

## **Tape 22: Interview with Clara Bucia and Thomas Ramirez**

**Interviewer: Helen Krische**

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Helen Krische (Interviewer): Alrighty. Um, usually the first question that I ask people is about your parents. Um, where your parents were from, did they come from Mexico?

Thomas Ramirez (Interviewee): Yes. Yes.

HK: And what were their names?

TR: Uh – Jesus and Mary Ramirez.

HK: Okay. And what part of – do you know what part of Mexico?

TR: Yeah. My father came from Mexico City and my mother come from a town named [Torreal?] Mexico, not very far from there.

HK: Okay. So it was pretty close to Mexico City.

TR: That's where they came from. Yes, uh-huh.

HK: And they were Spanish-speaking?

TR: Yes. Uh-huh.

HK: And, um, when did they come up to the United States, do you know?

TR: Well, my father came down here in uh, well he was born in 1904.

HK: Uh-huh.

Clara Bucia (Interviewee): He was nine – he was, uh, eighteen when he came up here.

TR: Yeah, something like that, yeah.

HK: And did he work on the railroads?

CB: Yes, he did. Many years.

TR: Yeah - that's what, many years, I think close to 50.

HK: Uh-huh. What railroad did he –

TR: Santa Fe.

HK: Santa Fe railroad, okay. Did he work in any of the other small towns or did he come directly to Lawrence, or how did that happen?

TR: Well, let's see. I know he – they used to live in Chicago at one time.

CB: I know he met my mother in Wichita.

TR: Yeah, in Wichita maybe. I don't know if he worked in the railroad there too - or maybe it was all combined.

CB: No, he did. No, he did, it was all combined.

TR: It's all combined. Must be.

HK: Oh okay. But they eventually ended up in Lawrence, here.

TR: Lawrence. Yes.

HK: Were both of you born here in Lawrence?

TR: Yes. Yes ma'am.

CB: There was thirteen of us born here.

HK: Ooh, wow! A big family.

TR: There's thirteen of us. There's still twelve of us yet.

HK: Huh. What year were you born?

TR: I was born in 1927.

CB: '31.

HK: '31. So where are you in the birth order, are you –

CB: I'm third. He's the first.

TR: I'm the godfather. I'm the oldest.

HK: The oldest of all thirteen?

TR: All thirteen, I'm the oldest. Yeah, I'm 78.

HK: Wow.

CB: You always hear that. [laughs]

TR: I'm proud of it.

HK: Give your age away. [laughs]

TR: Sorry.

CB: That's okay.

TR: That's alright.

HK: So, um, where did you live at when you lived here in Lawrence, or as you were growing up, where did you live?

TR: As I was growing up? Lived, uh, well, we lived along the railroad tracks 'cause my father you know worked on a railroad. The Santa Fe section used to be way on the east side down there, they used to have Santa Fe houses. Across the tracks.

CB: It's across the tracks - it's across the tracks way on the other side. Way down.

HK: What was it like living there?

TR: It was, it was nice. The good old days.

CB: It was the best life.

TR: Best life I think we ever had. Everything was so peaceful, you didn't have to worry about nothing.

CB: Nothing.

TR: Nothing, man, everybody just friendly, we all helped each other, in every way.

CB: There was about eight, there was about eight families who lived there. And, uh, there were nothing but bunk houses, like, like made out of brick, and everybody got along, we'd all make dinner and go outside and everybody shared what they had. All of us kids played together and made up things and games and...I'll never forget that. Just, never.

TR: For Christmas, you know, we used to all get together, and we all made hot tamales and everything else and we used to decorate our trees and all, you know, which were real simple at that time, you know. Any cloth, any piece of paper, anything else with coloring, that was

our decoration, a lot of it, and if you had a set of lights, man, you really had something. And we used to walk all the way from way up there on the east side and we used to walk all the way to St. John to go to midnight Mass and all this and that, you know.

CB: The parents, all the families, they all used to plant peppers and tomatoes and all that, and then they all shared them among all of us.

HK: So you had a big community garden?

TR/CB: Oh yeah. The majority – my father and all those ones that lived over there, they all had big gardens and everything. Yeah, they grew tomatoes, corn, everything, they had everything.

HK: Was there any livestock over there?

CB: Chickens. Lot of chickens.

TR: Chickens, yeah.

HK: So you had plenty of meat.

TR: I remember when I used to go get some milk, one of the men, Candelario? I used to go get him his milk for him in the morning before I went to school when I was just a kid growing up. He used to give me five dollars and I thought he gave me a lot of money at that time. That was back in, uh, shoot - '37, early '40, in the '40s.

HK: So that was kind of after the Depression years, or...

TR: Yeah. Yeah, tough years.

HK: Did anything change for the families during the Depression, was it any harder for them during that time?

CB: It was, it was hard for us as children because we were Mexicans and it made a big difference. That's why we were happy over there, away from people over here. Because the fact that we were not wanted, you know, and they didn't wanna have nothing to do with us and so that's the way it was. Now, we come up to the restaurant, which was the restaurant right by the railroad tracks, right by the depot. We'd go in there and get hamburgers, but we had to have them in a bag and eat them outside. We had water, drinking fountains, it was for the whites and for the blacks, so they wouldn't let us drink from the whites. We had to drink over there with the blacks. And, oh, I mean, I went to school and they wouldn't play with me because I was a Mexican. Kids were so cruel, you know. And it took me...before I even would forgive white people, I had to go into the mil – well, my husband - I met my husband and we went into the military. That's where I met a lot of different people. I'm talking about Mexicans and Indians and whites and I mean, from all over. You know. That's where I felt, at least I felt welcome, because there's no race in military life. We were in the military for 26 years.

TR: You know, it's kind of crazy. I went into the service in 1946, January of '46. I was in the Air Corps and I was in the Air Force for two years and uh, when I went in, I was classified as white. When I come out, I was classified as a Mexican-American when I come out. And I think the thing that hurt me too was that, uh, the Salvation Army, uh, we had to pay for everything when I was in the service, uh...no, wait a minute, Red Cross. When the trains used to take us you know in military, we had to pay for everything at the Red Cross we had to pay them and the Salvation Army would give it to us. Yeah. Those were hard years and it felt awful because you know a lot of times you'd go eat at a restaurant or something like that and they would tell you: "I'm sorry, we can't serve you."

CB: We used to get maybe, with the people, maybe we'd just rub up against them and they would look at you and go like this, you know.

HK: Oh, my God.

CB: Yeah, you know. Things like that.

TR: You know, it was a real prejudiced time. Oh, excuse me, sis. Go ahead.

CB: That's why I, I said, it took me a long time to forgive white people. Until we went, I met my husband and we went to the military and I found out there was a lot of good people. White people, and any race you wanted in there. So we were in there 26 years and I come back thinking, okay, you know, and when I got here I was so surprised, it's still going on. I mean, not as much, but still goes on.

TR: But you, you know, it –

CB: It goes on in our church yet.

HK: Oh...

CB: St. John's. It still goes on. I moved from, um, well, the father there, made us sit in the back. The last four seats were for Mexicans.

HK: What years?

TR: We had to sit in the back.

CB: Way back.

HK: What years?

CB: Oh, God. Still little.

TR: We were young then.

CB: But, I can tell you which father it was.

TR: I know my, uh, my mother used to tell me....We had to sit way at the back.

CB: We, uh, yeah, and if, for some reason like if we came in late, the father would stop the Mass till we found a place to sit.

TR: It was Father [name?].

CB: Well, I wasn't gonna say the name.

TR: Monsignor [name?].

CB: Well, I wasn't gonna say the name.

TR: You remember him?

CB: Yes. Yes, I do.

TR: He was strict. And I guess he got irritated lot of times because people would just come into church late, I guess. And you know, that kind of made sense in a way, because people – you don't come into church late. But, uh, he was tough anyway.

CB: Just about –

TR: He was a good – he was good, maybe he just overworked himself or something, you know.

CB: Just about a year ago, that I stopped sitting in the back all that time, all those years. Because we...I wasn't used to sitting up at the front. But I was sitting with some people that would never shake my hand. I mean, couples. They would never, you know, I would be there waiting for them to turn around and shake my hand and they wouldn't ever do it. So I thought, "Okay, you know, I'm not gonna be here," you know, so I went to the front. I'm very happy now in the front. I am. I am very happy.

TR: I know, my mother was the same way. Excuse me. My mother was the same way. You know, it hurt her feelings because a lot of times she would stick her hand out, you know, for the sign of peace –

CB: And they wouldn't do it.

TR: And they wouldn't do it. And it used to hurt my mother. See, my mother's been gone about 20 years or so, and it used to hurt my mother because she'd stick her hand out there and you know, nobody would receive it.

CB: And it's still going on in the church here. Still. I mean, you look at –

TR: I mean, you can see it and you can sense it.

CB: You know, I mean, no matter where you go, like, even the rummage house here. I work here. And I can see some. There's not that many, but there's some that still, they just kind of give you that, you know, so, you just kind of stay away from...it just brings back memories.

TR: We still live with that.

CB: Bring back memories.

TR: A little. Not as bad as it used to be, but it still happens.

CB: It's still here.

TR: Still here.

CB: Still here.

HK: Where did you go to school at?

CB: New York.

TR: New York. New York School is where we went to school.

HK: Did you go to New York School too?

CB: Yes I did.

TR: And then I went to Central Junior High.

HK: What kind of prejudice was there in those schools?

CB: I know in New York School they wouldn't play with me because I was a Mexican. Central they wouldn't do - they were the same thing. You know, just better than I was. And we lived across the track. And that made a big difference.

TR: I tell you what - I even tell my kids, my kids about actually the way it used to be a long time ago, they can't believe it actually happened. Because they never went through it.

HK: Can you think of some specific incidences? Like...I don't know, would they call you names? Would they...

TR: Yeah, sure.

CB: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they did. You know, Mexicans and she's just a Mexican and all this kind of stuff, and she doesn't - well, we didn't have any money to buy clothes. You know, my parents were poor. But, I mean, we never missed really anything because we weren't, you know, used to anything, so what we didn't have we didn't miss. I didn't have a bicycle, I didn't have any, all

these things that they have nowadays. I mean, my doll was from the dump. We had a dump there near our – my first doll was there. We used to play, um - store, and all the canned stuff that we'd find at the dumps, put them together like a grocery store, just to play, you know. But that was, we'd walk to school, as cold as it was. Walk to church, you know.

TR: Yeah.

CB: We didn't have cars.

TR: We didn't have no cars, no nothing. Like I said it was real bad, I say I was only about 10 years old. And you know, Mexicans and blacks and [unintelligible] we used to go to like, Ottawa, and they wouldn't serve us there either. And I was just young, you know? And then Emporia was real prejudiced real bad too. And then we went to a tournament and at that time I was kinda playing a little basketball. Kind of a Mexican ball team we had together. And we went to Chanute down there and this Mexican girl served us, and when they serve – she – they served her, well, they fired her. Because had she served us and she wasn't supposed to. But she did it anyway, and you know, those things that we had to live through, you know?

HK: What about Topeka or Kansas City? Did you go there at all, did you experience...?

CB: Back when we were young I don't think we used to go to Topeka. You know, later on we did but it was with the Mexican people, which was okay, but...it wasn't with the Mexican people we had problems with, you know. But you still see, you still find it –

TR: But you know, it's an awful feeling. It's an awful feeling, you know.

CB: Worst feeling in the world.

TR: We used to go to a restaurant, go eat and I tell 'em: "Sorry, we can't serve you." Man, that's an awful feeling.

CB: I mean, how sorry can you be, you know?

TR: I said, Yeah, man, it's an awful feeling, man, that people don't realize the feeling, you know, that you have.

CB: Yeah, like I said, it takes – it took me – and I still, if I meet somebody I have to feel them first, you know, to see how they're gonna act with me, you know, in order for me to...

TR: You know, I worked for the high school for 20 years and when I worked at Central too, I worked 20 years in schools, and I never had any, any problem except the last year one of the kids, one of the white kids spit on me. And I could never understand why, you know? And then now, you know, I've been working at KU now for the last 14 years, but I just work part time. And there's a lot of good kids, I mean, beautiful personalities, they kind of make me feel like I'm one of them. But there's some of 'em there, there's some young ladies, what's-her-name like that, I tell you what, they look at you like you're, you're nothing. That's a feeling, you know, that's



just a feeling you have, you know. And maybe it's my fault too because you know, I don't know, I... She says I talk quite a bit, so. [laughs]

CB: He does.

TR: And I just –

CB: Can you raise your hand? [laughs]

TR: I enjoy, enjoy being around people and you know, the people that I know, you know. I like to pass the time, talk to them and all, this and that, but... It was tough in those years.

CB: It was.

TR: 10 years old and I was even picking potatoes at the age of 10 years old. I even worked for the railroad at the age of 15. I worked with my father on the extra gang here, on the railroad. He didn't want me to work on the railroad. [pause] That was hard work. Those rails up there, all that sun hitting you, you know, all that rails, and those railroad ties, all that creosote, and we used to carry those things by hand. Now they got, you know, machines and everything to do it with now, and that was...hard times.

CB: That's why I think when I look, I work up at the rummage sale I see a lot of the Mexican people come in and they don't speak Spanish. So I'm there, really, you know, to help them and all that.

TR: She does, she interprets quite a bit.

CB: And uh, I know their feelings, you know, how they feel, you know, 'cause they come in here and because they don't know how to speak it they look at them like, [Come here?] I need your help. But I – I know how they feel, you know.

TR: That's the same way I am too.

CB: Yeah, I know the feeling. And I feel sorry for them. And you know, old Bush trying to get them out of here. Well, hey they want to work. They're poor. They want, you know, they're trying to make a living, they're not bothering anybody. You know, they're not hurting anybody. I agree that they should speak English, they should learn, but I don't think that they should get 'em out of here. I mean, they're getting money over here, over there, they're not. They got families.

TR: Yep, and they're making only fifty cents an hour.

CB: Yeah, so they'll take any job anybody doesn't want, you know. So –

TR: And they're willing to do it, you know, just to, just to make a little money. And then I hear on TV, you know, that some people say it's not fair that they're sending some of their money that they make here over there to their family. I don't know what difference, if they're making – it's their money, why in the devil can't they send it over there?

CB: Yeah. Yeah.

TR: And like I tell you, this place we go down there... [Villa de San Juan?] down there, down there by, in Texas down by Brownsville, McAllen, Texas, they...damn, I forgot what I was gonna tell you.

CB: Goods. [laughs]

TR: Anyway, one of the ladies told us there that they only make 50 cents an hour.

HK: Oh, gosh.

TR: Can you picture that? 50 cents an hour? Eight-hour day, four dollars a day. Here what's four dollars isn't hardly nothing at all. And those people just coming over here because, you know, their families'd probably starve. Here at least, here in the United States, you know, they got the Salvation Army, they got Link, they got all these other places that will help you, you're not gonna starve to death. But over there, over there if you don't have your own garden, and you don't want to work, your family's gonna starve to death. That's probably why a lot of them are coming over here. And all they want is a job. That's all they're looking for. I don't think they're trying to take jobs. But you know what? But my – my first opinion is, is that we spoil a lot of our kids because we've given them everything that they want. And normally sometimes –

CB: Everything we didn't have.

TR: Sometimes they both are working, they both are working and we've bought them everything they want, whatever they want. So you know, a lot of them are going right through high school, and probably some of them in college, lot of them probably never done a day's work in their whole life, you know? So why should they work? Sometimes over at KU I see some of the, I guess some of the well-to-do kids, driving brand new cars. [Hot damn?] they go to the ATM machine, they pull out the money, I guess the parents are just putting the money in it. [laugh] But yet, over there where I work, I see some of those kids out there struggling to work two or three hours, two hours, to make it through school and I praise those kids. [Long pause] Yeah. Yeah.

CB: It was, it was rough, anyway.

TR: It was tough.

CB: It's taken me a long time to forgive, and I still, like I still sit around and it just comes right back to me, you know, still.

TR: This right now reminds me of uh, you know, a long time ago, pretty much all, the majority of Mexican people that came down here, my father. They came from Mexico. They didn't have no railroad workers. So the majority of 'em that came in from Mexico, they didn't have any work, so they, they all came to work for the railroad. And now you're seeing the same darn thing, it just seems like it's going around again. They don't have the help, anything like that, and now, they gotta use it now.

CB: My dad, my father, when he worked in the railroad, he'd come back to work maybe 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, sore, and it would be snow, I mean inches of snow. He'd come back, his whole hair was just nothing but ice –

TR: Frozen. Frozen.

CB: His beard frozen, [unintelligible] in here, his hands were frozen, and you know, just and we'd come in and try to warm him up and hug him and just try to keep him, you know.

TR: It was all, all full of ice, and everything else, all full of ice –

CB: So he worked hard, you know, to raise us.

TR: It was a big family. But you know one thing about it, I never did ever hear my dad ever complain.

CB: He never complained, never.

TR: For a big family of thirteen. Yeah, but those were, those were tough years.

CB: We didn't need prejudice with it either. But we went through it.

HK: Did, did your parents often help people who were just coming up from Mexico that were like, new employees?

CB: They weren't coming then like they are now, at that time.

TR: At that time, you hardly ever seen any Mexican people out in the middle out here. They were mostly just stayed north of you, know, outside, you know, Arizona, and Texas and all those, you know, they stayed mostly [unintelligible]. That's why I say, you know, today, you know, I, you know, the way I look at it, I think that if they'd pay 'em a decent wage along the borders, a lot of them would probably not even come all the way up this way. But you know, they know they can find a job here, and like I say, the other day I was watching TV the other day and some kid, 15-16 years old, he said my father is already over there. He says, I'm gonna get over there. He's over in Mexico. [unintelligible] They're desperate. That's the reason why a lot of them are coming over, because they know you can make a little money over here. So I mean, I can understand that. I think if I was living over there I'd be coming over here too, you know, if I could feel I could better myself or better my family over there. And the thing about it is a lot of these kids today, they don't want to work. You can see it up there where I work. Those kids, some of 'em, they come to work one day and next day they don't come, and that's the way it is all the time. That's why you can't hardly find workers. Especially over at Memorial over there, at Memorial, over here, [business name?], they can't keep employees. Nobody wants to work.

CB: Well, what –

TR: And then you can't blame these ki- oh, excuse me. You can't blame these kids. Uh, you

know, they can better themselves, you know, on the computer and all this and that like that, you know, you can't blame them. That's why a lot of them just don't do none of that, you know.

CB: That's why military helped me out a lot. You know, to try to get out of it, to get out of all that. 'Cause like I said, we were in 26 years in every country you can think of, in towns and all that, so I learned that, you know, there's a lot of good people, a lot of them, all colors, but they were good people. And then I come here thinking I was gonna find out, come back and find...it wasn't as bad, but still the same thing. Yeah. Yeah, so...And I'm still leery sometimes, you know, meeting people, and, you know. Sometimes I go to the stores and I, I will open the door for, you know, an older lady, maybe a lady with a child, and I open it but it's like, "No thank you".

HK: No thank you.

CB: I'm the one that turns around: "Thank you." [TR laughs] You know? Because, you know, I mean, I learned a lot too, to be that way from being treated the way I was, you know, so I learned that. You had to –

TR: You know, that's what I see in church too. Go ahead.

CB: No, go ahead.

TR: You know, even in church here a lot of times you know, you get up there, you get in there, well sometimes you go to a different Mass or something like that, and you go "What's the name?" and you stick your hand out like this you know, for the deal, the peace. And normally any other time you go [unintelligible] somebody'll grab your hand, you know.

CB: Sometimes they don't.

TR: But, get your hand out there and they just stay there 'cause nobody'll want to do it. So you don't even –

CB: I don't even wanna turn around. And you know, because, I don't know whether they're gonna accept my hand or not. You know?

TR: Well see, that's the same way I feel.

CB: I just don't know and it feels good when you hold somebody's hand, it feels good, you know. I'm afraid to do it. Even in the front, I'd sit there and wait, see who's going to hold out their hand, you know, so. It's still, it's still here. Not like it was, but still here.

TR: Yeah. And not like it used to be, but yeah.

HK: So, um, when you were growing up, um, what kind of...I know that your mom probably did all the cooking.

CB: Yes, she did.

HK: And she probably did the sewing. Did she make all of your dresses?

CB: Out of, out of bags of flour.

TR: Flour sacks.

CB: They were printed at that time, at the printers. We'd get our- our skirts made out of those, yeah.

HK: And what kind, okay, what would be like a typical meal for you and your family?

CB: Beans, tortillas...

TR: Beans and tortillas.

CB: Chili, rice.

TR: Chile, rice.

CB: We never starved.

TR: We never starved.

CB: We never starved.

TR: [Unintelligible] every meal.

CB: Never starved.

TR: My mother used to have a big old pan about that big and –

CB: Not that big.

TR: I mean, for breakfast.

CB: Not that big.

TR: Just for breakfast! [laughs] This was just for breakfast!

CB: It was not like that. [laughs] We had potatoes, and let's see, fried potatoes and all that.

TR: Yeah, yeah.

HK: Did she have any special desserts that she would make for you?

CB: Um, I don't think we really could afford desserts. My, my – she used to shop for, well, go grocery shopping for my dad to make his lunch. She used to put an apple or orange, banana, whatever in there. Well, my dad used to bring it back so that we could eat it.

TR: All the kids.

HK: Aww.

CB: Yeah. The kids. Because he, I don't know, maybe he felt, you know, we weren't getting it. So he would bring it back, and just, we'd all run for that lunch meal, you know, cause we knew. And then we'd, uh, go to the store shopping and there was little pies like that and I used to say "Dad can I get a pie, a little pie from there?" He says "Yeah go ahead," you know, so I went ahead and I'd eat it all the way home so I wouldn't have to share it with – because I mean, I never got to have pie except that one time. [laughs] But you know, he did, he used to tell me "Yeah, go ahead and get, you know, a little pie." It was always too much money, you know, spending as far as I was concerned and he was concerned but he would let me do that because I went to the store.

HK When you went grocery shopping, was it to like the little corner store, or - ?

TR: Yeah, uh-huh.

CB: It was called Carter's grocery store.

TR: And we had Mildred too.

CB: Well, yeah, but we went to Carter's more than we did to Mildred.

TR: Yeah.

HK: Did your parents have, like, a line of credit there or...?

TR: Uh...

CB: At the store.

TR: Yes. Yes

HK: I know before some of the others said that their, their dad would get paid once a month

TR: Once a month.

HK: And then they would just, you know, pay it.

[voices all together]

CB: But we never went hungry.

TR: We never went hungry.

CB: Never did.

TR: You never, you never heard about diabetes either.

CB: No, you never heard anything like that either.

HK: [laughs]

TR: Everybody ate good.

HK: Speaking, speaking of diabetes, did, um...when somebody would get sick in the family, what would they do, I mean, would - ?

CB: Help each other.

TR: Yeah, we helped each other.

CB: Help each other.

HK: Did they, did they, like, call the doctor or did they do like, a home remedy type of thing?

CB: Lot of home remedies.

TR: Lot of home remedies. Yeah.

HK: Was there anything specific that you can remember? As being a home remedy? Like for an earache or toothache or anything like that?

CB: Oh dear, there was a lot of them. Gosh. Colds. God, there is, there is, I can't even remember the names of the things that we used to – Oh, I do know, though, that they used to – we'd see the doctor come in and they chase all of us out, okay? Pretty soon they come back. "So your mama just had a baby," he had a little black bag. Like where did the baby come from? [laughs]

TR: He'd come to the house.

CB: It was in his little black bag. He brought it in the bag. We believed that! [laughs] We believed it. Because [unintelligible] the doctor would come with his little, little black bag, you know.

HK: That's funny.

CB: It was funny. It was funny. [laughs] We used, I know we used a lot of Vaseline and Vicks.

TR: Vicks. Lot of Vicks.

CB: Vicks. Bayer aspirin.

TR: Bayer aspirins.

CB: I know they used to put, for a headache, I think slices of onions right here on the sides of your head.

HK: Wow.

CB: God, so many things...

HK: What about earaches? Did they...?

CB: Oh, dear, I couldn't –

TR: Oil, some kind of oil they'd put in there.

CB: Some kind of oil or something like that. I don't remember.

TR: I don't remember.

HK: I know my mom used to use, I think it was mineral oil or something like that.

TR: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah, it just kinda –

HK: Heat it up –

TR: Heat it up and put it in, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

HK: So that was something

TR: Yeah, oh yeah.

CB: Like I said, thirteen –

TR: But you know, those were quiet years too. I mean, I tell you what, even when my, when we were all small, you could leave, you didn't have to worry about night, I mean, you could leave your door wide open, sleep out on the porch and everything, you didn't have to worry about nothing. Everything's so quiet and everything now, compared to what it is today. You know, one time I heard a priest say one time he said that we used to lock our animals. Now we're locking ourselves up and the animals are out running loose, just the opposite of each other.



HK: Mmm. That's true.

TR: I remember a priest saying that one time.

CB: Yeah.

TR: And they, you know, all the houses, everybody's putting fences all around them like that. Fencing ourselves all in! And the animals are out running loose! No, but those, but those were hard, hard years. Yeah, I was picking potatoes at the age of 10.

CB: We all did.

TR: We were picking potatoes at the age of 10 out in that hot sun.

HK: Was that for the Heck farm?

TR: Yeah, Heck farm. Uh...

CB: Used to take a truckload of us, uh, Mexicans, Mexican families.

TR: All Mexicans, yeah.

CB: 50 cents a bag of, um, potatoes. You know, that's all they paid us, 50 cents.

HK: Was that those great big huge gunny –

CB: Great big huge gunny sacks.

TR: Yeah, yeah, we had gunny sacks.

CB: Pick 'em up, pick 'em up, yeah. I mean, we would, our backs were –

TR: I mean, we were out in that hot sun I mean all day, man, at the station, probably, long, way on the other side of the church. Could barely get one in, the tractor gonna come around and you're picking up on the other side. All damn day long. Bending over in that hot sun all day.

CB: That was the only way we could make money.

HK: Some of the other people said that there were, like, older people out there doing it too, just all ages –

CB: Oh, it was all ages.

TR: Oh, yeah.

CB: Even people from Topeka came to –

TR: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah. And then we used to get, uh, hauled, you know, when the fiesta was going on in Topeka?

HK: Uh-huh.

TR: You know, we used to haul in, to get in that same truck, same truck, get all dressed up and man, we went to those fiestas down there. [laughs] But we had a lot of fun. We always looked forward to it too.

HK: Uh-huh. Yeah.

TR: But it was hot. We had a good time.

CB: It was the only time we had fun.

TR: About the only time. I remember the years that I used to, uh, go down the alleys, down the alleys, pick up cardboard, just to make a little spending money. I remember when I used to cut wood, the big saw and the railroad ties, you know, for the winter months. I had to sit there and... just a young kid, just to get about 50 cents or a quarter or something like that to go to the show, get a candy bar and get a Coke.

HK: Uh-huh.

TR: Boy, that was hard work too.

HK: So these were the old distorted ties from when they did the, when they changed out the ties?

TR: Yeah, well, they had all that creosote and everything on them too. Yeah, see, they used to, this is what they used to heat the houses up with. I used to see the stoves, you know. That they used to have inside the house. That thing just red as ever on the inside.

HK: That's over at the Santa Fe apartments?

TR: Yeah. Uh-huh.

CB: My dad used to, um, uh...we had one of those potbelly stoves-

TR: Yeah.

CB: And, uh, he used to get up first thing in the morning to put our shoes next to it so when we all got up, all of us kids would get up, we would get our feet in warm shoes, you know. I thought that was great.

TR: But you know at that time, we all only had so much. Nobody hardly had any more than anybody else.

CB: Same thing.

TR: But those were the –

CB: Nobody was richer than anybody else. We just weren't, none of us were rich.

TR: Nobody had no money.

CB: Nobody had – everybody was the same. That's why we got along. That's why we got along up there. Like I said –

TR: No, you know, in those days you know, you were able to, uh, to just come up and visit somebody. Now you got to make reservations every time you want to see them. [laughs] Now you gotta call 'em and says, "Are you out of bed? Can I see you?"

HK: Yeah.

TR: But I don't know, that's the way it is today. But it's still some of it, still there, yeah.

CB: It'll probably always be there. I don't think it'll ever really change. It hasn't changed this long, you know. But I think these, the kids nowadays, like my, my kids, they now are accepted anywhere. I mean they can do anything, go anywhere, they get married with white people. I got a, I got a brother and a sister, got a daughter who are married to white people now. And, you know, when I tell them what went on in my life then, you know, they don't believe it, they say: "Oh, come on." I say "No, it's true," you know. So, no, they're, you know, they're accepted – and I'm so glad that they are now accepted in – probably the ones that are the most trouble are the ones still from my age, from way back. Yeah. But there's a lot of things now that are –

TR: I'm the same way, you know, the majority, all my son-in-laws are all white. And you know, they go right along with us today. Yeah. My daughter-in-law's the same way, she's white too. And uh, she – we get along as good as ever and they back us up and everything.

CB: Like I said, they – they don't believe though, they don't believe what we went through.

TR: They, yeah. I tell you, I about got my neck cut off one time coming in from the Santa Fe yards coming over to, over to St. John one time to church one time. I stuck my head underneath the rails, what's the name like that, I didn't know the train was pulling, I had just got my head through there, when the doggone train went by.

HK: Oh, my gosh.

TR: That was an incident. I says, Oh, God, I...After I thought about that, man, I had a cold sweat.

HK: So, were you crawling underneath the boxcars?

TR: Yeah. Well, they – the wheels, you know, I didn't know, it seemed it was sitting still, and I just went and stuck my head and I just went right underneath it, you know. I had just got on the other side and it doggone starts moving.

HK: Ooooh.

TR: But we used to walk all the way from the Sante Fe yards over there all the way to St. John at church and also go to the high school at that time.

HK: Did anyone ever get hurt on the tracks?

TR: No, not that I know of.

HK: Well, except for you. Almost. [laughs]

TR: Almost. Close.

CB: But it was nice, so, now when I hear the trains, it reminds me because, you know, like, we used to –

TR: See, we used to ride the trains all the time. My father had a pass since he had 50 years working for the railroad. Well, we used to ride the train all the time. And I haven't rode the train for a long, long time. And I've had people tell me now that, ride, that Amtrak, they say it's beautiful to get on those tracks. I'd – I'd like to go on a trip on one of those trains one of these days.

CB: I'd like to take my grandchildren –

TR: She likes to fly.

CB: Oh, I'd rather fly. [laughs] But my grandchildren, I would like to have them, you know, in a train, you know, like we used to, yeah, so...

TR: Yeah.

HK: Well, where – how did you meet your husband?

CB: In the Air Force, he was in Topeka. At a dance, we went to Topeka. And that's where I met him, so he's Filipino. But he passed away six years ago, so I'm by myself now. So I have my children and they're all, they were all born in the Air Force, so.

HK: How many children do you have?

CB: I have six.

HK: Six. And do they all live around this area, or – ?

CB: No, I have one in Germany. He just retired after 20 years but his wife is still in the Air Force, and she's over there. And then I've got a daughter in California and then I've got a son in Kansas City and then I've got a son here and two daughters. So I got three here, and three gone.

HK: So how many kids is that altogether?

CB: Six. Six. Three boys and three girls. And they were girl, boy, girl, boy, girl, and they went like that. [laughs]

TR: And I –

HK: You had it planned all out, didn't you?

CB: Yeah, my son – my young son said, "How'd you do that, Mom?" I says, "I'm not gonna tell you!" [laughs]

HK: And, and, where did you meet your wife?

TR: I met her in Topeka. Yeah. Well, the way I met her was when I told you I was working on the railroad, well we were working that extra gang after I worked on the sector with my dad. Well her brother was working there on the extra gang and he kept after me week after week saying, uh, "Tom why don't you come on down to, uh, down to my house?" And he kept after me and after me and he says, he finally, it finally got to me and I said: "Well, have you got any sisters?" He said, "Yeah I got one named Josefina" and then another one. So I went down there, and when I went down there I guess I fell for her right away. So,

CB: My husband was from Washington, D.C.

TR: And, so we've, we've been married 56 years. I got, I had four kids. I got a daughter, 53, that I'm gonna go – I gotta go watch her graduate in Kansas City, Kansas at 5:30 this evening. She's been a teacher at the 205 Michigan. Up there, she's a lead teacher there. Been 32 years now and she got her own office and now she's just graduated from KCK she been taking classes, and she's gonna go to St. Mary's. She wants to work at the, uh, Children's Mercy Hospital –

HK: Oh, yes.

TR: With the cancer kids and all that, things like that. But my, my son – uh, well, like I said, she's 53 and then I have a daughter named, uh, Cindy, she works for the city water department, and then I have a daughter named Rose and a son named Tom Jr. and he works in, he's in Facility Operations at KU. In charge of 17 people up there at the university, in charge of all the air conditioning units and all. I have seven grandkids and five great grandkids.

HK: Boy. Very neat.

TR: So, see, I'm telling my age, you know. [laughs]

HK: How long did you work for the railroad?

TR: Me?

HK: Uh-huh.

TR: Uh, probably, uh, probably altogether probably maybe four or five years, probably. Cause I think I only worked a year or so with my father, I think. But on the other ones I, I worked about four years on those, stay on those trains. We used to, we used to go in there and used to go down through Garnett, you know, out that way, you know, Ottawa, and all down the line that way. That's where...used to be there.

HK: And then you worked for, you said you worked for KU after that, or?

TR: No, well I worked – I worked at the – well, you mean the jobs that I had?

HK: Yeah.

TR: Well, I – I worked in the laundry. I worked in the laundry and then I went to working out there where your dad, where, Bob - Bob Krische.

HK: Was that when he had the marble business?

TR: The marble business?

HK: Yeah.

TR: I worked for nearly 20 there.

HK: Oh, really?

TR: Yeah, pretty near. And then from there they closed up and then this friend of mine had just left there and he says: "Tom why don't you come down and work for the schools?" And, which I did, and, man, I took a big cut in pay. I thought that first payment I got from the schools, I said, "Man, I can't make a living, I'm leaving." And I ended up staying there 20 years. I retired in '92, I retired for one week. I retired for one week and then I, for four – I been at KU for 14, uh, part-time. I go in at 6:00 in the morning, get off at 10:00. I always keep saying, "I don't know what I'm doing up here."

HK: So you just keep working.

TR: But to be honest with you, I enjoy the people that I work with, I think that's one reason, one of the reasons I stay on it. And second, no question, the money helps. And besides that, I'm kind of gabby anyway, so...

HK: That keeps you young.

TR: Well, that's what they all tell me. [laughs] What they all tell me.

CB: I'm not gonna answer that one. You know, the radio you can kind of turn off and on.

TR: She, she says I talk a lot.

CB: Yeah, he does. We just talk –

TR: Yeah, we've always been a close family. When one hurts, we all hurt.

CB: We all travel together... We go on vacations together.

HK: Oh neat.

TR: We all travel together on trips. Sometimes there's two, two vans full. Every place we go.

CB: We get together for birthdays, we get together and we each put in ten dollars, seventy dollars for the person's birthday, you know, and we go out to eat.

TR: We'll go out to eat, and get together, yeah.

CB: It was sort of – my mother, my mother wanted us to stay together.

TR: My mother always kept us together.

CB: We stayed together. We used to go to her house every Sunday, she would have dinner for us, you know, lunch, and that was, if you didn't go there she'd be mad. She, I mean by early morning she had it done.

TR: She had it already done.

CB: All we had to do was go over there in the afternoon. But she always wanted us to be together, so we did. We've stuck together all these 20 years now.

TR: I remember we got her a microwave to cook stuff in, she wouldn't cook in that microwave. She used her stove. She, she wanted to cook everything on the stove. I mean, that microwave didn't mean a thing to her at all. We had good parents.

HK: What kind of a cookstove did she have in the Santa Fe apartments? Did she...?

CB: It was a regular, uh...

HK: Was it a wood –

CB: It was a woodstove, like...what am I trying to say...oh, uh, she used to put coals in there, stuff like. Can't remember...the metal type.

TR: It was metal.

CB: Yeah.

HK: The big, heavy metal –

CB: The big, heavy.

HK: The iron and the –

TR: Yeah.

HK: Like on one side, it had a water tank or whatever, did it have one of those?

CB: No.

HK: And, oh. But did it have an oven?

CB: Yeah.

TR: Yeah, it had an oven and all. She used her oven like that. She wouldn't use that microwave.

CB: Yeah, our refrigerator was one with the ice blocks. We used to put, you know –

TR: We used to put blocks of ice in there.

CB: We'd buy the ice.

TR: Yeah. But like I said, those were the good old years.

CB: It was.

TR: They were tough, but they were good old years. Good years. Like I said, everybody was just happy. They didn't have the heck of a lot, but for us –

CB: As long as you stayed over there –

TR: For us, it was good.

CB: As long as you stayed over there.



TR: Yeah.

CB: We come over here and just kinda.

HK: Had to maybe pay more attention to, uh, relationships because, I mean, that's all you had, and, you know, since you didn't have much money.

CB: No we didn't. We had nothing.

HK: You had to depend upon your relationship with other people.

TR: Yeah.

CB: Well, everybody was the same. You know, like I said, nobody had more money than the other person, so, you know. I'd say, six to eight people, tight little community, you know. We were really happy there.

HK: What did you do for entertainment?

CB: Oh, played games. Oh yeah, there was a lot of games you could play, you know. Out there, there was no cars, nothing you had to watch for, traffic or anything. Played ball and you know, they had that dump, like I said, you go to look for the things, you know, just... people'd throw away stuff and we go up and get it. You know, it just... we never had anything new, you know. We used to get a dime for, uh, from my dad, each one of us. Then we'd go out and buy candy with it, so...

TR: I remember when I worked in the laundry at – I was still young, well I had my, my twins who are 55, I think - I used to get paid. At that time, I was making 75 cents an hour, can you believe that? I had four kids, 75 cents an hour. The day I got paid, on a Friday, we used to go out to that hamburger place, what's the name of it, sis?

CB: Oh...

TR: Five hamburgers for a dollar?

CB: Yeah, I remember...

TR: That was a big day for my kids.

HK: Griffs?

TR: Griffs. That's the place.

CB: You remember Griffs. They were good hamburgers, too.

TR: Those were big days, those were big days for my, for my kids. They used to look forward to it. Yeah.

CB: But like I said, it did take me a long time to forgive people, you know, just...I even got to where I didn't even want to be around them or nothing, you know, because of the way I was treated. And so, like I said, when I met my husband and we went into the military, that's where I changed, because of all the people that were there. Like I said, there were so many different races anyway.

TR: Yeah.

CB: So, in 26 years you meet a lot of people, you know. So it was kind of scary coming back, I didn't know what I was gonna – [laughs] I thought, "Oh, God going back up there," you know. But like I said, it's changed.

TR: Yeah, it's changed.

CB: It's changed. Still there's people, but still –

TR: Maybe some, maybe sometimes most of the older people –

CB: That's what I'm saying, it's the older people now –

TR: Most of the older people –

CB: Not the younger ones. Anymore, the younger ones accept anything.

TR: It's like, we went to my brother's in the hospital in St. Francis, and this older lady was up there and we went to ask her, you know, where he was at, and man, she talked to us like, man, she hated her job.

CB: And she hated us, probably, more than anything else.

TR: Like she hated her job, you know, like we forced her to talk to us. You know, all we asked her, you know, where my brother was at, you know, for information. Man, I said to myself, "You know, she don't like her job. Why in the devil would she go up there in a back room back there? Get somebody up here with a smile to the public."

CB: So you still have 'em.

TR: You still – but...I'm sure it's there. I don't think it's ever forgotten, I don't think. We've, we've had to live with this. Yeah. And like I say, our kids can't believe it actually happened.

CB: The old times. That's the old times, you know.

HK: I think if they listen to this tape and they listen to some of the other tapes, they will find out

that it was sort of, you know, universal, among the people during that time.

TR: Do the majority of the other ones, does this kind of, kind of, with the other ones, fit in pretty well?

HK: Yeah, there were some that, some – [tape cuts off]