

Interview with Isabel (Chavez) Gonzales

Interviewer: Emily Raymond

Date of Interview: February 19, 2021

Length of Interview: 41:21

Location of Interview: Recorded over telephone

Transcription Completion Date: February 28, 2021

Transcriptionist: Emily Raymond

Isabel Gonzales (Interviewee): Well, most of ‘em are older than me, but – but I did know who they were, yeah.

Emily Raymond (Interviewer): So, how did you find out about the project?

IG: Um, my friend, Judy Romero, uh, e-mailed me and said somebody had asked her to do some proofreading. She’s really busy right now taking care of her mom, uh, that she said she wouldn’t have time, and she asked if I was interested, and I said: “Yeah I can,” and so she gave me the information.

ER: Well, that’s fantastic. So, well, I mean, there are standard questions that – a woman named Helen Krische started this project, and she had a list of questions that she would just go down and ask people. So, I have those, but I’m also just interested in hearing about anything you have to remember; we don’t have to stick to a script.

IG: Mm-hmm.

ER: So, let’s just start with – what was daily life like, when you were growing up in La Yarda?

IG: Well, here’s, yes, I didn’t know if Nora had told you, that it was about La Yarda, but I, no, I told her I didn’t, uh, grow up there or even – well, not too far from it, but, no, I told her I really didn’t have anything to say about La Yarda. I went to pick up a friend, and – or walked her home, but that’s all. And so, um, and the same thing with my brother Carlos, who’s younger than me. And she said, well, that – that, um, are you the doctoral student?

ER: Yes, that’s me.

IG: Yeah, well, she said she thought you might be interested in just, uh, I guess, the life growing up in East Lawrence, and that’s why, but if you only are interested in La Yarda, I couldn’t help you with that.

ER: No, we – I’m interested in – in all of it, actually, because it helps to get a picture of what life was like outside of La Yarda in Lawrence as well, because some of the kids who grew up in La Yarda, they would say, well, you know, we went to school, we went to church, but we didn’t know much about what was going on in the town. Maybe they went to the movie theater, or something like that. So, it’s – it would be helpful for us to have a little bit of context from someone who’s – who was living outside the community at that time. So yes, please, tell me what you remember.

IG: Well – well, because it was, we lived at 805 Pennsylvania Street. Are you in – you're from Lawrence, right? Or are you there now?

ER: Oh, yeah. I know where Pennsylvania Street is.

IG: Okay. At the time, the 800 block of Pennsylvania was the most east street in Lawrence. The next – the next over, there was just, right across the street from us, were all, uh, buildings, like the cider building and there was an egg plant, and different things like that, but no houses. But one house on the corner, but after that there were no more streets. But if you walked down 8th Street, I think there was maybe a couple blocks, if I remember right, that was La Yarda.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: So, they were – they were kind of separate, but we were the last three east that was nearest La Yarda. Um, and a friend of mine, Celia Garcia, lived there, and, uh, actually, she's two years older, she's a friend of my sister, and sometimes we'd walk her home or – or walk, you know, to and from, so I remember just barely, barely remember entering that – that area. But, uh, as far as, you know, if you're interested in just what – what it was like, our childhood, is that what you're wanting to know?

ER: Oh, yes. I do. I – I'd love to know things like whether you had any holidays that you enjoyed celebrating, what your mom would cook for dinner –

IG: Uh-huh.

ER: Traditions that you guys had, just what it was like growing up in East Lawrence at that time.

IG: Yeah, well, the main thing is that there was so many big families, you know, I'm one of fourteen children.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

IG: And then – and then down the street, there was, uh, the Romeros, and the Ramirezes and the Romeros and [unintelligible] the Bermudezes, everybody had either – anywhere from seven children to, I think the Romeros had sixteen children.

ER: I think you're right.

IG: But everybody had – huh?

ER: I think you're right, what Pete said.

IG: Pete, yeah. And then the, um, Ramirezes had eleven, the, um, Mendozas I think had ten or eleven, so what was very fun was that almost all of us had somebody our age, two or three or four people our age that we could play with and grow up with, so we always had lots and lots of

fun, 'cause we, you know, played baseball in the street, since we were the last street besides those businesses, so by the evenings, there was no traffic down that street.

ER: Oh, that's right.

IG: We'd play baseball in the street, uh, just stay up real late at night, not like today, we could stay up till ten or eleven, dark, you know, in the summer, play that "Truth, Dare, Promise, or Repeat." Uh, we – we just had lots of children to play with. I do remember that. We put on plays with the Grand Ole Opry and Little House on the Prairie, Laura Ingalls, and commercials, we just had a lot of kids to do things with, which was fun. One thing that I never thought was dangerous, but, until I grew up, of course [ER laughs], going – going east, let's see, it would be north. North, right at the 800 block of Pennsylvania going north, there was nothing but, um, these big sand piles. I don't know if it belonged to the railroad. The Santa Fe railroad or who –

ER: Interesting.

IG: But there was huge – pardon?

ER: Interesting. I – I remember someone mentioning those sand piles, but I don't remember what they were for.

IG: Yeah, I don't either. We didn't know, 'cause we were children, but they were huge. Now, to me, they were, like, two stories high, but I was a kid. And what we used to do, which now I think would be very dangerous, is a lot of us would go over there, we'd climb to the top and slide down. And we just kept doing it over and over, I'm sure we brought those sand piles down some, but they were always so high. Nobody ever got buried in it or hurt, but that was one of our, that was our entertainment, one of the things we used to do, but um, just, I always remember lots and lots of kids and outdoors, we were just outdoors all the time, you know, in the winter playing outside, not that we – nobody made us, but we just were, um, well, I didn't, I'm the tenth child, so there's just four under me. And so, we never had a TV till I was thirteen in our household.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: So you could tell, there's nothing to do in the house, there's no TV, so, uh, we just played outside all the time. Uh, had a couple of bikes, and everybody took turns riding those. Just made up games to – to play outside, but, uh, the – and then, of course, in the winter not so much unless there was snow outside. Um, our parents were very, very devout Catholics, and I think all the Mexican families were in that area.

ER: Mm-hmm.

IG: Um, and, um, so, you know, we went to church every, uh, Sunday, of course, and during Lent, we went twice during the week for services. Um, my father especially was, uh, head of our family, as far as religion went.

ER: Oh, okay

IG: I don't know if any – we used to say the rosary every night. He built an altar, like a room-size altar; it was tall.

ER: Oh, really?

IG: And he built – oh, yeah, it was really beautiful, looked like a little bit of an altar you'd see in a church. Not that elaborate, but of – it was an altar that, um, and he led the rosary every night, uh, sometimes in Spanish, sometimes in English, 'cause he mostly spoke Spanish. My mom spoke both. And, um...but, and then we went to Catholic school when it was open, I started there in fourth grade, I think. There was no Catholic school before that.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: Um, so I went fourth through eighth, and then my younger siblings got to go when they were younger. All of the older siblings did not go. We used to go to, uh, catechism, like on Saturday morning.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: CCD. And, uh, you know, I'm thinking of all of the stuff in my childhood was good, it was positive, uh, it was good. Except for one thing, and it's super sad, because of what it was, and it was the church. Um, at the time we were growing up, St. John's was the only Catholic Church in Lawrence. And, uh, unfortunately, there was a priest there that was, uh, very prejudiced against blacks, Mexicans, um...yeah. And we were very – even though all the Mexicans went there, we were still a minority. The church was mainly white. I think there might have been one or maybe two black families that went there. But, uh, uh, I, you know, this incident was never reported or told or anything, and I – I happened to tell Nora about it because I felt – I felt like, you know, that it – it probably should be known. Uh, there was an incident where, uh, somebody tore up the bulletins. They used to have the bulletins in the back of the church, and when you left you picked one up, and –

ER: Oh, sure.

IG: Uh, yeah, so somebody had torn some up, and – and uh, we got a phone call. I don't know if it was that same Sunday or on Monday, the next day, from the Monsignor. And he said that my brother Frankie, who was at that time fourteen, I was ten, uh, that Frankie had torn them. Well, we always went to church and we sat way towards the front 'cause that's where my dad wanted to sit. Like maybe, I don't know, I don't know if you're familiar with St. John's Church, but we'd sit about ten pews back.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: Out of the – you know, it was pretty close to the front.

ER: Sure.

IG: Uh, and, uh, and, um, Mom – Mom, I guess, was the one that answered the phone, and she says: “No, it’s impossible; he would not have done that.” And, um, you know, thought probably some little kid did it. And he said – well no, I don’t know how he – how he thought, why he thought, that my brother had done that, and my brother said of course he didn’t tear up bulletins at church, and so, um, that priest told Mom if she didn’t write a letter apologizing, uh, for her son tearing up the bulletins, that we could not go back to that church. Well, us being such a Catholic family, we never missed a Sunday Mass.

ER: Of course.

IG: Mom, she said: “I don’t have a choice. I have to write this. There’s no other church.” It was the only Catholic church in Lawrence, and I remember, I’m 74 years old right now, but the reason I remember it so distinctly is because it affected me so strongly. I was ten, I saw my mom sitting down with a paper and a pen, and she was crying.

And I said: “Mom, do not write that letter. Frankie didn’t do it.”

And she said: “I have to, because we can’t – otherwise, we can’t go to church.”

And, um, to this day, that’s what I remember. I do not remember if she actually wrote it. I’m assuming she did, because we continued going to church. But that incident just stuck so much in my head because of, um, the tremendous meaning it was for us. My dad even, um, we didn’t have a car, so we always walked to church from 8th and Pennsylvania to where it is at 12th and Kentucky, I guess.

ER: Yeah, that sounds about right.

IG: Uh, 1234, ‘cause we went there so much, I remember. But um, on Sundays, my mom – I didn’t know this till after my dad had died – my mom told us that not all Sundays, but she said many Sundays he would go to Mass twice. And we said: “Why?” – excuse me – and she said: “Well, because he went the first time out of obligation,” ‘cause as Catholics we’re, uh, that’s, we’re obligated to attend Mass once a week, you know, on Sundays. Back then they didn’t have Saturday Masses. And then he said he went the second time because he loved God. And so, it was like, he didn’t want to go out of obligation only. He wanted to go to, you know, tell God he loved Him. And then he’d walk us, because we would go to a later Mass, and he’d walk us. I remember walking with him to church. But, uh, he was just very, very devout person. You know, all the time, when we left for school, he gave all of us a blessing, and before we went to bed he blessed us, and, you know, that’s the way we were raised, uh, knowing that how – how important church was. But other than that, I didn’t, you know, uh, feel any discrimination, like a lot of people have, throughout, um, other than that priest and his sister, who taught us CCD, because from first, second, and third grade, me and then all of my siblings went, his sister taught, uh, the Monsignor’s sister taught, uh, the catechism classes on Saturday morning.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: And so we went to her, and she was the same way. She pretty much ignored anybody, like the few Mexican kids that were there. Um, if she passed out a treat at the end, uh, we got skipped over, and the Monsignor did that too, when we were in the school. When we got our report cards,

he would – every time we got our report cards, he'd come and pass 'em out, say the name, kind of look at it, make a comment, give it to the person. But he never called us up at all. We just got handed the report cards later, same thing, passed out a treat, we didn't get it. So, they were very, uh, very, uh, prejudiced.

ER: How spiteful. That's horrible. Especially for a man of the cloth.

IG: Yeah, I agree now. As a child I didn't – I noticed it, but I didn't think too much of it. But as an adult, when I think back, yeah, it was. And it happened for many, many years, but that was a time during the '50s, um, and '60s, probably early '60s, that, people didn't talk so much about it or protest too much about it, because it was pretty common. Discrimination was, you know, I don't know if you know, but my older sister said there was signs everywhere, you know, where they – they couldn't do into a restaurant to get anything. They could get it to go. They had to go to the back door to get a drink, or, uh, something to eat.

ER: Oh, right, yes.

IG: That was pretty, uh, obvious in the '40s and '50s, anywhere. Um, but, um, anyway, uh, but other than that, my – at the schools, the nuns were very nice to us. The nuns were really nice to us, the, uh...[child yelling] okay, just a second.

ER: You're fine.

IG: The, uh, the other teachers that I had when I was in, um, uh, middle school and high school, they were all – they were all super good, and I never dis – uh, experienced any, uh, discrimination at the – I went to Lawrence Junior High, uh, right there on Massachusetts.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: And then on – and then, Lawrence High School. Uh, you know, good experience, I just – I just didn't have any other problems. Um, so the childhood really was, I thought, very good. And then you were asking about, um, uh, like holidays we celebrate?

ER: Yeah, like did you have any family traditions that you would celebrate every year, or...I know you lived in a large community, so did you ever get together with people and, I don't know, have cookouts or picnics or something like that?

IG: No, no, because each family was so big that we just did it with our own family. And later when older sisters and older siblings were married, they would come with their children, so we would have our nieces and nephews, and, um, like my oldest brother is, um, 20 – I think 23 or 24 years older than me. I don't remember living with him at all. He had gotten married by the time I have a memory. So, I was really young. So, and my sister too, so we weren't all fourteen in the same house at the same time. Some were gone and married, or moved out before the younger ones were born. But, uh, well, we always, of course, celebrated Christmas and, uh, birthdays, um, Easter. But always just with our own family, not with the neighbors.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: Yeah.

ER: I was curious as – as to whether you had done church activities like that. I mean, I remember when I was growing up, we did a lot of things with – with our church family, but that's because our – we didn't really have any relatives, so we were just kind of adopted.

IG: Oh, you don't have, uh, siblings?

ER: I have – I have a brother.

IG: Oh, okay.

ER: So...

IG: Just two of you? Sorry.

ER: I know, it's – it's strange because we –

IG: No, I'm sorry. You know, it's different. Because one Thanksgiving, on Thanksgiving, our older siblings that were married and had children, maybe they'd had two or three by then, or four, they would come for Thanksgiving and we'd have lots of people there. And my – my younger sister, one year none of them could come, the weather was real bad, so none of the married siblings and children came. And I remember my sister Vicky, when we sat down to eat, she looked real sad and she says: "This is so sad, there's only ten of us."

ER: Oh.

IG: Cause there's probably like 25 or more, 30 normally.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

IG: Yeah. So, you know, we're always used to, uh, lots and lots of family and friends, actually. I had, uh, three really good friends, and, um, that lived like, one block away, and another that lived close, and um, and then they would come for Christmas Eve Mass and to eat tamales at our house afterwards. They came a lot to our house, my close friends. More than any of the other siblings – an older brother used to have a lot of friends come over, too.

ER: Oh, okay. That must have been special. I'm glad that you had some – some friends that you could just invite over to your house. Now, you said your – your dad spoke Spanish, yes? And your mother spoke both?

IG: Both of our parents were born in Mexico.

ER: Oh, when was that?

IG: They, yeah, my – my dad didn't come till he was about fifteen, walked from central Mexico, Guanajuato, all the way, he worked in Texas for a while, then in Colorado for a while, then finally worked for the Union Pacific railroad, you know, and ended up here in Topeka, but – but, uh, he came at fifteen, and my mom was brought by her parents when she was three years old.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: So, they grew up speaking Spanish, yeah.

ER: Do you remember anything about your dad's job during that time? I mean, obviously he was away from the home, but did he ever come home and tell you stories about it?

IG: Not too much, I just knew that, um, it was real hard work. He was a – they fixed the tracks, repaired the tracks.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: That was his main job, and he had to travel to a lot of different towns, too. And it was all outdoor work, and, you know, he'd have to work no matter what the weather, storm real bad, cold weather or snow. Or the heat. And he always had two jobs. He worked as a custodian for the school, and I forgot what else, but he almost always had two jobs. But, you know, we saw him of course on weekends, and in the evenings when he came home. But no, he – he never really spoke English at – at home. I understood that he – he knew Spanish, I mean he knew English, but he just preferred to speak Spanish, and so we didn't talk to him a lot. Mom would – Mom was the translator between us and our dad, really. Our – my older siblings all spoke Spanish first. So they knew it. The younger ones did not.

ER: Did you ever have to take a Spanish class in high school?

IG: Well, I didn't have to, I chose to, I took it all through high school and KU. And I'm a Spanish – retired Spanish teacher. Uh, 'cause I – I love the language, and we have relatives in Guanajuato, Mexico, and I used to go every two years to visit them. I lived with them a couple summers, and so uh, um, I took it because I wanted to. And, uh, some of my siblings speak, the younger ones speak it, some do not, or – or know some, but not a lot. Um...but they – both parents came here because of the extreme poverty that they lived in, you know, sometimes my dad told me the story about, um, uh, well his parents both died when he was really young, I think by five years old he was an orphan.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: Went to live with an uncle. Yeah, went to live with an uncle, and he became a shepherd. He had him watching the sheep all during the night. And, uh, not treated, didn't treat him too good, didn't feed him really very much, and so he chose to – to leave when he was either fourteen and a half, fifteen, or something like that. But he said when he was young that sometimes they had no food, and, uh, that they were given marijuana plants to chew on. And I remember telling my

students this one time and they said: “What?” You know, they say marijuana’s supposed to make you hun – make you, uh, hungry or something, I forgot what they said.

ER: Is it? I don’t know.

IG: But that’s what I think they told me. But – I taught at Topeka High for many years, in Topeka West, but, no, he – they said – no, he said that – you know how today, it’s medicinal. He said no, it would – it would curb their hunger. It was looked – it was used as medicine. So their – so they wouldn’t feel hunger pangs. And, uh –

ER: I didn’t know that.

IG: Yeah, that’s what they – ‘cause it grew freely. It, you know, they didn’t have to buy it or anything. It just grew in the fields. And, uh, uh, even today, they – they know that they can use that for, like, use the leaves and put ‘em on your – if you have arthritis, um, our cousins and, ‘cause they had come here one time, and my sister, older sister has arthritis, and they said, she said: “Oh, it hurts,” and she tried different medicines.

And then my cousin said: “Well, have you tried marijuana?” This was, like, thirty years ago. [Laughter]

And she says: “Well, no, it’s illegal.”

And he – and we said: “Isn’t that illegal in Mexico?”

And he says: “Yes, but nobody cares.” You know, I know that a lot of – they have a lot of laws, but they don’t really enforce them very much.

ER: Right.

IG: So, he said: “Ah, we just go down the street.” He named the lady who had it, and he said you soak the, uh, leaves in alcohol, and then you lay it on top of wherever you have the arthritis pain. And it’s supposed to help. And now we’re finding out today, yes, they’re using it for medicine, so –

ER: Oh, my gosh. I guess – I just, I never knew that about it. I knew that, you know, regular smoking can be an appetite suppressant, but I didn’t know that just chewing the leaves would have a similar effect.

IG: Yeah, that’s what they – they just chewed the leaves. They just picked ‘em for free out in the fields, so –

ER: Oh, my goodness.

IG: But anyway, I know that both my mom’s family too were just really poor and when she came, there was a revolution was going on and there was, you know, burning – burning, you know, villages. And they – they had to flee. But, uh, anyway, I – they had a difficult childhood, both of ‘em. Ours was very pleasant, even though we had a big family, you know, we always had enough food, we had – our parents were good people, and, uh, I don’t remember any, you know, really anything negative. Um...I know my brother Carlos probably, he’s four years younger than

me. I told, um, Nora because – in that La Yorda, uh, interview, uh, my sister Helen and my brother John Chavez were interviewed.

ER: Oh, okay. I remember that I transcribed their interview as well.

IG: Oh, okay. Well, I proofread ‘em, and, um, I laugh ‘cause I said – because one of the questions was, you know, was anything negative or did you feel, you know, any prejudice? And, uh, both of ‘em were just real pleasant and sweet [laughs]. And they didn’t mention anything, and so I told Nora, you got the two angels in our family.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: ‘Cause they are. They just don’t – they don’t say anything negative, or even if it’s the truth, of course, I’m not – I’m not making things up – they just steer away from saying anything that might be, um, uh, negative. So, I said, I told Nora, kiddingly, I said: “You should interview my brother Carlos. He’ll tell you the true story. Or – or I know some things.” But no, ‘cause they’re – they’re older, and so they would know more about stuff before, like, in the – probably the ‘30s and ‘40s, instead of – mine is, like, ‘50s, really, when I was a child, it was in the ‘50s.

ER: Right. Well, and it’s just good to talk to different people of varying ages so that we can kind of see what changed over time, what might have stayed the same. I’ve, you know, I’ve had a couple people say they experienced a lot of discrimination growing up, and then others like you, they said, well, there was a couple of isolated incidents. I believe one of them remembered going to church and being asked to sit in the very back, instead of –

IG: Oh, yeah.

ER: Instead of up front, which shocked me, honestly, I...

IG: Oh, actually, the – the, you know, we use kneelers. The kneelers, you know how they have pads on ‘em?

ER: Yeah.

IG: They took the pads – they took the pads off of the last two rows I think, all the way across. And, uh, that’s where, before I went to church, the older ones said they were – they were all supposed to sit in the back.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: Oh, there’s just tons of incidences. It was not nice, what happened. Oh, gosh, one time I remember the procession, we used to practice this. When we were going to St. John’s, we practiced for the May procession. And, uh, we’re, you know, lined up two by two, the nuns lined us up and everything, and Father came over to watch the practice one time. And Cecelia Garcia, which, she was a good friend of my older sister’s, two years older than me, she was the one that

lived in La Yorda. She – I guess she got a little bit ahead of her partner, ‘cause I was – I was near her, but I don’t remember how far, and Father just yanked her back so hard he tore her dress.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: And, yeah. And, uh, just a lot of little things, lot of things that happened because of who those two people were. But, you know, I think everybody just wanted to forget that. I don’t know. ‘Cause other than that, we had a – it was good. Life was – life was not bad. For my older siblings, I’m sure they had more things that happened.

ER: Sure.

IG: But anyway.

ER: I’m glad that, you know, we are seeing this change over time.

IG: Yes.

ER: I think the worst story I heard was, and I cannot remember the name of the interviewee, but she would say that every time they did the passing of the peace, she would, you know, put her hand out, and she said: “Nobody would take my hand.”

IG: Oh, yeah. That had been before my time. I don’t remember that. But I’m sure that did happen, yeah.

ER: It just –

IG: It’s really sad, uh, Emily, because even today, all the stuff that’s going on, with mainly black but Asian now too because of the virus, but you know – all - starting with George Floyd and all that, I was just shocked at all the – the really bad discrimination against blacks. And not everywhere, but it’s definitely still here. We just have to work harder and harder at, uh, informing young people.

ER: It’s sad that it takes tragedies to – to get us to think about these things.

IG: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

ER: I mean, yes, of course things have gotten better, but it definitely doesn’t mean we need to become complacent, so you have an excellent point.

IG: Right. Right.

ER: Goodness. Speaking of –

IG: I’m not sure what else, any other questions –

ER: I was gonna ask you a question about, um, what about healthcare? I study the history of medicine, so maybe this is more personal interest, but what – what was healthcare like back then?

IG: Um, well, you know how today everybody goes for maybe a yearly physical? We did not. We went when we were sick. Um, and I – it was rare. People, you know, even though we were poor, we ate well, but I don't, I don't remember anybody getting sick very often, or needing to go to the doctor. Uh, we would get the shots. We did go to the dentist.

ER: Okay.

IG: Uh, but we did not, we did not, I – it was rarely I think that we, in my memory, I could be not remembering well, but I don't remember going for physicals at all, really, maybe, yeah, till I was an adult. And you know, already married and living here in Topeka, and go for your yearly checkup. But, uh...but that's about it, I – I know that we did go to the dentist. Um –

ER: I was curious about the dentist. Others had said, you know, we – we went maybe once or twice, when we were in elementary school, and then someone else said: “Well, I didn't go until I was married.” It's amazing how much changed in such a short period of time.

IG: Mm-hmm. Yeah, um, yeah, it just – it wasn't, I guess I didn't even see that people were getting sick very much. That they needed to go to a doctor appointment.

ER: Were the diets pretty good, I mean, back then?

IG: The food, yeah. Well, um, I – we had, um, we ate, I think beans and – and tortillas and chili pretty much every day, but my mom also made, um, I remember her making, like, goulash and hamburgers and, um –

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: Mexican food, like tostadas and enchiladas. Tacos. Um...but, um, mainly Mexican food, but we did eat American food, too. Mashed potatoes and, uh, like green beans and things like that. Um...

ER: And you said you were outside really often, you know, playing, like –

IG: Oh, yeah, all day. In the summer, from the time you get up till you go to bed almost, except for coming in to eat, we were outside all the time, yes.'

ER: What about swimming?

IG: We got a lot of sun, never used, uh, what do you call it? Sun...

ER: Suntan lotion?

IG: Sunblock? Yeah, whatever.

ER: Sunblock, oh my gosh.

IG: Sunscreen, never, I didn't even know it existed, so we never, ever used that. And we were out in the sun all the time, everybody, all the kids. Oh, and then fruit in the summer. We always had, uh, my dad would – used to come around with trucks of watermelons and cantaloupe.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: And they were real cheap, so we always bought lots of watermelons and cantaloupes. So we had a lot of that in the summer. In the winter, um, I think mainly, like, plums and apples. But not – peaches, my mom used to can. Oh, and my dad had a huge – two – two gardens, actually three gardens. He had one in North Lawrence.

ER: Three gardens. Oh, my gosh.

IG: A huge garden, and he did corn, and – and carrots, and radishes, and tomatoes. Tons of tomatoes, and, um, lots and lots, onions, he did – he planted a lot of stuff, 'cause we used to go to the gardens with him and pick. He'd bring bushels and bushel baskets home. Somebody – somebody who had a truck would bring 'em for him.

ER: Okay.

IG: But he'd walk from our house to North Lawrence to where his garden was, and then when the produce was ready, they would help him bring it home, and then my mom did a lot of canning. So, she canned a lot of that – the fruits and the vegetables. And then, somebody said he had one near our house, which I didn't know about that one. And then he had one in our backyard. So we, he grew a lot of, uh, vegetables.

ER: That must have been an enormous amount of work.

IG: Yeah, so I think we ate – ate well.

ER: Did he sell any of the vegetables, or did your mom just can whatever was left over?

IG: No, yeah, she just canned it. Yeah.

ER: What about swimming? Um, I remember some people I interviewed said that they were not allowed to go to the swimming pool in Lawrence, and so they went to the river instead. They said that was pretty dangerous.

IG: Yes, well, that's another sad thing, none of us learned how to swim, except for I think one brother, 'cause he used to go to the river to swim. But that was – that's true, you couldn't use the public swimming pool. But no, none of us ever learned to swim, to this day I didn't, because I

guess when you grow up and you've never been around water that – to swim, you just, I had a little fear of it, so I just never...never did learn to swim.

ER: Oh, okay. I was – I was curious about that. I'd actually heard several talk about how – you know, they'd say, well, we went down to the river, stood on the sandbars, and it was so dangerous, but we didn't think that at the time you know, because when you're kids, you just don't think about it.

IG: Well, and then our parents, uh, forbid us to go after one of the Mendoza boys, a young boy, I think he was about nine or ten, was swimming in the river, and he drowned.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: I remember that, he would have – I think he was, like, a couple years younger than me. And so then, you know, our parents didn't – didn't allow us to go there. One brother went anyway. Um, so he was a – one of the rebellious ones that had all kinds of experiences that –

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: Some he's shared, some he has not shared. But, uh...

ER: Probably for the best.

IG: Yeah. Anyway. But, um, so as far as – we used to play, um, we went to New York School, which was just, like, a block and a half from our house. And, um, they, um, had a big, you know, playground outside, and a jungle gym, and a few equipment, so all summer when school was out, we could go there to play.

ER: Oh, how fun.

IG: We used to go. And then they had a summer, some kind of summer program where they – they would set up ping pong tables and box hockey and have competitions, you get a snack, so all the kids, we always went there. And then on Sundays, we'd go play baseball on their field there. So, it was real nice that we had that, uh, that school so close to our house.

ER: I imagine that was fun.

IG: Oh, yeah. It was a lot of fun to go there. And I remember when it snowed a whole bunch, 'cause when I was little, it seemed like it snowed more in the winter. Uh, I just remember my, we kind of enjoyed it when it was a lot of snow, because my dad would not let us go to school. We walked. We walked to – now, this would not have been New York School. It would have been St. John's, which was about a mile.

ER: Oh, okay.

IG: It would have been the middle school, uh, Central Junior High, which was 14th and Mass [Street]. And then the high school, which was about three miles. But I used to walk home. We got a ride to school, but I'd always walk home from Lawrence High or Central Junior High. But if it was real high snow, because, you know, back then I forgot, you know, girls didn't wear pants. So, we only wore skirts.

ER: Yeah, that's true.

IG: Yeah, so we had skirts on, and then, you know, short socks, and the shoes. So your legs are exposed, of course we have a coat on, but not to cover our legs, and so, I just remember we, our legs would be red.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: Our faces were red when we got to school, bright red. Uh, and I remember one teacher at Lawrence, I mean at the Central Junior High, my ninth grade English teacher, Mrs. Black. My locker was right outside her room, and you go to your locker first, and I got there and it was a real cold winter day, and I know my face was bright red, and my legs. She came out of her room and saw me getting in my locker, and she – she came up and started, like, patting and rubbing my cheeks and saying: "You poor little thing," 'cause I was all red.

ER: Oh.

IG: But, uh, she was feeling sorry for me, for walking, but, um. So, on those days, especially deep snow, we didn't have boots. He said: "No, don't" – he'd tell my mom, he'd go to work, but he'd tell my mom: "Don't send the kids." Because he didn't want us to be out in the snow and that cold without, you know, proper – proper clothing. And I don't know if the boys went, they had pants. I don't remember. But he didn't want us to go, because it was just too cold, he said.

ER: I can't, I can't imagine walking to school dressed like that in the kind of weather that we had just last week.

IG: Yeah. Yeah, no.

ER: I was thinking, my gosh, it's dangerous for kids just to be out in this kind of weather, and...

IG: And some of 'em, like, waiting for a bus now, that's, yeah. That's why they canceled for a couple of days.

ER: That was a wise decision. I...

IG: Mm-hmm.

ER: It's so easy to take for granted all the things that we have now, especially in – in doing these interviews, you know, things that never even occurred to me that we just have access to.

IG: Oh, yeah, we just – well, everybody had outhouses back then. I remember outhouses. So you know, if you had to go when it's dark or raining or cold –

ER: Oh, my gosh.

IG: You still had to go outside to go to the outhouse, but also, we didn't have, uh, since we had an outhouse only, we didn't have a tub, like with running water.

ER: Oh, that's right.

IG: So we had a big, what they called a [unintelligible]. It's a metal, round metal container, and one of 'em was kind of oblong, like what you see is a horse trough, you know the horses, they get water?

ER: Yeah, yeah.

IG: We had two, a round one and then an oblong one. And we, Mom would put – in the winter, she'd put it in the kitchen and then boil water and then put regular water and hot water in there, and, uh, everybody would have to take turns taking baths there in the kitchen, where it was warm.

ER: Oh, so much work. Oh, my gosh.

IG: In summer. Lot of work, yeah, with so many children. Well, Saturday, and that was probably a lot of people, Saturday was your bath day, so it was just once a week. But everybody had to take turns, and I think we did it, 'cause I always did it with my sister, who was two years older than me, so we were in that tub two at a time. And then, uh, in the summer she put the – it was outside. And she'd fill it up and we'd take our baths on the side of our house. Just outside.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

IG: I know! One thing is, we – we, the neighbors on one side would be the opposite side of our house. They couldn't see us. It was a real small little house, with an elderly couple. And then on the other side was a barn. I don't even know what it was. It was a big huge barn that ran from the front of our house to the end of our house, the alley. So, there's nobody in there to see us either, so we were, uh, so, you know, we weren't exposed to anybody. But I don't even know what kind of barn that was, it was a huge barn, at first I thought it was some kind of a car place, but now I don't even remember what it was.

ER: So no livestock or anything, just...

IG: No.

ER: I mean, I guess you would have smelled that if it was.

IG: Yeah. Yeah.

ER: Oh, my goodness. Well, thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

IG: Sure.

ER: I don't want to take up too much of your time, I know you've got things to take care of, but I appreciate you telling me about what life was like back then.

IG: Sure. Sure, you're welcome. And good luck. Are you, you say, you're the doctoral student, right?

ER: Yes, ma'am.

IG: That – that is amazing. I just – I went to KU, but only got the graduate. I didn't go get a Master's or anything. This was a long time ago, I was there in the '60s, and um, nobody encourages us back then to go to school at all, or even continue. I don't know, it's just, I guess being poor, nobody thought we could do it, but my daughter is a teacher also, and, uh, she has a Master's, and she so badly wants to get a doctorate, but, um, she has four children and it's kind of hard right now. But she really, really wants to do that. I hope she gets to, so congratulations to you, best of luck.

ER: Thank you. And best of luck to your daughter. If she can get a Master's, she can get a doctorate. I promise.

IG: That's what I'm saying. She's real smart. So I'm sure she will eventually, some time.

ER: I'm actually enjoying the doctorate more than I enjoyed the Master's work, so I hope the same is true for her.

IG: Oh, good. Good.

ER: Well, thank you, Isabel.

IG: Okay. Thank you.

ER: Have a wonderful evening.

IG: Okay. Uh-huh. Bye-bye.

ER: Take care. Bye.

IG: You too. Bye.

END OF TAPE