

CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT FOR IRENE ESCOBEDO INTERVIEW 30 NOVEMBER 2006

Conducted 2006-2008 by Western Michigan University and the Kalamazoo Valley Museum

This project explored through oral interviews, non-white, minority life experiences in the Kalamazoo region, from informant's earliest memories to the 1980s. Project partners were, Dr. Lynn Brice (WMU College of Education), Dr. Sharon Carlson (WMU Archives), Elspeth Inglis and Donna Odom (Kalamazoo Valley Museum). Several members of the community helped to guide the process.

Interview conducted 11/30/06

Informant: Irene Escobedo

Interviewer: Julia Cardoso

Transcription by Julia Cardoso

Interview Summary:

Irene Escobedo (nee Campos) was born in Texas to Mexican immigrant parents. They moved to Kalamazoo during WW II when factories were in need of laborers to fill the many vacated positions. She recalls that people here were very nice, though also very curious about her family's ethnic background.

Career and family were interspersed from the 1950s through the '70s. She married and raised children in Kalamazoo, worked at both Bronson and Borgess hospitals and, finally, at the Gazette. Her favorite memories of career life were those years at the Gazette where her colleagues sometimes went out of their way to make her feel welcomed.

JC – I'm here with Irene Escobedo – How are you today?

IE – I'm all right.

JC – All right. Today, we're going to be talking about various things; from your community, to your family, education, and things that were happening around the time that you first got here, which was in the forties. What do you want to start with? Is there anything in particular you want to start talking about?

IE – How we got here...

JC- How you got here.

IE- ... We uh came from Texas, we were living in Texas during the “Pearl Harbor War” and they were desperate for help – they were taking the boys and the women into the war and this guy came from Kalamazoo in ah...looking for help...looking for people that needed a job. So my father thought it was a good idea. We got here in forty...forty-three and we started school – my sister and my younger sisters the three of us and we started school...we were the only Hispanics there in school in Lincoln school. We didn’t know the English language, we learned language in Texas, we were born and raised in Texas, but we learned the...started out in a Spanish school the language... and uh...so when we got here we had to learn the English language to make ourselves understandable. It was hard, but we got by. And uh...then my other sisters got here when we got here started working and my father started working at the, it used to be called ‘Brown Company’, but then it’s called Southerland Paper Company.

JC- oh ok.

IE- So they got the job right away and found a house for us and we were settled down. In fact, my father, and my brother, and my sister retired from Southerland from the factory.

JC – Oh wow...

IE- They worked that long. And then we just went on to school the other three of us. We finished school, but by then we knew the language. (Laughing)

JC- (laughing) You could communicate better with everyone better too.

IE – Oh yes, much better. What a difference....

JC – How did you feel, when you couldn’t communicate with anyone?

IE – It felt kind of, I don’t know...

JC – Did you feel left out, or like you didn’t belong?

IE – Well, we did, but everyone was so nice to us... (laughing) I guess because they had never seen a Hispanic before.

JC – (Laughed)

IE – An uh...so we finished school, and my uh...like I said my brother and sisters... And then in the summer time when there was vacation for us. We’d go back to Texas, and come back. We had family. We still had family. We’d have a place to go and we would go and stay for a while. Because before we came here, my father had a good job, a good

job. He worked in a place where, what do you call it – “Fishery”? It’s where they brought the fish from the ocean. They would take care of it.

JC – Oh, ok

IE – So it wasn’t a good paying job, but then the jobs were very very low. I mean the wages. But everything wasn’t expensive either. Groceries. Everything according to the salary.

JC – Right. How much did you get paid in that time like when you moved here to Michigan Kalamazoo area, Do you remember about how much did you get paid per hour?

IE –Um my uh. It seemed like my father was making about \$9 a week...

JC – Oh Wow

IE – But back then, eggs were like, 10 cents a dozen. And then uh when I uh...When I graduated I started working at Bronson Then from there at Borgess as a nurse’s aide, and uh. We learned the language pretty good where we could get by. I don’t’ know that pretty soon, more Hispanics started moving here...but we were the very first ones.

JC- Were you?

IE- I remember that I was like fifteen years old. I remember a lot of the things pretty well. And I... We finished school and got jobs. So we were very comfortable, and other people started coming in...it was just a small group of us Mexicans. We would get together and enjoy ourselves. Just to have someone to talk to, my mother didn’t speak any English at all or my father.

JC- Oh wow

IE- It was hard for them. But then my nephews grew up always spoke Spanish to them and they learned the Spanish, the kids.

JC – Oh really?

IE – Yeah, it wasn’t, I dunno. Then in the summer time, we would sometimes go to Zeeland and they had field s and fields of gladiolas

JC- Oh

IE- And they would hire us to cut the flowers...I guess they sell them I don’t know I don’t remember that, but. It wasn’t bad at all. I don’t know things went on...much better. But it’s been quite a while since those people that were here after we came here...they’re all gone.

JC – Oh really? Did they move?

IE – Well some moved. And we heard that they were not around anymore. We lost track of them. And now, we go to Saint Joe Church. And we uh...use to be quite a big group of Hispanics. We had a Spanish mass there.

JC- mhmm

IE-And know they...it's now just four of us.

JC – Wow, really?

IE – We were a big group and we can count them it four of us. They are all new people that come here. Migrate.

JC-mhmm

IE-And uh...I just couldn't believe...they're all disappeared, they're all gone.

JC- Right

IE-Their kids got married and they moved. Anything else...

JC- Yeah...so do you think that you enjoyed living here in Kalamazoo, as opposed to living in Texas? What were the differences?

IE – The difference uh. One thing that I can't get used to is the winters.

JC – Oh, you can't get used to it?

IE – Ohhhhh, no. I can't – it's just too cold. Here in the summer time, it's too hot (laughing). But I like it, we liked it here in Kalamazoo, we were comfortable...since there were just a few of us, we didn't have any problems with anybody they were all very nice to us. Texas uh...I miss it sometimes...

JC-mhmm

IE- But we practically were raised here so. We got use to living here in Kalamazoo.

JC – So this is basically your home?

IE – Oh yeah.

JC – Do you um remember any type of racial discriminations in that time or any thing like that going on here?

IE – Oh no...no nothing at all.

JC – Nothing at all.

IE – No, nothing at all...it was safe to walk at night and leave the doors open windows

JC- oh really?

IE- which you can do that know, but I remember we had to ride the bus, because we only had one car and my brother would drive it, but we had to ride the bus. Then it was a nickel, now it's close to triple that (laughing)

JC – (laughing) – oh yeah

IE – At eleven o'clock I would be riding the bus when we went some place and by then all the stores were closed on Sundays and holidays. There was nothing open... There was no malls.

JC-Right

IE-That's the only difference...

JC – Do you remember anything like when you were coming up from Texas to Michigan? Do you remember anything between your ride here from there or any type of racial tensions when you stopped to use the bathrooms or when you did this or that?

IE – No, no we never had any problems...even though we were probably the only ones to stop in those places where they have never seen those nationalities. But I really don't remember ever being 'discriminated' against.

JC – Well that's good. Do you feel that things have changed a lot over the years here in Kalamazoo compared to what it's now?

IE – Oh yes, a lot...so much violence and discrimination...now there is

JC – Do you think there is more now than there was when you first got here?

IE – Oh definitely. Yes.

JC – Why do you think that's so?

IE – I really don't know. You know through the years though, every generation changes...everything changes – that's the way it goes, I guess.

JC – Ok...Well, let me switch subjects; Let's talk about your family... like your parents, if you have any kids, your brothers and sisters. What was it like growing up?

IE – It was nice...my parents were very good to us.

JC – Mmm'hm

IE – My father and mother came from Mexico...so we were all born here. In Texas.

JC – What part of Mexico? Do you remember?

IE –Umm I think it's called Linares

JC – You don't know the state?

IE – Jalisco.

JC- Oh. Ok

IE- And uh...and uh...my mother really never did learn the language, because by then we were all speaking English...

JC- Yeah

IE-But she still didn't learn any, because we were speaking Spanish at the same time. So that was our first language.

JC- Oh. Ok Yeah

IE- So we had to learn so my mother would understand. (Laughing)

JC – Yeah, You had to do both. Well that's good. You think that helped you now especially knowing both languages? And even then?

IE – Oh yes it does. I know. A lot of people tell me, “ Do you think in English or in Spanish?” Whatever language I'm talking about.

JC – (laughing) Uh huh. Right.

IE –That's what I'm thinking to answer.

JC- Right.

IE- And it's easy it's not hard to think which ever language you are talking about. Uh, but I uh...

JC – What about your dad?

IE – He didn't speak...he spoke a little English he learned at work, but not very well. But he got by.

JC – Well that's good.

IE – He was working in a factory so; staying busy...and yeah he did all right. I don't know. I kinda think I like the olden days better, because of all the changes and every generation changes is different. Everything that's going on...why does this happen? It does who can say.

JC – What about brothers and sisters? How many did you have?

IE – I had one brother uh it was one boy and uh five girls.

JC – With you it was six or five girls all together?

IE – Well, I have to count...three of them are gone already. Two are gone so five girls and one boy. And uh, because like I said it was so different then. Nobody though about violence or 'being bad'. But he just have to 'go with the flow' of that generation. But, but that's the way it goes.

JC – Did you and your siblings, your brothers and sisters, hang out with any American and African American kids?

IE – Yes, we did.

JC – And like you said there were no racial conflicts? Nothing at all.

IE – No, maybe because they had never seen...like I said see Hispanics or Mexicans before. I guess we are called Mexican Americans cause we were born here. So not that I remember having any problems in fact they were very nice to us. I don't know they just...it was something different for then.

JC – Right exactly. That's very true...you were mentioning that you go to the St. Joseph Church...is that the one here in Kalamazoo?

IE – Yes, it is

JC – How long have you been going there? Do you remember?

IE – Ummm, the mass in Spanish, started about 35 years ago.

JC – Oh really, it's been here that long. I wouldn't have imagined it being here that long. Just because you how some churches don't provide it for Spanish speaking people.

IE – We were lucky, we had this priest that went to Mexico to learn Spanish and he speaks it perfect. He sings beautiful in English and Spanish. He learned the real thing in Mexico. He went to Mexico to learn it, so he says mass in Spanish. So thirty-five years like I said we started with a small group and they brought priests from different countries that spoke Spanish.

JC – Oh, ok

IE – Father Mike has been there for a while. He was the last one to come in who spoke Spanish. The others were just here for a while and they had to go back. But now it gets packed we don't know anybody

JC – Do you not get out into the community as much anymore?

IE – No, not like we used to. The small group after mass and get coffee and talk. Just to get to know each other better and to communicate. Now, I look around, and everybody looks familiar. Lots of them are not here to stay...the just come back and forth. It's still just wonderful that we have a Spanish mass.

JC – Mm'hm

IE – And that's a long time ago. He's kept it up, Father Mike. We really enjoy it, but we don't really get together like we used to, to, to get coffee, donuts...not anymore. But like I said it gets packed.

JC – Ok, so before these last 35 years, you said you just met in small groups and had mass, or how did you go to church. Did you go to church when you first came here?

IE – From Texas?

JC – Yes.

IE – Oh yes, I guess we were born Catholics (laughing) we had gone al our lives. In Texas we used to walk to Church, it was quite far. But yes, we went. The first church we went to is not there any longer. They built a cathedral so it's uh, everywhere we went, we were the only Mexicans (laughing).

JC – So were the St. Joseph Church is there use to be a different church?

IE – Not were that one is...they built that from the ground up. It used to be on Park Street, by the railroad tracks. That one came down and they built something else and they expanded the cathedral. St. Joseph's just finished renovating the church, because it had been there so long that it needed it.

JC – Ok and did you have any children?

IE – Yes, I have two. I have a boy and a girl.

JC – Oh? And what are their names?

IE – The girl is Mary Ester and the boy is Felix John.

JC – Oh. Are they older now Do they work? What do they do?

IE – Yes, they are older. Mary is past 50 and Felix is 2 years younger forty-nine or forty-eight. They both work. Phillip works at Minute Maid in PawPaw. It's Coca-Cola. Mary works in the Medical Center at Western. She works with the doctors and nurses.

JC – Oh, ok. And you were married?

IE – Yeah, I was...

JC – For how long?

IE – It was about 30 years before he passed away.

JC – What was his name?

IE – John...

JC – Was he Mexican?

IE – Yes, he was Mexican.

JC – Ok. Did you both work? Or was he working?

IE- Yeas he was working I was working until I had the kids. I quit until they started school...then I went back to work.

JC – You mentioned something about working at Borgess and Bronson. Is that what you were doing before you had the kids?

IE – Yes, I worked at Bronson first, and then Borgess when I went back to work after the kids.

JC – Oh, ok...and did you like doing that?

IE – Yes. Yes, I did. I worked nights from eleven to seven. You would think that visitors and patients would be sleeping, but they were not (laughing). That's what we were there for to help. I liked it, but then there where nuns that were running Borgess...they were all dressed in their....

JC – Nun attire. Oh wow.

IE – (Laughing) Yes, some in white and some in black. I used to work with two of them. They were so jolly. They'd take their breaks at like two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning. I'd say ok, but if somebody wakes up I am going to call you. (laughing) I enjoyed it. I really liked it.

JC – Great, and where did your husband work?

IE – He worked in a hotel for a long time, too.

JC – Was that one of the hotels here in the area?

IE – Yes, what was it called...I think it was Browns. He also worked at Schuler's in Marshall, too.

JC – Oh, ok

IE – Schuler's is a restaurant. He worked here too...something about food. (laughing)

JC – Oh, so he liked working at those places?

IE – Uh-huh (laughing)

JC – So did you get married here in Michigan?

IE-- We got married here in Kalamazoo.

JC--Do you remember the year?

IE – It was nineteen...Hmmm...Let's see, Mary's 53...we must have gotten married 50 years ago.

JC – It was in the fifties though?

IE – Yeah

JC – So were you young when you got married? Were you the same age?

IE – Yes, we were both the same age...twenty-three each.

JC – Oh, all right, that seems like a pretty good age.

IE – Yes, I thought it was...we got to enjoy ourselves before settling down. (laughing)

JC – And what type of activities did you and your family do here in Kalamazoo in those times. What was there to do for fun in Kalamazoo?

IE – Well, really just parties. When ever anybody had graduations and weddings....anything to celebrate. We'd never really try to go out and just have fun.

JC – Oh really...so you never went...you know how now they have movie theatres and bowling? Was there type of stuff like that?

IE – When I was young, when I was young yes I used to bowl. I think that's about it. Yeah Yeah. I sound like a dull person (laughing)

JC – Oh no (laughing)

IE – But to each his own, everybody is set on their own ways. I have things that I like.

JC – Right, right

IE – Dances...we used to go to dances in Albion and Marshall. Where ever there were Spanish dances. That we did like.

JC – Oh really, and why's that?

IE – Well, just hoping around and dancing...(laughing) just fake it if you don't know how.

JC – Oh, ok it's always fun to get out (laughing). When you had your kids...did you raise them to learn the Spanish language too, or do they just speak English.

IE – Well, unfortunately, we never taught them the Spanish, so no, they just speaking English. I don't know why. We just spoke English to them and at school, and they picked it up faster.

JC – Oh, I see...

IE – I wish I had now, or send them some place where they could learn the Spanish language. I figured when they are old enough they are on their own. They should do it themselves. They were too late to learn another language.

JC – Uh-huh

IE – But I wish I had taught them more Spanish, because when they're old enough, they'll be on their own and they can learn it themselves. It's never too late. Sometimes they need interpreters, like where Mary works, and she calls me over the phone and asks 'Mom, how do you pronounce this' or 'how do you say this?'...(Laughing) Oh boy get a dictionary.

JC – (laughing) So do you think it's important to be able to have both of those languages?

IE – Oh yes, I think so, because it helps a lot. There are a lot of migrants here and most do not speak English. So they always need someone to interpret. When I worked at the hospital, I was always being called to translate at both hospitals. I enjoyed that. It feels good to be able to speak both languages. I felt good...and proud. Cuz they say, that if you know two languages, then you're really speaking for two persons. It's true, but I'm really proud.

JC – Well, that's good. What culture did you go with when raising your family? Did you go with the Mexican culture, or the Mexican American culture, did you kind of go either way?

IE – Well, it was really either way...

JC – Do you think it was better to have done that...or do you wish you had added more of this culture or that culture? What do you think the differences are between both of those cultures?

IE – I don't know really, to me there both about the same. They're both equally important.

JC – Ok, did you adopt a lot of the American customs or way of life?

IE – Yes...

JC – How so, could you give us a couple of examples?

IE – Well, I raised my kids in more of an American culture...but even though we're in America, we must never forget our culture. It's always there, and helpful, and important to our people.

JC – Right, and were there any types of services to help migrant workers here in Kalamazoo? Right now they have different centers to help people or give them a hand – were there any services like that back then?

IE – No, there were not. The only thing we thought was funny that we...was Halloween...kids kept knocking on our doors saying 'trick or treat', and everybody just kind of looked at each other. 'What do they mean, what do they want'. A neighbor finally told us that they did that every year, we had never heard of that. They didn't do that in Texas. Maybe now I'm not sure. Things like that that were weren't use to.

JC – Right, were there more things that helped people coming up...like Mexican restaurants? I know there are a couple of them here in Kalamazoo.

IE – Yeah, there are a lot of them.

JC – Do you remember if you ever ate out? What types of restaurants did you eat out?

IE – Believe it or not, I loved Chinese...I could eat that any time. Because some of the Mexican restaurants...they're all different. They serve different dishes, different tastes; so sometimes you have to try them all out to find out. We go a lot to the American restaurants.

JC –That's good. Do you remember any of them by name? Like back them that are still here now?

IE – American?

JC-Yeah,

IE-because the Mexican started not so long ago.

JC-Right,

IE- Well only the fast foods. (Chuckles)

JC- Burger King, They went out of business, they moved out. Oh they had the best hamburgers. I can't remember the name, they were good.

JC – Do you remember where they were located?

IE – They were located on King's Highway and Lake street...On the corner there it was a long time ago.

JC – Right, so basically when did Chinese food start coming into town...do you remember?

IE – No, I don't remember, but for Mother's Day, my Birthday, I don't want anything don't buy me anything. Take me to the Chinese place. (Both laughing)

JC – Right, I asked that because you said you liked Chinese I wanted to know if you remembered the first time you went to a Chinese restaurant.

IE – No, I can't remember, because there's more and more Chinese restaurants.

JC – So you just like all Chinese food?

IE – Yeah...

JC – There's no difference, regardless of the place?

IE – No, I like the buffet style, because you can get whatever you want. We always go to the one out on Gull Road. Bamboo is called, I think. You can pig out, then an hour later you're hungry again. (Laughs)

JC – OK, we really didn't talk much about your school...you said something about going to Lincoln school?

IE – We started at Lincoln school, here in Kalamazoo. It was on Burdick Street, on the north side. Then from there, we went to old Central, until the ninth grade. They only had it until ninth grade.

JC – So, was the high school basically from ninth grade up, or was it K-12? Did it go from grades nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

IE – Lincoln school went up to ninth grade, then they called it graduating to Old Central.

JC – Oh, ok – how long were you at old Central?

IE – uuh, about three years.

JC – Did you go to college after that?

IE – No, I didn't go to college (laughing) – I wanted to work, I wanted money.

JC – So, is that the main reason why you didn't go, or was something else stopping you?

IE – Yeah, it was mostly then money-wise. There wasn't much money unless you had a good paying job.

JC – So did you see a lot of people go to college at that time or was it a very small amounts of people.

IE – Americans?

JC – Well, Mexicans or Americans.

IE – I'd say yes, lot of them. For some people they could afford it. The tuition wasn't as high as it is now. My kids didn't want to go to college. They wanted to work too...I think it's a good idea to go to college first. Well Mary did go to did go to KVCC...

JC- Oh ok.

IE-...for a while.

JC- Oh all right

IE- And Felix graduated and he got a job.

JC- And he didn't go to college?

IE- No he worked

JC- He headed straight to work?

IE- he didn't want to go to college. You don't know what you are missing. It's very important now days especially because without education, you're nobody.

JC-Yeah it's tough to find a job if you don't. How do you remember the school systems being back in the day? Was...you were saying something about being one of the very first Hispanic families here – did the kids make fun of you?

IE – No, they just looked at us like we were from outer space (laughing) – like strangers.

JC- they did look at you? Or they didn't.

IE- Yeah they did like 'what are they', 'where'd they come from'.

JC – (laughing) As far as food, did they provide food at the schools...or did you have to take your own food.

IE – We didn't live too far from school, so we'd go home for lunch...my mother never worked...

JC- Oh ok.

IE-...so she was always home, waiting for us. It was a few blocks walking distance.

JC – So you were able to go home from...That's interesting...

IE – Yeah, the first snow that we saw...when didn't know what to do – we had never seen snow before.

JC- Oh wow.

IE- Like in Texas. I think now it does sometimes. They get snow but ah. Over here...

JC-Do you like the weather?

IE-I don't know. My, my, my health, it's ah...well I guess...you are not in good health wherever you are at. It follows you wherever you go.

JC- It will follow. Right. All right do you want to stop for today or do you want to keep going or how are you feel?

IE-I feel ok what time is it?

JC-Umm...

END OF INTERVIEW SEGMENT

Interview continues

11/30/06

Informant: Irene Escobedo; interviewer: Julia Cardoso

IE but (continuing), um, as far as my health, it's been four years since I had surgery, and it started then, and I thought oh, I know I'm not gonna be any good --
No, you're fine. Okay, we're here once again with Irene Escobedo. So let's talk about where you worked when you first moved to Kalamazoo. Do you recall telling

JC me about that, where you worked?

IE Where I worked?

JC Yeah

IE Let's see. Hm

JC You mentioned working at the hospital

IE Yeah, I worked at both hospitals, and I worked in the kitchen at Bronson, and -- nurse's aid at Borgess, and then I had several jobs after that, like um, what -- two other jobs, a factory, and then I ended up at the Gazette. And I retired from the Gazette.

JC What did you do at the Gazette?

IE Oh, just answered the phones, and proof read the proofs before they appear in the paper, and then I had to call the advertisers to see if it was all right, or, or they would call me -- and did a lot of filing. The newspaper, we filed -- they call 'em tear sheets, and I -- I did that, file them, and mostly sit by the phone

JC How long did you do that for?

IE Twenty years

JC OH, really?

IE Yeah

JC So you weren't at the hospital very long, or

IE No, no, not too long. Because I quit for a long time because the kids were growing up and – and uh, oh, I felt like they needed me at home so – I just didn't trust babysitters (laughter). Nothing like the mother to take good care of their kids, so – I stayed home for a long time until they got older where they were able to kind of take care of themselves, and that's when I got the job at the glue factory, and then from that to the Gazette.

JC And at the glue factory, what did you do?

IE They um, they had machines for the glue tubes?

JC Um hm

IE And all we did was just pack 'em in boxes, and – uh – they came through a conveyor and then we just packed 'em, it wasn't hard at all. And – we had (pause) Borgess, after Borgess, yeah then I think – I quit Borgess – after Borgess, yeah, I went to the glue factory. When I was able to go back to work again.

JC And at the glue factory, were there just like women working or

IE Yeah. Just women. We worked nights, we worked 3-11, and the boss's son, or the boss – the real big boss's son – and um, but mostly women because we all stood around this conveyor and packed, and then women at the other end catching them. It wasn't hard at all. But when they asked me to – Bishop Donovan made it, talked to the boss, of the Gazette, the manager, and he said that he should have minorities – kind of – you know, not too many but (laughter) but uh, he – because of Bishop Donovan I got in there.

JC So did they have a lot of minorities working there, or did they

IE NO, they didn't have any, very few blacks, just a few blacks. But now they have more blacks. Minorities – as far as Spanish speaking – I was the only one.

JC Really

IE I was the only one

JC How did that feel, being the only one?

IE Well (laughter) to me, it was just – I didn't think anything about it. To me it was

just a job. A check.

JC Right. Was it the same at the hospitals?

IE Yes. Uh huh

JC You were the only

IE But they were ALL very nice to me, at the – at the Gazette. Everyone was so friendly. I mean, everyone was friendly to everybody. And they treated me really, really nice.

JC So you didn't feel that they showed any type of discrimination against you or to you or...

IE No, not at all. Not discrimination

JC So you felt that that

IE Because at my birthday, they always – just our department would have something for me, at Cinco de Mayo they would decorate the office (laughter)

JC OH, really?

IE Pinatas, and – and uh, the whole works. What do they call those things that you – (pause) oh, I know - -it's like a, part of a musical

JC Were they drums or

IE Maracas

JC Oh

IE Maracas

JC Maracas

IE And at Christmas time they would decorate the office with lights and trees, and I feel – I was going through all my papers the other day, and I said “gosh, they were good to me,” they did this for me

JC Um hm

IE And I was VERY happy there. Very happy there. But it was just – I turned 65 and I said “it's time to call it quits.” I could have worked longer but no, I was ready to-

JC Your kids were all grown up by then

IE OH yeah, graduated, and um – (pause) ‘cause they both went to Catholic school

JC Here in Kalamazoo or

IE Here in Kalamazoo yeah. Hack—they started at the school downtown by the church, what did they call that – O’Brian – yeah, it was O’Brian. And then was all boys

JC Oh really

IE So, somehow they – they merged, they had the boys and the girls at Hackett. And that’s where they graduated. So my daughter was one of the first, class, to graduate from a boy’s school. And it was really uh – well, she learned a lot. And then my son graduated but by then he – he graduated from Loy Norrix, because he didn’t want to go to Catholic school

JC Was there a difference with – in like, the schools, as far as how many Hispanics there were, or Mexicans or

IE No, no, there were lots – lots of Mexicans. Now there is, and there were when they were going to school. But at Hackett - -there wasn’t, I think my daughter was the only one, the only Mexican at Hackett

JC That graduated that year

IE Hm um, and um so – so much for that (laughter)

JC When you said, you mentioned, that you went to Lincoln Elementary?

IE We started at Lincoln, uh huh. That was my sister, Minga – she started, her, myself and my other – there was a sister between us. And we – when we came here we started school here, and my brother and my two other – older sisters, they started working right away at – oh, it has changed about 3, 4 different names

JC What, Lincoln has?

IE It’s Brown Company now, I think, but it was Southerland – no.

JC Um hm. That was the name of the school?

IE No, no, no, no – the job

JC Oh

IE Where my brother and my -- my stepfather and my sisters, I think they came straight into the job, they didn't -- it's so funny, now it's so hard to find a job, and then they were looking -- they needed the help so bad, desperately, because they were taking the boys and the girls

JC Were those here, were those jobs here in Kalamazoo or were they outside of Kalamazoo? The company -- Sutherland

IE Here in Kalamazoo

JC Oh, they were here in Kalamazoo?

IE In fact, we just lived across the street from

JC Oh, really?

IE I had to just cross the railroad tracks and

JC Oh, and Sutherland was there?

IE Sutherland, uh huh

JC Oh, so they were still up and running

IE OH, yes. Different name but

JC OH, really

IE Um hm

JC And, did the Brown Company change, or did they stop, or -- do you know?

IE You mean the name or the job?

JC The job. OH, is it still there?

IE Yeah, they're still in business

JC Oh. Okay -- and what about, you mentioned the glue factory. Was that here in Kalamazoo?

IE In Kalamazoo, yes. Uh huh

JC Do they -- do they still do that, or

- IE No, no, that's – I was glad I got out of there, because a few years after that they closed it down, or they went out of business. I don't know WHAT happened, but it – um, they just closed it
- JC Yeah
- IE So I was glad I got that job before
- JC At the Gazette, did you – do you ever want, like even to go back now, just to kind of see how it is, or
- IE OH, I do
- JC Do you?
- IE I miss – I really don't miss the place as much as I do the people, the girls, we used to – we had lunch together, breaks, and – I miss the girls because they were so nice to me
- JC Do you feel that – if you were able to do some volunteering with the , or any type of stuff like that, would you do it, or
- IE Anywhere, or
- JC No, like with the Gazette
- IE Oh, at the Gazette? No, it's changed so much
- JC Has it?
- IE They tell me, the girls – they're all – they have so many NEW people there, and the ones that are retired, they're replacing them with part-time jobs, and it's different, it's so different now. But I'm sure it wouldn't have changed with me, it wouldn't affect me, but – I go there, to see the girls, have coffee with them, because I know when their breaks, when they take their breaks, or – three of us got attached pretty close where we – sometimes I go and have lunch with them, and um – but uh, and I still see them once in a while, or they come over. And they have – every time they have a retirement, they have a party, they throw a party for the retiree, and I try and go every time I can but lately I just haven't been able to.
- JC Make it
- IE To make it, yeah, but when Jack Moss retired they had a BIG one for him, at the Radisson, they had a big
- JC Did they throw a big party for you when you

- IE Yes, they had a party for me, a dinner, and of course – it’s fun to have something to say about me – I think we used to – and I had to get up there too and kind of, make a small speech
- JC Did you have fun with that, or
- IE OH, yes, yes. Really
- JC The dinner was fun for you?
- IE Um hm
- JC And when you, when you mentioned going to Lincoln School, how was that experience for you, when you came to Kalamazoo?
- IE Well, we were the only Mexicans there. We – I didn’t feel – I didn’t feel out of place, because everybody – I suppose when there’s only one minority they treat you nice – they were nice to us, the teachers and the kids, and asking us questions about our heritage and that – um – but, I didn’t – they didn’t treat me any different. But some of them did look at us like “uh, what is she? What are they?” “Where did they come from?” “What planet did they...”
- JC How did you feel when they used to do that, or what did you say?
- IE I just told ‘em I was Mexican and where we came from, and Texas – we were born and raised in Texas, but some of them had never seen one before, I guess. Maybe pictures or movies, but not – not real life
- JC Right, right
- IE And um, I felt – I mean it didn’t bother me that they felt like I was – they did look at me, and they’d look at us like (pause) – I don’t know what they would be thinking, but I won’t say “different” either, it’s just – they wanted to know more about us, and – at first it kind of bothered me when they’d look at me, but after that, you get used to it
- JC Why did it bother you?
- IE Well, because it seemed like they looked at – they were always staring, they were looking at me like uh – and asking questions
- JC Did you feel kind of like out of place
- IE Out of place, at first, out of place. Until I got used to it, yeah.

JC How long did it take you to get used to all of this

IE Um, um, let's see. Not, not too long

JC Um hm

IE Because once I got to remember their names, know their names, and they knew me – it was different, better. But I know some of them didn't know what to think and I – different you know, different

JC Right. And what about the teachers, did they

IE They were all very nice, yeah

JC Did they ask a lot of questions?

IE NO, the teachers, I don't remember them asking questions, I guess

JC Just more the kids?

IE Um hm

JC What did you used to say, what types of questions, because – where did you come from and

IE Yeah, where I came from, and – did I speak Spanish? And I'd say well, right now that's about all, because we were just learning English. And um – 'cause when we went to school in Texas, they wouldn't let us speak English

JC Oh, really?

IE They wanted us to learn our language first, and then – so we did learn English too, but – so when I came here I knew a little but not enough to – for conversation or – so – I started to feel better after a while, though

JC How long did it take you? Not very long?

IE I would say – once semester of school, after – after you know, summer vacation, after I got back, I felt better. They were okay, in my book (laughter)

JC Did your parents want you to speak both languages or just Spanish or English?

IE My parents?

JC Um hm

- IE They only – only Spanish, they didn't speak English at all
- JC OH, really?
- IE Uh huh
- JC So did they – so you always
- IE We only spoke Spanish at home, uh huh
- JC How did you – did you feel that you wanted to communicate with them in English, at any time?
- IE No, no, because I knew that they wouldn't understand me, so – or knew what I was saying or talking about. It didn't – um, they didn't know any English at all. Well, my step-father a little, but not – he kind of learned through the job there
- JC OH, okay
- IE Working with people, you learn a lot – more - -but my mother didn't speak any at all. Any English, at all.
- JC Um hm. Did she WANT to learn, or did she just
- IE No, because we all spoke Spanish – the older ones, once we were home my sister, my brother, we all spoke Spanish until the – and now our kids do not speak Spanish at all
- JC They don't speak it?
- IE No. The oldest, nephews do because they were kind of raised with my mother and Dad, because we all came together, and um – and they still speak Spanish. But they're in their 60s, so – and um, other than that I have – they're the only ones from those – two oldest nephews, down, they do not – I feel bad, you know, we should, while they – while they were young. It's never too late to learn anything, but I wish I had spoken Spanish to the kids at home, they would have learned faster. They learn faster when they're young
- JC Yeah
- IE And uh, but we never did, because my husband and I always spoke Spanish too, so – but to them we, we just talked to them in English and – and I thought, I kept thinking, "someday they're gong to learn on their own," maybe they'll go back to school, or take a class or something. But it never happened (laughter)

JC Did you motivate them, or kind of like tell them, or – or just waited for them to do it on their own

IE I just waited for them to do it on their own, because you can't push anybody. The more you push the less the person cares

JC Right

IE It loses interest – I feel like they have to, whatever they're gonna do, do it on your own – I would advise them, but – they – they're gonna go ahead and do what they want to do. And they're both still at home, single, in their fifties – but I doubt it they'll ever go back and learn – 'cause my, my son – well they've both been to Mexico

JC OH, they have?

IE But – when someone spoke to them, like when you go across, what do they call it now, —

IE Um, those guards, or whatever they are, security they asked him where – in Spanish, they were talking to him in Spanish. Felix just let 'em talk and then he says "I don't speak Spanish" (laughter)

JC OH, NO

IE And sometimes he – he would uh, one time he was with this other American guy, and – I don't know – he was driving, and he was -- the other guy was driving, so the police stopped him for something, I don't know what, but he said, I guess "two white males here," Felix says "okay." I guess – Felix has blue eyes and Mary has green eyes, so – and they're very light-complexioned, so they think – well, they were American, but not speaking Eng—uh, Spanish

JC Right

IE But uh, they asked him when they crossed to Mexico that – start asking questions and – I guess, there are a lot of Mexicans with light complexions and blue eyes, green eyes, they thought – then they started asking questions – they asked for his birth certificate and he had it with him, and I don't know why because when he told 'em he didn't speak Spanish at all, they didn't believe him, I guess – I don't know

JC Was this back then, that he had to carry around his birth certificate?

IE Their what?

- JC Did he have to CARRY around his birth certificate
- IE You have to when you go to Mexico
- JC Okay
- IE Show some proof
- JC Right
- IE Where you're from
- JC Um hm
- IE And they said they can tell because I've been there several times, and they say they can tell by your accent right away
- JC Oh
- IE Just saying "yes" or "no" they can tell – that you're – you're Mexican but yet from the United States, and 'cause lots of times they ask me if I had anything illegal or – and I just say no – I did have (laughter), but I said no, and then "okay." So much for the security
- JC Right, right. Well, back then you know, there wasn't all this going on, so it was easier to bring things back and what not
- IE Yeah. Uh huh
- JC It was a lot easier, so do you still travel to Mexico, or
- IE Still what?
- JC Do you still go to Mexico?
- IE I haven't been there in quite awhile. We have family there
- JC Um hm
- IE My parents came from Mexico, both of them, and we – we have family, that's the reason we go, to see them, and have someplace to stay
- JC Right
- IE And in Texas too, we have family

JC What part of Mexico do you

IE Um, Las Mira Monterey – what’s it called – El Cardmin (?) or something, it’s a small, very small town by – oh, gosh, I was – I never seen mountains before

JC Oh, really?

IE And they live right – well, a little down, surrounded by those big, tall mountains – what do them call them in Spanish

JC Montania

IE Montania, yeah – and I said – I’ve seen pictures but this is BEAUTIFUL, to see those things – so high and – it’s, it’s beautiful in a way

JC Yeah

IE Or it was – well, it is, for the people that live there

JC Right. And you feel that you’ll go back again, to visit, or

IE Well, it depends on my health, but right now I’m not able to travel

JC Um hm

IE And uh, I’m hoping, some day I’ll get better, or feel better, so I can – I’d like to go back and, and visit them. Because every time I write to them or talk to them, “come on over, you have a place to stay. Come on over. Stay as long as you want to, you’re retired, you don’t have to go to work.” ‘Cause before I – I would go every two years, but I only had one week so, I had to fly and fly back, and – and well, it was faster, had to be back at work. And now they - -they say “you know you don’t have to, you can stay as long as you want to. You don’t have to rush back.” Now that I don’t have to rush back, I’m not able to travel

JC And is it like your aunts and uncles, or who is down there? Is it just

IE All my um, my – my aunts, I only have one aunt and one uncle, all their kids are all grown up and have kids, and have kids of their own – 3rd generation. And, so, um, it would be my – my aunt’s kids and my uncle – oh, it’s a big family

JC Oh, it is?

IE Oh (laughter)

JC Yours is small, isn’t it?

IE My what?

JC Like your immediate family, your kids, you only have two kids?

IE Only two yes, uh huh

JC And theirs is much bigger?

IE Yes. Oh. A lot - -yes, older, and uh, yeah, we're in the 3rd generation now that my kids would be, and my sister's and brother's kids would be the 3rd generation. We're the oldest, my two sisters that are left and I, and uh, we're the oldest. I never thought I'd see that day when I'd say (Laughter)

JC When you'd say you were the oldest

IE I'm next in line

JC No – no, and um – so your family ties are very strong, even though you're far apart?

IE Yes, uh huh. OH, yeah, yeah, they – they write, or call each other – whenever they get a chance. And they're so nice, and friendly – maybe because we don't see each other that much (laughter)

JC Do you feel that a lot of Hispanic families tend to be like that, where their family ties are much stronger, or

IE I think so, yes, I really do think so.

JC Do you feel that it's for a reason, or is it just

IE Well, because – I want to say, well, the relationship, they say blood is thicker than water, and – they all seem, they all seem very

JC And you're very close with your kids

IE Close – close together, yeah

JC Yeah, and um – another thing we talked about last time was the church, where you went to St. Joe, was it?

IE St. Joe, um hm

JC Do you still go there today?

IE Yes, uh huh

- JC How are things – are they same, are they different, from the people that are there, the congregation, or
- IE Well, see, we have a Spanish mass on Sundays, and sometimes we go to the English mass but all those people are so friendly, most of them senior citizens – the other, Saturday mass – and like, sometimes when we go to the English mass, Saturdays, we're the only Mexicans there. And they always ask us to bring the gifts, the host, and my nephew goes every Saturday, they ask him to – for the collection, and every time he's there – and the Spanish mass, they're all Spanish, they're different – Puerto Rican, from Colombia, Mexican, Cubans – so it's all in Spanish, it's beautiful
- JC Do you go more to the English or the Spanish mass?
- IE Most of time to the Spanish mass, faithfully, every Sunday. But since I've had this surgery I – I kind of slowed down, so – I go, sometimes, to the Saturday, on Saturday. On Saturday.
- JC Do you notice a difference from the American mass versus the Spanish mass, is there
- IE There's no difference, all the same, because they go by the __, the same readings, they do – and the Spanish mass is translated, or the English is translated into Spanish, so
- JC How about as far as families?
- IE Families, uh, well, believe it or not there's only three left – years ago, when we first started the Spanish mass, we all knew each other. EVERY body knew each other. And now, they either passed away or they move away, and so now they're having different – we hardly, I think, only 3 of us are from the
- JC OH really
- IE Olden days, when they first started about 35 years ago
- JC Um hm
- IE And uh, um – and it's um, the priest speaks Spanish beautiful, he went to Mexico to learn it, and oh, he's – sometimes I'm ashamed to say – it's just beautiful, the way he learned
- JC Does he still do the services there, does he?
- IE Um hm

JC Oh

IE Every Sunday at 1:00. Yeah, 1:00

JC So he's been there since

IE Yeah, since he was a deacon, he was a deacon there, at the church, training, and then – he became a priest, he got ordained. He went someplace else and then he came back to St. Joe

JC Oh

IE He's been there, now, again, I don't know, maybe 15 years or so, but – I mean, he has – his back to you, and he's talking to somebody else in Spanish, you would swear he was a Mexican

JC OH, really – it's that clear and

IE Uh huh. Oh, gosh, yes, and uh – but he tries not to use those big words he learned, because we tend to have – invent our Spanish words, a lot of them. They're not even in the dictionary. And so he tries to use just the basic Spanish so – so we would understand him. Otherwise, _____, he's – and a beautiful voice

END OF SIDE A

IE (continuing) English and Spanish

JC And do you, as a church, do you guys do any type of festive things, or – like celebrate, like for instance, when you celebrate Christmas, or any type

IE OH, yeah. Christmas, well same as the English, they're both the same, but the 12th of December, they celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe, and they're having special services for that. Celebrating, singing and praying, and refreshments afterwards. That they celebrate every year, Our Lady of Guadalupe

JC Did they start – when you first started going, did they do that as well?

IE Um

JC Or did they not do that yet?

- IE No, they didn't do that, yet. After a lady brought a picture, the Lady of Guadalupe, but – there's one at St. Joe, and I don't know about a big one, there, at St. Augustine, and that one is beautiful. That's where we go to celebrate our Lady of Guadalupe
- JC This is St. Augustine
- IE At St. Augustine, and uh – a lot of people go. There used to be a 6:00 in the morning, ooh – that was a little bit early for me. But now they're having it this time, this coming – when is that, the 12th of December, they're having it at St. Augustine and it's – I don't know who brought that, but there's a picture of her there. But it's beautiful – when you like something, you enjoy it.
- JC Right. And do you – were there, are there just Hispanic, Mexican Americans who do that, Lady of Guadalupe, or
- IE Not rea – they announce it in the bulletin in English AND Spanish, so whoever wants to go, and um – but mostly the Puerto Ricans and the others, they don't go – mostly the Mexicans. I guess they have their own
- JC Right
- IE Each one has their own beliefs, or saint, or – and, but there – a lot of people go. English and Spanish
- JC You do get Americans
- IE Yeah, usually the mass you say it in English and Spanish, for something special like that. And um (pause) – let me see, I forgot what I was going to say (pause) I don't know
- JC You forgot what you were going to say – and what about, I know a lot of churches and stuff do things during Christmas. Does that church do things during Christmas time?
- IE Just a celebration like in the church, singing, the mass and then all the Christmas songs, and –
- JC And when you first, when the first families started going to the church, did you guys want to do things like this but couldn't, or – like for the Lady of Guadalupe
- IE Um hm. Yeah, so I don't know – I can't remember who started that, but yeah we wanted her there. She's our – patron saint, of Mexicans. Mexico.
- JC Right. So did you have to kind of push to have it brought, or – to have it there at the church, or

- IE This lady brought it, um – she went to Mexico to visit her family, and she brought this – it’s not the statue, but it’s a frame. It’s in a frame
- JC OH, okay
- IE It’s in a frame, at St. Joe. And uh – um, well, mostly – well, it’s for anybody that wants to say a little prayer to her, and – but the big one, I can’t believe it’s a statue or a frame, at St. Augustine – (pause) I think it’s a frame, yeah.
- JC And I know that Borgess is a religion-based, kind of, hospital, and you remember saying that you had to wear a nun – nun’s attire to work, do you recall that? You told me you had that – you were in nun’s clothes, or the nurses wore nun attire, I don’t know if you recall
- IE The clothing?
- JC Yeah
- IE OH, no, no, we had two – then the sisters
- JC Hm
- IE The – Borgess was run by sisters, so they’d work at night with us, and during the day but they were registered nurses
- JC OH, really
- IE And we’d just replace ‘em when they were, went to – on breaks, or during the night, or..
- JC So the nuns were the nurses?
- IE They wore their own clothes, white – long, with a habit
- JC Right
- IE Just the regular – uh huh. No, we – we were, we could wear anything we wanted, except no, you’re right, we had to wear white, like a nurse’s uniform, but it had to be white with our name tags so they’d know we were employees there.
- JC Did you find that job to be tough?
- IE No, no, it was easy – at night, they’re supposed to be sleeping. I thought “well, we’ll have it made ‘cause they’re sleeping.” NOT. (laughter) And, they had the light on, they wake up and turn the light on, and want somebody there for something

or other

JC Right

IE And uh, uh – yeah, when you said about us wearing white

JC Um hm

IE It was like a uniform. White uniform, white shoes, white --

JC Did you have to have a skirt or the pants?

IE Um, you know, in those days, pants weren't very popular. We wore the dress, the uniform. White uniform, yeah.

JC So they look like – IE they picture nurses today with the skirt, and the little

IE Now they don't wear a hat. And now they don't even wear a uniform, just any top – whatever they want to wear. I can't believe that – oh, everything changes

JC Right. Would you have preferred to do, like, have that job now, where you got to wear the clothes that they do now, or did you like what you

IE I liked it when I was

JC Um hm

IE When I was working there

JC Preferred it?

IE Yes.

JC Well, that's good

IE During the day's a madhouse, but at night – it wasn't THAT easy, seeing all the patients are asleep and you can just relax, it doesn't work that way

JC And another thing that you mentioned was things that you like to do as a family, or things you used to do for fun. And you mentioned – going out to dances, and having parties, and – what type of parties did you normally have?

IE Well, usually, just – a dance, a band and – regular – well, parties – it was either – well, I guess a wedding, you would call it a party, or a quincenera, are you familiar with that – the quincenera, the birthdays, but mostly we used to go to Albion because they had a nice band there and – saw Mexicans – and just dancing, we did a

lot of dancing

JC Were they like the closest – Albion – as far as having any type of entertainment for Mexicans?

IE Yeah, they seemed to have uh – there's a lot of Mexicans there. And they seem to have, the musicians were all from there, their area. Um – but we would go to a party where – anybody invited us, we would go. Whatever comes up, we just loved to dance

JC Did they not have anything like that here in Kalamazoo?

IE Only when a special occasion, like a wedding, and then the food and then the dance, or -- ___ that – they would have a party, big party. Or, or they were trying to collect money for something or other, they'd just have a dance

JC Where were they located, where'd they usually have these

IE Different places, yeah, wherever there was a place they could rent to have it

JC OH, okay – you don't recall any of the places or – do you recall the names of any of those places, are they still around, or

IE It seems like it was so long ago – (pause) – no, I don't remember the names of the

JC Right

IE Of the places, like I said, wherever they could find, rent one – different places, I remember

JC Oh, so they did have like facilities to rent out?

IE Uh huh

JC OH, okay. All right. I think – that's all I have for today.

IE Oh, okay

JC Yeah, yeah I do. That's all I remember having. Once again, thank you for coming

IE Well, thank you, you're been so kind.

END OF INTERVIEW

