

Interview with Carlos Chavez

Interviewer: Emily Raymond

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Carlos Chavez (Interviewee): Like, uh, this is, like, from the mid-'50s to early '60s. So, uh, we used to have, uh, some KU students who would come to all of our neighborhood houses at Christmastime, and they used to take us, uh, to some building at KU, on a horse-pulling wagon, and we sat on bales of hay, and uh, we would sing Christmas carols. And then we got to this big building, uh, where they took us to, and they would have snacks, and they had a gift for each one of us with our names on it under this huge tree. And, uh, then they would bring us back after we celebrated a little bit, which was different. And they always gave us toys, not like we got at home, just clothes [laughs].

Emily Raymond (Interviewer): That's sweet. I hadn't heard anyone tell me about that before.

CC: Really?

ER: Nope.

CC: Yeah. And, you know, we see our neighbors that we grew up with and played with all the time, going too, 'cause, you know, I guess we were all poor in that neighborhood. Uh, and then sometimes I'd go with my mom pulling a wagon with jars and a bag of vegetables. And we went to 9th and New York Street. And there's a church basement there, we would go down, and I didn't know, I can't remember the name of that church. It's still there. Where, uh, she and other ladies were canning vegetables. And it was real hot in there, and I know I'd meet a couple of my buddies there, and we'd play outside, around the churchyard, while they were down there canning. But, um...and then during the summer, at New York School, uh, they had a summer playground for us, from ages to, like, about 10 to 17-year-olds. And from around the neighborhood.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: And they played games like, uh, they had, like, checkers and caroms, Ping-Pong, box hockey, and then all sports to play catch with. You know, they had balls and gloves and stuff. And you had to sign in and sign out, so you couldn't leave without signing out, so they would have an idea of who all was there.

ER: Sure.

CC: But, uh, and then, some of the home games that we played, you know, at our houses in the neighborhood, were, like, "Rover, Red Rover," and "Truth, Dare, Promise or Repeat." And we'd play ditch-'em – that was mostly the guys on bikes.

ER: “Ditch-‘em?”

CC: Ditch-‘em, yeah, it’s on bicycles, you have two teams and you just drive all around the back of the neighborhood and stuff and, uh, try and catch up with ‘em. When you catch up with somebody, you tag ‘em, you know, then they’re out. Just eliminating people.

ER: Oh, okay. I gotcha.

CC: Yeah. And then we had, like, spear fights with those cornstalks back behind the buildings [ER laughs]. But you couldn’t have dirt clods on ‘em, so, that was illegal.

ER: Oh. I – okay, you got rules for –

CC: Oh, yeah. And our favorite game was “rubbers.” And this, you probably don’t know what that is, but that’s when we used to have, uh, old inner tubes, ‘cause we had a lot of flats over there, with all the glass and stuff.

ER: Right.

CC: And you’d get an old inner tube and you’d cut up rings. And then you tie ‘em together, and it was, like, you could have four to five rings, and then each one got five of those. And then you had teams, and of course you chased each other, shooting somebody. And then you can’t shoot in the face. And, uh, you eliminated people that way. So, that was a game we all really liked to play. And then, of course, we – some of us were by ourselves or something, we’d just, uh, we’d go down to the dump and, uh, look around there, and you could catch tadpoles in a puddle that was by the waste plant. I don’t understand how there was always, uh, tadpoles there. Now that I’m grown, I don’t understand it.

ER: I don’t either.

CC: And then we’d play in the sand piles over by the Santa Fe depot, and we’d catch lizards there. There was a lot of lizards. They were real fast.

ER: Oh, ‘cause they like – they like the hot, arid environments with the sand.

CC: Right. Right. Or we’d just play in the woods, you know, a lot of wooded area there. Or go swimming in the river, you know, ‘cause of course, the pools were off-limits for us, so...

ER: The pools were off-limits?

CC: Yeah, there was a sign: “Whites Only,” there. And so, we would just go down by the river, but it was usually with older guys, and they would talk us into coming in, but, you know, it’s just more or less wading in the water. None of us really knew how to swim. All I knew how to do was dog-paddle.

ER: That must have been dangerous.

CC: It was dangerous. Of course, we didn't know it at the time.

ER: No, of course.

CC: The older ones would tell us, you know, you have to stay close to the shore and stuff. But, uh...and another favorite thing was, uh, they butchered across the street, and we'd go down there and watch 'em butcher cows and pigs on Tuesdays and Thursdays. But there was a real small ledge that you had to drop down into and see a small – through a small window. And it was a tight fit, and we'd have to take turns climbing in and out, so everybody could watch 'em butcher, but yeah, I got to know how they butchered each one of those animals.

ER: Goodness.

CC: Yeah. 'Course, in the inside, you know, like in wintertime and stuff, you know, one thing we hated was our phone was on a party line. 'Course, that didn't bother me until I was later in my teens, but [ER laughs]. Yeah.

ER: That – that makes sense.

CC: Everybody listening in on your conversations. But, uh, then when we were littler, I had an older brother than came in from Kansas City. And on Saturdays, and then he would let us watch this shock show, with Gregory Graves. I don't know if you know anything about that. It was just shows like The Mummy and Frankenstein movies and stuff.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: It was usually at about [9:30?] at night. And, uh, we'd watch that, and of course my mom would always be at the back room with my littlest brother; he was a baby. And we had an outhouse, and the girls were always afraid to go out there, so I always had to go out there with 'em and stand out there [laughs]. It was weird because they were scared too, because there was, uh, a place called the Tampico, which was a bar, it was just – uh, not next door, but the door after that.

ER: Okay.

CC: And there was always a lot of, you know, drunk guys walking around out there and stuff. You could hear 'em laughing and hollering and stuff.

ER: Oh. Alright.

CC: Yeah. And then, uh, I was gonna tell you about a – a kind of a work history that you wouldn't see today, and that's when I was seven years old, I started selling newspapers. But they were just walking up and down Massachusetts. And I only had, like, four blocks that I could be on, and that was on the west side of the street. And I would sell the Journal-World paper going

up and down Massachusetts Street, and, uh, they were seven cents a paper. They gave us ten [papers] to start off with.

ER: Seven cents. My gosh.

CC: Yeah.

ER: You wouldn't get that today.

CC: No, no. And the Kansas-City Star right now about the cheap price. But, uh, if they gave you a dime, sometimes they would say, "Keep the change," and we got to keep it ourselves. I can't remember if they even paid us for that, but I know we always had the – the three cents if they gave you a dime. I would even ask, you know, if I could keep the change.

ER: Oh. That's cute.

CC: The one thing I always did was, I was – I stayed close by this, uh, it was a midget named Leo. And he rode a small cart, selling things, you know, I'm sure that's even in the papers and stuff, about him and his history. And, uh, 'cause he attracted a lot of people, so it helped me sell more papers.

ER: I never heard about Leo. No one ever told me about him.

CC: Really? Oh, yeah, you can look that up, 'cause he was real popular in, you know, he wore glasses, and he wore, like, an engineer cap, you know, train engineer cap.

ER: Oh.

CC: And, uh, I could just picture him right now, too. But when I was ten, I was selling peanuts at KU football stadium, and Gale Sayers was playing there at that time. So I – I got to see him play, but I didn't ever meet him. And then at twelve and thirteen, it was funny because, uh, at twelve I was working on a farm for Paul [name?] across from Garrett's Market in North Lawrence.

ER: Okay.

CC: And they would leave me there in a field of soybeans, just to pull weeds. And I'd be there by myself, and that's, you know, at twelve years old. And at thirteen, I went to, uh, Hemphill's farm, which was also in North Lawrence, and that was, uh, uh, baling hay. And both those jobs, I never even tried to get – my mom, somehow, talked to somebody and told me: "Hey, you're gonna go with this guy, he's gonna pick you up," you know, so he was a stranger to me.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

CC: Yeah, by myself out there, you know, in these fields. It was really different. And you wouldn't see that today.

ER: No. Now you have to fill out paperwork – well, and then kids can't even work, you know, under a certain age.

CC: Right.

ER: Goodness. So, did you get to keep the money that you earned, or did you give it to your family to kind of help out with expenses, or...?

CC: No, no, I had to help give it to my mom, other than that. And, uh, in fact when I was making money then, I would go downtown. I don't know if you remember, they used to be open until 8:30 on Thursdays. And I would always go up town and buy her something and bring it back, and sometimes I'd get me, like, a shirt, maybe, or something.

ER: What would you get her?

CC: Oh, cooking stuff. I mean, kitchen stuff, you know, like that. Spoons and stuff, you know, she always – I always saw pans that were old, I would see, but of course she liked using her own, but –

ER: That's sweet.

CC: To me, I thought she would – yeah [laughs]. And, uh, and then after that, at fourteen I was a custodian at a community building. And at fifteen I was – I worked at the sirloin stockade in Lawrence. And, uh, but I got some funny stories about disciplinary times. When I –

ER: I'd like to hear about those.

CC: Yeah, when I was real little, I used to think that my older brothers and sisters – they lived out of town – were my aunts and uncles, 'cause, you know, they were a lot older than I was.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: I don't even remember them being at the house or, you know, anything. And so, one day my oldest brother came to visit, and asked if we – I wanted to go to the dump with him. Of course I did, yeah. And he started gathering all these broken parts of bikes and stuff, and I thought: "Wow," and he was putting 'em in his station wagon. Well, when he took me home, he just dropped me off and left. And I was telling my mom I didn't like him anymore, because, you know, he stoled our toys.

She said: "What do you mean he stoled your toys?"

I said: "From the dump, and took them. They, you know, those were ours." And she didn't see it that way, 'cause he was gonna take 'em to his own kids and fix 'em up.

ER: Oh, I see.

CC: Yeah. And I didn't know anything about that. I just thought he was gonna bring 'em to our house, and fix 'em up.

ER: Oh, no.

CC: But...and then when I was ten years old, we used to go around to different gardens. They had gardens everywhere around there. And, uh, I used to carry around a salt shaker. You know, I'd put wax paper under the lid and screw it down. Those old glass ones.

ER: Yeah.

CC: And carry it around. And, uh, so one time I stopped at a garden, and, uh, was filling up on tomatoes, and I fell asleep. And I was laying there, and my belly was full, and then I was awakened by this older woman. She was a small woman, but she – shadowed over me and blocked out the sun [laughs] in a loud voice, that I didn't understand what she was saying. She grabbed me by the ear and – and walked me down the alley where my dad was out there burning trash. And she spoke to him in Spanish, and it sounded pretty dramatic, anyway. He pulled me in the yard and gave me a boot in the rear [laughs] and then –

ER: Oh, my gosh.

CC: Up to the house where my mom was already waiting. She heard her talking. Waiting with the belt. And I guess that was called stealing, but to us, we just thought: “Well, you know, there's a lot of gardens; a lot of tomatoes out there.”

ER: Yeah, sure. Why not, you know, just...

CC: Yeah.

ER: Oh.

CC: And when I was nine years old, um, I was mad because, uh, my shoes had holes in 'em. And I wanted some Keds, you know, everybody was getting those Keds.

ER: Oh, yeah. I know what you mean. Those...

CC: Yeah, Mom said we couldn't afford 'em, so I decided to run away to Texas and make money [ER laughs]. So, I had to take my little brother – he was four and a half – because I was supposed to be watching him. So, I got a bag with an extra shirt for him and a long-sleeved shirt for me in the winter months, working outside, 'cause, like, my dad was always wearing long-sleeved shirts. And I also took my big sombrero that I got to block out the sun, that my older brother gave me. We headed down the tracks behind those buildings, the cider building and those.

ER: Yeah.

CC: So we wouldn't be seen, and also, I figured the track would lead us to Texas.

ER: That's so cute.

CC: Yeah, we were by my sister's house, who lived at 12th and 13th in Haskell. And, uh, she lived up, kind of on a hill, to me. Well, right now it just seems like, you know, nothing. But then it was like a hill. And when my brother had to use the bathroom, so I told him to go up in there and tell her – tell her that I'm out here. And so I laid belly-down along the curb, hiding under my sombrero. And it wasn't long that I heard: "Carlos? Carlos? Get up here." And she took me inside and he was sitting there with a milk mustache, eating cookies.

ER: Oh, my gosh. So that was the end of the runaway plot.

CC: Oh, yeah. She called my mom and took me home. And Mom hugged my little brother, and the belt started hugging me.

ER: I bet. Oh, my gosh. I like that you thought you could run to Texas on the track. That's –

CC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, anything was possible back then when you're a kid. You know, there was a lot of – lot of free space there, that you could explore and do things.

ER: Your sister had mentioned that you guys spent a lot of time outside.

CC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we did. Yeah, like especially playing those, uh, "Rover, Red Rover" games and that "Truth, Dare, Promise or Repeat." That was our biggest one.

ER: Was it?

CC: The neighbors would even come up and we'd play that one.

ER: I remember those two. We also played Kick the Can; did you ever do that?

CC: Kick the Can? No, no.

ER: Oh, well, it's pretty simple. It was just an outdoor game where everyone would hide and then one person would be looking for them, and the idea was for someone in hiding to come out and kick the can down the curb, and then you'd have to go run back and hide. And if you were caught, then you were "it," and you had to – had to find –

CC: Oh really?

ER: It was a silly game, but we would spend hours outside, doing that.

CC: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We were outside all the time, even in the wintertime. We'd make snow, uh, forts, and we used to pile all that snow up against our fence, and that helped build the fort, you know, and throw snowballs. It was great.

ER: That sounds like fun.

CC: Yeah. And in the summertime too, we had a couple – we had a guy, a Mr. Hill that used to come around in this blue pickup truck, and he had watermelons and cantaloupes. And he was a real nice guy, because when we were little, you know, he would ask me if I would go up to the different houses, and run up there and just let ‘em know that he was out there. He didn’t have a bell or anything like that, you know, like an ice cream truck.

ER: Right.

CC: But he had a whole back bin full of watermelons and cantaloupes. And he would even let us try ‘em. He’d cut out a little triangle and plug, and let us taste it, and then, you know, of course we’d buy watermelon. And then, for the littlest guys, he would give us those little round ones. I don’t see them anymore, but they – they were just, looked like the size of a baseball or softball.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: And they were good. He would give us those free. So...but that’s pretty much all I had thought about and stuff. I’m not sure what all you really wanted.

ER: No, I like those memories. I just like, um, a bit of context. Like I told your sister, even though you didn’t grow up in La Yarde –

CC: Yes.

ER: It’s helpful to know what was going on in Lawrence at the time, like you said, things like “Whites Only” at the swimming pool. Uh, I wouldn’t have known about that otherwise. So...

CC: Right.

ER: It’s all important. I’m curious – how did you enjoy school?

CC: Well, we – it was three miles away. We walked. It was, uh, St. John’s. And, uh, it was good. It was good. Uh, we – we played in the South Park there – it’s South Park, isn’t it? Yeah, it’s still –

ER: Yeah.

CC: Called South Park. Where the fire engine is. Yeah. And we used to have races there, going around those trails, with sidewalks. Uh, but no, school was real good. In fact, you know, being in a Catholic school, they’re – they are real strict, and so when I got to Central Junior High one year, there, in ninth grade, I was like, uh, “A” average. Which didn’t last long, but [laughs] yeah, it was – they were pretty much advanced in, uh...private school.

ER: And how about church life? Um, you sister said your parents were – were very involved in the church.

CC: Yeah.

ER: Especially your dad.

CC: Oh, yeah, he was. Yeah. And, uh, uh, of course we said the rosary every night, you know, in front of an altar that he built. And that was something else, 'cause man, he would be in front. He had a huge rosary, and then of course my mom would be in the back, 'cause, uh, she was the disciplinarian. Start giggling and you had to go to the bathroom real quick, because by then we had a regular bathroom inside, and – and I remember that once one started giggling, the other one'd start, and oh man, my two sisters that are older than me – but, uh, Isabel, the oldest one, she was pretty strict. The three of us were just gigglers.

ER: Giggles are contagious.

CC: Oh, yeah, they are. Yeah, they are. For no reason. [Laughs]

ER: So how about this altar? Your sister mentioned it as well. What did it look like?

CC: He made about five altars. And, uh, right now the older siblings, each one of 'em have one at their house, you know.

ER: Oh.

CC: Mom passed, 'cause she used to have all of 'em. But, uh, oh, it's – it's huge. It's probably six or seven feet tall. And, uh, and it looks like an altar you would see at a church. It even had a tabernacle and it had little – little, uh, chalices inside.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

CC: The doors would open. Oh, yeah, it was good too, you know, and detailed. And I have pictures of saints and everything, and it had a crucifix. And underneath it, it had a glass that covered, uh, the Last Supper. And it had all the picture, of all the apostles and everything in there. So, it was, yeah, it was nice.

ER: That's nice that you have those things to remember them by. That he made – so you can share 'em around.

CC: Right, right.

ER: So, how about – tell me about your family now. When did you meet your wife?

CC: Well, I'm divorced now, but I met her in – when, not until I moved here to Kansas City. But, uh, and actually I was married twice, because I used to be married to a – she's passed away, but, uh, in Coffeyville. And I had one son there. And, uh, I moved here years later, and I met another lady, and then I've got three kids by her. But, um, no, we – we still get together. We have, uh, family reunions, like, every three to five years. And I usually was the one that started

those, but, you know, wanting to pass that on to the younger generation. I did that, uh, two – three years ago. And they had one, but it was a small one, so we were planning a big one this year. And they're always in Lawrence, since we all started out there. But there's four families, and there's, like, and what I have is a family tree that I created, and it's a website. And right now, there's 547 names.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

CC: Of just family, yeah, there's – there's four families, uh, mainly, that are from the same ancestors. And those are Estrada, Gonzales, Chavez, and Alvarez. So...yeah, we have a big family, so we're looking forward to getting together again, which was planned already for last year, but that didn't happen 'cause of the COVID. But, um, probably not this year either. I'm not sure. But –

ER: It will depend on how they get the vaccines out, and –

CC: Right.

ER: How effective they are.

CC: They're usually at the 4-H grounds.

ER: Hmm.

CC: There in Lawrence.

ER: Well, I hope that can happen for you. I mean, that sounds like a really nice thing to be able to do.

CC: Yeah. And it's funny because most of the ones that, uh, the girls married guys from Topeka, and then the guys married girls from Topeka, so [laughs] and that's where mostly everybody is, between Topeka and Lawrence. There are some in Texas.

ER: So, how did they meet in Topeka, if you lived in Lawrence?

CC: They always had dances there in Topeka.

ER: Oh, dances.

CC: And, uh, yeah, oh, yeah. Weddings and everybody was always invited. And so, they're usually in Topeka where everybody met, because they would have dances, you know, and of course that's where they would meet [murmurs]. Everybody went to 'em. That's mostly how they went.

ER: How old did you have to be to go to one of those?

CC: There was no age. There was no age.

ER: Oh, just anyone.

CC: Most of the family, though, of the wedding party or whatever, they would have younger kids there, but the rest of 'em would just be, you know, teenagers on up to 70s and 80s. Man, there was, you know, everybody loved to dance at the dances there. And as a kid, you kind of had to know, learn how to do those dances, you know. [Cungas?] and rancheras and [unintelligible] stuff.

ER: That sounds like fun.

CC: Oh, it was. It was, it's always fun.

ER: So, I'm curious, apart from the "Whites Only" sign at the swimming pool, which takes me by surprise, um, did you ever experience any other kinds of discrimination, or witness it firsthand while you were growing up?

CC: Uh...not so much. I – I mean, I did when I was older, you know, I was in high school and stuff, but that was, you know, back when they were having riots and stuff. And that was already in the '60s.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: But, no, before that, I – I was trying to remember, but I barely remember, um, friend of mine, and I don't even remember who it was, but he was taking me to go swimming, and 'cause this was after I was in, uh, Cub Scouts.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: Now, that was a story, because my dad, I didn't know him very much, you know. He died when I was eleven. But I remember one time I had a – I was gonna get an award, and I told my mom, so she told him to take me, you know, walking, and that was up to St. John's, you know. We went up there and, uh, I was supposed to get a Wolf badge. And, uh, so he knew I was gonna get an award. Well, I was up in line, and they didn't have mine for some reason. It was a mistake, and my, uh, Mrs. Boyle was her name. She was our den leader. And she came up to me and apologized and said, you know, she was gonna get it to me, you know, within a week or two, but it didn't come in. And so, I just said: "Okay," you know, but I couldn't tell my dad, because, you know, he didn't speak English. And I didn't know how to tell him that, he was kind of looking at me, you know, he would – in Spanish I did understand what he said: "Y tu?" You know: "And you?"

ER: Mm-hmm.

CC: Like "Everybody got one, but where was yours?" and stuff. And I just didn't know what to do. I shrugged my shoulders. It's funny 'cause he was so tall, uh, my oldest brother and my

youngest brother, they're both six foot, and the rest of us in between are five [feet] eight [inches]. So, they were the bookends. But he was six foot also, and he had those long legs, and I remember walking with him, holding his hand, and I was taking, like, three steps to every one of his. And, uh, it wasn't till we had to get all the way home to tell my mom, you know, what happened. And then she explained it to him.

ER: Oh, okay. So, your mom would translate for you guys.

CC: Yeah.

ER: I didn't know if you had grown up speaking both Spanish and English.

CC: No, not at that age, when it was him, 'cause she would speak to us in English. And, uh, I didn't learn my Spanish till I was older, in the service and stuff. But, um, my dad – I hardly ever even saw him, 'cause he was always gone. He was always working. He worked two jobs and stuff, all the time, you know, and then of course when he got sick, he was in the hospital and stuff, so, yeah...

ER: You said you were in the service; which branch?

CC: I was in the Marine Corps.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: Yeah. I started out about three years in the reserves. I had about four cousins and a brother-in-law that was in that reserve unit. But then I just couldn't take that once a month and everything, so I went ahead and went into active service. And, uh, I avoided Vietnam when I went in, because the outfit they sent me to had just gotten back. But, oh, there's a – there's a Twilight Zone story there, because when I got out in '75, I was overseas, and then when I came back, I didn't get any mail or – the right mail. My mom and all of 'em had moved. She was the last one to move out of Lawrence, and she went to Topeka.

ER: Uh-huh.

CC: They tore that whole block down. Pennsylvania Street. They were gonna build a highway, I guess from K-10 or something, to North Lawrence, I'm not sure what they were gonna do there. Well, I never received a letter, and so when I got out in '75, I got to the bus station, it was already about 4:00 in the morning. And I had all my gear with me, and I had no money. I'd been just eating chips and stuff, because I had a check for five hundred dollars, but I didn't have it cashed at the time.

ER: Right.

CC: So I was walking down Massachusetts Street, and I noticed there was a restaurant open, I can't remember if it was Rainey's or something. It was kind of like a drugstore restaurant. But I went in there, and there was Judge Rankin, was there, and I – he talked to me, you know, about

being in the service and stuff, and he bought me breakfast, and then he asked me if I needed a ride home. And I said: "Yeah, I'll take one," and he told those police officers to give me a ride home. And so they were gonna turn their car in, they were done. And they asked where I lived, and I said 805 Pennsylvania.

And they said, uh, "No, you don't live there."

I said: "Sure I do, I've lived there all my life." And they took me there, and there was nothing there.

ER: Oh, how bizarre.

CC: What in the world? And, uh, I said: "Well, go down the alley," 'cause, you know, where are they at?

And they said: "No, well, we gotta turn this car in."

I said: "Well, I have a brother that lives on Craig Court," but I didn't know the address. And they took me up to that circle drive, and, gosh, it was on the other side of these huge bushes. But I didn't know, you know, his address, and it wasn't out there on the box – mailbox or anything, so...

And they said: "Well, we gotta turn this car in. Where do you wanna go?"

I said: "Well, just take me back to 805 Pennsylvania," and they dropped me off there. And I was walking down the alley, and then I decided to go out in the street, in New Jersey Street, and I walked all the way down to about, um, well, it was the 10th or between 10th and 1100 block. And, uh, I saw a light come on, and it was [Jamie's] house. And so, I went and I knocked on the door, and [Jamie?], he was getting ready to go to Stokely's, where he worked. A lot of 'em worked at Stokely's, a [murmurs] there on 9th Street. And, uh, he was surprised to see me, you know, and I said, yeah, I said:

"Hey," I said, "I was supposed to go home, but there's not even a house there."

He just laughed, he said: "You didn't know that?"

And I said: "No, where's my mom? Where is she living?"

ER: Oh, my gosh.

CC: "Oh, they moved to Topeka." He said that she was the last one to move out, but they, you know, they bought everybody out on that block. And then they already tore it all down. And, uh, so anyway, I got to call my sister that lived over on 6th Street, and, uh, she came, and her husband came and got me. And then they took me to Topeka, to where my mom lived. That was – that was just crazy, they couldn't believe I didn't know.

ER: No one had written to tell you?

CC: Well, my mom said she wrote to me, but I didn't get the mail, 'cause I was overseas I guess, that's why.

ER: Oh, that's – that is so strange. So disorienting, my gosh.

CC: But no, as far as, uh, uh, I was – like I was saying, there was a kid that took me to some club place. That they had a pool there, an inside pool. And, uh, they asked me if I had an ID and I said

no, I just had told them my name. And they said: “Well, you can’t come in here.” Now, I don’t know if they were saying it was because of the ID, because I told ‘em my name, but he didn’t have an ID. You know, they were members, his family was.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: And so, his mom, I remember, just brought me back and dropped me off at home. But, uh...that, and, man, I can’t remember the name of the kid. And I – but I remember going to school with him for a few years, when I was a kid, real kid. So, that’s about the only thing. No, after that, though, you know, with the riots and stuff. That was – that came way later.

ER: Do you still keep in touch with some of your friends from school?

CC: Yeah, yeah. I have. I haven’t been to a reunion. I did go to, well, I was living in Coffeyville, and then I came down to pick up a car in Topeka, and I stopped in Lawrence, but it was the day before the reunion, and, uh, that was our 40th. And then I, uh, went to a club there in Lawrence, that I knew a guy that was running it. And I met a lot of the guys there that came in for the reunion. I got to see them, anyway, but... There’s a few of them that I still stay in touch with, but not many – not – not a whole lot. I got so much family, it’s hard to keep up with the other people.

ER: I imagine it is. Your sister said something like that.

CC: Every month or so, which I’ve gotta do, uh, today or tomorrow, is I write a letter – or, you know, just a – talking about what’s going on, if anybody has any news, you know, graduations or weddings or anything, you know. I call it the family network. And then I send out a birthday list with the month of everybody’s birthdays, so everybody can keep up with whose birthday it is. And I’ve been doing that for several years now, so...

ER: That’s a special thing to do.

CC: Yeah, that takes up times, too, so, ‘cause I gotta know what to write, you know, some suggestions like – obey your parents, hug your kids, stuff like that. Just a whole bunch of those in.

ER: And what do you do for work? Or are you retired?

CC: I retired last year. I worked for Proctor and Gamble. I loaded rail cars and trucks and, uh, made soap.

ER: And –

CC: I worked there 30 years.

ER: 30 years.

CC: Mm-hmm.

ER: And you do the writing in your spare time?

CC: Yes.

ER: Good, you keep busy.

CC: Oh, yeah, I stay busy. I got two kids living with me, you know, they're busy with them too, you know, stuff that they're going through and everything, and trying to get 'em to go through some different stuff and more stuff [laughs].

ER: What do you like to do with your grandkids?

CC: Oh, I like playing with them. 'Cause I, man, I tell you what, it's a whole 'nother world; I'm not at all good with, uh, phones and computers and stuff like that, you know, other than emails and stuff, but gosh, the three-year-old, the four-year-old, they know how to work an iPad and of course, you know, they – I can't show 'em anything. But now, I do make sure that they don't use it very much time with that, 'cause they might at home, but not – not here. 'Cause I want 'em to, you know, play and talk, you know, see what they like to do, and – and go outside and do walking and stuff. That kind of playing.

ER: Sure. Take them outside of the digital world for a while.

CC: Yeah.

ER: Well, I hope you can do more of that, now that some of the restrictions are being lifted.

CC: Yes, yes, that did, uh, take a toll on it, so...

ER: Must have been kind of difficult to adjust.

CC: Yeah. Yeah, it was different.

ER: Do you still attend church at St. John's?

CC: No, no, I live in Shawnee.

ER: Oh, you live in Shawnee. Okay.

CC: Yeah.

ER: For some reason I thought you lived in Lawrence.

CC: No. Uh, I – we tried to go – my brother, I got an older brother that lives here in Shawnee, we sometimes go visit family together, but, uh, we try to go there on, uh, the – December the 12th,

the Lady Guadalupe Day. And, uh, they usually have a – we meet people there, and then they have in the basement, they have that, uh hot chocolate, what you call *atole*. And, uh [murmurs] so we get to talk to some of the older people, friends and stuff there. But, you know, and then we went to a lot of funerals, too, that they had there, and of course now you can't go.

ER: That's true.

CC: Well...

ER: Many things have changed.

CC: Yeah. And I keep up with some of the stuff that goes on in Lawrence, because I got two sisters and a brother that live there now.

ER: Oh, okay.

CC: And they got families, too.

ER: Well, I'm glad you can still keep up with them to some extent.

CC: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we're a close family. We're – everybody's, you know, involved with each other and stuff. And it just keeps growing and growing. Like I said, there's 547 names, but I know there's probably five or six that are not on there, of new ones that [laughs].

ER: That's a family forest, I think, not a tree.

CC: Yeah [laughs].

ER: Well, I'm happy for you. I'm glad that you have such a support network.

CC: Yes, yes.

ER: Well, is there anything else that you remember, or that you had written down?

CC: Nothing that I can tell. [Laughs] There's a lot of stories, but – that I told my sister about, and that's probably why she recommended me. But, no, those stories are – they're just for family [laughs].

ER: Yeah. Well, that's good. It will give you something to pass on.

CC: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

ER: Well, I really appreciate –

CC: Do you have a big family?

ER: I'm – do I have a big family? Um, not really. I grew up in Texas, and our relatives live in New England, so we would see them sometimes, maybe if we'd go up there annually, when I was a kid, but –

CC: Yeah.

ER: We – we grew up in a pretty small town, so the people we lived with became our family.

CC: Gotcha. That's good, too. That's good, too.

ER: I still keep I touch with all of them like I do with regular family, so it's nice. It's – there are some definite advantages to growing up in a small town.

CC: Right, right.

ER: Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me, Carlos.

CC: Sure, sure. Not a problem.

ER: And if you remember anything else, or you have anything else you want to share, please feel free to give me a call again.

CC: Okay. I will.

ER: Alright. Enjoy the rest of your day, and good luck recovering from your surgery.

CC: Thank you. You too. Be careful.

ER: Bye.

CC: God bless you. Bye.

END OF TAPE