. But I remember going to visit 'em, 'cause their oldest daughter was the same age.

NM: Was their car on the tracks, or was it off in the bushes somewhere?

THS: No, it was in the bushes.

NM: Oh, in the bushes. Oh, okay. So just an extra –

THS: They had just taken it and pushed it off the railroad tracks.

NM: An extra car, that –

THS: But it wasn't a boxcar, it was a passenger car –

NM: That wasn't being used. Okay.

THS: It had a lot of windows in it.

NM: Uh-huh. Interesting.

THS: So, um, but...no, it – it was...wasn't very good, so when we – in the '51 flood, we got out, like I say, the Romeros, uh, Raymond Romero and them, their dad and mom let the – let the Romeros go down and stay in their basement of their house. And next door lived their son, and Raymond, and he told my dad that he would, uh, rent the upstairs. He says that we had some people living up there, but they moved out, and it's all clean and everything. If you want it you can go ahead for \$60 a month, you can go ahead and move there.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So, we moved up there, up there, for about three months, then my dad decided we needed to get out of there. And so, he bought that house over on Rhode Island Street, and that's where we lived –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Till they left for a nursing home in St. Joseph, in Kansas City, so...yeah.

NM: When you were at La Yarda, did you have to pay rent to live there, or was that just housing for the workers?

THS: No, no.

NM: Okay.

THS: The – the bathroom, the toilet, was about from here to, uh...the, field, house over there.

NM: Wow.

THS: And you talk about going out there in the wintertime. You know. Oh, it was so cold. You know, they had one for the men, and then one for the women, and over on the other row of houses they had the same thing.

NM: Uh-huh. Did they have showers there, too?

THS: No, we had to take – we had to [laughs] we had to go out and there was a pump that sat in the middle of both, over here, towards the front.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Not in the middle, but in the middle of both houses. There was a pump there, and we had to go pump water out of there, and then we had to warm it up on the stove to take a bath.

NM: Wow.

THS: And in the summertime, we could see snakes down in there. But we didn't have much choice but to drink that water; we didn't have anything else. We – I mean, we – we kids could see 'em down there, you know, and – and we'd ask the people – I mean, the parents to get 'em out, they didn't want to get out.

NM: It was at the bottom of the well? These snakes?

THS: Yeah. Not too, you know, not too many, maybe we see a – a snake and some frogs, you know, jumping around down there. Oh, yeah. And we had to drink that water, 'cause that was the only water. Well...this down here, see, that's one of the toilets.

NM: Oh, right. Uh-huh.

THS: And this down here was a slaughterhouse. And they had a house there to live in, that's what the Romeros lived in, and then their dad worked on the slaughterhouse, cleaning the slaughterhouse.

NM: Oh.

THS: And, uh...So, uh, like I say, I mean, you know, we lived there and we thought it was very fortunate. We had concrete –

NM: Yeah.

THS: On our floor, you know, instead of dirt.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, then when we all got a little bit bigger, then we went to pick potatoes for the – out for Heck, over north of town.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: We all went. He'd come and pick us up at six o'clock in the morning in a big truck, and we'd all get in the back of the truck. And then, uh, he'd take us up there and then he'd bring us back at six o'clock at night. We picked potatoes, a 105 out in the heat.

NM: Dig 'em up out of the ground?

THS: No, they'd take 'em and plow; they'd have a tractor plow 'em.

NM: Oh.

THS: And we'd pick 'em up and put 'em in a wire basket, and they'd carry the wire basket up to where the trucks go to pick em' up and then sack – put 'em in a sack and –

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: They would come – uh, one of 'em, two guys on the truck, one of 'em would pick 'em up and throw 'em, the sacks, on the truck, and the other one would, uh, write how many.

NM: Okay.

THS: 'Cause we got ten cents a bag.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: A hundred pounds of potatoes, for picking 'em. That's what we – they paid us, ten cents a sack.

NM: So, a bag was 100 pounds?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: And you had ten cents?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: So, at – at the end of the day, about how much did you make?

THS: Not very much [laughter], but it made enough. It made enough that we thought we had a lot of money.

NM: Nice. Now, are you talking about when you were this age, like maybe you're, uh, fourteen, fifteen, something like that?

THS: Yeah.

NM: And these girls would all go with you?

THS: Oh, yeah.

NM: Do you know – do you remember their names, who these girls are?

THS: Yeah. Yeah, that's my sister-in-law Jenny, that's Mercy, that's me, and that's Carmen.

NM: And they're all Hernandezes?

THS: No.

NM: No?

THS: No. A Romero, Garcia...

NM: Oh.

THS: And, uh, a Ramirez.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: [Murmurs] Oh yeah.

NM: Did you say that's you?

THS: Yeah.

NM: Aw. You're looking right at the camera.

THS: [Murmurs] all the rest of 'em. And I didn't want to take pictures, but they insisted.

NM: That's a cute picture.

THS: But anyway, my daughter probably has one or two more. I told – she talked to me last night, told her to start checking the – papers.

NM: Oh, good.

THS: And see if she could find some more. Or if she could find somebody that lived in La Yarda that had pictures that wasn't in the flood that they might have around.

NM: Yeah, that would be great. Wow.

THS: No, Peter was – Pete was in the flood, yeah.

NM: Mm-hmm. Pete Romero?

THS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. They was there.

NM: He was there that day?

THS: Yeah.

NM: I see – I see him every so often; he comes to the fiesta meetings.

THS: Yeah, does he?

NM: Yeah, he's very busy with fiesta. Mm-hmm.

THS: He's, uh, he – he was – he, that's his sister right there.

NM: Oh.

THS: Which was my sister-in-law. Yeah, they took off and got – her and my brother took off to Topeka and got married at 17.

NM: Oh, really?

THS: Yeah.

NM: So you're mar – you're – you're related to the Romeros, then?

THS: Well, just by –

NM: By marriage.

THS: Yeah. By marriage. Mm-hmm.



NM: Now, did you – when you were moved here and you were two years old, um, do you remember your dad going off to work every day? Did he –

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Was he – did he get to stay home most nights, or did he have to go travel?

THS: [Laughs] You know, this is something that I never could figure out. During the floods, ‘course, between here and Lecompton, the – the water used to come over the railroad. Well, if there was water on the railroad, the trains couldn’t go through.

NM: Mmm.

THS: You know, so they made a stop down here to Santa Fe.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Railroad, here. Uh, so they would take one of the men down there, and leave him there, all night long. They’d –

NM: To guard the train?

THS: To – to see if the water was gonna come over the railroad.

NM: Oh.

THS: How in the world they were supposed to – to notify the Santa Fe depot, what I can figure out, we didn’t have phones back there with – I mean, they sat there all night long with a fire burning, you know, making sure. But the water didn’t get over the tracks, ‘cause if it did, the trains would have to stop down here.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Well, down here at the Santa Fe depot, was underwater too.

NM: Mmm.

THS: You know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So they couldn’t –

NM: So, this – did it flood periodically? This ‘51 flood was a really big one, but –

THS: That was a big one.

NM: But every so often it would flood?

THS: Yeah, it would – well, that’s the reason that my dad and Mr. Romero said – they – a guy from, a bigshot from Santa Fe came down and told ‘em: “Look, let’s move you out, there’s a big flood coming, you know –”

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: “And we’ll send trucks to – to load all your things up.”

NM: Oh, they knew?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Okay.

THS: “And – and, uh, move you out.”

“Oh, no, no, no. It’s gonna come up to the sidewalk, and it’ll go back down.” Well, it came up to the sidewalk but it didn’t go back down this time. And that’s the reason we lost everything.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Because they could have put it on trucks and taken it out.

NM: Oh.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: So, they had seen floods come and go –

THS: Oh, yeah.

NM: And they were not consequential.

THS: We used to – we used to get out there and fish, great big old fish. [Laughter] With a string and – and a stick.

NM: Yeah.

THS: A stick off the – the trees, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And we tie a string on it; we thought we was fishing. [NM laughs] Great big old carp about that big would come, you know, the water would bring 'em back, and –

NM: Right, they would get landlocked.

THS: If it got a little bit higher, we'd get out there and swim in that dirty water.

NM: Oh, gee. Dangerous.

THS: It's a wonder we didn't get sick.

NM: Yeah, yeah.

THS: Yeah. We – we – we done it all. I mean, you know. And, I gotta tell you about this. This Mr. Romero that lived in the slaughterhouse?

NM: Yeah?

THS: He was – they used to have a sale barn down here at the corner. Right on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, you know, where that – that trail is.

NM: A barn?

THS: Right up on that hill, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: There's houses on this side, and there's where Allen Press is, way back there. That used to be Stokely's, where they canned, uh, food, you know, beans and all that stuff, back there. Well, they used to have sales every Saturday night. And Mr. Romero, he was no relation to any of the Romeros. He used to go up there, he'd take a little – a little goat, or a little cow, or something, you know. Not a cow, but a calf, you know.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And then he – he'd come by with a – a sack [laughs]. He'd tell us: "If you kids don't say anything, I'll give you some meat after I cook it, okay?" [Laughs] He would tell us, of course we wasn't gonna say anything, 'cause we didn't eat meat that much, you know.

NM: Yeah. So he – he stole the calf from the slaughterhouse?

THS: Yes.

NM: Oh, gee.

THS: Up here on the hill, there on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, where they had that – they had the sale every Saturday morning.

NM: Oh. So, they were selling the cows and –

THS: The calves and everything.

NM: And he just snuck one out.

THS: He wouldn't get the big cows, he would get the little calves, you know –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Or the goats, you know. Then he, the goat, he would come down, dig a hole and – and, uh, put some rocks down in there. And then he would put a – wrap the meat of the goat [laughs] and put it down in there and then put ashes on top of that, and cook it all day and all night. And he would say: "If you kids don't say anything, I'll give you some." Well, we wasn't about ready to say anything if we was gonna get some meat, you know. But he used to do that quite a bit. And then the, uh, the guys from...from the sale barn would come the next day, and they'd say: "Did you kids see any – any, uh, we lost a goat." [NM laughs] "A baby goat, did you kids see anything?" "No, we didn't see a thing." Cause we knew that if we told them, we wasn't gonna get anything.

NM: How funny.

THS: And that was extra meat to eat, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Like I say, my mother cooked a chicken every Sunday. 'Cause she raised chickens after a while, after we was there. She'd cook the chicken every Sunday, the...uh...oh, the people that came over would eat the chicken, if there was Sunday chicken left, we would eat it. If not, we ate the soup off the chicken.

NM: Mmm. So, she had company?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Every Sunday we had company, and she'd kill a chicken, 'cause she – she raised some chickens in the back, and so, uh, she'd kill a chicken.

NM: Now, you guys – did you all belong to St. John's Church back then?

THS: We went to St. John's, when we had to sit on the three pews on the left-hand side. And we had to pay a dime. They wouldn't let us sit anywhere else in the church. We had to sit in the last three pews.

NM: They had three pews set aside for the Mexican children?

THS: Uh-huh. In the back.

NM: Or Mexican-Americans, yeah?

THS: In the very back of the – of the church.

NM: In the back of the church.

THS: On the left-hand side.

NM: And you had to pay. Did other people have to pay to use the pews?

THS: I don't know. I was too small, you know. I remember that – that my dad, on – when the snow was so high, and it was so cold, he would carry me. But, you know, the men always walked in front of the women. They'd never walk with them.

NM: Really?

THS: Uh-huh. That's the truth.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Yeah, the men walked about three paces ahead of the women, and the women walked back there.

NM: Hmm.

THS: And I always asked my mother how come they done that. "Oh, I don't know," she said, "they just always done that."

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Mm-hmm. They never walked together.

NM: Just the custom.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Did you grow up speaking Spanish?

THS: Uh, yeah.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Yeah.

NM: And –

THS: I didn't – I didn't know any English till I went to school. I went to school at New York School.

NM: New York School.

THS: Uh-huh. And they had a reunion there; I would have loved to have gone. A couple of weeks ago, they had a reunion. I had – I went to that, uh...oh...that, uh, deal they had in Topeka, you know, for the family. Uh, trying to think of the name. I'll remember it pretty soon.

NM: Yeah.

THS: It was uh, you know, for all the family. So, I really wasn't planning to go, but the girls wanted to go, because they wanted to see, you know –

NM: Oh, a family reunion.

THS: A family reunion.

NM: Oh.

THS: Yeah, they had it in Topeka, in that church basement, in the church building over there.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And so we went, but Andy said the only way he would take me would be in the – in the wheelchair. And I knew he meant it. So I went, but he did take me in the wheelchair.

NM: Yeah. That's fine.

THS: I don't like to ride in the wagon – the wheelchair.

NM: Oh, you don't? Does it make you nervous?

THS: It was my sister, my daughter-in-law's wheelchair that had Huntington's. And he still has it. And so, he'll bring it over and he'll say: "I'm only gonna take you if I can take you in the wheelchair. Or else we're not going, Mama."

NM: Well, I think it makes sense for you to go in the wheelchair.

THS: Oh, it does to him, but not to me.

NM: Because then you get so tired, and dizzy, so, that way you can relax.

THS: I get really tired, too, them seats up there. And then they had this display of [murmurs] cousins' pictures on the table, but they was mostly from our – from my side of the family, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: There was hardly any pictures from the other side of the family.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So –

NM: So, you knew everything. You saw everything that you already knew. You were looking for new things to see.

THS: Yeah, the girls was, uh, took me up there, you know: “Mom, do you know who this is?” Sure, I knew – [NM laughs] I knew ‘em all, you know. We grew up together.

NM: Sure.

THS: And, uh, when, um, uh, we went to, uh, pick potatoes, my, uh, cousins from Topeka and Pauline came over

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: To earn a little money, ‘cause Mexicans wasn’t hired back, way back then.

NM: The what?

THS: The Mexicans, they wouldn’t hire ‘em.

NM: Nobody would hire you?

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Oh.

THS: And we went to eat, the only place we would be able to get a hamburger or a Coke would be up at the bar. At the – even at the dime store. That’s – we couldn’t sit in a booth and – and eat, they wouldn’t let us.

NM: Really? And was it just understood, or was there a sign or...?

THS: No, they would tell you.

NM: Oh, they would tell you.

THS: They would tell you: "We will sell you food, but you can't eat in here. You'll have to take it with you."

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Real quietly, you know, where nobody would hear.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But that's what they did. I remember Leo was, he – he was in Louisville, Kentucky. And he hitchhiked home, so he could save money. Uh, he helped his mother pay the gas bill. She owned a house there on Tennessee Street. 1321 Tennessee. And she rented it to Chinese people.

NM: Oh.

THS: And so, um, he always – she never had enough money because they didn't pay very much. But they did feed her. [Laughs] So Leo always, uh, he used to shine shoes in the service for other guys to earn extra money.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So that he could help his mother pay the gas bill.

NM: Oh, mm-hmm.

THS: And so, he hitchhiked home, and they met him up at the TP Junction. And just coming down north, that north street, there was a place there, a restaurant that they called Deluxe.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And – and so he stopped there, it was in the – it was hot. And he said, he stopped there and he had his uniform on. He stopped there to get something to drink. She says – the lady came over and said: "We'll sell you the drink, but you can't drink it in here."

NM: What did she have against Leo? He wasn't a Mexican.

THS: Eh, no, but he – he looked like one.

NM: Oh.



THS: [Laughs] You know, he's dark-complected.

NM: Oh, my goodness.

THS: And so, she says: "We'll sell you the drink, but you can't drink it in here."

And he said: "I had my uniform on. I said, 'Lady, you can keep your drink. I don't need it that bad.'" And he continued to walk down to his mother's house on Tennessee Street. But he always remembered that, that they told him...

NM: Wow.

THS: But, you know, we was used to it. Now, um, I remember my brother came home one day and – and he told my mom, he says: "Mom?" 'Cause my dad didn't make very much money on the railroad, no. They paid him the least they could pay him, you know? And they worked him all day in the hot sun and in the cold wind and the cold – cold winter. Anyway, um, they, uh...um, Leo says, he used to shine shoes for the other soldiers so he could earn enough money to send to his mother to pay for the gas bills.

NM: Yeah.

THS: So, but he said he was happy that the Chinese fed her. [Laughter]

NM: They're good cooks.

THS: She wouldn't – she wouldn't have been able to get out and – you know, she was kind of crippled too.

NM: Yeah.

THS: So, she wouldn't have been able to get out. Now, there was some stories that, you know –

NM: Well, when you were at New York School, were there a lot of Mexican kids there?

THS: Oh, yeah.

NM: And did the teachers treat you okay?

THS: Yeah, they treated us really good.

NM: Were there white – or whiter Americans, I don't know what the other people were called?

THS: There was a – there was a few colored kids too, because, you know, we all lived down here on the east part of town.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: You know, we didn't live on that part of, any of that part of town over there.

NM: So, the teachers just taught you...

THS: Yeah, they taught us just like they did the rest of the kids.

NM: That's where you learned English?

THS: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

NM: Did you start in kindergarten –

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Or did you start in first grade?

THS: No, kindergarten.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Yeah. We all did.

NM: Yeah.

THS: We went on clear up to junior high. We went to junior high when junior high was on Kentucky Street.

NM: Oh.

THS: There was three buildings.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: One on each side, you know, on...

NM: Yeah, that's where Langston Hughes went to school.

THS: And you had to cross the street; when there was too many cars, you was late to the other deal. And you had – we had gym on the third floor of the one over on that side of Kentucky Street.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: So, if we was over there on – on that side of Kentucky Street, we'd have to cross the street, run all the way up the stairs to gym, and if we didn't make it, we'd get wrote up. We didn't have to come up and say, but everybody did, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But all them stairs, you had to run up them stairs to get up to the gym [NM laughs].

NM: Now, when you went to that school, what was that school called; do you remember?

THS: Um...they called it, well, it was Central.

NM: Okay.

THS: Yeah, Central.

NM: Alright. And, um, so the Pinckney kids came into that school also? Were there kids from Pinckney school and New York School, and – ?

THS: They all came up –

NM: Maybe some other school?

THS: Till they – till they, uh, moved the high school, Lawrence High, to the big high school. And then they made that a junior high.

NM: Mm.

THS: Yeah. Up to that time that – we was there.

NM: And were you okay there? I mean, were the teachers nice to you then, too?

THS: Uh-huh. The teachers was good to us, and – and so was the kids.

NM: Yeah?

THS: I remember we had – well, I don't know, but you know [murmurs] and Miss Six. She was an older teacher. She was the nicest teacher you ever did see. There was quite a few colored kids and they put us up there on the top of this – the one on – on, uh, the east side. The building on the – there was one on the east side, one on the west side, and then one on the north side. There was three buildings, yeah.

NM: Okay.

THS: And that was junior high. Okay, so you go in one building, you had a class there, and maybe you had to go clear over to the other building to get there, to go to the other class.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Well, like I say, if you had gym, clear up to the top of the north building, and if you was on the east building, you wouldn't make it there. You got wrote up and you had to go stay after school.

NM: Right. Yeah.

THS: So, um – I had a sore there.

NM: Oh, dear.

THS: I think – I think it has to do with that cancer I got on my nose.

NM: Oh.

THS: Yeah. And they took that one out, and I think it's come back again.

NM: Mm.

THS: They took one out about that big on my cheek. And I had just had surgery for my eye, because it was swollen shut.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And they just went to get the stitches out, and they sent me to a dermatologist.

NM: Oh, boy.

THS: He said they'd have to take that out. So now my eye is going shut again. But I'm not gonna have to [murmurs].

NM: Oh, dear.

THS: But, no. But...and – and, Miss Six over there on the top of the – of the south building over there, yeah, the south building, um...most of them was colored kids in there. Yeah. I don't know if they divided 'em because of that, or – or what. But, there was about three of us Mexicans in there with all these colored kids.

NM: Oh.

THS: Well, she couldn't handle the kids. They'd get up and sing, and dance, and just carry on, and she – she would say: "Now, kids, if you behave yourselves, I will give you an A!" [Laughter] Well, we'd get an A too, 'cause we was right there. Oh, it was so funny.

NM: So, what did Mrs. Six teach? Was she an English teacher?

THS: No, history.

NM: Oh, history. Okay.

THS: Said: "If you behave yourself, I'll give you all an A." We all got an A, every one of us.  
[Laughter]

NM: So, were you – were you the same kids all day, or did you change; switch around?

THS: No, we would change, because some of the kids took, uh, some kind of, uh, subject and the others took another, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm. Right.

THS: And like the boys, they would play basketball or anything like that, so, you know, they would change, they would go to – the girls would go to gym all – all at one time.

NM: Oh.

THS: Not at one time, a certain hour, and then the boys would go at a certain hour.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But never together, you know. But, no, it was – it was real fun to go to school there. Then when we went to high school, then it was a little bit different.

NM: Oh, was it?

THS: We didn't, uh, we was just mixed in with everybody, and everybody treated us like anybody else.

NM: Okay, well, that's good.

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: That kind of surprises me.

THS: Yeah, it does. But, uh, the church, and if you ever go to the cemetery, you will walk behind the – the garage –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And you see, most of the older Mexican people are buried back there, because we wasn't allowed to be buried anywhere else in the cemetery.

NM: You had a certain area of the cemetery, yeah.

THS: The back of the garage.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And we had to dig our own graves.

NM: Gee.

THS: And they had to make their own stone.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: They made it out of concrete and they wrote the names on it.

NM: Mm-hmm. Are your parents buried back there?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Yeah.

NM: In the Catholic church?

THS: But, when Leo and I went to get our lots, I told him, he says: "Where do you want to go?"

I said: "I want 'em over there by the lake."

He says: "What for? You're not gonna be able to see anything."

I said: "I don't care, I want..." So our – our tombstone's just as you come in the gate.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: And then, uh, he said: "I want a vault."

I says: "What you want a vault for, you're gonna go to ashes anyway."

He says: "I don't care. I want a vault."

NM: He said he wanted a vault?

THS: So he got his vault and [laughs] I got the –

NM: And you got the spot that you wanted.

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Yeah, that's great [laughs].

THS: But, you know, most of it, it was because, we was, were – was able to, you know, be buried anywhere then.

NM: Yes, yes.

THS: We didn't have to be buried back – well, my folks are buried out there. Back there, so...but Mrs. Mitchell's buried – uh, she – she was a colored lady, she's buried right next to them.

NM: Uh-huh. So, did the colored people get buried in the – in the same area that the, um, Mexican people did?

THS: When, uh, when Father, I think it was Father Larry, or one of 'em, Father O'Neill, I can't remember which one it was, but that's when we got, uh, and then of course when Father Tao came, he was more or less, you know, for the whole. Uh, all the people in the church.

NM: Which one? Father who?

THS: Father Tao.

NM: Tao?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Oh.

THS: He was Monsignor Tao, I guess.

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: I don't know if he was here before, um, when he was still...yeah, he – he married us, Monsignor Tao, yeah.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Uh, I was in high school and my dad had been in the hospital for three, uh, three weeks in Topeka. And there was no income coming in. And so, uh, Gladys Romero used to clean house for Mary Tao. That was Monsignor's sister. And so, she had to quit for so – well, she had breast cancer. And she had to quit, and so she asked me if I wanted to go take that job over there. So Mary, she hired me right away, you know. And – excuse me – and so, uh, she had me taking the flowers off the altar and – and, uh, cleaning the – the house, you know, and

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And uh, uh...ironing, you know, tablecloths for the altar and all that. Oh, I done it all. Yeah.

NM: So, you kept the church clean.

THS: Yeah.

NM: And the –

THS: Well, they –

NM: Parish –

THS: They had people come in and clean the whole church, but –

NM: Oh, okay.

THS: Uh, she had me wash and iron the – the table – the altar cloths.

NM: Oh.

THS: Uh-huh. And the – the altar boys,

NM: Oh, the albs?

THS: ‘Cause at that time they didn’t have no girls, you know.

NM: Sure.

THS: Just boys. So I ironed all of them, so then when Leo and I got married, they had pictures taken of her – him and I together with Monsignor and her.

NM: Oh.

THS: Oh, yeah. We got pictures, and then I asked her if she would stand up when we had Andy. We was married three and a half years before Andy was born.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And she said yeah. So her and Leo’s brother stood up for Andy.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Yeah. Well, she got to where she was liking me real well, you know, she would just leave me at the house and say: “Answer the phone, do whatever you want to do.” You know, they would go somewhere and, so that’s what I did. And, uh, then I went to work in the laundry for \$12.50 a week.



NM: Oh, I remember you working at the laundry. Yeah, where was the laundry?

THS: At Independent. Independent Laundry, right across from the seniors' place, over on Vermont.

NM: On Vermont, across from where the senior center is now? Okay.

THS: No, it's across the street from there.

NM: Oh, okay. Across the street.

THS: Yeah. It was right next to the Brand building, where they had the W.R.E.N., it was right next to it.

NM: Okay.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: So, what was that like? Was it all Mexican girls working there, or a whole bunch of different girls?

THS: No, they had others. They had colored ladies working, and Mexican girls, and they had white –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: White women, but at that time, you know, we was kids, and everybody just took us under their wing, you know, they just –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: [Murmurs] Thought it was just a bunch of kids that just loved to work [laughter]. You know.

NM: Well, it's hard work, ironing all day.

THS: We worked from six...6:30 in the morning till 5:00 at night, mm-hmm. In that heat.

NM: And seven days a week, was it, or did you get Saturdays off?

THS: Ah, no, we had Saturday and Sunday.

NM: Oh, nice. Okay.

THS: Unless we – unless they was behind, 'cause we had to do all the sheets of the – and the pillowcases of the fraternity houses and the sorority houses.

NM: Oh.

THS: And all the Memorial Hospital sheets. We had to do all the, I mean, Jenny and I used to, I mean, leave piles of sheets, you know. But of course, they had some ladies put them in baskets, you know –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then put their names up. But yeah, we done all of ‘em. All the fraternity and sorority houses.

NM: Did they have big washing machines to wash ‘em?

THS: They had a big [unintelligible] Tommy. I think they had five of ‘em [unintelligible], Tommy. And then they had, uh, women on that – they had another room. And then they had the office upstairs. And the women in the other room, they sorted out all the clothes. Except the hospital ones. And, uh, Tommy had to just throw ‘em in the washer like that.

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: But you never know when – what you’re gonna find in that hospital.

NM: That’s what I’m thinking.

THS: He used to take it, take stuff and throw it clear over [laughs]. Make us jump. I learned how to do it all, I learned how to press shirts, I learned how to fold clothes, I learned how to put tickets on them, I learned how to separate things.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Yeah. I had to.

NM: I just gotta get one more story. I – I love that story you have of Christmas and how you’d go to church, and then your dad...

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: Would invite everybody home. So, tell me that story again.

THS: Yeah, um, we used to make tamales. My mother would get up at 3:00 in the morning, and she would be on her knees with a *metate*, which is a rock, and then another rock, a big rock about this – did you ever see one like that?

NM: Uh-uh.

THS: Okay. It's a big rock, about that wide, and about that, and it kind of slants down. And then she used to have a – another rock about this – it was only about that wide. And it was about that long. And so, she put the corn in there, and then get that rock, and rock back and forth, and back and forth, till she got all that masa just right.

NM: Mmm.

THS: Okay. She'd get up at 3:00 in the morning, 2:00 in the morning, and be out there, uh –

NM: Outside?

THS: No, in the house.

NM: Oh.

THS: Yeah, they would cook the – the corn outside.

NM: Oh, they cooked it outside.

THS: Yeah, in great big old cans, about that big.

NM: Okay.

THS: Yeah, they built a fire –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And cooked the corn. Then they would bring the corn in, and, uh, she would grind it. And then they would take their hands and work with it, after she grinded it.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, then she had all the rest of the family come in and you'd take that spoon and you'd put that corn on them corn shucks, you know, you spread it out just so-so. She had to have 'em just so-so. You talk about being young and trying to get that on there.

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: You'd put it on there, it'd come back in your fingers. Then she would took – take a piece of meat, and then she would fold 'em so, and then she would stack – she would put a little wooden thing, about that big, that my dad made with three – with...uh, four, uh, little doodads about that big, just like a star.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Only it had one more than a star. And then, um, she would stack the tamales in that bucket just so-so.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Because you had to have this, the steam – you can't cook 'em in water. You have to just cook 'em in steam. So, you let the steam go out –

NM: In between.

THS: And that's what cooks the tamales.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: She would make two or three cans, and the cans was about that big, that used to be flour cans.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Okay. And then, after – then we'd have to pray the rosary, and my grandmother: "We got to pray the rosary before we go. You can't go till we pray the rosary." Well, it'd be alright if we prayed the rosary, but after we'd prayed for John because he was sick, and – and Joe because he was sick, and this and that, and us on our knees. She: "You have to get on your knees," on a concrete floor. You know.

NM: Cold floor. Mm-hmm.

THS: Then after that, we gotta lay the Baby Jesus down before we go to church. Okay. We gotta lay the Baby Jesus down, and my dad would go to the store and he would buy bags of mixed nuts and bags of hard candy, and they would have this great big old dish, and they would fill it up. You can't have any of that till after you lay the Baby Jesus down. Okay. Then we were allowed to go and get a handful. [Laughs]

NM: After all those prayers.

THS: Then after, we'd go to Mass. Then after Mass, my dad would stand on – on the – on the...steps of the church, after church. "Come on to the house for coffee and tamales. Come on to the house," my mother would say. They would set this great big old table in the kitchen and, uh, so that's...

NM: And that would be an afternoon Mass, or a – or a – ?

THS: No, midnight Mass.

NM: Midnight Mass?

THS: Oh, we had to go to midnight Mass.

NM: Oh.

THS: We had to lay the Baby Jesus down.

NM: Oh.

THS: Before we went to midnight Mass. Oh, yeah.

NM: Ah, so it would be like...one in the morning by the time you were home.

THS: Yeah, by the time everybody left, it'd be six o'clock in the morning.

NM: Oh, goodness.

THS: And, uh, everybody would come in for coffee, my mother would make pots and pots of coffee.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: For coffee and tamales, and of course, they start talking about way back in Mexico and pretty soon it was six o'clock in the morning and [laughs] you know, but that was Christmas.

NM: What a party. Yeah.

THS: That was Christmas, and everybody always looked forward to it.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Not everybody came, you know, but we always had a houseful.

NM: Great story.

THS: Not just of our family, but...

NM: Yeah.

THS: You know, yeah. And my grandmother used to come, and she'd spend one month with – with us, one month in Topeka with my aunt, and another month in Pauline with my uncle. And then she would start over again. She said that way they won't get tired of her. [NM laughs] So, and she come over here, my dad would buy her a dress, and maybe shoes, or something like that. Then she'd go to Matt's in Topeka, and they'd do the same thing. 'Cause way back then, you didn't get no Social Security or anything.

NM: No, there's no –

THS: So that was the only way that she could make it. Of course, when she lived there with 'em for that month, they would feed her and – and all that, you know, so...but no, she came, and they'd, uh, I mean, coming from somebody that really owned so much stuff and then – it was hard on her.

NM: Had to have been very hard, mm-hmm.

THS: But...they made it.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: You know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And still they're – she's – she's gone. She passed away. In fact, they've all passed away. Actually, I'm the only oldest one out of the whole family.

NM: Mm.

THS: I mean, um...my dad's and – and my uncles and my aunts, yeah.

NM: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

THS: Yeah. Everybody else has passed away.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: So...but no, we had – we had some good times.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And, uh, we – we played – we didn't have to go out and find somebody to play. It was always the boys against the girls. [NM laughs] Well, that's because they would just push us around and everything. Yeah, okay. "We're gonna play football. We're gonna play us against the girls." [NM laughs] "We're gonna play baseball. Come on, girls. We're gonna play against you." You know, and: "We're gonna play basketball," well, they – we had a – a basket that they had cut the bottom out of it.

NM: Oh.

THS: And hang it up. And that was –

NM: That was your basketball.

THS: It was always the boys against the girls, 'cause there were so many. See, the – the Romeros had eleven. Uh, we had seven. Uh, the Ramirez had, uh...ten, I think. And the Garcias had eleven, too, I think.

NM: Gee.

THS: Yeah. They all had a big family, so –

NM: Right.

THS: We didn't have to go out and – we – we just got pushed around. We didn't have to go out and find somebody to play with. [NM laughs] And then until we got a little bit older, and then the Ramirez moved on New Jersey Street, right across from the Holy Rollers Church. [NM laughs] The day that the Holy Rollers was gonna have church, we was all up in that porch, the Ramirez porch, waiting to see them carry the people out. They would sing –

NM: Yeah?

THS: So much, that they would have to carry 'em out.

NM: Wow.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: They would faint?

THS: We had a lot of fun. But, you know, we – we went to the movies, we had to sit way up there in the balcony.

NM: You had to sit in the balcony.

THS: Yes, we wasn't allowed to sit anywhere else in the movies. We did get in for ten cents, so we had to save up fifty cents [murmurs, laughs]. And they had chapters, and we would go every Saturday morning, to see the Lone Ranger and Gene Autry and Will Rogers and –

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: For ten cents, but, yeah. We – we enjoyed it, and like I say, La Yarda, they had, you know, bathrooms, but, oh, it was so cold [laughs].

NM: Oh, goodness.

THS: And, uh, in the house, uh, we had wood stoves.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And if the wood stove went out in the middle of the night, you were out of luck. You're gonna freeze to death [laughs].

NM: Did your dad try to keep wood in there all night?

THS: My dad did, mm-hmm.

NM: Oh.

THS: Yeah, he tried to keep it... 'cause, you know, I still had one of my older sisters at home with us, and then my other sister, she was married, but he was in the service, so she lived right across from us.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: In the other row of houses.

NM: Did you help your mother cook and do all the chores?

THS: They did.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: I didn't have to do it.

NM: You didn't have to, 'cause you were the youngest?

THS: Mm-hmm. The others always griped [unintelligible]. My mother always said: "Leave her alone. She's – she's too young to get in here." And so I didn't learn how to do anything.

NM: Oh.

THS: No. Mm-mm. I didn't have to, 'cause, both the girls was –

NM: Well, how did you become such a great cook?

THS: I don't know.

NM: Just experience.

THS: I just experienced – I didn't know how to cook one bit when I got married to Leo. And he knew how to cook.

NM: Yeah? 'Cause he'd been in the army.

THS: Uh-huh. He knew how to cook real good, but I – I didn't.



NM: How funny.

THS: But I learned, mm-hmm.

NM: Yeah.

THS: And a lot of it, you know, I couldn't remember what my mother used to tell us. 'Cause she used to sit me down with the other two [laughs] and tell us what we were supposed to do and how we were supposed to do it.

NM: Uh-huh. But you didn't remember.

THS: I was – I was always the youngest, so I didn't have to. They did.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Yeah. And then in the summertime, like I say, we picked potatoes. Then we'd went to California. My mother had an aunt up there. That's where my sister got married. My dad was so mad. [Laughs] He couldn't find her, they took off and hid in – along the trees along the road. And, uh, we used to, uh, the boys, well, they'd take me too, but they would take me till we got to the peaches and apricots, because –

NM: Oh. Are we talking about California now?

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Okay.

THS: They say that they made more money because they would be picking up, and they had little buckets about that big.

NM: Yeah.

THS: So, all I did all day long was carry little buckets back and forth. The women was cutting the apricots in half, and laying 'em on this tray, my mother did it.

NM: Oh.

THS: To dry.

THS: And then they'd put 'em in the oven.

NM: Oh. Now, when was it that you went to California?

THS: [Laughs] In the summertime.

NM: Oh, in the summer. Just one summer, or different summers?

THS: No. Different summers.

NM: Several summers you went to California.

THS: We would go in time to – to work on the apricots.

NM: Oh.

THS: And then we worked on the peaches. We lived in a tent there. My mother cooked outside in the pot.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: But the boys says: “Mom, we’d make more money if she carries them little buckets back.” Well, you know, carry the – I was old enough to go to school, though, they made me go to school in Cucamonga, and I’ll never forget that. I didn’t like that.

NM: The what?

THS: Cucamonga.

NM: What’s that?

THS: It’s a town in California.

NM: You went to school there?

THS: Where I went to school.

NM: Oh, so it was like a migrant children’s school, or...regular ?

THS: No, it was a mixed school, uh, but I didn’t know any – anybody. There was a row of houses, great big old row of one-bedroom houses, I mean, it reached for about a mile.

NM: Yeah.

THS: Where they’d hire all these – where the let all these people live, to work on their grapes.

NM: Oh, on the grapes.

THS: Uh-huh.

NM: Oh.

THS: So, we would go and work on the – on the apricots, and then the peaches, and then we'd come back over to this little town, and the boys would work in the grapes.

NM: Oh.

THS: Well, the more grapes they picked, the more money they made.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: I must have been about eight or nine. Maybe not even that. I don't think I was there... Anyway, the truck would come and drop off all them little wooden boxes about that big.

NM: Right.

THS: Well, they didn't want to stop picking, because the more boxes they would, so they would...

NM: So, you were the go-fer, huh?

THS: I went to get them little boxes, I carried two, one in each hand, you know, and get over there to 'em.

NM: Were they cardboard or wood?

THS: Huh?

NM: Were they cardboard boxes, or wood?

THS: No, it was the wooden boxes.

NM: Ugh. Heavy.

THS: And so, I'd take one in each hand and then take 'em to one, and then go get two more and take 'em to the other, and...

NM: Right.

THS: The other – my three brothers was working in the area [murmurs].

NM: Now, did you take the train to California, or how did you get there?

THS: We took the train.

NM: Oh.

THS: See, my daddy got a pass, so we could go anywhere as long as the train ran.

NM: Right. And so, you knew people there that got you these jobs, and...

THS: Well, uh, my aunt, she – well you didn't have to know anybody, you just go there. There was plenty of people to –

NM: Oh.

THS: You know, they had to pick that before it would ripen.

NM: Right.

THS: And so then, when we went over to this other place after we got the peaches and we went in the grapes, oh that sand was so hot, though, on your feet. But the boys would say: "Mom," 'cause the truck would dump the boxes clear out there.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Well, if they had to quit picking to get the boxes, then they made less money.

NM: Mm-hmm. There you go. So they got their little sister to help.

THS: Till I had to go to school, they told me I had to go to school. They told my mother she had to send me. Well, she put me on this bus. I don't know anybody on the bus, 'cause none of the people there was very friendly, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: They all kept to themselves. She puts me on this bus, and we go all the way about from here to Eudora on the bus.

NM: Mm.

THS: Maybe a little further. Then the bus goes in this place, the gates open. Great big old fence about as tall as this house. The bus walks – drives in, they close the gate. There I was, standing in the hallway crying, I didn't know anybody there; I didn't even know what class I was supposed to be in.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: You know, she just put me on the bus and she says: "Go to the school."

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And the gates didn't open again until you got to go home.

NM: Like a prison.

THS: Yeah.

NM: Wow.

THS: It was. To me it was a prison, anyway.

NM: Did – did anybody help you?

THS: No.

NM: No?

THS: Finally a teacher came over, and she asked me where I was from. And so, she took me under her wing and took me to this grade, and, uh – uh, you know, told the teacher there and – but none of the other kids ever talked to you. No.

NM: So strange.

THS: They wouldn't even sit with you when you had lunch, because you'd go out in – in under these trees, and they had –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Picnic benches out there. None of 'em would talk to you. They was Mexicans and white kids there too.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: But they... oh well [murmurs], oh well. I made it. Then we'd come back and we'd go to Minnesota to work in the potatoes, the carrots –

NM: Gee whiz.

THS: And the onions.

NM: Hmm. And you took the train out there?

THS: No. Raymond put us in the back end of this big old truck. Four families back there. And it was cold back there, too.

NM: Oh, yeah.

THS: In the wind, you know. And so, we'd go out there, and we'd sit – we'd live in the garage on a dirt floor.

NM: Gee.

THS: One in each corner of the garage, you know. We all slept in the same garage.

NM: Ooh.

THS: We just had to, you know, and then the women cooked outside.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And then the man had some peach trees out there. And apricots. [Laughs] And, of course, you know, we being kids, we'd go over there after dark and pick 'em.

NM: Sure.

THS: Then the next morning he would come and he'd tell my – our mothers: "Would you please keep your kids off of there." Oh, we was hungry. You know, living in a place like that and nowhere, you know. They'd take us to town on Saturday nights to watch a movie, you know, and they wouldn't let us off the truck, because they was afraid we'd get lost. So we sat in – on – in the truck.

NM: A drive-in movie?

THS: Well, it really wasn't a drive in, 'cause all you got to see was the movie. You couldn't – they didn't have no things to –

NM: You couldn't hear it?

THS: Mm-mm. But we seen the movie. [NM laughs] Then they'd take us, uh, twice a week to go take a bath in the – in the lake.

NM: Oh.

THS: Great big lakes in Minnesota.

NM: Oh, that's the cold water.

THS: Yeah. Yeah. That's where we went and got...

NM: And it – was that summertime, it was fall or...?

THS: It was fall, yeah, because that was the time we picked.

NM: Oh, gee.

THS: But we made money, enough for the kids to come back and go to school.

NM: Yeah.

THS: You know, the boys. That was the important thing, that –

NM: Why did it cost money to go to school? Just for school supplies, you mean?

THS: For school supplies, mm-hmm.

NM: Did you have to wear a uniform to school?

THS: No.

NM: Okay.

THS: No. We – we wore just any...

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Any, uh, thing we wanted to. Of course, we didn't look like the other kids did, but we was dressed, you know, had shoes on.

NM: Sure.

THS: We didn't have to go barefoot. Yeah, we done all that when we was in La Yorda. We walked to school from the Santa Fe yards clear over to New York, and then to Central, and then to the high school.

NM: That's a walk. That's –

THS: We didn't have no rides. We just had, in the wintertime it was so cold.

NM: I bet. I'm trying to think, it must have been two miles to Central, a mile and a half maybe.

THS: Well, it was all the way on the other side from La Yorda, way back here, all the way on the other side of Massachusetts Street, on Kentucky, and then high school clear over there where Central was at.

NM: Yeah.

THS: So...but, we made it through, and we got, you know, things, after a while things got better, like I say, we was able to sit anywhere in church, we was able to be buried anywhere in the cemetery, and –

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, we was able to go anywhere and eat, you know, without saying: “No, we can’t serve you.”

NM: Mm-hmm. That must have been hard for your parents, then, when they got here.

THS: It was. But, they didn’t go anywhere except to church, you know.

NM: Yeah.

THS: I don’t think my mother in her life ever went to the grocery store.

NM: Really?

THS: No.

NM: Did your dad go to the grocery store?

THS: Yeah.

NM: Oh.

THS: My dad went every two weeks, and bought pork chops. That’s...the only time we got to eat meat, we didn’t have to [murmurs, laughs]. He brought a whole bunch of pork chops for us, and then he brought back some fruit. Apples, oranges, bananas and everything. I always remember he’d bring it, and my mother would divide each one of us a banana and an orange and an apple, you know. ‘Course, the girls couldn’t eat theirs all. So what’d they do, we had no icebox. They’d put it on top of the icebox. You know, they would eat one or two, and put the rest of ‘em up there. What do you think, with three boys it’s gonna stay up there? No.

NM: It didn’t last.

THS: There would be arguments going on all the time because: “You ate my apple, you ate my orange.” Mom says: “Well, you should have ate it, or you should have hid it instead of putting it up there where the boys could –” ‘Cause there was three boys, you know.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: And so, but...that was the times that we had down in La Yarda, and like I say, we did play a lot of games, but it was always the girls against the boys. They beat us every time. [Laughs] And then of course we had, uh, places where we’d get to go out and dig caves on the side of the

–

NM: Oh.



THS: Yeah, it was sandy ground, you know.

NM: Uh-huh.

THS: Where the flood has – had been before.

NM: Right.

THS: Mm-hmm.

NM: And so you dug caves.

THS: So we used to dig caves.

NM: Oh, good.

THS: We had a lot of fun. We didn't have to go out and find anybody else to play with.

NM: Mm-hmm.

THS: Till later on, but...it was fun.

NM: Yeah. Well –

THS: I can remember all of that, and if there's anything else you want to know, I'll be more than glad to –

NM: Well, I think I should probably let you go now, because we've been talking for, like, an hour. I don't want to wear you down.

THS: Oh, that's alright. I'm not planning to do anything, no.

NM: Well, I'm thinking I'll come back maybe next Sunday. What do you think?

THS: Sure.

NM: Yeah?

THS: Sure.

NM: Alright. Well, I'll give you a call, see what's a good time.

THS: Yeah. You still working?

NM: I work part-time.

THS: Part-time.

NM: Mostly Mondays and Fridays.

THS: In Topeka?

NM: No, um, I'm doing home health now.

THS: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. I thought you was still working for the, uh...

NM: St. Francis? No, no.

THS: For the...oh...

NM: Oh, Democrats?

THS: Democratic.

NM: Yeah, well, I worked there for a while, and then there was a whole turnover, so I left with the other people who were leaving, so...yeah, but I liked working there.

THS: Did you? Yeah, I know you said you did.

NM: Mm-hmm. [Laughs]

THS: Yeah, that's what happens. They, you know, have turnovers.

NM: Well, your, uh, neighborhood's changed. [Papers shuffling] I haven't been here for a while.

THS: We got a church – [tape cuts off]

**END OF TAPE**