

Tape 17b: Interview with John Chavez and Helen (Chavez) Martinez

Interviewer: Helen Krische

Date of Interview: 2006

Length of Interview: 8:43

Location of Interview: St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

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Transcriptionist: Emily Raymond

Helen Krische (Interviewer): Um, when did you meet your – your wife, or your husband? Were they from around here originally, or...”

John Chavez (Interviewee): Uh, my wife was from Kansas City. Argentine District. And, uh, I guess a lot of times we’d meet people through dances or weddings, maybe baptisms, or whatever, just get together, you get to see people you didn’t know. So the first time I saw her, first time I met her, was at a wedding dance. Teresa and Leo Schwartz. They got married here in the church. They had a dance in the community building and, uh, she happened to come down with, uh, people that were involved, I’m not sure if it was sponsoring something or what they were, but they came down from Kansas City. And she may have brought her – she was babysitting for – they brought her down, so that’s how I met her.

Helen Chavez Martinez (Interviewee): Same experience. Mutual, through a wedding. [murmurs]

HK: Was he from Lawrence, or...?

HCM: No, from Ottawa.

HK: Ottawa.

HCM: But, uh, his sister, uh, married a neighbor of ours that [JC clears throat] a few houses from us, the Bermudezes. And, uh, we were up close with his sister [murmurs]. They asked him to be in the wedding, and he was in the wedding because of his sister and –

HK: Okay.

HCM: Like John says, it’s just about, that’s how we all –

[laughter]

JC: There wasn’t too many people here to choose from, or I guess you know, as I said, the same, you know, that were your same age. So whenever you saw somebody from out of town, I guess, it was more attraction; I don’t know what it was [laughs].

HK: Well, you have, most of the people were your relatives. [laughs]

JC: Yeah, seemed like they were, yeah.

HK: And how do you think, uh, how do you think it's been different for your children growing up? Uh, you know, growing up in Lawrence. Do you think that it's been a lot different for them, or...?

HCM: [murmurs] More opportunities for them [murmurs]. And of course Lawrence has really grown. Back then, Lawrence was very, just, small and there was not much, other than the movies, for us. Now there's activities for them, they can go see arts center, they can get involved in different programs. Swimming, we didn't really grow up learning to swim, because we didn't... The only place that I recall, uh, Mexican people, if they wanted to swim, they would go to the river. Because I recall going with our, my oldest brothers and sisters would watch, swim at the river. There was a sand pile. We stood up at the sand pile and watched. But, you know, it was very dangerous.

HK: Yeah. Definitely.

JC: That was another activity we had, sand piles.

HCM: The sand piles, yeah.

JC: I can't remember how often but it was pretty often. 'Course everybody told us, you know, not to be there 'cause it was dangerous, but we didn't think it was at that age, I guess. There was a lot of family –

HCM: And it was very close to where we lived, just right down the road.

JC: Yeah. Yeah.

HK: There's a lot of sand bars along that area.

JC: Yeah, mm-hmm.

HCM: So no, our – our children and grandchildren have so much more opportunities. And they, now, you know, they pursue the school, the education.

JC: Mm-hmm.

HCM: Back then, it was, it was a little bit of a [struggle?] to go to school, if you wanted to, [JC clears throat, obscuring HCM's voice].

HK: How far did you go in school?

HCM: From high school –

JC: High school.

HCM: Yeah, high school.

HK: High school.

HCM: Mm-hmm.

JC: I think the kids now are [clears throat] the Mexican –

HCM: Our younger brothers and sisters did go on to college.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, they're more comfortable in school, with their classmates. Uh, I think maybe they, maybe that we weren't that comfortable in school.

HCM: That's true.

JC: Cause there were very few Mexicans and...hadn't been around that much, you know. Next generation gets more used to seeing people at a younger age. And they had more time to go to school, so it makes everything else a little easier. [murmurs] Integrated into the system, the school system and, uh, and their friends. They have a better, easier time making friends.

HK: What do you think about all of the, um, immigrants? [JC laughs] All going on now?

JC: I think, well, so far, they – they've been doing [unintelligible] I think is good, they need to control borders somehow. But, uh, they also should give people who are very poor opportunities to support their families, so... You know, when you don't see a person, don't know a person, you kind of, you know, stay away, but once you know a person, you want to help them. I think that's the main thing, you know. Once you see a person, get to know 'em a little better, you want to do something for them and they are much less fortunate than you are, money-wise.

HCM: You know, they wanted a better life for themselves, for their families, because that's how our parents came. You know, we know what it was. For them, they want them to have lives. By the same token, yes, they should, you know, they should have – have a, you know, legally become citizens.

HK: Do you remember your parents helping any of, uh, if there were new families that moved into town?

HCM: We had [JC clears throat] remember them visiting, you know, we had several new families that would stop and visit Mom sometimes, but, uh...

JC: I remember some person helping Dad around the house and he would pay him, but I'm not sure if it was just 'cause he had the ability that maybe Dad didn't have or he was just trying to help him somehow, but I don't know. I'm sure they did help each other.

HK: Do you remember anything about the Depression years? If it was extra hard for your family, or...?

HCM: Our – Carmen and Lupe probably would tell you about that, but I – I can't recall talking about [murmurs].

JC: Mm-hmm.

HK: Well, can you think of anything else that you want to mention?

JC: I just know that in this, in this area, in this, uh, time, in our history that there was a person who, I didn't know the person but I was told that, uh...Mexican lady was working the Santa Fe yards and [he would] gather all the children together and would teach them, uh, Catholic religion.

HK: Huh.

JC: And, like I say, I wasn't involved with that, but maybe this gentleman over here might have been. [Laughs] And, uh, well, it was just something unusual for somebody to – to gather all of, all the young kids, and, uh, have class for 'em [unintelligible].

HK: And that person, that person was also Mexican?

JC: Yeah. Yeah. There was a lot of people who come, uh, for short periods of time, then go back to stuff they do now, and I think that's probably one of them. Also, some came and they – they died here, and they never made it, you know, never went back to Mexico. They were out in the cemetery for bottom?] markers.

HK: Oh.

JC: And, uh, whether their families ever did go back to [murmurs].

HK: Well, I thank you very much. It's been a pleasure. And, uh, we'll get you copies of the consent forms. And – [tape cuts off for final 15 seconds]

END OF TAPE 17B