

Interview with Pedro (Pete) Romero

Interviewer: Emily Raymond

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Pete Romero (Interviewee): I – you know, I've always wanted to write down a lot of notes about – about my life, and, uh, oh, you know, I like to do this here, write notes down. And then one – one day, maybe, get it all together and – and maybe...making a book out of it, you know.

Emily Raymond (Interviewer): I think you should.

PR: Kind of pass it on to the family.

ER: You've gone to all this trouble to make all the notes.

PR: Well, yeah. I was gonna...

ER: And with the self-publishing platforms nowadays...

PR: Right.

ER: You can – you can publish books yourself as often as you like.

PR: Here's – here's the history of the Romero family.

ER: Oh, that's right. I remember you said your parents were Gonzalo and Avelina.

PR: Yeah, yeah. Let's see...

ER: Oh, you're so lucky to have these pictures.

PR: And there was, uh –

ER: Your parents.

PR: Thirteen of us and – and we're – we're all in that book. We're all in that book.

ER: Oh, you have a table of contents, good.

PR: Yeah.

ER: There are you. December 7th. Okay, so that's – you called her Jennie. Okay.

PR: Yeah.

ER: I'll be sure to spell it with an "ie" when I do the transcript. I've heard the name before, but I wanted to make sure I got all the spellings right.

PR: I checked it out with the family and asked 'em if it was okay if I used this – if I could, uh...uh...take this book and let somebody look at it and – I got their permission, you know, to...

ER: Oh, okay. Of course.

PR: So, anything that you can use in there, you can – you're welcome to use, and...

ER: Topeka, Kansas. Okay. [Background voices for several seconds] Okay, so your mother was – your mother lived to 89 years old.

PR: Yes.

ER: That's impressive.

PR: Yeah. She passed away when – when she passed away, I, uh...you know, there was thirteen of us, so we all took our turns going down there every evening. Somebody went down there every – every evening to check 'em out, to make sure they were okay, 'cause they wanted to live in that house.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: They wanted – they wanted to live in that house, so, there was thirteen of us, so everybody took their turn. Uh...in the evening; on the weekends, um, on the weekends, we stood there all day with them. And then we left them alone in the evenings, you know, because they –

ER: Of course.

PR: You know, they, that's the way they wanted it, you know. They just wanted to be there in the daytime. And, well, really, they probably didn't even want us there [laughs], but they were so – you know, they like to have their independence and all that. It was their house, and I just wanted to do things.

ER: But you still want to look out for them, and just check in, make sure they're okay.

PR: Yeah, so, anyways, uh, it was, um...it was – it was on the weekend, and it was my turn. So, I went down to – went down to my parents' house and the house...my mother was cooking. And it – she had a heart attack. Anyways, the house filled up with smoke.

ER: Oh, no.

PR: So anyways, when I got there, I drove through the alley, and I seen all the smoke coming out of the house. So, I parked the car in – I parked the car in the parking lot there, and I – it was, I think it was, like, in spring. It was April or something. Anyways, anyways, I – I parked my car, and I seen, uh, a pile, looked like a pile of rags out there. Well, it was my dad. My dad was pretty – pretty much blind. Somehow, he had managed to get himself out of the house. He got out of the house, probably looking – looking for help, and I guess he just...fatigue got to him, and he was laying out there and I found him out there. And I asked him where Mom was, and he said: “She’s inside the house.” So I said: “Okay, Dad, I’m gonna put – put you” – let me see, how it was that I did it – I put him in the house that wasn’t full of smoke, and, you know, to get him out of the rain. Right inside the house, and I couldn’t see nothing. It was all full of smoke. My mom had been cooking something, and, uh...um...

ER: It started burning.

PR: It just, you know, started – started a smoke fire. Smoke. Anyway, I found her, she was on the floor, so I – I’m the one that found my mom. But anyways, and...she died. She – she died from a heart attack that day.

ER: Oh.

PR: Um, and my dad after that, he – he didn’t want to continue living. You know, he said he wanted to be with – with Avelina. Uh, so, I think he maybe lasted about a year. My – my dad really gave up on living after he lost my mom. Um...

ER: How long were they married?

PR: 76 years.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: 76.

ER: I think that’s a personal record for me.

PR: Right, yeah, that was – that was a long time.

ER: I – I don’t blame him for feeling that way, when you spend so much time with someone, it’s hard to imagine living without them.

PR: Right, yeah. It was hard.

ER: I like how you wrote here, he liked to fish.

PR: Yeah. He liked to go fishing.

ER: And he's got his – his birthday cake with all the candles. It sounds like you had a really close family.

PR: Oh, we were close. We were big. We were a big family, but you know, we – we took care of each other and all that. And we were poor. And you know, working, my dad worked for the railroad.

ER: Yeah, tell me about that a bit. I'm – I'm interested about what – what was it like, just growing up, daily living there?

PR: Well, we, uh...like I said, we – we were poor, but we didn't know it. Um...I – I think we lived – we had six rooms that...let's see [murmurs] that fourteen of us shared.

ER: Fourteen people for six rooms? Wow.

PR: Yeah, uh, my parents, and my brothers and sisters. Somehow, we managed in these – in, um, to, uh, live there in La Yorda. You know, the – the rooms – the little rooms were six – I think they were, like, eight by ten. They were eight by ten rooms. And, uh, um...they were concrete. Concrete floors and all that.

ER: Must have been cold.

PR: Oh, it was. In the wintertime it was cold. We used to have to, in order to heat the house, we had to haul wood. Wood – we had the little wood stoves.

ER: Oh, the little potbelly stoves.

PR: Yeah, potbellied, to keep us warm and all that. It was cold. It was cold in there. Gosh, I remember as a little kid, in the wintertime, looking out the windows, and the windows would be all frosted with ice.

ER: Oh.

PR: It was that – it was that cold. We had – if we had to go to the bathroom, the bathroom was outside, like around 40 feet.

ER: Oh, that's right.

PR: And, oh gosh, I remember having to go – I remember having to use the bathroom a few times, and I looked – went outside and looked up in the sky at the bright stars and all that, and went to the bathroom and came right back in. We didn't stay out there very long.

ER: No.

PR: No, and – and, well, to this day I don't know how my parents did it. All them kids and we all had to sleep, uh, we all had to sleep together. I think it, like all the boys slept together. It was, gosh, I think two of the rooms that we used were for the boys to sleep.

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: And then my sisters had a couple rooms for theirselves, and Mom and Dad in their room. Had a little kitchen. But, that was – it was pretty rough. Our – our water, our water was at the water pump outside, and –

ER: Right.

PR: We had to get the water and haul it from outside, inside the house.

ER: Oh.

PR: For drinking water and taking a bath and things like that. Um...

ER: The amount of work.

PR: Oh, yeah. I – I don't know how my parents did it, but we did it – and, you know, to us, it – it must have been rough. It – it had to be tough.

ER: No doubt.

PR: But us guys didn't know it. I knew, you know, we – we had something in our tummy and woke up next morning and all that. We were – we were surviving and all that. And it – it, um, it was pretty rough there at the – La Yarda. Going to school – going – little kids, little kids...there was no sidewalks or anything.

ER: Oh, back then.

PR: In La Yarda. It was just a path. A path that had just been worn in time by people going through that little path, and we had to, uh, to go to school we had to climb this – this little hill; on top of the hill was the railroad tracks. And, Emily, I tell you, in the wintertime, I – I don't even think we had galoshes. I – I think it was just our regular shoes and things like that.

ER: Oh, not even waterproof boots.

PR: No, no waterproof, no, we didn't know such – there was no such thing existed like that for us, you know. The – the – um, can I say “The white kids” or “Anglo kids”?

ER: Yeah, absolutely.

PR: Yeah, it won't offend you? Okay. You know, you know, the – the little white kids we'd go to school with, they had their galoshes on, and big old mittens – gloves, and all that.

ER: Fluffy coats.

PR: Yeah. We always thought they were – we always thought they were rich, because, you know, they – they had better stuff than us. But anyways, we went to New York School. And, um...we went to New York School, and I remember going to New York School, uh, we all had – we all had Spanish, and we were all – we were born, given Spanish names. But when we went to school, they changed our names.

ER: Oh.

PR: My name was Pedro. That's what my parents got on – but I got to school, and they called me Peter, okay?

ER: Oh. Okay.

PR: I had a brother named Tony. Antonio. Went to school, and from Antonio, they called him Tony. Francisco, Frank. Juanita, Jennie.

ER: So, they Anglicized everyone's names.

PR: Yeah, that's – that's what happened to us. When we went there, and it was hard for us, because...

ER: I imagine it was.

PR: Yeah, 'cause we grew up on Spanish. Our parents, that's what they talked to us, in Spanish. So, anyways, we – we'd go to school, and, uh...we were – we were – it was hard for us, because, uh, a lot of the words that they used, the teachers used, well, we didn't know that. We were, you know, taught the – the words in Spanish. And it – it was a little tough. It was a little tough.

ER: I imagine it was. And you must have done remarkably well, for not knowing any English when you arrived.

PR: And you know, to us, oh, my gosh, New York School was a – it was like a palace!

ER: Oh, was it?

PR: Wow, in these scripts that I got, I'll describe some of that, but gosh, we went to New York School. Beautiful building there, and we went inside and the floors were tiled, and we'd never seen – we'd never seen nothing like tiled floors and all that. And, God, we were amazed by that, and how nice and warm – how nice and warm it was.

ER: Oh, the school was heated.

PR: Inside the school, compared to our house –

ER: True.

PR: In La Yarda. Going to New York School, gosh, bathrooms.

ER: Actual bathrooms.

PR: Inside bathroom, and we couldn't get over it. Gosh. We were so used to the outhouse out there in La Yarda and all that, my gosh, that was so neat.

ER: Seemed like a luxury.

PR: Oh, my God. Water fountains.

ER: Water fountains.

PR: They had water fountains inside – inside the – inside the building. We were used to going outside and getting our water in – had little buckets, I guess that's what we had, buckets, and whenever we wanted water, we'd just get a drink of water, but it – it was – oh, New York School was so beautiful. And it – it was funny because, um, I – I remember – I remember one time, we – to, uh, for lunch, we used to take our little lunch, uh, sacks. The – the white kids had their little, real nice.

ER: Oh, the tin boxes.

PR: Nice buckets and things like that. And now, today, you know, they – they eat in school and all that. They eat in the school, but...

ER: So, there wasn't a cafeteria back then?

PR: No. No, there was no cafeteria.

ER: Okay.

PR: So, um, gosh, the kids would – us guys, we had paper sacks.

ER: Yeah, like that.

PR: And we'd take our little lunch and all that. And the other kids, white kids, had – had lunch buckets and nice pails and all that. I remember one time, I remember we – we grew up on – on tacos and things like that, um, burritos. You know, at – at that time, I thought, "Gosh, we're poor." We eat this food, 'cause that's all we had, you know, tortillas. Tortillas, and we'd make burritos and all that. So anyways, uh – uh, I remember one time we, uh, we – my parents, my mother made us some burritos for us. It's a tortilla, and inside was –

ER: I like burritos, yeah.

PR: So, anyways, uh, we – one time we took them and – and, uh, the white kids looked at us, checking out our little burritos, and they'd say: "What the heck is that?" And – and, uh, we – we'd tell 'em that's what we ate. And then I guess we must have told our mother and all that, our mother about it, you know, the kids wondering what that was. Kind of odd-looking food. So, after that my mother started making us butter and jelly sandwiches.

ER: Oh, okay, with the –

PR: But, yeah, you know, things like that, that happened to us, and...

ER: Were you ever teased for that kind of food, or were they more curious about it?

PR: I think they were more curious.

ER: Okay.

PR: Yeah, I – I think they were more curious about what, you know, but, you know, it was funny because, um...Um – okay, I'm gonna read some of these; is that okay?

ER: Oh, yes, go ahead.

PR: What was – my – my, uh...thoughts get a little, uh, um...

ER: Well, and you said you have a headache, too.

PR: Yeah, I've got – I've got my headache, but I – I don't know, about school...uh, the kids – the – the – we felt different. But we felt different because we were – our features were different. The color of our skin was different. Um, our language was different. Okay, um...we – we never really had real nice clothes.

ER: Right.

PR: Most of our clothes were hand-me-down clothes, things like that. Um...and I don't know, we always felt that the other kids were better than us. Um...now, we were – we had to speak – we were always kind of...scared, because we didn't know if we were gonna say the right thing.

ER: Right.

PR: You know, use the right word. We were bilingual, I guess.

ER: You – oh, absolutely.

PR: Yeah, we were bilingual, at home Spanish, at school was English and all that, so we were always a little bit, uh, I think we were always a little scared to get up there and talk and all that. We felt so much better when we were in our group.

ER: Right.

PR: When all the little Mexicans were all together. Um – we felt much better, you know, and...

ER: Did you stick together at school that way?

PR: Oh, yeah. For – yeah, for sure, yeah, we did. We – we stuck pretty much together. We did everything. We did everything together. Our...our best friends were the – our own Mexican-American – Mexican kids. We – we never did go to any of our white friends' house.

ER: No?

PR: No, we never did. We always stuck around with – with our kind. Oh, gosh, we – at church, St. John's Church, we were little kids, maybe...seven, six, seven years old.

ER: Oh.

PR: We were altar boys at – at the St. John's Church here.

ER: Oh, yeah, that's right; you were an altar boy.

PR: Yeah, we were altar boys. We had our own group. Uh...then, um, we had a lot of altar boys and they were all put in different – in squads, we called 'em – they called 'em squads.

ER: Squads.

PR: Squad Two, Squad...

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: And – and, um, um...it was – it was – it was always, always kids that, you know, they was only Mexican kids that – that, uh, that made up that group. And then – and then, when we got a little older and we all played on the same baseball team. So, we stuck together pretty much. Today – today, they're – they're still our best friends.

ER: Oh.

PR: Today they're still our – today they're still –

ER: I'm glad.

PR: Our best friends, and some of 'em have passed away, and – and we've always – we always relied on each other. They – we felt so comfortable when we were with our own kind. Um...

ER: So, you – you played baseball at – was it South Park, or Hobbs Park?

PR: Uh – uh, well, we played at South Park.

ER: At South Park, okay.

PR: We played at South Park, at South Park and the other Hobbs Park.

ER: Okay.

PR: Yeah.

ER: I remember from your first transcript, you had mentioned playing in a park.

PR: Yeah – we played there. We played for the St. John's...uh...team.

ER: Oh, they had a team?

PR: Yeah – the –

ER: I didn't know that.

PR: Yeah. It was St. John's team. In fact, we got some – we got a lot of pictures of –

ER: Were you good?

PR: I was average. I was average [laughs].

ER: Are you being modest?

PR: Yeah, I was pretty – yeah, I, uh, I had other brothers that were quite a bit better than me. But I mean, you know, I knew the game, and I knew the position to play, and I – yeah, I just, um...

ER: Did you play any other sports? Um, let's see – basketball, football?

PR: Well, that was funny. That was funny, Emily, 'cause like I said, uh, we'd always felt comfortable playing with each other. In fact, when we were, like, maybe...twenty...eighteen, nineteen, twenty, we formed our own baseball. We had our own baseball team. Softball. Fast pitch. And, uh, we – we would go, uh, on these baseball, these, uh, Mexican-American tournaments. There'd be some in Topeka, there'd be some in Kansas City, Chanute, uh...

ER: I never knew about this.

PR: Uh, yes, uh...Salina, it was – we had a team, um, I don't even know what we called each other, but we had a team – we were – we were pretty good. We were pretty good. You know, Mexican-Americans, uh, there – there were some pretty good athletes. But when you got to school, it was funny because, uh, the Mexican-Americans, they – they – they, uh, they were all

smaller people, you know. For instance, uh, in junior high and high school, it seemed like the – the bigger – the American kids...they – they, uh, they were bigger kids. You know, they – the little, the Hispanic people, they're not real tall people and then –

ER: Right.

PR: Yeah. So anyways, uh – um, um, the – the Mexican-American kids, they were good, but, you know, they – they, you know, in football you need the big old guys and all that.

ER: Yes.

PR: So that was one of the reasons why we kind of stuck together.

ER: That makes sense.

PR: Yeah, we kinda stuck together. Um, gosh...oh, gosh, I [murmurs] but, yeah, um, we – we stuck together pretty good. [Murmurs]

ER: I like how you're all still friends, that you still maintain that connection over the years.

PR: Oh, yeah.

ER: That's special.

PR: And you know what, yeah, we – we – we still – we – we still look out for each other. You know, we – we always want to know how a certain person is, you know, like I got some friends like, um, Izzy Bermudez.

ER: Yes.

PR: He's a fireman, he's – he's not doing too good, but I – I always manage to find out how he's doing, and we, uh, um...um, later in life, we – we – we cut grass at the cemetery. The Catholic cemetery.

ER: Oh, so you were responsible for keeping that up.

PR: Yeah.

ER: Okay.

PR: We cut – we volunteered to do that, so we did that. It was – at first it was all Mexican people, the guys that did it and all that, and slowly the, uh, the white – white guys would come out there and help us later on and all that, but we – we did – we did a lot of things together, and we were well...uh...how do I put it? We were – we looked out after each other. That was – that was the thing, looking out for each other. We always did that.

ER: A community in the true sense.

PR: Yeah. Yeah, that was – that was the way our parents, um, taught us to be. To – to look out for each other, take care of yourself, you know. In the end, you're gonna realize how important it was. And everything they said is true. You know, you care for – care for other people, and you show 'em, and they're gonna do the same for you, so...

ER: And you must have seen them demonstrate examples of this. While you were growing up, they would take care of your neighbors, for example.

PR: Oh, for sure.

ER: If they were sick, or –

PR: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I'm – I was told by my older sisters that when we were young and, um, my mother would have to have a doctor's appointment or something like that, or she had to do something, well, all the neighbor ladies would, um, take care of us kids.

ER: Oh.

PR: And – and there's some pictures out there where there's a bunch of kids, and there's a lady in the background. I guess she's taking care of all them kids [laughs]. Yeah, it was things like that, you know. It was just – it was really something, because it's nothing like that today. Nothing today, we – well, then, to the Hispanics, they always had big families.

ER: Right.

PR: They were – they were all Catholics and all that, so they all had big families. Today you got your family, maybe four, maybe three or four kids, and that's about it. But, um...yeah, the – living at La Yarda taught us a lot. Taught us a lot. My dad – my dad was, uh, given a piece of land by the, um, by the railroad.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: And – and, uh, my dad, uh, on this piece of land that they gave him, it was just not very far from where La Yarda was, maybe...two, maybe a hundred feet away. My dad would grow, uh, tomatoes, corn, radishes, things like that. Things like – things that he – we could grow that we didn't need to go to the store.

ER: Sure. That makes sense.

PR: Yeah. We didn't need to go to the store. Oh, gosh, I remember when he – I remember my dad had the garden. He – he would plant the tomato plants in the ground, and our job was to get water from – from, um, a pump, a water pump that was farther up the track. I remember them buckets full of water. By the time – by the time we got from the pump to the – the plants that were in the ground to be watered, well, we had lost half of the water, because we were young,

going along, all the water was sloshing out. Oh my gosh, Emily, I told myself, I told myself, I'll – I'll never have a garden, because it – it was rough, and my dad, you know, he paid pretty good attention to the garden. He made it – he made sure we did it right.

ER: Yes.

PR: He made sure it was right.

ER: It's a lot of work, keeping up a garden.

PR: Sure. For little kids, it was – it was, like I said, it was – it was tough. 'Course, you know, we didn't know it, because it was expected of us.

ER: Right.

PR: To help do the chores and all that. So anyways, I always thought: "Man, I'm never gonna have a garden. That's too hard." So anyways, I got married and got a garden.

ER: Yeah, of course you did.

PR: Got a garden. Same thing with the fireplace. In the winter times at La Yarda, oh my gosh, them buildings got so cold. Oh, Emily, I tell you –

ER: With the concrete floors.

PR: Oh, the concrete floor and the windows would cake up with – with ice, I guess it was because all the – all of us being inside, these six rooms that we lived in, and all that heat.

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: Hitting that glass, and just all ice. I remember we used to have to scrub the, uh –

ER: Oh, to see outside.

PR: The ice off to see [murmurs].

ER: My goodness.

PR: My, um, we cut our own firewood. Oh, God, them days. I remember the days that little kids [murmurs] hand saws, sawing the logs.

ER: Gosh, and they're kids, too.

PR: Small enough to – to put into the woodstove. Oh, gosh. I don't know how my mother did it. Oh, gosh. All them kids and feedin' all them kids, and –

ER: What would she make? I mean, I know you said she made burritos. What else would she make?

PR: Oh, we ate beans. Frijoles. Frijoles.

ER: Frijoles.

PR: You know, Emily, it's – it's funny because today, all this food that we ate – we thought – man, this is – this is poor man's food. Today, man, shoot, this food that we're eating now, today, oh, it's...probably [unintelligible, dollar's?] business, you know. Taco Bell, and –

ER: Yeah, it's –

PR: Things like that.

ER: Taco Bueno.

PR: All the – God, all that food that we ate, and we – we got tired of [laughter]. Got tired of eating the same food, eating our frijoles with our tortilla. And instead of using a spoon or fork, the Mexicans used, uh, the tortilla.

ER: Yeah, strips of tortilla.

PR: Into the strips and, like that. But anyways, gosh, we – anyways, yeah. The, uh, uh...we had stoves. My mother had stoves, and that's the way she cooked, with a woodstove. Um...it, uh, it was very tough.

ER: Did you eat vegetables from your dad's garden?

PR: Uh, yeah.

ER: So a lot of tomatoes, then?

PR: Yeah. Oh, yeah, we, yeah, my mother would, uh, can. She – she would can the, um, um, tomatoes.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: Yeah, and –

ER: So you'd have some for the winter.

PR: Yeah, for the wintertime and all that, so – yeah, so, oh, gosh, you know, I – I remember too, is my – my, uh, there was – La Yarda was down here, and right across the tracks was the City. We had a lot of – we had a lot of cousins that – that lived – that – we didn't have a lot, but we – some of our cousins lived across the tracks, which was the City. And we always thought that was

so neat. We always envied, as little kids from La Yarda, we always envied our – our relatives that lived in the City part. The City part – part – they had houses with electricity.

ER: Running water.

PR: Running water. Some of ‘em had bathrooms inside, latrines inside. I think there were some they had outside too. But we always envied them kids. I – I remember, I remember going to school and – and, I mean, the teacher would ask us: “Well, what does your dad do for a living?” And – and we – we didn’t know exactly what to say. We know that he worked for the railroads. His job was – my dad’s job was, and all these other people that lived at La Yarda, the men, their job was what they called a section gang.

ER: Section gang.

PR: Yeah. They’re the ones that cleaned up, cleaned the, uh, the – the tracks.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: Yeah, they – they cleaned the tracks in the wintertime. I remember the wintertime, my dad would come home all full of snow.

ER: Oh.

PR: Full of snow, or a lot of times, in the winter times when it was storming real hard, they’d call out the men, and, um, tell ‘em that they had to report to work, because the railroad tracks were getting covered with snow.

ER: In the middle of the night?

PR: Yes, I remember that. I remember, they would – the – the – they used to call him the foreman. The foreman would get somebody and – and go – the guy would, the man would come to the yard on foot and tell the men that they were to report to work.

ER: Oh, that’s right, because you didn’t have telephones.

PR: Yeah, they didn’t have telephones, so...gosh, I – I remember my dad going to work and all that, on the tracks. But anyways, going back to the City, yes, going back to the City. Um, our – our City relatives, that’s what I’m gonna call ‘em, they had addresses on their house. 910 New Jersey Street.

ER: Oh, that’s right.

PR: Or 820 New Jersey Street, and all that. We – we didn’t even have an – we didn’t even have an address to where we lived. The teachers would ask us: “What’s your address?”

ER: Oh.

PR: We didn't know. All we knew is that – there used to be a mailbox. It was for the people that worked – that lived there at the Santa Fe apartments, La Yarda.

ER: Uh-huh.

PR: I – there used to be a – a mailbox. Oh, gosh. It must have been about a quarter of a mile from La Yarda.

ER: Really?

PR: Yes. So – so we have to walk all that ways down there. Yeah, that was one thing I remember. Our cousins that lived in the City, we always wished: “Gosh, one of these days we'll be – we'll live in the City.”

ER: You'll have an address.

PR: Yeah, we'll have an address. Yeah, things like that I remember. I – I too, you know, I remember the – the, um – we didn't have no electricity.

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: Uh, my parents – my parents had these, uh, kerosene lamps.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: To, you know, for nighttime. That's the – that's the light we had. Kerosene lamps. Uh, later on – later on, we, uh, they – they, uh, installed electric. We had electric lights. But for a long time, that's what we lived with, just, uh...gasoline lamps.

ER: Did they ever get knocked over by accident, or...? It must have been a fire hazard.

PR: No, not really.

ER: Not really?

PR: Not, not really.

ER: Well, that's good.

PR: Yeah, that was good, but...I – I don't know, I don't know how we did it. That many people living in them little rooms?

ER: I don't know how you did it, either.

PR: It, oh, my gosh, I remember one time as a little kid, the Mexican-Americans, they were superstitious, okay? I remember, uh, when I was a kid, my dad, there was – there was always – there was sometime there'd be an owl, you know, squeaking at nighttime. And I mean, you know, when you hear something like that, I'm sure it's – with the Anglos too, you know. Owl howling at night means that somebody's gonna die.

ER: Oh, is that what it means?

PR: Well, in the Mexican-American, yes, it is. So, I remember my dad, he had a .22 rifle, and he'd go out there in the middle of the night and try to find that owl.

ER: And shoot the owl? [Laughter]

PR: Yeah, because really, it was. It was, uh, an old superstitious, uh, uh, tale that if an owl hooted at nighttime, somebody was gonna die.

ER: I've never heard of that one before.

PR: Yeah. Somebody was gonna die, and –

ER: Do you remember other ones like that?

PR: Well, yeah, like La Llorona.

ER: Oh, the weeping woman.

PR: Yeah, the weeping woman.

ER: I heard about that in Spanish class.

PR: Yeah, you heard that in Spanish. Yeah, people were scared to go out at – at night at the river, 'cause if La Llorona was there...

ER: I don't blame them, I don't think I'd want to, either. [Laughter]

PR: Yeah, you know, things like that – that, uh, that happened, and...Christmastime. I – I remember Christmastimes. My sisters – my parents didn't have no money. Gosh, in fact, my dad worked for the railroad, uh, when I was a kid. Summertime would come, and there used to be farmers out – out in the country, that they'd, uh, they'd grow potatoes.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: And – and in the summertime, instead of my dad taking vacation time, he would spend it out there picking potatoes to earn extra money.

ER: For Christmas?

PR: Well, for –

ER: For everything.

PR: For everything. And I – I picked potatoes for a long time, too.

ER: Did you?

PR: Yeah, I picked, oh gosh, I must have been maybe eleven years old. Out there – out there in the fields picking, uh, potatoes.

ER: That must have been hot work, just...

PR: It – it was hot, but us kids, we were ornery.

ER: Oh.

PR: We used to make – we used to make games out of picking –

ER: Did you?

PR: Throwing tomatoes – ah, throwing potatoes at – at the railroad tracks, at the railroads. Okay, the – the railroad cars.

ER: That sounds about right.

PR: That would pass by there on the tracks, and we'd be out there [laughs] throwing potatoes at them.

ER: You made your own fun.

PR: Yeah, we – we made our own fun. And my sisters, for Christmastime...they – they would – they would save their money and buy us, man, like a little truck or a little car or something like that. I remember that. We didn't have no money. They didn't have much money, but they always managed to – to buy something for us.

ER: Get something, at least.

PR: Little thing, and God, we thought, man, that was the greatest thing. The greatest thing, yeah. Gosh. We – we used to make tamales at –

ER: Oh, I love tamales.

PR: That – that's a Christmas tradition. We used to make tamales. My dad would get the corn, and we had a room where we grinded up the corn kernels.

ER: By hand?

PR: Yeah, by hand.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: And – and they – they made the masa, which is the dough. And the women would, um, they, uh, the women would get in there and work –

ER: Knead it?

PR: Whatever you call it, yeah. That, and, uh...it was just – the process of making tamales, getting the corn husk and all that, and –

ER: It's an all-day process.

PR: Oh, yeah.

ER: In the town where I grew up, there were families used to make 'em.

PR: They take all day.

ER: Yes, all day long.

PR: You start early in the morning, and maybe by 9:00, you know, maybe you quit about that time, about 9:00 that evening you'd be, yeah, we – things like that, made tamales. My – my dad had two chicken pens. Had two chicken pens out there that we raised chicken to eat. We ate the heck out of chickens. [ER laughs] Our poor little chickens, I remember, you know, as we got older, our job was to wring the – wring the necks.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: Yeah, so we al – we always had chicken. Sunday. Sunday as a little kid, Sunday was a big day, 'cause my mom went out, went all out and made us a good dinner.

ER: Chicken dinner.

PR: Yeah, chicken dinner, we had chicken. We ate sopa, I'm sure you know sopa, and, uh, um...

ER: What about eggs? Did –

PR: Oh, yes. We – we had our own – we grew – my dad had all these chickens. Doggone it, I remember...

ER: That's a lot of eggs.

PR: Yeah, I remember my dad bought the little chickens. The little chicks, oh, they were so –

ER: They were tiny ones.

PR: Yeah, they were so beautiful little chickens, and – and, uh, they grew to be bigger, and we raised ‘em for eggs, for the eggs, for the meat. My – my dad had two chicken pens. And it was our job to go feed ‘em, oh, gosh, be – before we did anything, before we went out there and played with our friends or anything, one of our deal was to go feed the chickens. Feed them, chicken, feed the chicken, water the chickens. It was –

ER: So that was one of your chores.

PR: Yeah, it was a chore. We – we had to do chores. We had chores to do. And like I said, haul wood or water, but, uh, we – we’ve always, you know, we grew up learning to do things. I mean, it – it, uh, it was – it was hard work, but we – we did it, and, you know, we just thought that was part of living our life.

ER: Sure.

PR: Like that, so, yeah, and...

ER: Did your dad ever teach you things, like when he would work on house renovation or construction? My dad used to teach us how to do that.

PR: Ah...

ER: When he would work on the house, we were little, and we’d watch him, and he’d show us how to do things.

PR: Yeah...I tell you...my dad, he – he was – he was kind of a quiet man. He was kind of a quiet man. He’s – he’s in, uh, yeah...my mom, if us boys did something, if the boy – if any of the brothers and sisters did something, mostly the brothers, if the brothers did something wrong, well, that evening my mom would tell – would, uh, would tell my dad.

ER: Oh.

PR: And, uh, I remember my dad would – he – he – he’d get after us. [ER laughs]. He’d get after us. A lot of times I don’t even think that my dad knew why he was getting after us [laughter]. All he knew was that Mom said we did something wrong. We had a fight amongst each other or something like that, and, uh, we were well-disciplined.

ER: I imagine you were.

PR: Discipline. Discipline is a big word for us. Discipline, we – to this day, there was – my parents taught us that respect, to have for the women. To the women, especially our sisters.

Today – to this day, my sisters can get after us boys [ER laughs] and us boys won't say nothin' to 'em. We would not say...you had to get after us and all that, and we just – we don't say nothing to 'em, and, a lot of times they'll kid around, they'll say: "You guys better be – you guys better behave. Today. Today. You guys better do this and that." And: "Okay, okay."

ER: Do what you're told.

PR: Yeah, my – oh, my parents were real, real – that was one of the thumbs of rule, is to respect the women. That was one thing they always taught us. Respect the women.

ER: And your friends, were they raised the same way?

PR: Yeah. Yeah, yes.

ER: So, this is community values, just part of it.

PR: Yeah, that was – that was – that was one of the culture things. One of the culture things. Music, we – we all listened to the same type of music, and I was gonna show you...this is, you – you say you're from Texas?

ER: I am.

PR: You've been around all the Spanish people then.

ER: I have. That's why we have the good tamales instead of having to go to Taco Bueno.

PR: You know, the – the music like this.

ER: Oh, you've got records.

PR: Yeah, we – these are old. These are – these are some of my mother's, we grew up on this type of music here.

ER: [Band name]

PR: Yeah. I could – I could...I wish my mind wasn't so blank.

ER: I don't think I've ever actually listened to a record. I've never had a turntable.

PR: Oh, yeah, we – oh, this kind of music we grew up on. Gosh. You know, as kids, every Saturday on the weekend, there'd be a Mexican dance. And we all went to it.

ER: Oh, did you?

PR: Oh, my gosh, yeah, we went to every – we all looked forward to Saturday night, when we'd go to the dances and meet – meet all the girls, and –

ER: Of course.

PR: And – oh gosh, I remember going, buying a special shirt or pants.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: Just going down there. That was – that was something we looked forward to, the dances on the weekends. Now, there's no more things like that. And there's nothing like that anymore, but that was one of the big ways the Mexican-Americans got together.

ER: Sure.

PR: Here in Lawrence, uh, it's funny, 'cause here in Lawrence, when the Mexican-Americans came to this country, my parents, they came to this – they came to Kansas. They settled here in Kansas, so they – they would tell their – their relatives in Mexico: "Hey, Kansas ain't a bad place; come on down."

ER: Sure.

PR: And – and, you know, it was different. It was cold.

ER: I imagine.

PR: So, some of 'em went back, but a lot of 'em that stayed – well, what happened was that we were all related.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: At La Yarda. I think we were all related, so – so when it came time to dating and all that, well, the – the – all the girls that we knew, we were all related to [ER laughs], so I ended up getting married to a girl from Topeka – Anna, my wife Anna, Anna Perez. But she was in Topeka, that's how I met her, because there wasn't no girls here, here in Lawrence.

ER: That you weren't related to.

PR: That we weren't related. That, or the – the ones that we did know that weren't related to us, well, they were like, almost sisters to us.

ER: Yeah, sure.

PR: Because we grew around, you know, like the Bermudezes. Uh, uh... Rachel Bermudez, she wasn't related to us, but we knew her so good –

ER: It felt like family.

PR: They felt like sisters, so... or – or – or the Chavez, um, they had a lot of daughters about my age, but, doggone it all, you grew up together.

ER: Just not the same.

PR: She's like a sister, I can't – so I, like I said, we used to go to the dances on the weekends. I met my wife at a dance.

ER: And that's where you met her.

PR: Oh, my God, yeah. Oh, gosh. I remember the day I met her.

ER: You do?

PR: I remember the day I met her. I got – she – her cousin introduced me to her, and gosh, she was – she was dressed in a – she was dressed in a black dress. Oh, my God, she – whoo!
[Laughter] Beautiful.

ER: Swept off your feet.

PR: Oh, my God, yeah, she was beautiful, man. So I married her, and...two boys. Got two boys, uh, Paul.

ER: And Vince.

PR: And Vince. And Vince – Vince's got – Vince's got six kids, all going to St. John's School. He's – they got their seventh one coming up in May. But anyway, that – that's how – that's how I met my wife, through the, uh, going to dances back then.

ER: That's sweet, though.

PR: We were all related. You know, like I said, when the people, uh, from Kansas told the people in Mexico: "Hey, come on down up here," it's, you know, when they told their cousins and things like that. So, all the cousins would come to live in Kansas, and like I said, we were all related when it came to dating and all that.

ER: Had to go elsewhere.

PR: We had to go someplace and look. And – and at school. And at school. Let me tell you, in school, when I was in grade school, we were – we – we were – we were...us, and the Anglo kids, the white kids. We – we got along okay. We got along okay. Uh, in junior high, junior high was a little different. Junior high, the white kids would – they liked to hang around with us. We got along with them pretty good. Um...high school. High school was way different. I – I don't know what – what – in high school, I – I think what happened was the – the white kids, um...they didn't – they didn't associate with us as much as they used to when we were younger.

ER: Right. 'Cause kids will play together when they're younger.

PR: Yeah. But as we got older, you know, they – they kind of stuck to their own selves.

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: They stuck to their own selves. In my time, you – you couldn't date a white girl.

ER: Oh.

PR: You couldn't date a white girl.

ER: It just wasn't done.

PR: Yeah. If – if you dated a white girl, you – you know, people kind of looked – it wasn't like today, you know. Today, interracial marriages are –

ER: Are more common.

PR: But then, gosh, so it – it was hard growing up for me, 'cause I – I, well, I liked girls and all that, but I couldn't really date.

ER: Yeah.

PR: Really date, so...back again, you know, it goes back to having these social events. Um, Mexican dances and all that. So, but – but I did notice, in high school. The kids sort of – it's almost like, if – if they felt that we were different, and – and – even with the – the black kids –

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: They – they kind of stuck together, in their groups. As a kid – as a young junior high school kid, high school mostly, the only really good friends I had were the Mexican friends. The kids that I grew up with.

ER: The ones you played baseball with.

PR: Yeah, I played baseball, altar boy, and – but that – that's the closest I've – that's...that's why I was so close to them. High school, that's – that's all I ever hung around with, was the Mexican kids that I knew. I felt comfortable with them. I really felt real comfortable with them. I – I remember – I remember, um, segregation.

ER: Oh, you remember that?

PR: Oh, my gosh, yeah. I – I remember as a kid, um, we – we weren't allowed in the swimming pools.

ER: Really?

PR: Yeah, we weren't allowed in the swimming pools. So, we would go down there to the swimming pools, and – and watch all these kids swimming and all that, and I remember [laughs] I remember leaning against the fence and watching the kids swimming in there.

ER: Oh.

PR: And they always told us: “Well, you can't get in there because you have to pay.”

ER: Oh.

PR: You had to be a member. But that was their way of keeping out

ER: That was, yeah, that was what they said was technically the reason.

PR: They said: “You gotta be a member.” Oh, gosh, I remember so many times watching, going down there, watching all them kids, white kids, out there in the swimming pool, and...uh...

ER: That seems cruel.

PR: It...

ER: You're just kids, you know.

PR: Gosh, I remember us guys...ten, eleven, twelve years old, going out there to the country and finding some pond out there and – and swimming in them ponds. And you know what, it was funny because [laughs] pretty soon, the farmers' cows would [laughs] and – and, uh, drink water out of the – out of the –

ER: The stock ponds, I think they call 'em.

PR: The stock pond, yeah. Them things, we'd go out there, and that was our way of getting in the water. We had to go to places like that. Or go to the river. The Kaw River.

ER: That must have been dangerous, too.

PR: Oh. Oh, my gosh, yeah. You know, Emily, I remember one time as little kids, we were little kids. Our – our parents...good parents, excellent parents, but a lot of the time, they – they didn't know where we were at because, you know, at that, a long time ago, you could send your kids out there and – and they were safe.

ER: Yeah.

PR: You know, you didn't have to worry about predators being out there and things like that. You – you – you send your kids out there and say: “You kids come back for lunch.” So, we'd go

out there, I remember one time we were at the river, wading in the river, and then, uh, we were getting ready to leave, and we were standing by – on the bank of the river. And we were – we'd left, and about twelve seconds later, that bank that we were standing on caved in. I mean, you could just see it – whoosh!

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: That whole section.

ER: All of it? Wow.

PR: Yes, if we would have been there, um, a few seconds earlier, us guys would have been in the river. But that's things that we had to do, because we weren't allowed in the swimming pools. I – I – I remember when me and my wife Anna got married, and, uh, in the evening we'd go out for...you know, a root beer or something like that.

ER: Yeah.

PR: I remember going to the – there was one stand, a root beer stand here – here in Lawrence, that, uh, all them people would get served in them, you know, glass...

ER: Oh, like in the pictures that have the glass with the straws.

PR: That, uh, ice and all that kind of...we – we were put in cups.

ER: Just plain old cups.

PR: They had paper cups. We were put in paper – they put our drinks in the paper cups.

ER: What a shame.

PR: And...I remember going into the service, and I was stationed in, um, in, uh, the South. I – I remember Atlanta, Georgia. I remember, uh, getting off a plane in Atlanta, Georgia. I went – I was hungry, so I stopped at this one place, this – they used to call 'em drugstores, then.

ER: Oh, okay. I gotcha.

PR: And I went to this drugstore to get something to eat. When I went in there – this was in the '60s – went to this place to get something to eat, and they had – there was like a big old, there was a table and counter.

ER: Oh, yeah.

PR: A table, this is the counter.

ER: Yeah, with stools.

PR: Yeah, with stools, there you go. So, I went in there, and they had for whites, this section was for whites, this section was for blacks, and I went in there, thinking to myself: “Where do I go?”

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: I’m not white. Or I’m not black.

ER: What did you do?

PR: I got to sit in the middle.

ER: That sounds smart.

PR: Even doing that, you know, they looked at me. White people would look at me. The black people would look at me. I – I didn’t know where to go. So I, like I already said, I went in the middle, in the middle of the counter there, and I was okay there. Same thing, you see the bathrooms. Using the bathrooms.

ER: My gosh.

PR: What bathroom do I use? Do I use the white or black? I was in between. And using the bathroom, the water fountains. Remember the water fountains too, white and black, and there was nothing for us, there wasn’t no middle person, so...

ER: It must have been bewildering, just not knowing where you fit.

PR: Oh, for sure, yeah. But you know what? I – I don’t know. I don’t know which I felt better with. I might have felt better with the blacks, because...I’m a little darker, closer to the blacks than I am to the whites. So, I – I was probably closer to being with the black people. Oh, gosh...

ER: That’s unfathomable. I never grew up with that.

PR: Yeah.

ER: We grew up with smoking and nonsmoking sections, but I – never, never like that.

PR: Yeah. It – it was quite, yeah. And in the South.

ER: It was – it was very bad in the South.

PR: Sure.

ER: More pronounced, anyway. I know racism is everywhere, but in the South it was – it was very prevalent.

PR: It was tough, it was tough – it, uh, I didn't know where, which one to go to. So, like I said, I just found the middle of the counter and went to the middle counter, I got served...oh. Bathrooms, water fountains, everything like that. Um, I was gonna show you, this –

ER: Oh, you got a picture there.

PR: That's a picture of my two little brothers.

ER: Oh. I love their overalls.

PR: And then – that was La Yorda right, well, this is – this was La Yorda.

ER: Okay, it's right behind them.

PR: This was the...

ER: Which brothers are these?

PR: Uh...okay, that's my brother, uh, uh...Rick. Enrique.

ER: Enrique.

PR: And then my brother Omar. Gonzalo Romero.

ER: Oh. On the left.

PR: Yeah, this – this...

ER: I see, oh, he's got – okay, so you've got shoes, but they definitely weren't the waterproof kind.

PR: No, no – I, yeah, really, they weren't.

ER: That's a cute picture.

PR: Yeah, that's a cute picture. That was back probably about 19...maybe 19, in the '50s, probably early '50s.

ER: So, do you remember when the flood happened?

PR: Yeah.

ER: Other people have talked about that in their interviews.

PR: Yeah, they talked...and – and I was – okay – do you, uh...this – this was the layout and –as I can remember. I'm no artist, okay, but I can remember.

ER: Oh, but this will do.

PR: These were the La Yarda, the two buildings. Okay – walked south, and there was the railroad tracks.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: Yeah, this was the railroad tracks there. You had to climb up a little s – a little hill, uh, to cross the tracks. Once you got across the tracks, that was the City.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: Everything out here was in the country. But I remember as a kid, I remember this here. I remember this little – it was a dirt road, a dirt road that ran down, uh, east and west. Uh, I remember some of the buildings. There was a little pond out here. Here's the two bathrooms.

ER: And there's your chicken pens.

PR: Yeah, a chicken pen there, and another chicken pen. Gosh, I think I drew this back in 19...about 20-02. 'Cause this is still fresh in my mind. I tell you, my – my memory is still okay, but...

ER: I'd say it's good. You have excellent recall.

PR: I – I feel that, you know, this is necessary to do, because one of these days, there ain't gonna be nobody around, you know.

ER: To remember.

PR: That actually lived in these places here. So, this – this is what I find, this is what I find real interesting, I – I'd like to really get involved in this, but one of my biggest drawbacks is that I'm not a very good speaker, you know? Like I can put things down on paper better than I can talk about it – I've always been like that.

ER: I'm the same way. I like to write things down.

PR: Yeah. I like to write, seem like I could express myself better. I mean, gosh, I envy the people that can get up there and speak and...

ER: Oh, it's such a gift.

PR: All they do is open their mouth and these words are coming out. Me, I'm thinking about: "What am I gonna say, am I saying it right?" [Murmurs] Oh, gosh.

ER: Even when I do lectures, I have to write out what I'm going to say.

PR: Yeah, I'm – I'm like that. You – you know, I was – I was...[rustling]

ER: I like that magic bag. It's like Mary Poppins. You just –

PR: What's that?

ER: Like Mary Poppins' bag, that she could just –

PR: Oh!

ER: Put all these things in there.

PR: Yeah. [Paper rustling]

ER: It's just – it's fascinating that these pictures here, you know, of the foundation, you know, that's the pump. That's where it was.

PR: Right, yeah, yeah.

ER: That's amazing.

PR: Did you ever see this? [paper rustling]

ER: What's this? "La Yorda: Undiscovered Oasis."

PR: Did you – you ever see it?

ER: No, I haven't.

PR: Okay.

ER: But this would be the kind of thing that they would – if they could restore the area, they could put this on plaques.

PR: Yes. They – they have...they have, uh, the, uh, they keep telling me they got money. They keep telling me they – they got some grant money, that they could do – that they could help, uh, maybe making this possible. But...

ER: I don't see why not.

PR: I tell you what, it –

ER: Especially with volunteer work, I mean –

PR: It – the – the land today, the – the railroad, the Santa Fe Railroad gave, uh, um, the land to the – to the City. So, what the City doing now, is they – where La Yarda sits, right, not too far, maybe a couple hundred, maybe a hundred feet or something like that. They built – the City's got sewers, um, City sanitation.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: Plants out there. I guess that's what you call 'em. But I was thinking, son of a gun, if – if the City just – it belongs to the City now. If – if they could just buy a little piece of land –

ER: Sure.

PR: Clear that area out, and – and fence it, maybe fence it? I don't know how long the fence would last, but –

ER: Still.

PR: They could do something like that.

ER: Oh, I like that picture.

PR: Yeah.

ER: All the little kids. 1933.

PR: This is the way – this is the way La Yarda looked like.

ER: Oh, okay. I got you.

PR: There was two of them. There was two of 'em.

ER: And there's the pump in between the two.

PR: Yeah, there's the pump, and these were the two ends. The – the two ends were the biggest part of the...of the building there. But yeah, there was these – there was all these doors, and all these doors led to a different room.

ER: I wonder who was responsible for making the drawing here.

PR: Ah...

ER: Do you – was that Frank Chavez?

PR: Yeah, I –

ER: Was it –

PR: I got the original picture of that.

ER: That's right. That's the one you showed me on your cell phone. So, this is that.

PR: I can – yeah. That is it.

ER: Wow.

PR: The slab is still out there. The slab is still out there, it's –

ER: I'd like to go out there and see it.

PR: One of these days –

ER: Yeah, when it's not snowing.

PR: No, no, one of these days – if – one of the best times might be in the springtime, because well, right now it's all right, but it's cold and...

ER: Yeah.

PR: Today is a good – um...before – while – while it's still cold, and there's poison ivy, and that's not out there, it's dead, but –

ER: Oh, that's true. That's right.

PR: Yeah, there's...in springtime, summertime, there's, you have to watch it, 'cause there's poison ivy out there.

ER: Maybe at the end of February, or March, when it warms up, but the plants having started coming back yet.

PR: Go out there. Man, I – I thought about how we could preserve, uh...

ER: Even a small piece, like –

PR: This piece of land, yes.

ER: Just seems like such a shame.

PR: And – and the City – the – the City could go in there and take care of it. Could – Park and Recreation.

ER: Just like a park, you know, hire people to mow the lawn, and...

PR: Get, you know, clean it out, and maybe put...grass and all that, and keep it mowed and all that, and...God, it's very interesting. Like I said, there was a German camp just right – right up the road.

ER: That's fascinating. I wouldn't have thought that – right there, you know.

PR: There's a lot of history in there, that deal there. Lot of history.

ER: Especially when you think: Lawrence is a community that's really proud of its history –

PR: Right, yeah.

ER: So, why not preserve this?

PR: Yeah. To me, the Hispanics are left out.

ER: I would agree.

PR: They – they are left out. One of the – one of the reasons was because the – the Mexican-American community, they all lived in La Yarda, and East Lawrence. New Jersey Street, Pennsylvania and all that. Their parents made it a goal in their life to get their kids educated. That was very important, get them kids to school, make a better life for themselves. Get out. Get something nice out there. The Mexican-American people in – in Lawrence, they're spread all over Lawrence now. You know? Once they got a chance to get a good job...

ER: They left.

PR: They wanted something better. So, man, you'll find 'em all over now. West side, south...they're all there.

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: But not in a group anymore. The – the first, the chance that they got to get out, make something for, you know, make 'em a better life, they – they moved away. They...different parts of Lawrence now. But at one time, they were all pretty much on the east side.

ER: And that needs to be preserved, because that's – that's where your parents lived. They helped you...

PR: Right

ER: Think about something else beyond La Yarda, and that's where you started, so I think it's a shame that it would just go unpreserved like that.

PR: Yeah, they're – like I said, about the only time you see the Mexican-American people get together is when they go to church.

ER: Oh, when – okay.

PR: You go to church or the fiesta, the fiesta that's held in June. And you see all the Mexicans and all that. They're all here in Lawrence. They're all here in Lawrence, but they're all spread out.

ER: Yeah, just not in the same place.

PR: No, not no more. Once they got a chance to, uh, uh, get out and...get better jobs, better jobs and...get out there, and instead of living, you know, there's nothing wrong with the east side, but that's where we all kind of grew up on.

ER: Yeah.

PR: But you know, there's places, nice places out there that they can – they can have.

ER: So, you've been going to St. John's for – how long, would you say?

PR: Oh, forever. I been – I was baptized here in Lawrence. I was baptized at St. John's.

ER: Oh, were you?

PR: Um...we were altar boys. Little kids.

ER: In the squads.

PR: Yeah, in the squads. We always made fun of each other, because [ER laughs] you know, we'd be altar boys, and the altar – are you Catholic?

ER: Ah, no. I have some Catholic family members, but I was raised Baptist.

PR: The altar was kind of steps, and I remember we – we'd be kneeling down on the top stairs, and – and you could always see the shoes, all the little Mexican shoes all had holes in 'em.

[Laughter]

ER: Oh.

PR: Holes in 'em, and maybe some cardboard, you know.

ER: I believe you.

PR: And they, uh, all the shoes had holes in 'em, with cardboard. But yeah, um, like I said, you – you see all the Mexican-American community at places, at church. They're mostly all Catholic, so...yeah, we – we – we never have gotten away from the church. This church is our second home.

ER: That's what you said on the – on the phone, you and your wife, you know, it feels like a second home to you.

PR: Oh, it is a second home. It's, um, all the people that got baptized, got married, and got buried there. That's – church is about – it is our second home.

ER: Are you still – are you able to have in-person services over here yet, or...?

PR: Um...

ER: How did that change with the pandemic?

PR: Okay...let's see...you – there's church service, but you have to sign up.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: You have to sign up, and then once you get in church, and the pews – you, they're distanced six feet.

ER: Right.

PR: But the first thing you gotta do is you got to, uh, uh, you got to, uh, make an appointment. Um, and then once, once you make an appointment, you can get in, then, uh, they...have you, every six feet apart. So, at church, I – I'm gonna say there's maybe...a couple hundred people when the church is filled up. With – with this epidemic and all that, there might be, like, thirty people in there.

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: Thirty people that, you know, signed up. A lot of people still don't want to go, because, you know, they don't feel safe. But it – it's still open, and it's – it's different. It don't even seem like a church hardly any more, because of the restrictions that there is.

ER: That's what I miss, I think, most about, 'cause we're not having in person services at church. I miss seeing people every week.

PR: Yeah.

ER: That I wouldn't necessarily...it's just not having that close community in person. They have 'em online, but it's not the same – it's not the same.

PR: My wife, Anna – she – she likes to watch it on – there's a Catholic station on TV.

ER: Oh, is there?

PR: Yeah, yeah, I think it's Channel 91. Midco. I think it's Channel 91 – she'll watch it on –

ER: I haven't got cable.

PR: So, she'll watch it on Sunday at, uh, 7:00 Mass. But me, I...I like to come into the church, but I like to stay my distance, but it's – it's not – it's not like it used to be.

ER: No.

PR: Yeah, used to be you could go to church and meet your friends and talk and all that. Now you go to church, you know – you're too far away to talk to each other.

ER: Can't shake hands.

PR: You can't shake hands, or...it just – and then after church is over, you know, we used to get outside and talk and all that, but you can't.

ER: Maybe even go out to lunch, or...?

PR: What's that?

ER: Maybe go out to lunch, or something like that, and...

PR: Yeah.

ER: Just visit.

PR: Yeah. We used to do that, but not no more, no. Um...

ER: It seems so strange to think that a year ago, you know, I'd just go and get some coffee, talk with people.

PR: For sure.

ER: We'd stand around talking, and we'd shake hands, we'd sing together, and then...nothing. That's – it's been difficult, adjusting to the lack of community.

PR: Yeah. Hey, so, Emily, how can your project, uh, how can you help us?

ER: I'd like to know that. I'd like to ask Nora how I could be involved.

PR: How can you be of help to us?

ER: What do you think?

PR: I – I think...I really think that this – this – this is possible. This is possible, but we have to get people involved. I'm, uh, I'm all for it. I'd like to –

ER: Maybe preserving –

PR: But, yes, I'd preserve, maybe do something to – to La Yorda. Uh...I'd like to preserve it, but we – we need the people, and, I don't know, it just seems that people...it just seems like people just aren't interested in it. I mean, you know, we – we tell our – our – our grandkids, we tell our two boys about how it was and all that, and they – they listen to us, and, you know, they can't believe that – that, you know. We had a life there in La Yorda and all that.

ER: Right.

PR: But...I don't know, I – I just, I – I wish there was a way that, uh, we could do something about this.

ER: I think it is doable.

PR: Yeah.

ER: And I'm hoping that when Nora finishes the project, maybe she can...present it to – to a committee, maybe even to the City –

PR: Right.

ER: Some members of the City, and get them interested, but even something as simple as writing letters, if we could get people to inquire about what might be possible.

PR: You know...I know a lot of these people. They're – they're, uh...they're smart people. They're smart people, but, and just like the Mexican-Americans, like the Mexican-Americans, they – they're kind of, uh, quiet people.

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: They're kind of quiet. The – they're smart, they're smart people. But – but they're – they're kind of quiet, you know, they – they don't like to get out there and – and speak up.

ER: Sure.

PR: I'm – I'm the same way, too, like I said, I'm...I'm pretty good at writing stuff – I don't know if I am, but, you know.

ER: I think you are.

PR: Like I said, you know, writing stuff down.

ER: You've had years of practice.

PR: Yeah, and like I said, I'm better at –

ER: I got it.

PR: Oh, thank you. Try and open my sinus up. I – I, yeah, I'm – I'd like to be, I'd like to help as much as I could, I can, but I – I can't see myself speaking up there in front of the City, the City leaders.

ER: And that's just it; you shouldn't have to. Like, there should be people that can do that, with different talents. You do the writing, and someone else can, say, do the speaking if they're comfortable with that, they have....

PR: That – that's me right there.

ER: That's – that's what we need, is more people involved.

PR: Right. I...I, um, I got the – I got the feelings to do it and all this stuff, my intention's good, but like I said, I'm just, I just can't, I'm just not that kind of a person that...that can get up and talk about this to the public, like the City and all that.

ER: Someone else can do that. Look at this – all this foundational work that you've done. It would make an excellent book.

PR: Oh, my God. That's, well, I – I'm, well, I, living in La Yorda, it just made me appreciate...people. Caring for each other. I don't know, it's – it's a good feeling, you know, to...um, caring for people. Respecting people. I think – I think we lost a lot of that respect today.

ER: That's a shame.

PR: It's a shame, because we said – like we live, we live for ourselves now. We could reach out, reach out and try to help each other, like we used to do. Like we used to do. We used to reach out and help each other and...

ER: And you've been honest about how hard it was. You know, it wasn't an easy life, but...

PR: For sure.

ER: But you're right, you also – when you leave that behind, now we miss the community aspect.

PR: Yeah, yeah.

ER: Where people wouldn't think twice about, you know, helping someone else, and of course you'd do that.

PR: Yeah. Gosh.

ER: Now, it seems people are more hesitant to just reach out.

PR: Right.

ER: I think this – this deserves to be remembered.

PR: Well, you know, if this – if this, I'll be glad to help you any way I can. [Murmurs] I don't know, if you've seen any of these pictures there.

ER: I haven't seen any pictures.

PR: Okay, you haven't seen no pictures at all? Okay, this –

ER: No, all I'm doing is transcription, so I never saw any of the materials. Gosh, all those skirts. All made by hand. Oh, Mary Nunez. I did – I transcribed her interview.

PR: Mary Nunez?

ER: Mm-hmm.

PR: Mary Nunez. You – you did an interview with her?

ER: Oh, I transcribed it. I think Helen had done that. Helen Krische was the first one to start working on this.

PR: Oh, okay, okay.

ER: Yeah.

PR: Okay, yeah.

ER: But I had done...Garcia...I love the costumes.

PR: That's – that's me right there.

ER: That's you?

PR: Yeah.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

PR: We used to have a dance group.

ER: Do you?

PR: We used to have, when we were small kids, about that age there, what, eleven years, maybe?

ER: I love the gold braid on that costume.

PR: Yeah, we used – we used to go around and dance for the Kiwanis Club or the Lions' Club.

ER: Oh, okay. I gotcha.

PR: And the people ate all that stuff up [laughs]. Seeing us little Mexicans out there dancing.

ER: It's cute. So, here's the railroad tracks.

PR: That – that was the flood. That was the flood.

ER: The '51 flood, is that right?

PR: The '51 flood. Okay, this – this right here, these, um...

ER: Oh, my gosh.

PR: These were little buildings that the railroad men, my dad, they had all their tools in these sheds there, and every morning they'd go out there, that's where they would meet. From there they got the orders to go wherever, wherever they had to.

ER: All that water. Gosh.

PR: But all that was underwater, at one time.

ER: That's unfathomable. Oh, here – wow, right up to the –

PR: The railroad tracks are right here. And all that was flooded, that's why my parents had to move. They got tired of...they got tired of cleaning up that mud, and all that.

ER: I would too. Oh, my gosh.

PR: This was La Yarda. Okay, this – this is the roof. That is the roof.

ER: Up to the power lines.

PR: That's the roof there, and that's that little piece that sticks out.

ER: All just underwater.

PR: All underwater.

ER: I can't imagine what that was like. I've never lived on a coast, or even lived through a huge flood like this, so...my gosh, such destruction.

PR: That's an old picture of my...

ER: Oh, that's your mom and dad?

PR: Yeah, that's my mom. My dad.

ER: You have your mom's eyes, I think.

PR: [Laughs] My grandma.

ER: Is that your dad's mom, or your mom's mom?

PR: Yeah, my dad's mom.

ER: What was her name?

PR: Gregoria.

ER: Okay.

PR: Gregoria.

ER: Okay, she had written –

PR: Yeah.

ER: It was in the book, there.

PR: She was...

ER: You're lucky to have so many good pictures.

PR: Oh, my – okay, my mom was from Mexico City, and my dad was from Veracruz. And I tell you what, as kids, boy, we – we were taught to respect our elders. Oh, my gosh. Oh, like we – we – the elders, like the women, we would call 'em Dona Maria, Dona Rosa. Everything – well, in English, it'd be like "Ma'am" or –

ER: Yeah.

PR: But, everybody, all the ladies we talked to, we – we'd address 'em by Dona. D-O-N-A. Dona Maria. Dona Rosa.

ER: My parents raised us to do that, too. You know, Mr. John or Miss Ramona.

PR: Yeah, right.

ER: I still – I still do that now, because it just feels odd not to call them by their first names.

PR: Yeah.

ER: But you're right, I – this – it deserves to be preserved.

PR: Yeah, so if there's any way that you could help us, oh gosh, you know, we have a lot of young kids today. Young kids in their 40s, 50s, probably – intelligent Mexican Americans. But, I don't know, I'd like to see some of them kids step up today. Step up, um, and – and take more interest in – in their roots. You know, these – my two boys, okay, Paul graduated from the, um, business, school of business. He's, uh, he's, um...he works at – for the UMBA, uh, bank in Kansas City. In Kansas City, Missouri. I got my son Vincent, who works at, uh...

ER: Healthcare, was it?

PR: He's health administration.

ER: That's right.

PR: He works at the hospital there in, um, Kansas City, Shawnee...uh, I think it's called Advent now.

ER: Oh, okay.

PR: But, you know, I'd like to see our younger people step up. A lot of them, you know, are smart kids.

ER: Of course they are.

PR: They're smart kids, but, I just, I don't know, they're just – really, you know, on – on the school board, we don't have anybody on the school board, um, I wish we did. I – I, that's one of the things I'd like to see happen while I'm still living, to see some of these young kids grow up, you know, and be on the school board, or be on the City commission. I – I look forward to the day –

ER: To have a voice in the town.

PR: Yeah, have a voice in – in Lawrence. But we don't have nothing like that. We don't have nothing like that. I don't know. I don't know why.

ER: I hope that happens for you. I hope you get to see that.

PR: I do, I live for the day that I see one of these, somebody on the school board.

ER: One of your grandkids, even, maybe.

PR: Yeah. Like I said, the Hispanic-American community here in Lawrence...they're – they're – they're there, but they're – but they won't – they – they just don't stand out.

ER: Right.

PR: You know, to be noticed.

ER: Like you said, quiet.

PR: Yeah, they're quiet. They're – I guess we all –

ER: Smart, intelligent, full of history and – and knowledge, but just not...

PR: And all this history and all that, we're keeping it to ourselves. And one of these days, all that history's gonna die with people that actually lived in, you know, like in La Yarda and all that, so...anyways, um...

ER: Well, thank you for sitting down and showing me all of this.

PR: If – if I can be of any help, I'll be glad to help you out, and, um, like I said, I wish – I wish more could be done.

ER: I think it can.

PR: I hope so.

ER: And I'm hoping that when Nora's carrying this project through to completion, that that will go some way to at least putting it out there, and being visible.

PR: Yes. I always think of myself as being a – not a leader, but a follower. You know, I –

ER: And we need both.

PR: Well, yeah.

ER: Just like we need the Marys and the Marthas.

PR: Right, yeah.

ER: That's what keeps us going.

PR: I'll be glad to help Nora in any way I can. But...we – we gotta do something. If we don't, history's gonna pass us by.

ER: And that will be a shame that we can't fix.

PR: Yeah...well.

ER: I'll go ahead and turn this off.

PR: Okay. Okay, well, I'll gather up –

END OF TAPE