

Interviewer: This is Irene Ruiz interviewing Mrs. Ruth Lopez at 719 West 20<sup>th</sup>, September 30, 1980. ...for you to tell me about your early life, like where you were born and when.

Respondent: I was born October 17, 1922, in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico. My parents brought me when I was four months old.

[0:00:31] And I've been in the United States ever since.

Interviewer: You came directly here to Kansas City, Missouri?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And would you give me the names of your father and your mother?

Respondent: My mother's name is Dolores Camarillo, and my father's name is [Rogelio] Juarez.

[0:00:56]

Interviewer: Okay, so then that means that you did not live in Mexico very long, just a few months. And you came directly here to Kansas City. Now, where? Did you immediately come here to this area, where your business is now?

Respondent: No, we lived on 1123 West 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

Interviewer: And did you remain there as far as you remember, or as far as you know, for quite some time? Or did you move to different areas or different locations?

Respondent: Well, I remained there until I was 19.

[0:01:27]

Interviewer: Then if you can, try to think back about what you recall of the neighborhood as you remember it, as well as you can. What the houses looked like. Were there businesses in the area? Or was it strictly families? Was it strictly a residential type of...

Respondent: No, it was more of a business area, all along 24<sup>th</sup> Street. I remember all the little stores.

[0:01:54]

Interviewer: On 24<sup>th</sup> Street, there were businesses, predominantly?

Respondent: Mm-hm. And they had a tavern. They had restaurants. And they used to stay open real late. I remember that.

Interviewer: Day and night, huh? What days were they open?

Respondent: Monday through Sunday.

Interviewer: Were these businesses small businesses that were owned by people there, Mexican Americans?

Respondent: Yes, Mexican Americans.

[0:02:26]

Interviewer: But there were a few families, like you, like your family, who were living there?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Were these mostly people who were working or did they own their businesses?

Respondent: Well, they owned the business downstairs and upstairs was where they would live.

Interviewer: And what about your parents? How did your parents make their living? Or did your father have a business too?

Respondent: My father had a business. He had a little confectionary there on the corner of 24<sup>th</sup> and Holly.

[0:02:57]

Interviewer: Did he have this business there for many years?

Respondent: Yes, my mother stayed there, but he passed away. [interruption]

Interviewer: And you were saying your father had this little confectionary shop, and I suppose your mother helped with the store too at times?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And you mentioned there were businesses like a little tavern? And what other kinds of business shops were there?

Respondent: A Mexican bakery and a movie house.

[0:03:27] Everybody used to call it [El Tio].

Interviewer: Is that right? Did movies every day?

Respondent: No, just certain days, I believe.

Interviewer: Were they mostly films in Spanish, then?

Respondent: No, they were American films.

Interviewer: And I suppose your mother did not work anywhere else outside the home and outside the business?

Respondent: No.

[0:03:57]

Interviewer: And your father operated the business?

Respondent: My mother didn't help my father until after my father passed away. Then my mother took the store over.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So then she started operating the shop?

Respondent: When he was alive, she was living across the street from the store, and she would have stayed at the house.

Interviewer: She didn't work there.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Now, you said something about, he was killed. Was this an accident?

Respondent: No, somebody shot him in the stomach.

[0:04:27]

Interviewer: But not in the store?

Respondent: No, at a pool hall.

Interviewer: And that's when she came – in 1930, she came to take over the business?

Respondent: In 1931, mm-hm.

Interviewer: How many brothers – I think we did not mention – not necessarily their names, but about how many were there in the family as far as brothers and sisters?

Respondent: There was 11 of us, except one has passed away, in '79.

Interviewer: But your mother reared all those after your father died?

[0:05:05]

Respondent: No, we were just five then, but then my mother remarried.

Interviewer: Okay, I see. So then there were five of you. She was widowed with five, and then she married. What about while you were there, then you went to school there? What was the name of the school that you attended?

Respondent: Adams School.

Interviewer: And that was here?

[0:05:26]

Respondent: Right there on 24<sup>th</sup> and Mercer. And I remember Ms. Meyers was principal. And we only had until fourth grade. After fourth grade, they would send us to Switzer. And we used to come from Switzer – we graduated when we were seventh, and we'd come to West. And from West, we would go to Manual, because West used to be just a junior high. And then they would take us to Manual. That's where I graduated from.

[0:06:03] I graduated in 1940, I believe, because I got married in '41.

Interviewer: What are some of the ideas that you remember or some of the things that might have happened while you were in the schools, either at Adams or at Switzer or West? Do you have good memories of those years or good and bad both, or what?

[0:06:28] Is there anything that stands out in your mind? How about maybe what the conditions were? Or were you happy with the schools and the teachers?

Respondent: I really never paid attention.

Interviewer: You went to school, you enjoyed it. You obviously had good experiences.

Respondent: Well, we used to walk to school. There was none of this bussing. So we enjoyed it, because all the way, we'd be picking up all our friends, and we'd go to Manual.

Interviewer: Just kind of a neighborhood school, in other words.

Respondent: Neighborhood, uh huh.

[0:06:57] Everybody would start out from one end and all the way through, we'd be picking up...

Interviewer: Like a little parade, huh?

Respondent: Uh huh.

Interviewer: And then what about when you came to Switzer? You still walked, so it wasn't all that far?

Respondent: We used to walk to Switzer and to West.

Interviewer: But then to Manual, how did you go to school?

Respondent: We used to walk.

Interviewer: Walk all the way from home to Manual, back and forth?

Respondent: Back and forth.

Interviewer: In rain, or winter, or cold days? Winter snow or whatever?

Respondent: Whatever. If we wanted to go, we'd have to walk.

[0:07:31] And the bus, then, used to cost \$0.05.

Interviewer: Is it true that many of the other youngsters in the area that would have been Mexican Americans that lived along here, did many continue, or do you think many dropped out?

Respondent: Oh, many dropped out. I don't know if it was the [lunch] or the money, but...

Interviewer: Different conditions.

Respondent: Uh huh, different reasons.

[0:07:56] But I completed. I know most of my friends never graduated.

Interviewer: And so what church did you belong to?

Respondent: Well, I went to the Mexican church that was on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street there, because my grandmother was Protestant. And she used to take us to the Protestant church. I never became a Catholic until I got married.

Interviewer: What church was that, then? A Christian?

Respondent: Yeah. It's Alta Vista now.

Interviewer: Alta Vista now, but it probably had another name.

[0:08:29] But you used to go there.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Okay, but then did your mother and father belong to that, then, or just your mother?

Respondent: My mother did.

Interviewer: That was on your mother's side. Your maternal side, that belonged to the church, that belonged to that group?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Okay, what about your neighbors or most of your friends in the area? Did they belong to that church?

Respondent: No, most of them belonged to Guadalupe. I believe all the children used to go to Guadalupe Church.

[0:08:57] There were very few people that belonged to the – like Mrs. Chavez and Mrs. Galadez. Those were the only two families that I recollect that are still living.

Interviewer: Still living, that belonged to the Christian church.

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Okay, were there any clubs, or were there any organizations in the neighborhood?

Respondent: Guadalupe always had the Boy Scouts.

Interviewer: Oh, Guadalupe Center?

Respondent: And the Cub Scouts. Well, it used to be a couple of houses.

[0:09:28] We used to call them the white houses. Casas blancas. Because they had about two houses there on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.

Interviewer: I have heard that they call them that, the white houses, for what is now the parish center. Okay, but then were you able to take part in some of the activities? [interruption]

Okay, you were telling me about some of the activities or organizations, and you were telling me in particular – what about Guadalupe?

[0:10:00] Like, when they had their fiestas?

Respondent: They used to rope off from 23<sup>rd</sup> and Holly to where the church stands now, and they used to have a big dance out in the street there on Madison. And I think that the boys had to pay \$0.10, and the girls were free. But that used to be the highlight.

[0:10:29]

Interviewer: But this was just a dance for everybody. But this was not actual special dances that the girls did? Like the Mexican dances?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: And when you were a little youngster or even a little older, did you have a hobby? Was there anything in particular that you liked to do? Either read or sew, or collecting of anything?

Respondent: There was that Baptist church here on – you know where Guadalupe Church stands right now?

[0:11:03] Up the street? Is that Madison? There used to be a Baptist church, and they used to have sewing classes. And they would give the material and the sewing thread and I'd go in. And young girls that wanted to would go, and I used to love to go, because I like to talk to the ladies and just exchange ideas.

[0:11:29]

Interviewer: So you became active with that. And did you do that for a long period of time?

Respondent: Oh, yes, I think I did it for quite a while.

Interviewer: Was there any person there or persons – like you said, you liked to talk to those ladies. Are there any of those that stand out in your mind? Any one in particular, or any activities besides a fiesta? You know, something else, an experience?

[0:11:57]

Respondent: Mrs. [Castilleja] was one of them, and Mrs. – she's passed away already.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. She was active with that group?

Respondent: Mm-hm. And Mrs. [Salmarica]. She's still alive. Oh, there was elderly – they were very nice. Mrs. Villegas, and her sisters. They all belonged to that sewing class.

[0:12:30] Because they must have gave us the material. And they're like pillowcases or table cloths or towels. Whatever you wanted to embroider, the church would furnish it. That was the Baptist church that used to furnish that.

Interviewer: All right, now, thinking about other things besides the fun things, were there any things that might have happened? Any special event that might have affected you? [interruption]

[0:12:58] Any groups like – I've heard that there were people that were either sent back to Mexico or went back on their own, or were encouraged to go, maybe because of the difficult times, economically, like during the Depression. Do you recall anything like that? That would have affected many people?

Respondent: I don't remember. In 1930, I was...

Interviewer: Well, it may gone on beyond. Yes, you may just have heard. Okay, well, maybe a little bit further, something that would have affected you would have been like World War II.

[0:13:30] You were a little bit older by then. Or maybe you were already married?

Respondent: I married in 1941.

Interviewer: Where did you meet your husband?

Respondent: At the UCM. UCM used to be on 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

Interviewer: Union Cultural Mexicana, right?

Respondent: Mexicana. On 24<sup>th</sup> and Jarboe. Right there, UCM used to have their hall.

[0:13:57] And they used to have Spanish classes and teach us how to read and write. And we used to go to those too.

Interviewer: I've heard that they were active in that area.

Respondent: Mr. Ramirez, in fact, was a teacher. He already died.

Interviewer: So you did learn Spanish there, as far as more formal training, as far as how to read it and write it? Because as you know, many of the members in the community speak it but maybe don't read it. The majority don't.

Respondent: Well, I can read it, but I don't know how to write it very good. I can read it.

[0:14:28]

Interviewer: All right, and so you met him there, and you were married in '41. And what happened then? Did he stay here, or did he go away to the service?

Respondent: Well, he tried to join the service before we got married, but they would not accept him because he was not an American citizen.

Interviewer: He was also born there?

Respondent: He was also born in San Luis Potosi. And they brought him when he was about four, I believe.

[0:14:56] And he tried to join, and they would not accept him. But after it got bad, they drafted him in 1942.

Interviewer: And his full name was what? I know they called him [airy], right?

Respondent: [Spanish spoken]

Interviewer: All right, and so then he went off to service? And you stayed where?

Respondent: Well, I stayed in my house there at 2312 Holly, where Berta lives.

[0:15:29]

Interviewer: Oh, is that right?



Respondent: That little house was ours. We bought it from – his father used to live there. Mr. Manuel Lopez used to own that house, and he lived there. When he bought another house here on Penn, he sold that house to us.

Interviewer: So did he go overseas, your husband?

Respondent: Yes, he was in Iceland. But he was lucky. He was one of the lucky ones. They sent him to Iceland to guard that island over there.

[0:16:00]

Interviewer: And he stayed there for how long? Too long, probably.

Respondent: He was gone for four years. Well, practically four years, from '42 to '45, after the war was over.

Interviewer: And so after the termination of the war, he returned here, and you remained in Kansas City? Or did you...

Respondent: No, we remained in Kansas City.

[0:16:27] In fact, that's when I moved here to this little house here at 717 West 20<sup>th</sup>. That's where all my children were born. I raised all six of them there.

Interviewer: So you had six? How many sons and daughters all together?

Respondent: Five sons and one daughter.

Interviewer: While he was gone, did you work, or did you do anything?

Respondent: Yes, I worked when he was gone.

[0:16:56]

Interviewer: What kind of work were you doing?

Respondent: Well, even though I was a graduate, they would not hire me because I was not an American citizen.

Interviewer: Oh, that's right.

Respondent: All the work that I could get would be at a laundry or at a sewing factory. In fact, I worked making, you know, like for the service men?

Interviewer: Oh, like uniforms you mean?

[0:17:32]

Respondent: Those khaki pants.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Respondent: What were those really famous jeans, coveralls that they used to make.

Interviewer: You mean the name of the company? I don't know. But anyway, you worked in one of those companies. I'm afraid I don't know.

Respondent: They trained me how to run the electric sewing machines, and I worked there for all that time, four years.

[0:17:58] After he came home, I stayed home.

Interviewer: You stayed home to rear the family. And then what did your husband decide to do then? Did he go into any kind of training or some other kind of work?

Respondent: Well, his training was being a printer, because he took that at Lathrop. They used to call it the Lathrop Institute, here where Municipal Auditorium is? That was a boy's school, and that's where he went.

Interviewer: He had been trained as a printer?

[0:18:25]

Respondent: As a printer.

Interviewer: So he came back and immediately went into working for...

Respondent: Well, that was the bad part about it. When he came back, they were not given that GI training on account of he was not a citizen. But this man on 15<sup>th</sup> Street, from Allen Printing, took him in, and he stayed there with him for about five years. But then he didn't have any benefits like Social Security or hospitalization or anything for the family.

[0:18:58] And one day, he got sick, and he went to the hospital, and he went back to work, and they wouldn't pay him for any of it.

Interviewer: Because he was not a citizen?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Well, could have have become one? Or he had not considered it?

Respondent: Well, yes, at that time is when he realized that he should become a citizen, and he applied for it, and they gave him his citizenship right away, in three months.

Interviewer: And did he continue working there, then?

[0:19:26]

Respondent: No, he quit this job.

Interviewer: At Allen?

Respondent: And went to this Alice Press.

Interviewer: For what length of time did he remain there?

Respondent: He remained there until it closed. Until 1975.

Interviewer: All those years, maybe from 1950? Maybe 25 years?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: He retired from there, in other words?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

[0:19:55]

Interviewer: And then the two of you of course reared your family. Were you able to at least train or give your children a little formal education? Your sons have daughters have done very well, haven't they?

Respondent: Uh huh. I have one boy that went to Pittsburgh. Graduated from Pittsburgh. And Manuel graduated from Pittsburgh.

Interviewer: So you have two?

Respondent: Manuel, I didn't pay for his, because he went to the service first, and when he got out, the army paid for his college education.

[0:20:27]

Interviewer: So what are they doing now, the two that finished Pittsburgh?

Respondent: Manuel is Hallmark's...

Interviewer: He's the one that works for Hallmark, that you had told me, Manuel?

Respondent: [unintelligible]

Interviewer: Does he do some kind of advertising or promoting?

Respondent: Well, he checks all his printing, because he took up printing too. And they send him to different states to check the printing. Or their colors. I don't know what really his job is.

[0:21:02]

Interviewer: He gets to travel around quite a bit.

Respondent: And Ricardo travels too, because he's in insurance.

Interviewer: Oh, Ricardo works for an insurance company?

Respondent: Uh huh.

Interviewer: And what about the others? There's three more.

Respondent: Well, there's one that's a postman. One's a fireman. And one works for UPS trucks.

Interviewer: United Parcel?

Respondent: Parcel, uh huh.

[0:21:31] And Nancy works for the federal courthouse. They all were able to finish high school. And Nancy took a couple of years of college too, for secretary work.

Interviewer: So at least you feel they were able to get out very well on their own, considering that you'd had difficulties because you were not a citizen, and your husband did have some hardships there.

[0:21:59] So then when he retired from his – with a printing business – is that when you decided to go into this little shop? Or how long have you been at this little grocery store?

Respondent: No, I decided to get this little shop before then, because the children were going to school here at West. They used to have such a big – oh, what would you call it?

[0:22:28]

Interviewer: Troubles?

Respondent: Troubles with the other children.

Interviewer: Oh, while they were at West, your children?

Respondent: Mm-hm. And we decided they had to go to another school, because these friends would always say, well, let's go here, let's go there. And we thought, hmm, that was not good for them. We better send them to Lillis.

Interviewer: But they go to Switzer. Most of your children went to Switzer?

Respondent: Yes, they went to Switzer, and then they went to West a couple of years.

[0:22:58] And then I sent them to Lillis.

Interviewer: So that's when you needed the extra income, so you decided to go into business, huh?

Respondent: Mrs. Rudy was selling.

Interviewer: That was the lady who had operated this store, at this location?

Respondent: That's how come they call me Miss Rudy, because she was here for many years. Thirty years, I believe she told me.

Interviewer: She operated this business for 30 years. And then you took it over, and then for how long?

Respondent: I've been here 18 years.

[0:23:29]

Interviewer: And it's still thriving. There are not too many little shops of this type anymore in the neighborhood, and in this neighborhood, I think there are less and less now. A store closed down the ways a little bit. And then your husband stayed with you until earlier this year, or was it last year?

Respondent: No, my husband was March 15.

Interviewer: March 15 of this year.

[0:24:01] Well, is there any other comment or any other comments that you'd like to make? Or is there something else you remember, either from before or from now? You might think ahead of what you still would like to do or to accomplish or to have maybe your children or grandchildren?

Respondent: Well, I would like to see this neighborhood more healthy, more alive.

Interviewer: Like it used to be?

[0:24:29]

Respondent: Like it used to be. All the people sitting on the porches, visiting one another.

Interviewer: You've seen too many of those houses torn down.

Respondent: Now there's not that many houses. There used to be an apartment house across the street right here.

Interviewer: Oh, at this corner, that's vacant now?

Respondent: There used to be one over there by the bridge. An apartment house.

[0:25:00]

Interviewer: The streets and the expressways and all those things that keep going up. And then this Kemper, I guess, opened up all that, helped to make the neighborhood go down.

Respondent: I believe so, and now if they take the school, that will be another. It will really make the neighborhood [unintelligible].

Interviewer: Completely dead. All right, Mrs. Lopez, I certainly want to thank you for your time and unless you have something else to add, this concludes this interview. Okay.

Respondent: All right.

Interviewer: Thank you.