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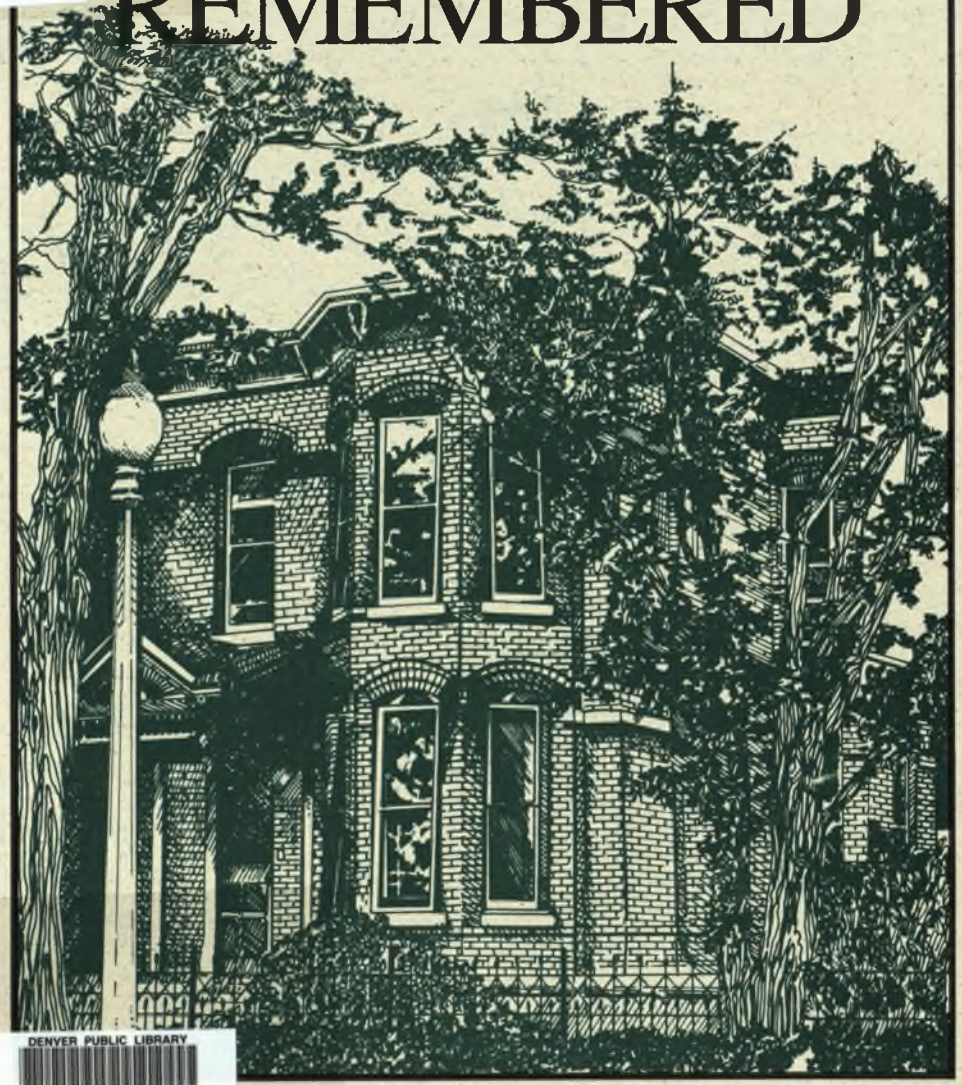
AURARIA REMEMBERED



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Dedication

This volume is dedicated to the residents of the Westside neighborhood whose lives were disrupted so that the Auraria Higher Education Center might be built where their homes once stood. Because of their sacrifice, tens of thousands of college students have enriched themselves and the greater Denver community

The memories of former Auraria residents recorded in these pages are the result of moral and creative support from Santos Blan; of hard work by a dedicated project director and editor who also trained and mentored a talented group of Honors Program students; of many hours that students spent interviewing and transcribing; of careful typing and layout; and of final arrangement and printing by the graphic arts faculty coordinator and students. To all of you, my thanks and gratitude for giving yourselves fully to a challenging project.

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Bryon McClenney
President
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October 1991

Auraria Remembered

An oral history by former residents of Denver's Westside neighborhood compiled by Community College of Denver staff and Honors Program students

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Introduction

Denver's beginnings date to the 1858 discovery of traces of gold in Cherry Creek. The Gold Rush brought frontiersmen and pioneers who settled on the southwest bank of the creek. Named Auraria (from aurum, the Latin word for gold), the settlement also drew a trickle of Spaniards from Mexico in 1859.

It wasn't until 1916 that the first wave of Hispanics arrived from Mexico and New Mexico, fleeing revolution and poverty. They were seeking a new and more secure way of life, but it took them a while to establish roots. The non-Hispanics, who were the first major settlers in Auraria, were apprehensive about the cultural differences between them and the Hispanic people, so little by little they moved out, leaving vacancies for more Spanish-speaking people to move in. Discrimination from the outside brought the Hispanic community closer together, and there was a sense of belonging in the small neighborhood which they formed.

The community was established more permanently in 1926 when St. Cajetan's Catholic Church was built at Ninth and Lawrence Streets. The lives of the Hispanic people in Auraria revolved around their church. This was the place where they met weekly, made friends, and watched the children of all the families grow. It was the weekly social and also the focus of many religious and secular holidays. The Hispanic people did not have much at that time; they did not have a public institution where they could mingle and feel important. St. Cajetan's became that place.

Over the years, community bonds cemented as marriages between families took place and new generations grew up together. By becoming a close-knit group, the people were able to do things they might not otherwise have been able to do. It did not matter whether the outside world accepted them; they accepted themselves. For over fifty years, Auraria was home for these Hispanics, but in the early 1970s the community was broken up and relocated to different sections of Denver. The Auraria Higher Education Center was to be built on the site.

The people in the neighborhood had no idea what was being planned for them. Indeed, the first time the residents heard anything about the relocation was when leaflets were passed out to every house. The relocation plans described in the leaflets caused shock and fear. The community was invited to a meeting at the basement of St. Cajetan's Church. The residents thought that someone from the city said the whole community would be moved somewhere so that they could stay together. It was never done.

The residents did not want to move and 155 families filed lawsuits. Governor John Love then created the Auraria Higher Education Center Board to act as both landlord and mediator. In 1969 the city called a special bond election to secure funds for the project.

Father Pete Garcia, assistant pastor of St. Cajetan's Church, helped the people to organize the Auraria Residents Organization, Inc. (ARO). Members of the ARO talked to city planners and became informed about what was happening and organized opposition to the bond election. Campaigning went on all over the city. All the Catholic churches in the city were visited and leaflets were handed out. The group felt positive that they were winning the struggle. Then, the Sunday before the election, Archbishop James Casey sent a letter to all of the Catholic churches in Denver to be read from the pulpit encouraging all Catholics to vote for the bond issue. Subsequently it passed and the ARO activists felt sure that the letter is what made the difference.

The ARO called a final meeting in 1972 and threatened to erect a "tent city" because of the excessive number of evictions. Residents of Auraria were to be given funds for relocation even if they were renters. A few houses were in violation of building codes, and rather than fix them up, the landlords evicted their renters.

The Auraria Higher Education Center now occupies the land. Just one block of houses, Ninth Street Historic Park, remains as a reminder of Auraria's early days. The Hispanic families who lived in the area for over fifty years brought color to the history of the neighborhood. Their lives should not be ignored. The following stories, told by former residents, are a vital part of that brilliant rainbow of historical narratives that make up Auraria's past.

Magdelena Gallegos
Project Director
Auraria Remembered

Martha Gonzalez-Alcaro

Martha Gonzalez-Alcaro, 1942

Martha, where were you born and in what year?

I was born in Broomfield, Colorado which was a farming community at that time. I was born in July, 1924.

When did your parents move to Auraria?

My parents moved to Auraria in 1934.

I might add that during that time, prior to the depression, it was very hard to find a home.

What kind of neighborhood was Auraria?

It was on the downgrade of inbetween. The people living there were mostly merchants and would move up the ladder, onto Capital Hill and other areas.

What was your reason for moving to Auraria?

Actually, that was the only place available at the time.

So it was actually a happy time when you lived in the house at Auraria.

Yes, it had a big yard and was very pretty with a lot of flowers.

Where did you live?

It was 1020 Ninth Street. It's still there.

Unfortunately, during the renovation, they didn't do justice to it.

They, for financial reasons, weren't able to save most of it. To our family, some of the things they weren't able to save were very important.

If there was one thing that you could save that they didn't, what would it be?

Well, there was an addition to the back side of the house (which later became a restaurant) and that is where the kitchen was. That's where all the goodies came from!

Then in the back there was a U-shaped brick building that I suppose used to house the servants.

Do you remember the house very distinctly?

Yes, I do. The back portion was used for gatherings with the community.

What was it like to live there?

We had a lot of dances. The kids were all allowed to bring their friends.

It was a free, liberal neighborhood community center.

It sounds like something we need today. You don't see many families like that. It sounds beautiful.

You must remember the extended family was very important.

We're talking about three generations that shared the same enjoyments.

Simple things like child care, care of the elderly, were all taken care of.

What are some of the things you remember about Auraria?

I would say it was multiracial.

The different smells coming from the cooking pots were quite a mix.

We had an English family, directly from England. We had a German minister and his son living a few blocks away. The grocer was Jewish.

We had a Filipino family, and more Hispanics started moving into the area.

We had St. Leo's Church, which was mostly Irish Americans, and of course the German Americans.

We had the German Lutheran building which was right next to the Art Center here. The church I attended was a Spanish Methodist church on Ninth and Colfax. It (Auraria) was a contained community. We had our grocery store, and a shoe store. They were family - owned businesses and in many cases the families lived upstairs.

Everyone knew each other. It was very comfortable. If you didn't act correctly it would get around. In a way, people policed each other's kids.

That element gave a sense of stability. It gave a sense of support for the kids. I'm not saying that the kids were angels, but there was that important element.

What other characters could you describe in the neighborhood?

We had James Pavey, who was a good pianist. He was very temperamental, being raised by three women.

We had the German minister who invited us to Christmas programs.

The minister had a son who was mentally disabled. This was 1934, before more Hispanic families started to move in.

We used to rent Turner Hall, which is now Tivoli, for celebrations.

The people were friendly.

I'm sure everyone was closer then and knew more about each other than today.

Yes, I think I got to know people better with all of the interaction.

We had a man who sold goodies in a wagon that came to every home. We had a man who would pick up newspapers and tin cans and sell them to companies.

I mean people were self employed and did very well and provided an important service.

Everyone was respected.

There was a drug store (two brothers ran that). It was the kind of a thing where everyone knew everyone.

The stores were simple. There was no trend to make them fancy. They were pretty stable. Prices were a lot lower.

I used to go to the public market and buy bread and have a feast at Cherry Creek.

It's a big change. It's not a bad change, but there was a lot more community support.

We may have not always agreed on everything, but there were some things that were just understood.

Do you miss it? How do you feel about the community now?

Well, in comparison, I find a lack of understanding and respect.

So your generation has lost certain values they had before?

I think so, and I think it's been a trend. You have peer pressure whether you're young or whether you're old.

What holidays were observed?

Mexican and American traditional holidays were observed. We had a knowledge of them and we accepted them (American). It has helped us a lot.

There has to be a certain amount of tolerance when you live in such a mixed neighborhood. I don't find that in many neighborhoods today.

What games did you play?

We didn't have all the fancy equipment. We went swimming, played tennis, marbles for the boys, jacks for the girls, kick the can for everyone, jumprope, hopscotch, and we made up our own games.

Do you think that television has taken the place of a lot of the outdoor activities?

Yes, I think it has. Although some programs are excellent. But I don't think kids are using their

imagination as much as they used to. You'd be surprised how kids are great at using their imagination.

We went up to the mountains and we were let loose. Of course there was a lot more freedom. The population was smaller.

We didn't have as many environmental problems to deal with.

What kind of problems or struggles did the neighborhood have?

We had some people who liked to celebrate too much.

I think we were all so busy surviving throughout the depression that I don't think that the neighborhood paid attention to the little things.

We did have some rowdy kids in the neighborhood.

Was there talent in the neighborhood?

There was a lot of musical talent, especially in my family. I enjoyed everything. I never liked to perform that much. I would help on the perimeter. I could be part of the group, though. I was more the support person.

Who were some of your friends?

Lorena and Josephine. You're in contact with people of all ages. You couldn't help but integrate and be part of the community.

When did you leave the neighborhood?

We were forced out of the neighborhood in 1974.

While we knew it was for a good cause, most of the residents of the neighborhood have ended up with bitter feelings that they didn't get the proper amount of money for their homes.

There were some businesses down in the neighborhood and I was a secretary of a group called "Auraria Businessmen Against Confiscation." We did everything to get adequate reimbursement for the properties.

We went as far as the State Supreme Court but nothing came of it. There were certain promises made that were not kept. We should have gotten them in writing. That's when we moved.

Emotionally, we wanted to see the place saved. There was no objection to having a school.

You'd be hard pressed to find someone who would admit to that. I'm sure some things were predetermined before they went public.

I'm very happy the campus is there. I don't feel hostile, but I feel that people who are placed in the position such as we were should do their homework very, very carefully so that it doesn't happen again.

Do you think that could happen today?

Oh, yes.

The sad part is that all the development that has happened has been detrimental because the community hasn't been involved.

You walk up Seventeenth Street with all the empty buildings. There is no warmth, or public markets. There is nothing there that the community can relate to. That human element is really missing.

I think that to understand your own history, whatever it may be, is very important.

We were, in times of real need, finding out that you do have to depend on each other. You don't have a choice. When those things come into play, like during the depression, you'd be surprised how people will respond. I'm not saying we need a depression, I'm saying these qualities should be integrated.

Interview by Jennifer Smith

Dennis Bryan

I understand that you lived in Auraria before it became the Auraria Campus, and that you lived at 1045 Eleventh Street across from St. Elizabeth's Church. Where were you born and what year?

I was born in Denver, Colorado at Mercy Hospital, 1945, July 15th.

When did your parents move to the area we call Auraria?

Approximately 1954.

So, you would have been nine years old when you moved here.

Yes, I lived in the housing projects prior to moving to Eleventh Street, and I went to Greenlee Elementary School.

Do you remember the house in which you lived in Auraria?

I sure do! It was a double and it was two stories directly across from St. Elizabeth's Church. Behind us towards Speer was a car garage and Rainbow Bakery - so we could smell the bread baking.

I bet that was enticing.

Yes! We also had a dairy just down the street. I would say just on the other side of where the North Classroom is now.

When you were a little boy did you explore the dairies and the bakeries and the surrounding areas in your games and if so what kind of adventures did you have?

This is true confessions now. When I became an altar boy, we would serve the Stations of the Cross Friday evenings and after that service we folded the papers for Sunday service. Then the altar boys would go out. It was almost a Friday ritual. We'd go to the dairy in the evening and knock over the empty milk cans, and of course we would run and escape. I was often surprised why they never set a trap for us because we were there every Friday. So yes, we did explore the dairy. The bakery was fun because we'd go by when everyone was out to lunch and we could get a few pieces of really fresh bread.

What was it like to live in the area?

At that time all the kids in the neighborhood were friends within a three to four block radius. We played games like "kick the can" in the streets. We didn't have to dodge cars because people were home and didn't bother driving anywhere else. We played hide-n-seek. I remember playing hide-n-seek one evening with the nuns from St. Elizabeth's. They had on their habits with the wide brimmed hat. We played hide-n-seek, and they all sat down and covered their faces, and we couldn't tell them apart because they all looked the same. We did things like that. It was great! Everyone knew where everyone was most of the time.

What people do you remember from the neighborhood?

I remember the Engles..the Lopez'. Ron Lopez was a student here at Metro for awhile. I remember the Martinez family, David and Dora, the Pacheco and the Trujillo families.

What holidays were observed by your family, what celebrations took place?

In the neighborhood, the big holidays were Easter and Christmas, and there was usually a lot of activity at the school and the church that brought the families together.

What kinds of foods do you remember being served at those rituals?

It was a mixture of German, Spanish and Irish foods. We were a mixed neighborhood.

What did you do for recreation?

I played football for St. Elizabeth's School. It was a lightweight team so we all had to be under 100 lbs. to do that. One summer between my seventh and eighth grade I was four feet eleven inches and weighted 98 lbs. and had to remain at that weight.

So I would run the Colfax viaduct every day. Two weeks later my height and weight shot up...I also went to many of the Bears' games.

Who were the Bears?

The Denver Bears - they're now the Zephyrs. I would walk over to Bears Stadium which is now Mile High Stadium. I would be a vendor. I sold popcorn out of a popcorn stand that used to be directly up from the first base line. I remember vividly - I must have been twelve years old by this time. The box - the container for the popcorn - was a megaphone and we had to construct the megaphone and put the little plug in the bottom so the popcorn wouldn't come out and when you were finished you'd pop that out and have a megaphone so you could cheer on the team.

We also used to walk Cherry Creek and what I mean by walking Cherry Creek (this was usually after Stations of the Cross) is if we didn't go down to the dairy or if we just served Benediction on a Tuesday night, we'd take a hike in Cherry Creek. This was before the bike paths and everything else, so we'd hop rock and jump in the water and make it all the way down to the Denver Country Club and come back. I remember one Christmas time (again I was eleven or twelve years old) I would go downtown. At that time we had several five and dime stores. I would pick trash to find gifts for my sister and brothers. Once, I found a tea set that had one little cup that was broken so I threw that one out and took the remaining five pieces and wrapped it up.

What kind of problems did the people in the neighborhood have? Did the rest of the neighborhood help them?

I can't remember adult problems. It seemed as though whenever there was an emergency or a crisis in the neighborhood everyone pitched in, but being young I was off in my own world. There was always a sense of neighborhood - of camaraderie.

How long did you live in the neighborhood?

Until 1963 - no until 1960.

And then you left and went to...

South Denver, South Lincoln.

Did you have any special pets?

We had a female dog by the name of Tippy. She was allowed to cruise the neighborhood. She never did get into trouble. Like I said, the neighbors knew who she belonged to, and everyone really liked her, so we had no problems with pets.

Did you put in any theatrical performances with groups or did the kids just get together?

We did theatrical performances at school. I had the pleasure of working with my father, an ex-vaudevillian comedian, doing a little skit. I also had the pleasure of being on the same stage as Eugene Fodor. He was younger than me and attended St. Elizabeth's School, and of course we know him now as a violinist of some prominence. That was exciting.

Can you tell me a little about your father as a vaudevillian comedian?

Yes. He worked with a partner, Douglas Sherlock. They would just do skits like Abbott and Costello's "who's on first" and maybe one about Jackie Gleason. I was the child in there and had one or two lines. It was good. It was fun to watch him work.

And what was your father's name?

Herbert.

Are there any other memories or anecdotes you'd like to share with me?

Well, I sold newspapers and shined shoes on the corner of Colfax and Lipan. There used to be a drug store there. I sold the evening Post and then I would walk around to the neighboring bars and sell the Post and shine shoes. My mother worked at a bar and restaurant called Dinty's which was right across Colfax by the city jail. I went in there one evening, and some guy was giving my mom a ration of "no good" and she decked him. She just hauled off and decked the guy! He was going to get up and do something, but she had so many friends there that they came to her aid and the guy left. I don't think he gave her any more "lip" from then on.

So you were kind of an entreprenuer? Were all the kids as active as you were business-wise?

Oh sure, most all of us were doing something - paper routes, you name it, washing cars, shining shoes something to earn 50 to 60 cents a day, dollar a day, sometimes three dollars if we were lucky.

So what did you do with your great wealth?

It was spent on good junk food. Every now and then I'd buy a shirt just to keep in style, or a record.

What kind of music did you listen to?

Rock-n-roll! American Bandstand was young. I even went to Denver Bandstand when it was at Channel 9 and even won a calypso contest, a Latin dance take-off like a Cha Cha. I was thirteen years old and heard Nat King Cole sing in person on that show. This was all free too! We would go to teen dances sponsored by KIMN. Saw Bobby Darin for 50 cents there. Saw the guy that did Purple People Eater, too.

Sounds like this was a great place to grow up.

The dances that we went to were on Third and Broadway in a vacant building. They were every Friday night and we'd walk up there. The boys would stand on one side and the girls on the other and sometimes we'd dance.

Interview by Lori Ganni

Dennis Bryan's class photo, St. Elizabeth's Church

Molly Chavez

When were you born and what year did you come to Denver?

I was born in Pueblo. We left there in 1926, something like that. From there we went to Delta on the Western Slope, then to Hotchkiss, Colorado.

Baby picture of Molly Torres-Chavez

How did you end up in the westside of Denver?

We went there after working the beet fields in Hotchkiss. My mother managed to save a little money and we left. I don't know why we came to Denver. One day this man brought us to the Spanish Barrio. We ended up on Tenth and Market. This man brought our furniture but we rode to Denver in a model T - my mother and my brother and my two sisters. We didn't know where Denver was. There were no signs. The roads weren't even roads then, just a path. The car almost tipped over. We had to lean in one direction when we came to a bend. It was really scary! My mother had hold of the statue of

Molly Torrez-Chavez, five years old

Jesus that was stuck to the dashboard. We thought the car was going to tip over. We came to a fork in the road and picked one out an I drove lickety split!

Do you remember how old you were when you lived in Auraria?

I was about six years old when we came to Denver. This woman had a three room house (in Auraria) and she offered us the front room for the night. The next morning my mother got up and looked for a place to live. We moved to a little house about a half block away from there. Later we moved to Eleventh Street and then to Tenth Street.

Do you remember any stores in the area?

Butler's grocery store on Tenth and Market and Eleventh and Market was Miss Bloom's grocery store. At Tenth and Larimer was a pool hall and right across the street was Buffalo's Bar.

When did you live there?

We lived there until about 1933. We moved to Fourteenth Avenue near Umatilla. Right after we moved there, there was a big flood. People's belongings were floating all over, and everyone had to leave their houses.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Franklin School near Lipan and Mariposa on Colfax. Across from there near Ninth Street was a fire department.

I had some friends that lived behind Buffalo's Bar and there was a little log cabin. This woman lived on Ninth between Curtis and Champa and had lived in Denver 50 years. The owner of the little house came to our school and told the PTA the cabin had been used as a lookout for Indians. They knocked it down afterwards. I don't think they should have. The PTA meetings were different then. People would come and put on plays or something that was special. The woman who owned the little house - her great grandson used to go to my school. His name was James Pavey. Now he is a famous hairdresser here in Denver. I guess he went to Chicago and studied.

Denver is a really young town compared to the towns in the East and cities in California.

I met some people who came here. They thought there was nothing but prairie here and horses and covered wagons and were disappointed that they weren't here any more. Denver is so different now than when I was a little girl.

In what way?

Well, the buildings and everything.

How are the neighborhoods different?

People would sit on their porches and now they don't anymore. My mother used to bake bread and cook beans and share them with the neighbors. It's not like it used to be. It's a cold city. A lot of people come from other places.

Do you remember people helping each other in the neighborhood?

Yes, when we came to Denver, we were strangers to the woman who gave us her front room. She didn't ask for money or anything or how long we would be there. There were a lot of empty houses then. You didn't have a hard time finding a place unless you were particular. We weren't particular because we didn't have money or time.

Did you work or marry in the neighborhood?

No, but we went to St. Elizabeth's School and St. Cajetan's Church. I went to second and third grade there and then went to Lawrence Street School, which was on Eleventh and Lawrence. Then I went to Franklin School, which I told you about, and then I went to Baker which was on Sixth Avenue. They built St. Cajetan's School a year after I left. I always seemed to miss the new schools.

You said you married at eighteen. Did you have many children?

I had five children first and then had eight later - thirteen altogether. They say it's cheaper by the dozen, but it isn't.

Six of Molly's Children: Steve, Patsy, Gloria, Anthony, Abby and Kathy

Molly's children Kathy, Abby and Steve, Patsy, Gloria

Molly's sister Nellie Dominguez holding baby Linda

Molly's children: Abby, Stevie and Kathy

First Holy Communion for Molly's children: Abby and Stevie

Molly's boys: Nathan, Anthony and Danny

Does any experience really stand out in your mind?

Well, I used to take care of my kids. When I heard a noise outside I used to go around the house with my two by four. I was never afraid. One time these two guys came out of Sammy K's Bar and were fighting. I said, "Get away from here. What are you guys doing?" One of them said, "He's trying to kill me ma'am. He's trying to smother me." He was trying to smother him with his chest. So I grabbed my two by four and said, "Get out of here. If you're going to kill him, kill him somewhere else, not in front of my kids." When we lived on Eighth Street two guys were fighting and one was going to stab the other. I did the same thing then - I grabbed my two by four and they both ran.

I always had my two by four...I was willing to use that two by four and I guess they believed it!

Do you remember any particular holiday traditions?

My mother used to make meat empañadas, baked bread and tamales. She baked a lot the day before Christmas and we'd go to midnight mass. We went to St. Cajetan's Church.

I know at the Tivoli they used to have rallies, political rallies. I was only about ten then. They'd have big speeches and a band and all the kids used to go in there. It didn't matter that they had beer there. The bar was on one side and the men used to go there. The women would sit somewhere else, and little kids would run around and dance. It wasn't like now - the younger kids weren't going to get drunk, kids didn't drink at that time. It was real nice, like a family. The men got to drink because they were men and they were old and nobody interfered. They didn't fight at those rallies. It was really family-oriented.

Teenage students in front of St Cajetan's School; Front row: Lillian Lopez, Bobby Taylor and Margaret Maestas

I hear that you are quite a storyteller.

I used to sit outside until about eleven o'clock at night and tell stories to all the neighborhood kids. We used to like to sit and tell stories. The grownups did. too. My mother used to make us go out and play and wouldn't let us listen. We would sit by the door and listen anyway.

Interview by Lori Ganni

Russell DeLeon
Tina DeLeon
Norman Baker
Eugenia "Dynamite" Baker

Were you born at Auraria?

Eugenia:

I was born at Colorado General. Most of mom's kids were born in the house (1023 Ninth Street).

When did your family move to Auraria? And do you know why they moved there?

Eugenia:

Well, Frank used to own the house and sold it to my dad. Frank lived there and we used to live in the little back house - two rooms. Frank moved out and we moved in the big house.

So was Frank a DeLeon also?

Eugenia:

Yes. He was my dad's brother.

Any particular outstanding memories of the area, the neighborhood?

Russell:

It was kind of a close-knit neighborhood. I mean, everybody knew everybody there.

Eugenia:

We had a corner store we used to go to.

Norman:

Wasn't he Jewish?

Eugenia:

Yes.

Russell:

A Jew owned the corner store, and he had high prices on his stuff.

Eugenia:

And then there was the fun part. Wasn't it the Archuletas - they found all that money?

Russell:

That was before my time.

Eugenia:

They found some money and they were spreading it all around.

What was it like to live there?

Russell:

I thought it was safe. I mean, we had some break-ins, but I still thought it was safe.

Eugenia:

We knew the people that used to break in, but I still though it was safe.

Russell:

It was kind of like its own neighborhood (Auraria). Nobody else would go in that neighborhood, it seemed like to me, except the people who lived there. I don't know why. Maybe because it was lower downtown Denver or something. On the westside, there were railroad tracks where you couldn't cross. And there were two bridges coming over, that was Colfax and Lawrence. Auraria just sat like a diamond, right in there, so there wasn't really easy access in or out. I mean, you go in and that's like a dead end there. Maybe that's why...I never thought about it, but it was like a neighborhood all by itself.

Eugenia:

Protected?

Russell:

Yes.

Eugenia:

Secluded?

Russell:

Yeah. Away from the busy streets. Because it sat inside of Colfax and Speer Boulevard and Lawrence. And then the markets were on the north.

Eugenia:
That was fun, going to the market.

Russell:
Yes, they had a cookie factory... Keebler, or Nabisco, or something. They made cookies there, and then there was a bread company and a potato chip company.

Eugenia:
And a pickle factory across from St. Cajetan's.

Do you remember most of the people from the neighborhood?
Russell:
Ah, yes. All my friends were from there, in that. neighborhood anyway.

Eugenia:
The Rodriguez, the Morales, the Torres families.

Russell:
They lived there about as long as we did. There were a lot of renters there, but I'm trying to think of who actually owned their homes there. The Torres family and us. Most of them were renters.

Eugenia:
The Vigil, the Ramos, the Gomez, the Costillo and the Archuleta families, they all owned their houses.

And the Angladas, they were related to the Gomez family.

Russell:
A lot of relations lived together - extended families.

Eugenia:
Especially the Gomez family. A big family.

The Gonzalez family, Arnold and Ray and Martha. They owned that restaurant right across the street. The Casa Mayan.

Russell:
That little neighborhood had its own fire department, its own Mexican restaurant, its own grocery store, its own Catholic Church, its own credit union. What else?

Eugenia:
Restaurants on Colfax, the grocery store that ain't there no more and there was a bar.

Norman:
There was quite a bit in that little neighborhood.

Eugenia:
And Ernie's Barbershop. I don't remember his last name.

What holidays were observed by your family?
Russell:
I guess all of them, weren't they? I mean, Easter was probably the biggest.

Eugenia:
Easter was the biggest.

Russell:
Of course, every Sunday was like a holiday because we'd all dress up and go to church. The church was always packed. And there were two different churches there. There was St. Cajeten's, which catered to the poor people, you know, and then there was St. Elizabeth's, which catered to the richer kids, and there was always a controversy between the two schools because one school was low income and St. Elizabeth's - in order to get in there, you had to have a pretty good wage.

Did they have a tuition fee?
Russell:
Yes. They both did. Both Catholic schools did. Only St. Elizabeth's was a lot higher, and they claimed they had the better nuns and stuff. But I don't know if it was true.

Norman:
Like (St. Elizabeth's) they were the rulers.

Eugenia:
Especially at St. Cajetan's. We used to always get whipped.

Russell:
But we went to Catholic schools and it only went up to the eighth grade. I liked Catholic School. I think I learned a lot. As a matter of fact, we weren't

that poor, but we had so many in our family. I think there were twelve, wasn't there? My dad tried to get us all through Catholic school, and I only remember one year that I went to a public school and that was fifth grade. I don't know why, maybe because he was short of money or something. And I don't know about the rest of them. Maybe one year they went to public school, but all the other times we were able to go to Catholic school. My dad used to do work for the priest there in order to pay for some of the tuition.

Did your father have a carpentry business?

Russell:

Yes. He had a construction business. He didn't keep it very long. He only had it about three or four years maybe, and then he started working for a construction company. Then he'd do side jobs and stuff to kind of make extra money.

There was a Mexican restaurant right across the street. That building's gone, isn't it? I can't remember.

Eugenia:

No, it's still there. Casa Mayan.

Russell:

Casa Mayan. They catered to Anglo people mostly, and if you can imagine Anglo people going into lower downtown.

Eugenia:

I used to work there. We used to go downtown to their houses to serve dinners in rich homes and everything.

The Gonzalez family owned that, right?

Russell:

Yes. When I was a kid, we used to take care of cars for extra money and it was kind of a neat scam because an Anglo person would come by in a nice car and want to go try this Mexican food - because it was great food. They had their suits and stuff, fancy dresses, and we'd wait and they'd have to park in front of our house because the restaurant was right across the street. We used to ask them if we could take care of their car for 50 cents or a quarter or something - and you know - I guess we looked like we were dishonest. We were Spanish, so it's like, "Well, if we don't give them a quarter or 50 cents, they might flatten our tires or something, so maybe we'd better give them something." So, they'd pay us to watch their cars, and then they started getting wise after a few weeks and they'd remember us and say, "Well, I'll pay you when we come back, and if you're not there, how am I going to pay you?" We used to tell them we'd take care of their car, and then we'd get the money and leave. And we also worked there (at Casa Mayan). I guess our whole family worked there. We met some interesting people though. There were some rich people. I thought they were rich - maybe not. Maybe they just looked rich. But I remember this one lady gave me a business card and told me to call her so she could buy me some new shoes. I never called her because I was afraid, but I always got offers like that. I was only about twelve or thirteen. I was a water boy or busboy or something. That was probably my first job. I worked there for a long time.

That house was supposed to be haunted. The owner's dad died, and he was supposed to have been the ghost upstairs on the second floor. I remember the owner used to take us up there at midnight, and I don't know if it was in our heads, but we used to hear someone moaning all the time. We always thought it was haunted, so we'd never go up there at midnight because that's when it happened.

Which house was that?

The Casa Mayan was at 1020 Ninth Street. The owner used to live upstairs and when he passed away, his son took over. Arnold Gonzalez. But it was kind of a neat place. He'd (Arnold) wear his Mexican outfit. He was a cook and the owner, and he'd sing Mexican music. Those Anglo people sure loved it. The only drawback was that it was in the low-rent district. But it was safe. I don't think it ever got busted in; otherwise, they wouldn't have had a good business.

What kind of problems did people have?

Russell:

Money. I don't know. I don't know of any problems.

Eugenia:

Everybody was happy there. Everybody was real close.

Russell:
I know one thing. We couldn't plant grass. We tried and tried and tried. There were people that could plant grass. But we tried and we just couldn't. I don't know what it was.

Norman:
There were fourteen kids running over the new lawn.

Russell:
Probably. There was a lot of kids in the neighborhood.

Norman:
I meant your family. I wasn't talking about the neighborhood kids.

Russell:
It seemed like everybody had big families there. There were always kids everywhere. Maybe because they were mostly renters in that area. That was probably one reason. Because it's kind of strange to go there now and see grass. I think there was a lot of renters and you know, they just didn't care about their property. I mean, my mom used to go out there and sweep the dirt.

What's your mom's name?
Russell:
Margaret.

Eugenia:
We were real close to everybody there. We were all like one big family.

Russell:
There was a meat packing place there. There were a lot of businesses, everything just about. It was amazing. I do a lot of printing for the principal's center (North Classroom). I go there quite a bit and it just struck me - I delivered a job there and you have to go through this gate, right? And they won't let you in unless you have a permit or something. I thought it was kind of funny that I lived there half my life, and now I have to get a permit to get in the area.

Give me the names in your family from oldest to youngest.
Eugenia.
Eugenia and then there's Gilbert.

Russell:
No, Tony.

Eugenia:
Oh, Tony. I was already thinking of Gilbert.

Russell:
Carol, Labertha.

Eugenia:
It was supposed to be Labertha. My dad called me Jeannie for years until I went to Colorado General and they told me that wasn't even my name. It was Eugenia, and there ain't no middle name. Because they used to call me Jeannie Mary, and there wasn't such a name. And Carol, when she went and got her marriage license or something, it was Labertha.

Russell:
I was in the seventh grade until I realized my birthday's July 10th, not June 10th.

Eugenia:
And they all know me by Jeannie, not Eugenia. It's kind of hard. They still call me Jeannie.

Who's after Carol? Gilbert?
Russell:
Gilbert, then me, and then Rosemary, Angelo. Now watch, she'll come up with fifteen names.

Eugenia:
Stevie.

Russell:
Did I say Fay?

Tina:
Wasn't Sammy older than Stevie?

Russell:
What about Fay?

Tina:
Fay comes after Rosie.

Russell
No sir, she comes after Sammy. Then I think Fay and then Sammy.

Eugenia:
No, she has Rosie down already.

Russell:
Angelo, and then ...Fay? Or Sammy? What about Stevie?

Eugenia:
No, I think it's Fay.

Russell:
Yeah, I do too. Fay and then ...

Tina:
Sammy ...

Russell:
Stevie's older than Sammy, isn't he?

Tina:
Nah, Sammy's older than Steve.

Russell:
Angelo, Fay, Sammy, Stevie...Susie, and then Ricky?

Norman:
How many is that?

Eugenia:
Twelve.

Russell:
Okay. And then there was one called Paul, but I don't know if it's true ...

Eugenia:
He was born in the house.

Russell:
They said he died when he was ten or something, but I don't know. Is that true?

Norman:
He died when he was born.

Eugenia:
He got pneumonia or something.

Russell:
But she had two miscarriages, my mom.

Eugenia:
Well, my dad's mother had fifteen children. They were pretty close. All my dad's brothers lived around that neighborhood.

Russell:
The other side of Colfax.

Eugenia:
His mother and two brothers and now his brother and sister are living in their mother's house. And the kids thought they were husband and wife. They were brother and sister. Remember we would sleep on boards. Everything we could get hold of we'd sleep on. Five in one room.

Russell:
It was just two bedrooms, wasn't it?

Eugenia:
Yes, two bedrooms.

Russell:
My dad had to make ... he added on the upstairs. Well, first it was the basement. We didn't have a basement. We had to dig it all out by hand because the house was already built and my dad was in construction. So I remember we had to get the dirt out with buckets.

We had to crawl through a little window - a little crawl space. And I hated to get in there, but I remember digging it out - and the basement was big.

Eugenia:
It was the length of the house.

In what year was that?

Russell:
I was about twelve maybe, so it would be about thirty years ago. After that, there was still not enough room. Nobody wanted to sleep down there because it was a cat haven. We didn't have any windows in the bottom basement there. They were always broken out. So cats would go in there, and they'd live in the crawl space. So we wouldn't sleep down there. Then my dad added on upstairs, and it was a pretty big place upstairs as well.

So it started out as a two-bedroom house?

Eugenia:

Yes, I think it was just two bedrooms.

We used to all pile up. My mom and dad would sleep in one room, and we'd all pile up in one room.

Russell:

We had bunk beds.

Eugenia:

An ironing board - we'd sleep on it.

Russell:

Sleep on the sofa.

How many rooms did you add on the second floor?

Russell:

It was just one big room no partitions or nothing. But it was nice up there.

Eugenia:

Then when they built the upstairs, that's when my son and Rick started the fire. And they didn't want to tell grandpa it was on fire. They were taking up cups of water to put it out, until finally it was getting too bad. They ran out there and told their grandpa.

What year was the fire?

Russell:

I don't know. 1964 maybe?

How old was Kenny?

Eugenia:

Kenny's twenty-eight.

Norman:

No, then.

Eugenia:

Oh, then.

Russell:

He was only about four or five.

Eugenia:

So he and Rick are about the same age. Rick's maybe two years older than Kenny.

Were they just playing with matches or something?

Eugenia:

I don't know what they had up there.

Russell:

I'm not going to tell. Your mom (Tina's mom) said I could stay at your house and then she made me pay utilities. I was only fifteen, I think. Had to get a job. She (Tina) lived around the corner.

Was Tina your childhood sweetheart?

Russell:

Yes, I guess. I'm trying to think of the older stuff. Oh, I remember. I don't know if I should say it, but there were so many of us, my dad could only afford to buy us one pair of shoes. He used to take us to this place called Hills Brothers where you'd get two pairs for $5.00. Something like that. It was kind of far, up on South Broadway. I was playing baseball that year and I wanted some cleats real bad. It was either a choice of cleats or shoes. So I took the cleats. I had to go to school with cleats. I remember walking down the hall (klomp, klomp, klomp). Everybody knew I was coming. But I wanted them real bad, and he couldn't afford to buy me two pair, so I took the cleats. When I did have a decent pair of shoes, we'd come out of church and have to take them off and save them for next Sunday. Money was tight I guess.

Eugenia:

He locked them up.

Russell:

He was tight.

Who were your friends?

Russell:

People in the neighborhood, mostly. I don't think I had any friends that lived outside of the neighborhood or maybe a few from school. My best friends were in the neighborhood. We always stayed in the neighborhood most of the time, because we felt safe. We'd stay out till one, two o'clock in the morning on the weekends, and it was safe. You didn't have to worry about anything. Now, it's totally different.

Eugenia:

You'd just stay out in the front yard or out in the street there, but it was always close to home.

What kind of games did kids play when you were a kid?

Russell:

Marbles. That's why we didn't have any grass.

Eugenia:

That's all we played, marbles. Then, when we got older, Celia Gomez used to have all the parties. Eighth Street would be on one side and Ninth Street would be on one side. We'd be separated. They'd be in one room, and we'd be in another room.

Norman:

We played all the children's games - red light, green light. We didn't have drugs.

Russell:

We had to make up our own games, hide-and-seek and we played marbles. It's called poison or something. About every four feet you'd dig holes. Just like pool. That's what it was. Kind of like pool. You know how a pool table is.

Eugenia:

For Easter we'd always go to the park and play leapfrog. That was our excitement. Or my dad would take us down Larimer and buy us all kinds of little goodies. We'd wait for payday to come.

Russell:

We'd go to Mother Cabrini Shrine.

Eugenia:

But it was mostly at the park when his mother was living.

Russell:

I remember there used to be bats living in the neighborhood.

Eugenia:

We'd get mad at them, throw rocks at them.

Russell:

They used to live in the trees and we'd throw rocks up in the air. Of course, they'd come after the rocks.

Eugenia:

We always had something to do on Ninth Street.

Russell:

Bats in the neighborhood was kind of strange.

Eugenia:

There was a lot of them, too.

Eugenia:

But we were always stuck on Ninth Street.

Russell:

When I was growing up, we didn't have a recreation center until I was about maybe thirteen or fourteen. It was on Lawrence Street there, and we just kind of hung around before that. We always found something to do, though, whether it be jumping in those big containers that had pickles - well actually, they were cucumbers.

We'd go to the bread factory and they'd give us free bread. Or we'd go to the cookie place and they'd give us free cookies.

Eugenia:

The potato chip factory.

Russell:

Yes, potato chips. I mean, there was everything there. There was even a Duffy's pop nearby - a Squirt, and there was a canteen place. They had their warehouse there.

Eugenia:

And we used to go to Tivoli's Easter dance. It was neat. We just stood around that area (Auraria) except when we'd go on Easter to the parks.

What parks did you usually go to?

Russell:

Washington Park and Turtle Park.

Turtle Park was Sloan's Lake, and Rocky Mountain Park.

Eugenia:
The one where Ray Miller lived.

Russell:
That's Washington Park.

Eugenia:
Yeah, Washington Park. That's where we used to go all the time.

Sloan's Lake was Turtle Park. That's what my grandma used to call it. "Let's go to Turtle Park, Okay?"

Russell:
We had a park in our neighborhood, well kind of. It was up on the other side of Colfax. It was called Lincoln Park and they changed the name now to La Alma Park. We used to go there a lot, too.

Were there public schools in the neighborhood or just the two Catholic schools?

Russell:
Just the two Catholic schools.

Norman:
What about Greenlee? When did it come in?

Russell:
Well, that was on the other side of Colfax, but to me, that wasn't considered the neighborhood. It was a little ways out. We had to go to public school after the eighth grade, like West High School. I went to Greenlee in the fifth grade. Just that one year. I don't know why. I never did ask my dad. I should ask my dad. But I enjoyed the Catholic schools. I remember Mayor Mac was trying to get people to move out. I think he was offering the renters $1500. Back then, that was big money, I guess.

Eugenia:
Especially to the renters. What about the owners?

Russell:
I don't know. My dad ... did he owe any money on it?

Norman:
He paid $4,000 for it (the house).

Eugenia:
He bought it from his brother so I'm sure he didn't pay that much.

Russell:
They gave him a brand-new house ... well, not a brand-new house.

They moved him?

Yes, they moved him and gave him this other house. It was about ten years old. It was a nice house. A brick home where they live now, but they didn't want to leave.

What year did they move out of the neighborhood?

Russell:
My mom was one of the last to go in the neighborhood because she didn't want to leave. I mean, everybody was comfortable with that neighborhood, and nobody wanted to leave. The bad part was that a lot of people were renters. So they were offering the renters $1500 to move out. And of course, they took it. They took their money and left.

The ones that owned the rentals couldn't rent them to anybody because they knew that a campus was coming. So they decided just to sell. They were losing money anyway. Then the people that lived there that did own the houses, like my mom and the others wouldn't budge. They wanted to stay. And I guess they would come back with counter offers. I can remember somebody coming by and telling my mom that if they didn't move out, they were going to end up getting nothing, or a lower price.

Eugenia:
They would wind up getting nothing if they didn't move out at that time because they were already at the deadline. I think it was probably 1970.

Norman:
Your favorite mayor, Bill McNichols.

Russell:
Yes.

Norman:
He used to get them all to Lakeside to get their votes.

Russell:

I know. Didn't he do some kind of a big thing at the arena there? I remember going there as a kid and getting a stocking full of candy at Christmas. He probably knew that a campus was coming in. He was probably trying to butter up everybody because I remember going down there. He used to have something big every year at Christmas time. It was called the arena, the Denver arena, but now it's the auditorium. Right across from the police building on Thirteenth Street.

Any other memories?

Russell:

I remember the pop trucks back then didn't have sides like they do now. It was easy to get pop. They used to park right in front of our house because of the restaurant. We weren't bad kids. We were just normal kids, deprived of the things that we though we should have.

Tina:

They put it there just so you could get some. They never chased you or nothing.

Russell:

Well, until they started putting two drivers...but it was kind of fun. I don't know. I guess it was stealing, but back then it didn't seem wrong.

Norman:

I used to drive by on my bicycle and grab a case.

Russell:

Yes. It's almost like they figured out, "Well, we'd better take some extras just in case these kids take some." I don't know what they thought of us, but they knew we were taking some. I'm sure they kept track of the inventory, but they never told us anything.

Any particular neighborhood conflicts? Did most of the families get along okay?

Russell:

There was a strange family that lived in the neighborhood. They were people that we never did see. I mean, it was weird, and we had it in our minds that a half-man and half-lady lived there. It was two doors from the corner of Curtis, and there was a grocery store there and the Rodriguez house and then this other house. Do you remember them?

Eugenia:

I don't remember their names?

Russell:

I was afraid to go by their house.

Eugenia:

They were always by themselves. They wouldn't associate with anybody.

Russell:

Yes, they were like separate. I think they were probably Anglo people because we'd never see them. I know they lived there. I don't know who, but somebody lived there, and the kids around the neighborhood swore they saw a half-man and half-lady.

Eugenia:

They had a lot of stories from that one house, though.

Russell:

What about that house next door, that old man with the hats?

Norman:

The big house right next door to yours. The old guy who lived in there - he made hats, I think.

Russell:

That was - Kittredge was his name. He was an Anglo person. I think he bought this small apartment house next to ours. I think it still stands. It was really fixed up nice. I don't know if it's still there. I can't remember, but it seemed real big when I was a kid.

Eugenia:

You mean, next to the Torres house?

Russell:

No. The other way.

Eugenia:

South of your house?

Russell

Yes, that apartment complex. We used to have a lot of parties in there. 1050 Ninth, I think. Something like that. 1051?

We used to jump from roof to roof, but we used to have parties in there. He hired us to do work for him,

minor construction work - like painting or cleaning, stuff like that. He didn't live there, but he owned it. He'd rent it out to people and I remember having parties upstairs on that balcony. It was kind of like old stuff. If I'd have kept it, it would be worth some money now. You never think of it when you're young.

There was a house in back of us. It wasn't a house. It was like a garage or something. There was a modern fixture company there, too, right across the alley. They made church pews and real fine furniture.

Next to that was a garage or something. It was vacant and bums used to go in there and sleep it off. We were always scared to run through the alley because we were afraid of these drunks, but they never bothered us. There was St. Rose Residence - I guess it was a retirement home for older people. Again, it catered to the richer people. They wouldn't let us in the front gate.

Where was that located?

Russell:

On Champa, about Tenth and Champa. They used to have a soup line where the bums would get free meals there - free sandwiches.

St. Rose Residence was a retirement home?

Russell:

I think it was a retirement home. I don't know if it was for nuns or what. There were always nuns walking around with their black uniforms. The people who worked there never lived in the neighborhood. What else was down there? There was a meat packing place across the alley where my mom worked. She worked there for many years.

Eugenia:

And the clinic that used to be on Eighth. That's where I used to go when I had my son. Remember?

Eugenia:

It used to be right on the corner (Eighth and Curtis). That's where I went through my pregnancy. I was living with my parents.

Norman (to interviewer):

I want you to make a note. My son's in Saudi Arabia.

Eugenia:

He's still out there doing construction. He's covering up little holes or something. He said he was coming back this week.

Russell:

I remember some women going in there (St. Rose Residence).

Eugenia:

I think it was just for women. It was just for girls who didn't have a place to live.

Russell:

I never saw any young girls.

Eugenia:

I had a girlfriend who used to sneak me in there.

Norman:

What did you do in there?

Eugenia:

Sit. Talk.

Norman:

With the old lady?

Eugenia:

No, she wasn't old.

Was it like a halfway house?

Russell:

More exclusive than that. I mean, it was nice.

Norman:

Do you know why she was in there? Your girlfriend?

Eugenia:

I don't remember. I don't know if she was going to be a nun.

Russell:

It was a well-kept place, clean.

Eugenia:

Yes, it was clean for sure.

Russell:
They had a wrought iron fence. You couldn't get through there.

Norman:
I don't know why they'd have you in there, Dynamite.

Eugenia:
Because my girlfriend used to sneak me in.

Russell:
I don't know what that St. Rose Residence is. I don't know why I even bothered.

Norman:
You were talking about how they used to give sandwiches.

Russell:
Oh, yeah.

Eugenia:
St. Elizabeth's used to give sandwiches too. There used to be a soup line. Still is.

Like our church that we go to. They even give you groceries. And if you don't have gas money, they'd give you gas money too.

Norman:
It's coming out of your pocket.

Eugenia:
That's why they asked us to give more to the church, about 10% of your earnings. I don't give 10%, but I give about $20 a week now. But they do a lot. If you need help, they'll help you. A lot of people don't know what that money goes to. It goes to the people who need it.

Was that clinic at Eighth and Curtis the main health facility?

Eugenia:
Yes, that was the only one they had.

Russell:
I remember going there for shots and stuff. You know, if we got sick at school, they'd send us down there. The Ave Maria Clinic, I believe that's what it was called. I remember singing, "Ave Maria."

Norman:
On your way to the clinic?

Eugenia:
They used to have the crowning of the Blessed Mother. Oh, that was sad. It was nice though.

Eugenia:
They used to crown the Blessed Mother in the backyard. Remember?

Russell:
Yeah, they had a statue of the Virgin Mary there.

At the clinic?

Eugenia:
No, at the Church - St. Cajetan's.

Russell:
They had one there too, inside, but it was in the nuns' yard too.

Russell:
I forget what day we'd go - what holiday it was? We'd have to go to a meal and pray. I guess back then everybody was pretty religious - strong Catholics back then. I mean, if you didn't go to church, you were in trouble.

Eugenia:
My parents would go. We had to go. If you don't go to church, you won't get your dime to go to the movies.

Was there a movie house in the neighborhood?

Russell:
Downtown, which was not far away.

Eugenia:
There's all kinds of them now.

Russell:
The Rialto. The Victory.

Norman:
I used to hang out there, too. Ten cents to get a candy bar.

Russell

And they turned X-rated. A lot of the kids from the neighborhood, when I was growing up anyway, were associated with the church in some way. Like me, I was an altar boy, and a lot of my friends were altar boys. You had to learn a lot, of course. The Mass was said in Latin. So we had to learn Latin. Of course I don't remember it now, but we had to say our prayers in Latin back then.

Does anyone in the neighborhood practice ... what do they call it? ... cuanderismo?... using herbs and stuff for medicine?

Eugenia:

When we had a sore throat, we used to put tomatoes on the bottom of our feet.

Eugenia:

When we had headaches, we used to put potatoes and vinegar on our heads. It used to work.

Russell:

Yes, we couldn't afford to go to the doctor so we had to look like salads.

Eugenia:

That was my mother's idea of putting tomatoes on the bottom of our feet for our sore throat.

Russell:

Don't tell her where we put the cucumbers. That was another story.

We had chokecherry trees and apple trees and then that mint leaf - it grew wild everywhere in the yard. We used to make tea out of it, right?

Eugenia:

We used to drink it like tea. It was good. It was good for stomach-aches. Still is.

Russell:

What other remedies did mama have?

Eugenia:

I don't know. She used to put some kind of flour or something on her shoes. Every Easter, remember? She was all wrapped up in white.

Russell:

Sammy - I don't know what happened to him. He had an ear infection or something. His ear always leaked or something. My mom put - I can see the picture now - like band-aids over his head, on his ears, around his chin. It looked like he'd been through a war or something.

Eugenia:

I remember they put horse medicine on me. The Torres kids were playing with the lawnmower, and I was sitting out there. They went brrrrrrrrrrrrr, and a big old chunk of me came off, so they put some horse medicine on me. It worked. It closed up.

Yep. When we'd get real bad sore throats, they used to rush us to Denver General to get a shot. I had a sister who used to get convulsions. She doesn't anymore. What was that kid's name across the street? They used to always have the ambulance over there. He was another one that used to get them. Russell got it in the backyard. He was playing and all of a sudden he fell down. He was foaming from the mouth. Maybe it was something in the water. I don't know. We rushed him to the doctor. There was a little girl who used to live next door to us. She used to eat caterpillars. And then we would tell her mom, "She's eating those caterpillars." "Oh" she would say, "The doctor says they're good for her."

There was one guy who lived there who used to always break in our house. But that's when my dad used to leave the door unlocked. We'd get out of work and he'd be there. I turned on the light and there he was with a knife. Agh! There goes the light and he went out the door and I was screaming. My dad would tell us, "You can't go out. You gotta bring your friends to the house." So, we'd bring our friends to the house. He used to get mad at that too. "I don't want them here anymore." So, we'd go over their house, and he wouldn't want us to go over there, either.

Russell:

I remember our first color TV. It had a color screen tint. My dad sat in front of the TV. It sold for I don't how much.

Eugenia:

Before we got that TV, we used to go on Larimer and watch the TV's out there - you know, in the store fronts? We'd sit there and watch our movies. We used to park right in front of the thing so we could watch it.

Anything else you can think of?

Russell:

Not really. I wish my mom and dad were here. They'd have a lot of input.

You know, when I was a kid, I can remember looking in a closet, and there'd be grenades and stuff like that. Maybe when my dad got out of the war or something. Remember when he used to go to Fitzsimons?

Eugenia:

Mom used to work, and she'd have these little plastic black cups. She used to bring some of them home.

Russell:

No, these were grenades. But they were already dead, and old pictures that I remember looking at - my dad would stand by a Japanese, you know - he'd be standing right by a dead one or something. I don't know, just old pictures.

Eugenia:

And my mom, she worked.

Russell:

She used to make the bombs, right?

Eugenia:

Yes. And these little black cups. I remember her bringing those little black cups home.

Russell:

We all started working when we were really young, twelve or thirteen, maybe even younger. Like Gilbert, my brother, Gilbert. As soon as he got out of school, he was working at Broncucia's vegetable packing or something. He used to help pay for some of the food.

Do you keep in touch with many of the people from the old neighborhood?

Russell:

No. They kind of separated once they left the neighborhood. They had a reunion a couple of years ago on the south side of Ninth Street there. But I didn't go because I had to work. I really wanted to.

Eugenia:

I went, and it was really nice. I'm waiting for another one. You meet all the old people over there. There were a lot of people there. Well, maybe they'll be inspired by all this research that we're doing to put together another reunion.

Russell:

I remember they were telling my mom and dad, "If you move out and we build this campus, all your kids are going to be able to go to college here." They couldn't afford it (college). There was no way. It seemed like everybody else was out of state and was moving in so they could go to college there.

Eugenia:

They should have something, though. My son joined the service, but my daughter wanted to go to college. She knew we couldn't afford it so she didn't go. Now, my son wants to go because he plays basketball.

Russell:

You'd think they would do something for the families.

Eugenia:

Yes, they should.

Russell:

It's history now. They're all forgotten.

Interview By Sara Milmoe

Don Gallegos

Don Gallegos - 943 1/2 Tenth Street

Where did you live at Auraria?

I lived at 943 1/2 Tenth Street. It was a two story brick house. There were two rooms downstairs, two rooms upstairs plus a porch leading to the upstairs bedrooms and there was an outhouse. We didn't have any hot water - no bath tubs. Our baths were taken in a wash tub that was stuck on top of a chair with the back of it cut off. My mom would warm hot water on the coal stove and then she'd put a curtain across the room and we'd take our baths.

Was that a family project?

It seemed to be pretty much of a project because mom would have to keep the boys separated from the girls.

I also remember a coal shed out in the back too. We'd keep a little bit of coal if we could afford it - mostly wood. And then there was a hole in the ceiling above the coal stove to warm the upstairs bedrooms.

Do you know when your family arrived in this community?

I'm not sure exactly when mom and dad arrived because I wasn't born yet, but I suppose sometime in the middle 30's.

What were the names of your parents, brothers and sisters?

Dad's name was Felix Gallegos. Mom's was Florence. My sister Madgie (her name is really Magdalena) was the oldest in the family, then my brother Larry and then me. I was thirteen when my youngest sister Debra was born. We were all born at 943 1/2 Tenth Street.

Felix & Florence Gallegos

A festive wedding took place at St.Cajetan's Church on August15, 1934, uniting Felix Gallegos and Florence Torres. Felix will never forget the wedding. "I saved $200 and paid for the wedding gown, the flowers, my suit, and all the food and drinks for the wedding dinner at 934 1/2 Tenth Street. I rented a brand new white Chrysler. How do you like that? And after the wedding at the church, we drove to Greeley just for the heck of it."

The wedding party: from left, Phillip J. Torres and his fiancee Petra Lopez, Morris Lovato and his fiancee Rose Vasquez, Ben Torres (the bride's brother) and his wife Rose Apodaca Torres, Joe Torres (another brother) and his fiancee Agneda Lopez (Petra's sister); in front, the bride and groom, Florence Torres and Felix Gallegos with flower girl Irene Torres (Ben and Rose Torres' daughter)

What are your outstanding memories of the neighborhood?

Well, a couple of my outstanding memories were involved with the house in the wintertime. When it was really cold outside, I remember my mom would light a big fire in the stove in the morning time. She'd go up the wooden stairs to the bedrooms and wrap each one of us individually in a blanket and carry us down the stairs and sit us down in front of the coal stove. Another outstanding memory was when my brother and I were locked in the coalshed by one of the neighbor boys and the shed was set on fire.

What happened - how did you get out?

Mom smelled the smoke and we were screaming and pounding on the door, so she rescued us.

Do you know what brought your family to the area?

According to my folks, it was a promise of a better way of life than in New Mexico and at times it was like a big adventure, but sometimes it was tough.

Larry and Don Gallegos, 1947

Who lived in the area?

Well, different ethnic backgrounds because of the three churches, St. Cajetan's which were Spanish-speaking people, St. Leo's and St. Elizabeth's, German and Anglo people.

What kind of work did your family do?

My dad worked for Ace Box Company. He started there as a truck driver. It was kind of nice because he would bring home the scrap wood, and we would have wood for the winter time.

And your mother?

She was really active at the school (St. Cajetan's) and St. Cajetan's Church and PTA and a terrific homemaker.

Would you say that most of the women stayed home in those days?

It seemed like. I wouldn't say they stayed home. There were quite a lot of women like my mother.

Did your family rent or buy their home?

We rented the house, and that brings up another memory. The amount of rent that we were paying there was, at the time, I think about seven dollars a month and then later on after years passed, I think it was something like twenty-eight dollars a month. Compared to the rents today, it's unbelievable.

What special holidays were observed in your neighborhood?

The holidays that I remember mostly would be involved with the churches and the church bazaars. Those are really fond memories. I wish I could still live in those times.

Can you tell us something about the bazaars?

It was held there in the school yard at St. Cajetan's School, and all the different booths were set up. They'd have something for the kids and something for the adults too - gambling, fish booths, and they had rides.You'd see a mixture of people. Pretty big crowds went to those bazaars.

What did you do for recreation?

Recreation in the winter time was kind of rotten. There weren't too many winter sports that you could do. At a certain age I could remember, we'd have

snowball fights - do little things like throw snowballs at buses. Sometimes we'd get caught.

Summertime wasn't too bad; we'd do things like play softball, go to the zoo.

What illnesses did people have?

Mostly, I can remember, just colds and sore throats. I remember one girl in school had tuberculosis.

What political activies were going on in the community?

I can vaguely remember my mother in politics, but Phillip Torres was pretty active - making sure there were recreational facilities for the children.

St. Cajetan's School

What kind of recreational activities?

There was a community hall - they'd have dance: there for adults. Around Christmas time they would have Santa Claus come down there.

Then they had sports such as boxing and basketball.

Were there any racial or ethnic problems in the neighborhood?

Yes there were - in our neighborhood - our immediate neighborhood anyway. I suppose it probably happened with other families there. Our family - we were a Spanish-surnamed Mexican family, and we lived in this one particular block and were surrounded by German people. Our friends or some of the other Mexican people took offense to our choice of friends.

What was it like to be a child in this community?

Sometimes it was adventurous and sometimes it was down right scary because of street gangs. If we had any money, we would hide it in our socks so they wouldn't rob us. Also, we'd be afraid of dogs.

Who were your friends?

We had a lot of friends. Friends in school, friends around the home and neighborhood.

Family and friends: Al Nieto, Tony Lucero, Don Gallegos, Jack Smith, Larry Gallegos, Leo Torres, Magdalena Gallegos, Tom Torres, 1948

What games did you play?

Monopoly at home, card games like war and fish. It seemed like sports were pretty dominant.

Were there any neighborhood conflicts?

I really don't remember any adult conflicts going on. I think the adults were not aware of the seriousness of the problems of the children.

What was the role of the church in the community?

I think the church did a lot to help. The church set up activities. I was an altar boy which kept me busy. We were taught as Catholics that you needed to go to church. It was a sin if you didn't go to church.

Some people would teach us the fear of God, some would teach us the love of God, so there were mixed reasons for going to church.

What businesses were in the area?

The business I remember was the pickle factory. We would stop at the door - they'd be sorting pickles by different sizes and pick out the larger ones and hand them to us at the door.

Down half a block from there was a tamale factory and a potato chip factory. We'd make the rounds there. Also, we'd get free potato chips. There was an ice cream factory and the Tivoli.

When did you move from Auraria?

I believe it was 1953. We moved to North Denver.

What was the impact on your family?

We weren't relocated because of the college. My dad finally purchased a home in North Denver after years and years of saving - so it was a nice move for us. It was an upgrade, so to speak.

How did your parents feel about moving?

My mother felt mixed emotions - but they figured it was better for us children.

Felix Gallegos in front of St. Cajetan's Church. Perkins Pickle Co. in background

Interview by Magdalena Gallegos

Florence Gallegos and Magdalena Gallegos First Holy Communion, 1941

Betty Smith, Magdalena and Chuck Smith, 1945

Tony Garcia
(son of Molly Chavez)

Anthony J. Garcia, 1960s

Tony, can you tell me a little about yourself? What do you do now?

I am the Artistic Director for El Centro Su Teatro. I have been with Su Teatro for nineteen years. The theater company began out of the University of Colorado at Denver in 1971. It grew out of a Theater 101 class. I began as an actor and two years later directed my first piece.

Anthony J. Garcia, 1991

Recently you produced a play that you wrote and directed called El Corrido del Barrio about the Auraria neighborhood before it became Auraria Higher Education Center.

El Corridor del Barrio is the story of the Ninth Street area near St. Cajetan's. I was born there and went to St. Cajetan's Elementary School and Cathedral High School which was at Nineteenth and Logan.

What do you remember most about the neighborhood?

I remember a real sense of community. Neighbors watched out for each other very much. There was a lot of interaction and activity . Weddings and funerals and births were all celebrated as a community. I remember the outside world as always being threatening to the community. The community was a safe harbor and the outside world harbored racism and economic oppression and was not safe for man or beast.

What holidays do you remember celebrating?

I was baptized at St. Cajetan's Church and was an altar boy for awhile. The church was the center of activity in the neighborhood. The school was heavily Chicano and the nuns were not, which was a problem. But I remember there was one Anglo student and one who was half Black and half Chicano. Everybody else was Chicano - so integration hadn't come to our school. Consequently, the activities always had that flavor of Mexico. I remember that the masses were held in Spanish and we sang Spanish songs. I remember wearing a Mariachi outfit for Cinco de Mayo. For Christmas they would bring in theater groups to perform the shepherd's play. During weddings, they

would block off all the streets. Everyone in the neighborhood knew what was going on. Everyone would participate.

Sounds like there was a definite "grapevine" in the neighborhood.

For a very small neighborhood we had three churches, a synagogue, and three bars where all the people could congregate. In the mornings it was in the churches - in the afternoons it was in the bars.

Did you go to the Denver Bears games?

Yes, and I haven't forgiven them since they changed the name. The baseball games were great and it was one of the few things my father took me to. As a kid, we would walk the viaduct to the stadium. If you went towards the end of the first game on a doubleheader on Sunday, they would let you in. We used to walk down towards Thirteenth Avenue by the Colorado Ice Company. When I was a kid we didn't have refrigerators. We had ice boxes. We went to the Colorado Ice Company where they would load up the trucks. A lot of ice would fall and my father and I would pull my little red wagon. We would load up the wagon with ice, cover it up and use it in our ice box. My mother tells me that when she was younger and lived here (Auraria) they would go by the railroad tracks and pick up leftover coal to heat the houses. We had our own system of working out things.

What games did you play as a kid in school?

We would block off Ninth Street near the Mayan Restaurant. We had a supply of street barricades and would set them up until the cops came by and kicked us out. But we would block off the street and play football in the middle of the street pretty regularly. At St. Elizabeth's we had a great basketball court, the best in the neighborhood and we would spend hours upon hours playing there. If we wanted a field, we would go to Lincoln Park (La Alma now). There was also a vacant lot on Tenth and Champa where we would play baseball.

Do you remember walking to any of the teen dances?

There was a radio station called KSCM. It was right on Colfax on the other side. It was a little room behind the Bostich Staple Company with a little window that looked out. The DJ was there all day and played 50's and 60's rock-n-roll. We used to hang out and harass the poor DJ's.

So everybody would dance in the streets?

Well, later on they had the KIMN dances at the Auditorium arena for a dollar. I remember going and hearing Rick and DeeDee, the Beach Boys, and Chuck Berry, Bo Diddle, and the Drifters. Do you remember the Coasters? You know, "Yackety Yack!" They got into a wreck on the Colfax bridge and brought their bus back and parked it behind Sammy K's which was right behind my house. They parked the bus there and all these Black guys came out in these fancy suits. Weird memories. Boy, that was a long time ago!

When do you remember the community becoming more integrated?

It was only later when I grew up that we started mixing more. When I was little it was a totally segregated community. My whole world was Chicano.

So you didn't get much influence from the outside world?

We got our first television set when I was eight years old. There was always a battle between the Mexican station and the rock-n-roll station at my house. But I was lucky that I read. We always had newspapers to read. Life seemed to be so simple then.

Interview by Lorie Ganni

Juanita Lopez

Juanita Lopez was born September 27, 1949 in Denver, Colorado.

Her parents bought a house at 1009 Ninth Street in 1950.

Juanita's father (Ernie Lopez) was born in Socorro, New Mexico, and her mother was born in Santa Rosa, New Mexico

Ernest Jr. and Juanita Lopez as children on Ninth Street

Why did they move to Auraria?

My father's brother lived in the Westside.

Lopez family home, 1009 Ninth Street

What do you remember about the house?

It was an old type duplex, three bedrooms, fireplace, basement, lots of nice wood, nice chandelier.

What are your outstanding memories of the neighborhood?

It was a close-knit type neighborhood. People cared about each other. Children were watched over by a number of adults caring for each other's kids.

Ernest Jr. and Juanita Lopez

What was it like to live there?

It was an interesting neighborhood. Three Catholic Churches: St Leo's, St Cajetan's, St Elizabeth's. It was a self contained neighborhood. You had a Credit Union, Pickle Factory, Jewish-owned market, another market and drugstore. At one time there was a restaurant.

There was a lot of help for transient people. St. Elizabeth's served sandwiches at 11:00 am. They'd come over to St. Leo's about noon. Kids grew up seeing a lot of people come through there and get assistance.

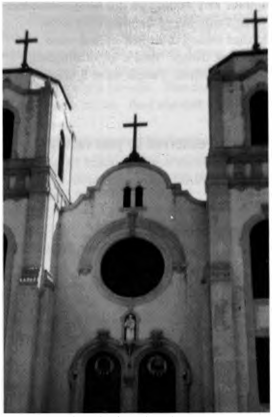
Real healthy interaction about people being involved in the churches, politics, and also a touch of a

common ground between the rich and the poor. There was a Mexican restaurant in the neighborhood, "Casa Mayan". The prices were very high. Most of the people in the neighborhood could not afford to eat there. It was kind of interesting because, on one hand, there were several kids in the neighborhood who had learned how to do the Mexican dance and would go over there to entertain.

Wealthy people would come and fill the restaurant and park their fancy cars. It was like a culture shock. I remember the ice truck that would come and deliver the ice to the Casa Mayan. Kids would gather around and get ice.

We had vendors, and a tamale factory. We were close to Denargo Market. Sometimes some of the kids would go down and pick up some of the smaller vegetables. And there was a fire station real close by.

Fire Station, Ninth and Colfax Avenue



St. Cajetan's Catholic Church in the 1950s

St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church in the 1950s

Do you remember any people in the neighborhood?

There were a number of families that were pretty stable, that owned their homes and were involved in different things. And a lot of mingling between different families. People were related by marriage.

What holidays were observed by your family?

September Sixteenth was important to my family because my parents were married on that day.

What did you do for recreation?

Play cops and robbers, cowboys and indians, war games.

There was a recreation center that closed down when I was growing up. Lincoln Park, the swimming pool, playing kickball. In winter we'd make a patch of ice in the alley so we could sled in the alley. Climb poles.

What problems did people have?

Common things like alcohol, drugs - probably kids getting into glue.

Do you remember any people with special talents in the neighborhood?

Mr. Abeyta, who was a carpenter. He made his daughter a doll house. Carved different things for the kids. Mr. Phil Torres was real involved in political things.

Who were your friends?

The Torres children, the DeLeons, Cathy Abeyta.

How did the people get along with each other?

Fairly well, no major feuds. There was an acceptance of each other.

When did you move?

My family moved out around 1963 and moved back in 1969 in the same house and stayed until the end.

Why did you move out?

My brother and I were getting older and the neighborhood start having trouble with this drug thing. My parents were starting to worry.

What businesses were in the area?

My father was a barber (Ernie's Barber Shop).

We had different shops in the neighborhood, a pickle factory, car wash, drug store, K&M Grocery Store, some kind of auto store, TV shop, local bars, Sam's store.

Was there ever any conflict between the people and the businesses in the area?

Nothing major. Parking sometimes.

How did people get along with each other as a whole in the neighborhood?

They got along well. There were children in every house, so at some point they hung out together.

What about the schools?

I went to St. Elizabeth's Grade School, St. Joseph's High School, then to University of Northern Colorado and obtained a BA in Sociology/Psychology.

There was discipline, and values taught in the schools. I spent a lot of time there, so I felt like I was practically raised by the nuns and priests. A lot of us were baptized by the same priest, Father Ordinas.

There was a strong link between the church and the people.

Ernie's Barber Shop, 1036 Champa, 1948

Ernie Lopez in his barber shop. Picture taken by Tom Ord on June 11, 1959, with his new camera

Car Wash, Colfax Avenue between Kalamath and Lipan Streets

Do you remember any of your teachers?

I'm still somewhat involved with the Franciscan Sisters at St. Eizabeth's. Sister Mary Mark was my seventh grade teacher. Sister Xavier was the principal of the school, a healthy role model for me. She was a very gentle person. She did away with an old strap used to hit us. And she put curtains in the classrooms.

I remember at school they'd ring a noon bell and we would have to stop and be quiet, not move, hold it for a minute or two then they'd ring another bell and you knew it was time to line up - these were separate lines for the boys and girls according to your grades. Another bell - we'd file out of the lot and go back to the classrooms.

Did your family rent or own your home?

We owned our home, my father also owned a barber shop (Ernie's Barber Shop).

What kind of work, besides your dad's barber shop, did your family do? Did your mom work?

Yes - First Day Care Center - was in the Westside. She was a sewing machine operator downtown and a receptionist and secretary at Westside Health Center with the mentally ill. And she was at Servicios de la Raza - she was a secretary over there.

Are your parents still alive?

Mother passed away July 15, 1979; father, June 12, 1990. My brother passed six weeks prior to my dad on April 29,1990. There were just the four of us.

Interview by Reggie Lopez

Peggy Olona

What was your address?

I lived at 906 Curtis, and I lived at 1059 Ninth Street, and we lived at 1242 Tenth Street. We lived at 1002 Champa, and they were all down here, but the last two places we lived were 906 Curtis and 1059 Ninth Street.

Where were you born?

1242 Tenth Street in 1947. It was right across the street from the Tivoli.

When did you and/or your parents move to Auraria?

We've pretty much always lived here. I think we moved when I was seven. For about two years and then came back. That's when we lived at 906 Curtis. I think we lived there for about seven years, then we moved to 1059 Ninth Street and lived there for about two years. Around 1963 we moved.

Do you know why they moved to Auraria?

We were born here. We all lived here, my aunts and cousins, uncles all lived down here.

From what I hear it was a pretty tight-knit, large family?

Oh, yes. My mother's two sisters lived here, too.

Do you remember particulars about the houses that you lived in? What they looked like?

Oh, yes, definitely. At 906 Curtis, now 900, the Mercantile. The stairs that we had aren't even there - there's a porch right on the side and we used to go all the way upstairs and immediately straight was a long balcony, then facing west on your south side was the kitchen. It was real big and it had a big pantry. Next to that was the dining room, and next to that was our living room, that's going all the way around. Next to it was a bedroom, and another bedroom with a great big closet. It was a comical looking closet that went from the living room into that bedroom and next to that was another bedroom with a huge closet that we used for storage and for closet space, and then it went right back to the hall and all the way around. But now I wonder how could a family of seven or eight, with my parents, live there? It just seems so tiny now. When I look at it now, it didn't look like enough room, but then it seemed huge to me.

Then, at 1059 Ninth Street, the stairs went into a great big, long hall. I haven't been in there, so I don't know if it's the same, although the stairs seem like that's the way they go. I've peeked in the bottom part of it, and as big as those rooms were, they're little, but they really seemed big. The rooms were just huge to me. There was an open living room. There were no doors, then the dining room was next to that and was real big. The kitchen was gigantic. I'm trying to think if there was a bathroom down there by the kitchen. I can't remember, but I think there was, off to the left. Then there was a porch next to the kitchen that had a door and going straight, you'd walk up the back and there were steps. We had a big backyard. That porch looked smaller, but I'm sure it's the same size. We had a lot of water pipes and stuff like that. As kids, we used to climb on the railing on the outside of our windows and play. As soon as you walked up the steps, there was a bedroom. Next to that was another bedroom, next to that was another bedroom and then there was a little bedroom off to the side. As you turned there was a great big bathroom. It was real long and there was a lot of space. There was a closet next to that, a big walk-in closet.

I'm trying to remember the other house, I really don't remember the one I was born in. It had gigantic rooms, and there were two families living in it. What was it, 1242 Tenth Street? There was a great big kitchen.

There were two families living in that house?

Yes. One lived upstairs and we lived downstairs.

Do you remember their names?

My aunt lived upstairs. Her name was...let me see, who lived up there for sure, because I know we lived up there for a little while. Helen Pacheco. I'm pretty sure they lived upstairs. I don't know how long ago.

What memories do you have of the area?

There are so many things, stories. I could probably go on forever. They used to have trucks that they used to squirt water off of both sides to clean the streets. We used to run alongside of them for as many blocks as we could. Then a little bit later on, the guys started hooking the trucks and they tried to get us on. None of us ever hurt ourselves, but I remember it was pretty crazy. There was a bakery down from the Tivoli they used to give bread away to school kids. They would go through the alley saying, "There are your loaves." But that wasn't good enough for us, we'd go around the sides and take a whole crate of bread. The people knew, they would watch us and they would let us take them. We would take them and sell them to families because some of the families would have eight kids, maybe ten kids. We'd sell them to them for ten cents. You could buy a lot for ten cents and if you sold the whole box you had eighty cents to a dollar.

We'd all go fishing with one of the families and we'd come home and we'd have fish fries. We would bring our sleeping bags and sleep outside. If we could sleep over two times, like on a weekend, we would. Nobody would ever bother you. We knew everybody. If there was a stranger in the neighborhood, you would know it because we all knew each other.

Let me see, what else can I tell you. A lot of things happened. When they were building a bridge, we used to play on the bridge. The pickle factory was across the street. We used to take pickles out of the barrels because they were right there. Oh, yes, there was Carlson-Frink over here. They used to have ice cream. The girls wouldn't but the guys would get inside the bins and take out milk and who knows what else. That was pretty fun.

There was a bakery but I don't think anybody ever went to the bakery. They had a cookie place across the street from the bread place.

Oh, something just terrible happened. It was a place that sold automotive parts, they had paint and what have you. I can't remember exactly who did it, but we stole a couple of cans of paint. There must have been several cans of paint because there were about six of us kids who were together, me included. We got the cans of paint and just sprayed our names. We sprayed our names, so-and-so loved so-and-so, this and that on garages, on business buildings. It was just awful. The next day, sure enough, there were the cops and we had to get some kind of turpentine or something that would take care of it. We did our best to clean it off, but it was marked forever. It had to be painted over. It worked out okay. Oh, we used to do some awful things. There was a place where people would go and eat. We would be mean and throw dirt over there. I don't know why we did that. Kids are just mean. We just threw dirt over the fence while people were eating. They were eating on the patio and we'd yell through the cracks. We were kids.

What holidays were observed by your family?

The regular ones Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, Catholic things, Catholic observances. Nothing in particular.

Anything special that you remember about the holidays?

We would often get all new clothes and stuff was pretty good - like for Easter because in the beginning there was just my mother and six of us kids and we got new clothes all the time, for each holiday. She must have been a good budgeter. That was really neat about my mom. We all got together with each other's families, like for Christmas. I told you I had two aunts that lived in the neighborhood, one at 809 Champa and then one on the corner; I can't remember her address. The whole family would go to one place and when we got older, we would all get together at our house.

Who were your family and extended family members?

Bea Martinez and her husband's name is Manuel. They lived at 809 Champa. My other aunt was named Helen Pacheco and her husband was named Pat and my mother, Josephine Olona.

Who's the oldest of the kids?

My brother Frankie, he died. Then my sister Ruby, my brother Sam, me, Jim, Nancy, and Renee. I was born July 4, 1947, and my brother Sam, was born in 1945, he's a year and a half older than me. Ruby was right before that, and Frank was right before that. We were all one year after the other.

What did you do for recreation?

We played a lot of Monopoly. We used to play jail break on the corner. Everybody would say, "We're going to play jail break tonight," and everybody would do their chores and all meet on the corner where the Mercantile is. We used to call it Eddie's; we would choose sides, and go and hide. We broke up into two groups, one would go hide and the other would go find them. We could hide anywhere. We would hide in ash pits, doorways, under cars, on top of roofs. And this was at night. It was so safe then that you could be in the alleys and nobody would ever bother you. We used to sing. We all had our little groups and we'd get together and sit on porches and sing songs, like "Do Wa," and "Sh-Bop, Sh-Bop." Then we had a girl in the neighborhood who used to play the piano. Her name was Bessie Rodriguez. We weren't all always over there, but I was a pretty close friend of hers.

We would tell stories, ghost stories because sometimes we couldn't come off our porch. My mother would say, "You can go downstairs and sit on the porch," and the kids from the neighborhood would come and sit with us. If their parents told them that they couldn't go out of the yard, then we'd sit on their porch and eat lemons and crackers. They lived across Ninth in the yellow houses at the end of the block. It's directly across from the Mercantile. In fact, that's now the CCD president's office. That's where we used to have most of our parties. Boy-girl parties.

Do you remember any people in particular who had special talents, like musicians or painters? Besides the one girl?

Elizabeth Rodriquez was a tap dancer. She played the castanets really well. They called her Bessie. It was fun when it was fun, but then it was time to work. We used to all have to be in bed by nine o'clock.

Kathy and Sandra were your primary friends?

And Bessie. Laurie Espinoza, she lived across the alley from Bostich.

Where was that?

Across from 809 Champa. I guess they did staples and stuff like that. Then there was an alley going east and theirs was the first house. Suzy Pacheco (my cousin) lived around the corner from them. There was somebody in the neighborhood called Patsy. I can't think of her right now. And you didn't hang out with the girls. You hung out with the boys and played cars and trucks. You played marbles. We used to play jacks. The only thing I think we ever really rushed home for or did as far as television goes was watch American Bandstand. It was right after school. I think there was a Parcheesi game in the neighborhood. I think Leo and Bessie had it. Just about everybody had a Monopoly game. And we played tetherball.

I think kids now don't even know what that is.

It was way more fun to do those things that we did than to have those Nintendo games that they have now. I don't know. I think it's kind of a waste.

Did most people get along with each other?

Yes, I think everybody had their little scraps but it was mostly the kids. And then it's like an overnight thing, like kids, you're fighting and then half an hour later you've made up. I think for the most part it was very congenial. We pretty much all got along. I can think of a few scraps that we had here and there, but you're going to have that.

When did you move out of the neighborhood?

I think we moved out in 1963.

You just spread out from there?

We moved to the projects, the ones on the other side of Lincoln. We moved to the far end. We lived there for maybe a year, and we moved to Fifth and Washington and never came back this way again. My mother moved out south. Everybody lives in Montbello and way out in Aurora. I live on the Northside now.

Interview by Sara Milmoe

Gloria Rodriguez

Where were you born?

I was born at 1121 Lawrence Street.

When did you or your parents move to Auraria?

My mother lived there when she was a little girl. She was born on Twelfth and Curtis. My father was born in Las Vegas, New Mexico and he came here when he was five years old. He lived on Fourteenth and Osage in the beginning.

Gloria's father in front of St. Cajetan's Church, 1929

Do you know what drew them to that area? Why they moved to Auraria?

I think the fact that it was a new little community, that it was a Chicano community coming together right there. And my grandfather was interested in the area because he wanted to get involved in St. Cajetan's Church. My grandfather helped to build the church.

What are some of your clearest memories?

Probably the businesses that were around there and how much all of the neighborhood kids just got together and traveled the whole area. I mean, we knew the area like the back of our hands. I remember that people who worked in those businesses were very nice to us and we'd go to visit our friends or we'd go to the bakery and we'd get bread or cakes. If we went to the dairy, they would give us ice cream or the Canada Dry Bottling Company would give us sodas. There was a canteen where we would go and our friends there would give us candy. A real outstanding part of it, I think, was the markets where the trains would bring in the produce from out of state. We'd go over there and they'd give us fruits and vegetables, and I mean we just got things all over there. People knew who we were, where we lived, who our mothers were, who our fathers were. It kept us out of trouble. It was a lot of fun. There were lots of kids in the neighborhood and we did lots of things. We played together. It was very, very nice.

Was there unity?

A lot, a lot. So if you did something wrong, your parents knew about it right away. Probably before you got home. Parents were very aware of what their kids were doing and what the other kids were doing and kept us in a line.

What people stand out in your memory?

The nuns and the priests from St. Cajetan's School, St. Cajetan's Church. Our family was involved in the church from the very beginning. My grandfather, like I said, helped build the church. All of my brothers and my sister were baptized at the church. Most of us went to school there. As long as the school was standing we all went to the school. So our family was baptized, married - if one of the family

members died they had their Masses at the church. There were a few priests who were very, very mean, we thought as kids, but they were just keeping us in line. I think my father and my mother went together from the time they were probably in the fifth or sixth grade. They started being boyfriend and girlfriend from back then and ended up being married.

Gloria and brother Danny Herrera
First Holy Communion in front of St. Cajetan's School

It doesn't happen like that any more,does it?

No. And I think, had the community stayed a community, a lot of my generation would have married people from the community and we would have grown the same way as our mothers and fathers did. I have really good feelings about that area. And when they put the college up it really bothered a lot of people.

Before it was like one big family. And when they had to send everybody to a different location, it tore the heart out of the community.

That's sort of the feeling I've gotten from other people that I've interviewed.

Have you? Yes, it really did. I mean it's sad. But I know progress has to take place. Couldn't they do it somewhere else?

What holidays were observed by your family?

Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter. I think those holidays were observed by everybody. Easter especially was a big time because everybody got new clothes - as compared to only getting them when school starts. And you'd get new clothes at Easter and it was really exciting for the kids, and Christmas was a time for everybody to remember what Christmas was all about. Not for giving presents or anything but for going to church and being involved in the church activities.

What sort of things did you do for recreation?

There was a recreation center there in the area. It used to be a grade school. And my mother and dad both attended that school. Once they took the school out, they turned it into a recreation center. So after school we would all go to the recreation center and play there and, in the evenings, that's when we all got together. We must have had maybe twenty kids running around in the evening - always though, in front of someone's house. Wherever we were playing the parents would be out there watching us. And we'd play games like kick-the-can, and hide-and-go-seek, and we'd think up our own games or we'd go to the center or school grounds and go swing on the swings over there, play ball in the field over there. We made up a lot of our own games.

There was one thing in the summertime that everybody liked to do. The water trucks would come out and they'd go down the middle of the street and swish out water on both sides of the truck to clean the streets. We thought it was exciting. We'd go sit on the curb and let the water splash.

And that happened every time the water trucks would go through the streets - we'd be out there waiting for them to come by. That was one of my favorite things to do. And we'd roller skate and Weicker's Moving and Storage used to be across the alley from where we lived on Lawrence. And they used to have real smooth cement floors in their garages. When the trucks weren't there, the men from the Weicker's would let us roller skate in there.

And it was wonderful because our sidewalks were all flagstone. They were all cracked and everything. But their storage garage was wonderful for skating. So we did a lot of skating. They'd chase us out when a truck would come. The business people were really, really good to us. And you know, we never ripped them off or never did anything bad to them so they were willing to let us enjoy ourselves.

Were you aware of any kind of problems that people in the neighborhood had?

I guess everybody has a bad seed in the family. Some people had older brothers and sisters, well maybe not so much the sisters, but older brothers who got in trouble with the law and had to spend time in juvenile hall or in jail. But as kids it didn't bother us. That was just part of life. As far as political stuff, not really any problems that I can remember. I know my mother and father were dedicated voters and my mother worked on the election commission. The fact that we were poor never caused us any problems because we didn't know we were poor.

There was enough and if you didn't have something then your grandma did or we just all shared. I never knew I was really poor until I was in the tenth grade. When I went to junior high school, everybody was about the same level so it never really made a difference.

Gloria and her grandmother, 1955

Do you remember people in the neighborhood that had particular special talents? Musicians or artists or anybody who stands out.

Yes. There was one girl in our area. She lived at the corner of Eleventh and Lawrence. The family name was Valdez. Irene the daughter was probably two years older than me and she was a very good singer. And a lot of the kids that we played with all got involved in the recreation center and we did a lot of talent shows and performed in the Show Wagons and stuff. As she got older, she went on to do professional singing. I think she sings in Las Vegas right now. But she did a lot of professional singing here in Denver. A brother of mine was a good artist. At the recreation center they used to have a piano and although my brother never had lessons or anything, he learned how to play the piano just by plucking away at it. As he got older and some cousins of mine got older, they formed a singing group and they recorded one record. One of my cousins used to write their songs and then they put the music to them. And there used to be a talent show held at the Santa Fe Theater on Tenth and Santa Fe. The theater is still there but I don't think it's a theater any more. My brother and three of my cousins were in a group and they were all very good-looking. The girls used to just go crazy for them. They'd always win when they'd go to the talent show. They did very well with their singing. They never went on to do anything more. They just did it as something that was fun during their teenage years.

How many kids are in your family?

There's ten in my family. The spread is like a year and a half to two years apart. I have two older brothers. My oldest brother just turned 52 on June 1. And I have another brother who was the singer of the group, and myself, and there's two years' difference. I have one brother who was killed in Vietnam in 1968.

Pete, Bobby, Gloria, and brother, Joseph

Stevie, March 1952

How many boys, how many girls?

Six boys and four girls. And all but my brother who died in Vietnam, live here in Denver. So we have lots of family gatherings. My mom must have at least twenty grandchildren, probably four or five great grandchildren. We just had a graduation for one of my nieces and there's, let's see, four generations.

We were taking pictures to show the generations.

Who were your friends?

I think probably my best friend was one of the Oguin sisters. And the Oguins lived next door to us for many, many years. And before they moved next door to us, my oldest brother used to hang out with her brothers. I mean there was probably fifteen in that family and so they hung around together. My oldest brother married one of the sisters and we just all had kids about the same age. To this day we're still very good friends with them and we keep in touch with them. Although my brother and his wife had a divorce, we're still very close. I think Agnes Oguin was my best friend back then. She was probably two years older than myself but she made a real big impact on my life as far as wanting to do more in my life than just get married and have kids. She's a doctor right now in California. She was very smart and whatever she wanted to do she knew that if she fought hard enough for it and worked hard enough for it she could do it.

It's interesting to get a perspective of the neighborhood from your side. The people that I've interviewed up to now were from Ninth Street.

When we were kids, there were times when we thought that the kids on Ninth Street thought they were better than we were. We talk about that a lot in our association that we have formed, which is the Displaced Aurarian's Association. And when one family, in particular the Manzanares family, were moved from Ninth Street, their father was the caretaker and the maintenance man for the recreation center - so while he was doing that, they had housing available downstairs from the recreation center. When they moved from Ninth Street over to Eleventh then we became closer and we used to tell them "Yes, you guys thought you were real big, you know, big and bad over on Ninth Street but now you're down where we're at." They'd come to the recreation center and we'd be there. When it was time to go home, they'd go their way and we'd go ours. But it was fun.

Just for the record, give me the names of your brothers and sisters.

My oldest brother is James Joseph Herrera, and then there's Bobby, myself, Lydia, Louie, Stevie, Delores, Tommy, David and Anna.

Jim is fifty two, I believe, and Anna is thirty - three, I think. Thirty-two or thirty-three. And when

my father was a little boy, when he was very young, he had very, very blonde hair. And my mother, on the other hand, had very dark hair and we have a combination of the two of them. My sister Anna is very light with very light hair and you can see me, dark hair, dark skin, and my brother Louie was very light skinned.

Did you move around?

We moved around but always in the same neighborhood. When my brother Stevie was a baby, we lived on Tenth and Market, the street down from Lawrence Street. And we lived in a little house (I was probably eight or ten years old) between two big warehouses and set back from the street. You could hardly see it. It was near the railroad yards and we lived there for about maybe a year or so. Then we moved back up to Lawrence Street. We lived with my grandma at 1121 Lawrence for awhile, moved to Tenth and Market, moved back up to 1117 and we lived at 1117 pretty much the rest of the time. We moved in 1959.

Is that when you moved out of the neighborhood?

That's when we moved out of the neighborhood and then never came back. But in the time that I was growing up, we had moved to North Denver to Twenty-Ninth and Zuni, lived there for probably a year, then came back to West Denver and we lived at 1117 until 1959. I was in the sixth grade when we moved to Twenty-Ninth and Zuni and went to Ash River School. It's now Valdez School. We moved back to the Westside and then when we left in 1959, we moved across the street from North High School. We lived there until my senior year and then we moved out to Fifty-First Avenue. But most of my life was spent in the Westside. My brother finished out the eighth grade at St. Cajetan's School because we had first through eighth grade. Then he went to Cathedral High School. I went to St. Cajetan's through the sixth grade and then in my seventh grade year, I went to public school because my parents just couldn't afford the tuition any more. Tuition had gone up and they had so many other kids, so we just went to a public school. I went to Baker Junior High School.It was a change from parochial school to public school, a big change. You didn't have to go to church every morning.

What businesses, stores, hangouts, places do you remember?

Mr. Albert's store was located on the corner of Eleventh and Lawrence. He owned a lot of property on both sides of the block. He owned terraces. He owned houses. And he used to give all of the people credit at the grocery store. Like I said, everybody was poor so everybody was getting credit from Mr. Albert - like my grandma, when she would get her pension check, then she would pay him or when my dad would get paid, then they would pay him. He was very nice to me, but there was some kids in the neighborhood he didn't like. One of them was my sister Lydia and the other one was Manuel Oguin. They were probably the two rowdiest kids in the neighborhood.

There was an incident when my sister went into the store - my sister Lydia. For some reason or other he told her something and she got smart with him and he ran out the door after her and she ran home and ran in the house and he ran right in behind her. My mom said "What's going on here?" And he's telling her, "You'd better keep Lydia out of my store. She's driving me crazy. She's gonna give me a heart attack." And my mom told him, "Well, what'd she do?", "Oh she's just getting smart with me and this and that." My mom told him "Don't you ever come in my house without knocking and the second thing is I'll handle it and you can call me and tell me or come to my house and tell me about it, but don't you think that you're gonna hit her." Lydia just broke the camel's back that time. And I don't know what she said, but evidently, he didn't like it very much.

Another grocery store that was bigger than Mr. Albert's was on the corner of Eleventh and Larimer. It was like a supermarket. More so than the little store Mr. Albert had. And they had fresh meat in there and the gentleman's name who owned it was, we used to call him Joe Bo. Well, he'd always have the ends of the baloney left, so it was always first-come, first-served. We'd always go if we were hungry, "Let's go to Joe Bo's, maybe he has some ends." Then there was a potato chip factory called the Mayfair Potato Chips. And they used to be between Tenth and Eleventh and Larimer. We would go over there and we could buy a bag full of potato chips for a nickel. And so we'd have the ends of the baloney and potato chips from the potato chip factory and we'd all go sit in the center of the grounds where the swings were and eat potato chips and baloney. Those places stand out in my mind.

What other schools were in the area?

There was another school, St. Elizabeth's School, which was located right next to the St. Elizabeth's Church where the Interfaith Center (St. Francis Center) is. They had the same grades as St. Cajetan's, but St. Elizabeth's School was for the German people. Those kids had more money than we did. They could pay the tuition there. And I don't think the education itself was better than we had at St. Cajetan's.

My mom and dad went to Franklin School on Eleventh and when they finished up there, they went to a new Franklin School which was located on Colfax and Mariposa. I think that school went up to seventh grade. My mother and dad both attended Baker Junior High School. And when I went to seventh grade at Baker Junior High School, I had a science teacher who had taught my mom and my dad.

Any other little stories about the area that you can think of that you'd like to have shared?

When my dad was very young, say maybe thirteen, or fourteen, he had a bicycle. He loaned his bicycle to one of the girls in the neighborhood. She was riding the bike on Speer Boulevard and she got hit by a car and was killed. My dad felt so responsible and guilty for that death that he would never ride his bicycle. The first one who got a bicycle was my brother Louie, and it wasn't because my dad bought it for him. It was because someone had given it to him and this was when we had already moved away from West Denver. One of my brother's friends gave him a bike because he had gotten a new one. My dad told us the story about why he never gave us bicycles, so we always wanted to learn how to ride bikes. The few kids who had bikes in the neighborhood, we would borrow theirs. Everyone would try to help one another learn how to ride. Well one time, I don't know where my sister Lydia found this bike, but it didn't have any tires on it. It just had the rims. She was all happy so she rode the bike on just the rims. When she'd be riding fast you could see the sparks coming down the street.

Everybody would tease her about it. To this day we have people in our association who still tease her about it.

Did you ever go to the Casa Mayan?

No. Well, we'd go over there, not ever to eat. But we'd go over there and we would watch the people. A lot of white people would come to the neighborhood in limousines and park there and go into the restaurant. And sometimes the kids in the neighborhood would get real mad would say, "Oh, why should they be able to go there, we can't even go there."

I know another interesting story. The Oguin family was the first to get a television in our block. And the Valdez family who lived at the corner were more well-to-do than anybody else and I knew they had a TV but we couldn't go into Irene's house. She could always come out and play with us but we could never go in her house. We couldn't go up on her porch. I mean, you just didn't do it. At the Oguins, their father was very strict. But when they got a TV, he put it in the frontroom where us kids in the neighborhood could go stand on his porch and look in his front window and watch TV. So we would sit on the porch or we'd have turns looking in the window and watching TV for a little while. Manuel Oguin is my age. We used to call him the walking TV Guide. When he'd get up during the summer, he'd turn the TV on and it had a test pattern on it. He would watch test patterns until the regular shows would come on TV.

They (the Oguins) lived all over that area, too. They lived on Tenth and Champa when I first met them. And then moved to Eleventh and Lawrence. My grandmother lived at 1121 Lawrence and she bought that house there. We lived at 1117 Lawrence, which was right next door. And then at one time, my Aunt Betty, who is my mother's sister, lived at 1105 Lawrence. So all those three houses in a row our family lived in.

And when my mom and dad first got married, they lived at Tenth and Lawrence. One of my aunts and her husband had bought a house at Tenth and Lawrence. It was a great big house. It had a great big yard and my mom and dad lived in the back of their house. It was a little apartment there. So I lived there for awhile when I was growing up.

And another story that I'll always remember is when we lived there at my Aunt Josephine's house on Tenth and Lawrence. It was Thanksgiving. We were getting ready to go to my grandma's house or something. I must've been maybe six years old. I remember my dad telling me, "Go to the icebox and get the pumpkin pie that's in there." And I said, "Pumpkin

pie, all right," I was all happy. I went to the icebox and no pumpkin pie. And I said, "Well, where is it dad?" And I looked on top - looked underneath, couldn't find a pumpkin pie. And I came back and I said, "Dad, I can't find it." And he said, "I was just fooling hita, we don't really have one." Oh, and I started crying. And my dad started laughing because he thought it was funny that I would go look for it. That brings back a good memory.

All of my aunts and uncles all got married at St. Cajetan's Church. Their kids were baptized there.

That little area there was our whole life. There was a pickle factory across the street from the church. They used to grow their own cucumbers and pickle them - big old fat ones. And we'd go at night and stick our arms through the fence in their garden and take cucumbers. And they'd say, "Why are you coming and taking them? Just ask us for them. We'll give them to you." It was more exciting to stick our hands through the fence. Very good times around there.

A lot of the kids who have come out of there have become professionals and have done really well with their lives.

Our association organized a reunion - an Auraria reunion - for all of those people who lived in the community. And people came from California and Utah to the reunion. I had an uncle on my dad's side who had gotten killed in the war. He was never married. He died, I think, when he was in his twenties. He was very young. The girlfriend that he had in the neighborhood had moved to California and she came back for the reunion and she and my mom got together. And my mom was saying, "Yes, this was your Uncle Joe's girlfriend. She was gonna marry Uncle Joe when he came back from the war." And she hadn't been in that area since the early 40's or something. She came back for that reunion. It was wonderful. I got to meet someone of my Uncle Joe's liking. It turned out to be a wonderful reunion. We had so many people. We had Mass start everything off. Then we had a barbecue. Then we had a party later on at a club that had music and everything. The schools helped us out.

Tony Hernandez, the representative, helped us get funds together. We had it on Ninth Street.

I've been married twenty-seven years and I have four children, three boys and a girl. My daughter is the youngest. She's sixteen years old and my oldest is twenty four. I have four grandchildren, three girls and one boy and my nineteen year old son who is still at home graduated this year. He received a $1,000 scholarship from Scholastics Incorporated for his photography. He had his portfolio sent to California to be judged nationally. He was selected one of 150 students and received a $1,000 scholarship which he will use towards equipment because he has not applied for any in-state colleges. He wanted to go out-of-state to New York but funds weren't available. And my other kids, my other two boys, one's married and working and the other one is not married. He has one little girl but works two jobs. He's a workaholic. Their names are Anthony, Miguel, Louis and my daughter's name is Renee. My daughter and I have a really good relationship, where I'm her mother, her friend, her companion. She tells me lots of things that I think a lot of girls wouldn't tell their mothers. She's a good girl. She's a sophomore at North High School. And let's see, I work at the Denver Community Development Corporation

I have a number of titles and responsibilities there. I'm administrative assistant, executive secretary, manager, supervisor of clerical staff and I love my job.

Interview by Sara Milmoe

Floyd & Peggy Sandoval

Floyd's parents were originally from the San Luis Valley, his father from Alamosa, his mother from San Acosta, Colorado. Floyd was born in Denver in 1943. He has three sisters, Peggy, Virginia and Elizabeth. The family moved to Auraria in 1952 and had a house and a grocery store on Twelfth and Stout Streets, then moved to 1020 Champa.

Why did your parents move to Auraria?

That's where everybody was living.

Do you remember the house?

Yes, we moved to 1020 Champa Street. That's where we started.

What were your clearest memories?

Attending school at St. Cajetan's. I played football in seventh and eighth grade - got cleated. The wound got infected. Nobody could take care of me, so the Ava Maria Clinic took care of the wound by wrapping it with herb leaves. At the Lawrence Street Center on Eleventh and Lawrence (big school house), we played basketball there and behind St. Elizabeth's Church.

What was it like to live there?

It was great. Most of the people came from Southern Colorado around that neighborhood (La Junta, Alamosa). We were all like brothers and sisters and very poor. From Ninth Street, there was a guy they used to call Bulldog, Bobby Montoya, Albert Nieto, Chuck Ramirez, Jerry Torres, the Jirons, the Laws, Zeke DeLeon - he's playing for the Brass Monkeys now here in Denver. It was kind of interesting. Jerry Rodriquez, Bobby Bland, Chris Torres, it was all a big gathering. All us guys used to have a good time.

My stepfather made $50 a week. I worked at the car wash on Kalamath and Colfax for 75 cents an hour. I had to quit school in my senior year because I couldn't afford it. Then my mom had a stroke. It was really tough. Everybody had tough times. I had to do that work to survive and help support my parents.

What holidays were observed by your family?

Every holiday! It was always a family gathering - it's something that's unreal, from Christmas to Thanksgiving to Easter.

I was an altar boy at St. Cajetan's. Everything we did - we'd have to go to Mass, every day, every day.

I used to serve the Stations of the Cross as an altar boy - never missed a Mass. I came from the San Luis Valley and we were very religious.

What kind of problems did people in the neighborhood have?

There really weren't problems. I mean we go back to the Elvis Presley days - Fats Domino. We used to play marbles. Marbles was our biggest thing. We were like a big clique. We were mostly interested in sports, especially basketball and football. We were like a little gang (community group thing). In fact, we were a gang called "Black Orchards." We didn't get into fights. If we did, it was a man-to-man-type thing. No one could jump in.

Do you remember people with special talents in the neighborhood?

Zeke DeLeon, he's now with the Brass Monkeys. One of the biggest talents around there. We would go to the talent show to compete with other people around there. Or we'd go out and sing at the corner.

Who were your friends?

Chuck Ramirez, Jerry Torres, Vern Jiron, Bobby Bland, Philip Martinez, Zeke DeLeon, Leonard Benavidez, Sonny Anaya, Frank Olona, Kelly (Bull Dog), Bobby Montoya, Danny Morales, Anthony, Pat Lucero, Rolo (passed away).

Everyone went to St Cajetan's, Baker, then West.

How did people get along with each other in the neighborhood?

We all got along very beautifully. Our families were so strict that you couldn't fight. You couldn't do anything.

The neighbors all associated with each other, and everybody used to help each other out, because the people could not afford anything. Neighbors would bake pies, cakes, biscuits and everybody would share with each other. Everybody got along beautifully. Even the people who didn't speak Spanish always wanted to eat chili - make tortillas with my mom. It was a different neighborhood. Everybody was very close.

When did you move?

I had to move out in 1961 and went to the Air Force. I had to go to the Air Force because I couldn't afford to take care of my mom. My dad died in 1951, so I was the main support to the family. I had to go to the service to send my family money so they could survive. It was very tough.

After the Air Force, 1971-72, I came back to Denver, met my wife and heard the neighborhood was going to be Auraria Campus. They gave my family and everyone notice they would have to be leaving there.

What I did hear was that if they ever got the campus there, our grandchildren would be able to go to the Auraria Campus. It's upsetting because nothing was ever signed or anything taken care of.

What kind of work did your family do?

My stepfather worked in a foundry on Colfax and Osage. Mom worked at Frontier Motel on Thirteenth and Curtis.

Did your family rent or buy your home?

Everybody rented around there. I don't think anyone owned a house. We all rented.

Were there political activities in the community?

The only thing that was political was Corky Gonzales that we used to hear about all the time.

What about businesses in the area.

It was Eleventh Street. Everyone hung out at the Eleventh Street Center, Carson Frink, Tivoli, Pickle Factory, Ernie's Barber Shop, Billie Albert's Grocery, O'Meara Ford, Casa Mayan, Ava Maria Clinic.

We'd go to the Salvation Army. That's the only place we could afford clothing.

At the pickle factory, they'd soak pickles and we'd go take some.

Interview by Reggie Lopez

Ida Sigala

Ida was born in April, 1926 and moved to Auraria in 1945.

Why did your parents move to Auraria?

They bought a terrace there. My father was born in Del Norte, Colorado and my mother, in Conejos, Colorado. My mother's still alive now; she's ninety two.

My mother and father married in 1920 at St. Cajetan's Church.

Where did you live?

917 Curtis, after marriage at 921 Curtis.

Do you remember the house?

Yes, I do, I do. We lived there very comfortably. It was nice because we all knew each other and Sam Ketchum was a man from the grocery store. And I remember going to church at St. Cajetan's, attending baptisms, weddings, just the whole family went there.

What was it like to live in this area?

It was nice, very nice. You could walk downtown or get the bus - many ways -wherever you wanted to go. Everything was there. The Lupe Market where you used to go get meat on Fourteenth and Arapahoe.

Do you remember people in the neighborhood?

Yes, the Archuletas. We never called them by their first name, mostly their last names. Mr. and Mrs. Archuleta, the Arellanos, the DeLeons, many more I can't remember. It's been quite so long.

What holidays were observed by your family?

Cinco de Mayo, Sixteenth of September, all of them really, Veteran's Day.

What did you do for recreation there?

Go dancing a lot, go to the shows a lot, rollerskating. Mostly dances though, dancing at the Rainbow.

Do you remember people with special talents?

Corky Gonzales - fighter, Red Martinez - fighter, we never missed one of their fights in the Auditorium.

Who were your friends?

Lucy Trujillo, Anna Armenta, Virgie Arguello. My sister's friends too - we were always together.

What kind of games did children play there?

Mostly they'd ride their little bikes outside.

My nephew used to fight in front of St. Cajetan's (boxing).

How did people get along?

I think they got along good - very good. They all knew each other. We were all good neighbors.

When did you move?

About 1969. We sold our place.

My mother stayed there until they threw us out.

What kind of work did your family do?

Father worked at Veteran's Hospital as a gardener. I worked candling eggs for eighteen years. During the war - making powdered eggs first - then candling eggs.

Did your family rent or buy your home?

My dad bought the home. I wasn't married yet. Then when I married we bought next door.

Where did you receive health services?

Ava Maria Clinic - if you didn't have enough money you could go there. They were very good to you. There wasn't much sickness, although my cousin got polio - not bad, but bad enough.

Racial or ethnic problems?

Not where we lived. I guess because we were all Spanish or Spanish Americans.

How many churches were in the area and what do you remember about them?

St. Leo's on Colfax, St. Elizabeth's, the Jewish Church, and St. Cajetans's.

What businesses do you remember?

Fifteenth and Market Street, the Loop, the Meat Market on Fifteenth and Curtis, Sam's Grocery Store. There were no conflicts between business and people that I remember. St. Francis Residence (St. Rose) for women.

How much money did you get for your house?

We didn't, we sold about six months before. If we'd stayed there six more months, they would have bought us a house too like they did the rest of the people. My mother, they did give her another house. Still she had to pay about $2000.

How did you feel about moving out of the neighborhood?

I didn't like it, it was sad. I lived in the neighbood about twenty-seven years.

We lived there so long we liked everything. It didn't matter. It was your home and your only home.

How were your neighbors?

They were good, good. The Archuletas, the Stillmans, we never really fought like you see neighbors fighting.

How about when people were having hard times?

We were used to hard times. We were dirt poor, but happy poor.

Interview by Reggie Lopez

Nea (Agneda) Lopez-Stoner (mother)
Lola Torres-Sanchez (daughter)

Where were you born?

Nea:

I was born in Las Vegas, New Mexico, on November 23, 1918. We moved to Denver in 1924. I went to St. Elizabeth's Grade School, Baker Junior High, then West High School. I was six years old when we moved here. My father was working in the D. & R. G. Railroad and was transferred.

Where did you live in Auraria?

Ninth Street and Curtis. The house was right on the corner. I don't remember the number. It was a group of green brick terraces. We were right on the first terrace. Across the street there was an old flour mill that burned down in 1927...and in my mind I can see all the houses on the block.

What do you remember about living there?

Our social life was built around St. Cajetan's. We grew up on Ninth Street. The first house we lived in was green brick in the middle of the block facing Curtis Street. There was a corner store across the street which was Goldstein's, I think. They staged plays at St. Elizabeth's School. My sister Petra had a leading role in a play at school. Also, we put on stage plays in the basement of St. Elizabeth's and St. Cajetan's. Our plays were religious. The men had an orchestra. Mr. William Bernard was our professor. We would cook and serve meals in the basement of the church. My father Eusebio Lopez played the trombone and he was in the marching band. He was in the parades on holidays down Sixteenth Street. I was so proud of him.

The neighborhood was mixed: Russian, German, Irish, Polish, Spanish and Mexican. The children at St. Elizabeth's were mixed races. The names were Ball, Getts, Barth, Hight, Hunsinger, Span, Vasquez, Gomez and Gonzalez. The Allisons had a candy store down on Curtis street. They were Greek. We had a lady, her name was Mrs. Seaman, and she made all our costumes for our plays at school. This was before St. Cajetan's School was built.

Our lives were centered around the church. The altar boys I grew up with were James Martinez, Charlie Vigil, Augustine Lopez, Frank Guerrera, William (can't remember his last name), and Ben Valdez.

Eusebio Lopez (Agneda's father) stands with daughter Isabel Lopez-Montoya and her three daughters in front of 1033 Ninth Street, 1959

Do you recall any of the people who weren't involved in the church?

Everyone was involved in the church. There was another Protestant church up there on Colfax...but ours was one large community and our lives revolved around the churches.

What holidays were observed by your family?

Christmas, Easter, New Years. We never celebrated the Sixteenth of September because we weren't Mexican. We came from New Mexico and my ancestors came from Spain during the sixteenth century, from Seville. So we didn't have that culture (Mexican.)

So you just celebrated the Christian holidays and the American holidays?

Right, and then later on when we mixed more with the Mexican people, we celebrated the Fifth of May or the Sixteenth of September - which are their holidays - but I didn't know about them until then.

What did you all do for recreation?

Mostly the plays. We'd go to different little towns and we'd put on plays with Mr. Bernard and the orchestra.

Did the children play street games?

Oh, we played outside: kick-the-can and hide-and-seek and all those. Mostly, I played with the boys.

Do you remember people with special talents?

Oh yes, a lot of talent. Magdalena Gallegos' mother was in our stage plays, and she was in the choir. She was very, very dramatic...so was my family, my father, my mother were very talented.

Lola:

Their talent was amazing!

What problems did the neighborhood have?

You know that none of us locked our doors because no one had anything to steal. We never thought about locking our doors. I could wrap myself up in a blanket and go sleep out in the front porch which we did when it was hot because we had no air conditioning. Oh, once in a while there was a gang that would maybe come from the eastside. They would meet at Lincoln Park and they would fight. But we'd get away from them.

And you moved out when?

In 1947 when I got married. I moved to Elati Street, that's where my two boys were born. Then I moved to the projects for one year and that's where she (Lola) was born. And then I've been here (362 Pennsylvania) the rest of my life.

Petra Torres, Florence Gallegos, Agneda Lopez- Stoner. 1940

Agneda's son Tom Torres and niece Julie Torres in the 1940's

Were you a part of, or involved in, what happened when Urban Renewal began moving the people out of the Auraria Area?

No, but my sister (Petra Torres) did. They went through that but I didn't.

Do your sisters still speak very much about it?

There's only one sister left. And we went and looked at all the places in Auraria.

Is it true that all the families who weren't Hispanic had begun to move out of the Auraria area earlier?

They did eventually, yes. But when I was growing up it was all mixed and we never had a fight like you see now. It was a very peaceful time.

Interview by Kelli Baldree

Torres Family

Celebrating Easter Sunday and the birthday of Phillip J. Torres' great granddaughter Christina.

Where were you born?

Phillip J. Torres:

I was born in Torreon Coahuila, Mexico. I am now seventy five-years old. I never expected to get this far, but I'm here. I bought the house at 1033 Ninth Street. The house is still so livable that the president of Metropolitan State College of Denver had his office there. Today there is a plaque stating that I lived there. At one time, I was the founder of the Latin American Research and Service Agency. Well, they thought it would be worthwhile to spend a few dollars on my plaque and put it in the house at 1033. My oldest was born in the hospital and the rest of them were born at the house with Doctor Justina Ford.

Ellen Torres:

There are seven children. The oldest is Antonia Rebecca. She was born in 1939. Mom and dad were married in 1938 and my mother's name is Petra. Then comes Julie, and what year were you born, Julie?

Julie Torres-Lopez :

February 1941.

Ellen Torres:

Okay, and so Becky was born in the hospital, and then Julie was the first one born at the house, with Dr. Ford who is also a very reputable person in Colorado history because she was the first Black doctor. There's a history behind her and her home is now over at the Justina Ford House. Then after Julie comes me, (Ellen Torres) and I was born in 1944 and then after me comes my brother Phil Jr. who is married to Betty. He was born three years later, no, twenty-three months later. I remember he was born at the house. Then comes Teresa, then Matthew and the last one is Frances.

Frances Torres :

I was born at Saint Joe's Hospital.

Antonia Rebecca, Julie and Ellen Torres, 1940s

Left to right: friend of family, Julie Torres-Lopez holding Teresa Torres-Vendegna, Ellen Torres, Kathy Montoya-Naranjo, Phillip "Butch" Torres, Jr.

When did you or your parents move to Auraria (West Denver)?

Phillip J. Torres:

We bought the house (at 1033) and of course we lived there thirty-eight years.

Why did I buy that house? Because when we moved into 1033 Ninth Street, we couldn't find other places to move to. We wanted to make sure that we were close to St. Cajetan's School and the church (St. Cajetan s) and then of course I became president of St. Cajetan's Parish Credit Union.

I really didn't think we were going to live there thirty-eight years.

When Auraria came through we made arrangement for housing and we moved to 3316 Tennyson and live there today.

What do you remember about the Auraria neighborhood.

Agneda Stoner (sister of Petra Torres)

Well to begin with, my mother had a house right on the corner of Eighth and Curtis, and St. Cajetan's was our social place.

I taught catechism, basic English and Spanish and we went to St. Elizabeth's School. My mother helped with the church. They helped repair and fix it. The people in the church worked at plays to make money for the church. We served breakfast and lunches downstairs and we made it just like a community center for Hispanics. We had Polish, Germans, Italians down the block.

Ellen Torres:

I remember the day Frances was born. That was on a Wednesday and the TV went off. There was a power shortage. I was eight or nine years old and I think the important thing was that Frances was born in the hospital. We had been used to all of us being born at home. When my mother would have a baby, we would go visit my Aunt Nea and we'd have to spend the night over there.

Kathy Naranjo : (cousin)

Well, when I was a teenager, I worked at my stepfather's "Casa Mayan" restaurant. My cousin Ellen Torres and I worked at the restaurant. We were Spanish/Mexican waitresses and that was an adventure. Most of the people that frequented that restaurant were Anglo. It was across the street on Ninth Street.

Frances Torres:

Being the youngest of seven children, I remember a lot of what my elders did. My sister Teresa used to do a lot of risky things and I remember watching her take a dare to jump off the roof. I know people remember it as my brother pushing her. We used to have a porch, and you can see it now, because they kept it. We'd go from the porch to the roof, and it really didn't seem so far, but I remember standing in the yard and we'd dare - well I don't really remember daring my sister. She jumped off the roof and she broke her leg.

Back, left to right: Kathy and Ruthie Montoya
Front, left to right: Teresa Torres, Victor Gonzalez, Frances Torres, 1033 Ninth Street

Julie Torres-Lopez:

I remember being the second of seven. We used to play in the street, but it was safe then.

The street washers used to come down the street and we would run to the curb and get wet. That was so much fun. And one thing I can remember is we never locked our front door. We never even had a k y to the front door for many years because everybody around there was so trustworthy.

There's just so many, many memories. It was just so much fun and good, clean, honest fun. And of course we used to have the street car go by and it was always fun watching the people with their little heads bopping up and down.It wasn't fun when we put bricks on the rail and they'd have to stop. They'd get out and holler at us and we'd run in the house, but it wasn't destructive.

Do you get a chance to go by Auraria very often?

Julie Torres-Lopez:

As often as I can. When I walk in, (to 1033 Ninth Street) I tell them who I am. They're very pleasant about showing me the closet that one day my brother closed the door very hard, as he was being

chased around, and the whole wall fell down. He came out looking like a ghost. He had plaster all over. Oh, that was so much fun. That's why those walls are together - because of the many coats that my mother would paint. She'd paint every year.

Julie Torres, second from left

How do you feel when you walk through that house?

Julie Torres-Lopez:

You just get such a great feeling of pride that you were able to live there and be a part of that close-knit neighborhood. Everybody watched out for everybody. We were so fortunate to only go to one school in our whole eight years. We went to St. Cajetan's. We were involved with the church a lot. I wish everybody could have had that opportunity because you don't find that often. We do have our reunion every year.

Father's Memories:

Phillip J. Torres:

I have so many. Everyday I lived it and I live with a memory.

We were members of the church at St. Cajetan's and in those days, all social activities, as far as Spanish-speaking persons were concerned, revolved around the church. We only lived a block and a half from the church. At that time I was recreation director for the neighborhood.

Do you remember the people in the neighborhood?

Ellen Torres:

Ruthie Arguello, the Ramos family, the Rodriquez family across the street, the DeLeon, the Jaramillo, the Abeyta and the Nieto families. There were so many of them.

John Nieto is the organizer of the reunion that we have. They try to get as many families for the reunion as they can. They go out with the newsletters about once every three months, and they're planning another.

They want all the families to get involved.

What holidays were observed in your family?

Ellen Torres:

Christmas Eve was the holiday. We always took part in the choir. We'd start two or three months in advance preparing for Christmas Eve. It was always an open house at Pepa's house (Ellen's mother). We had enchiladas, biscochitos and square pizza. She's (Pepa) the one that started the chili on the Pizza. Don't kid yourself - it wasn't Domino's. We'd get to stay up until four or five o'clock in the morning. That's when they had Mass at 12:00 a.m. All the family would go to Mass. Dad was the recreation director for Lawrence Street Center. He had basket-ball and movies there. The center's not there any more. So in a way he had seven children but then you could probably add seventy-seven to those children because of all the kids who went to the Lawrence Street Center. In the afternoon and in the evening they'd always have baseball and various activities to keep the kids off the street.

Frances Torres:

That was fine - we didn't have any gangs. The interesting thing was, my dad was asked to do that because during the war, or after the war, there was gang activity. They were afraid it was going to come to Colorado from California - the Zootsuiters. So that was kind of a preventative thing that the city was getting into.

What did you do to prevent that from happening?

Phillip J. Torres:

Well, we had dinners, women's club, dancing, Mexican dancing. Then there was Mr. Bernard who was paid by the W.P.A. to help train the youth in the music field. He built this orchestra and we went

around the state playing. Today my musical ability - I have to thank Mr. Bernard because he instigated it. He made sure that at least we knew DO, RAY, ME, FA, SO....

What problems did people have and how did you all deal with those problems?

Ellen Torres:

I think they were economic problems and what happened is that people would help each other. I remember people coming, borrowing the phone because they didn't have a phone. Our mom was real involved in the church and so you just did a lot of things. Not organized things like under a non-profit, but just a lot of things involved around the church. Babysitting was a problem back then. It was the beginning of the working mother. My mother didn't work, so she babysat a lot.

I was thinking of this one time when this woman had come from Germany, and her little girl was really thin and our mom fattened her up. I remember that because I remember the older boy writing swastika signs and that was really scary and different. Toward the end before we were moved - there was controversy. They tried to give excuses and say there were a lot of renters but people rented and stayed a long time. My aunt didn't own her home at that time. She lived next door to us, she lived across the street from us, she lived down the street from us, so I think the problems were economic. We were basically Hispanic. When people ask me - my world was Chicano - my religion was Catholic. My whole world was like that until I moved to East Denver. We all went to St. Cajetan's. We all graduated. We all went to Catholic high schools. We all took piano lessons and dancing lessons. Our mother never worked and I think that was important. There were reasons why she didn't work. Our father had a good job. We struggled and our parents really believed in education. My father went to school. My mother was really someone and she believed in education. At one point in our life, we were all in school. My dad was at Denver University. My mother was at University of Colorado at Denver. I was at Colorado Women's College, Matthew and Frances were at Cathedral and Teresa was at Metro. My mother studied journalism. My mother wrote for the Catholic Register and she loved to write articles.

Julie Torres-Lopez:

We lived at 1027 Ninth Street, and David (Julie's son) was remembering one of the happy memories when dad (Phil) would go out deer hunting and he'd come home with a big carcass and the big antlers.

David Lopez : (grandson)

I was about six years old. I visited my grandfather a lot. We lived next door.

When I see pictures, I kind of remember playing out in the front yard, seeing the traffic, always wondering what the tracks were for (the trolley tracks).

Julie Torres-Lopez:

See, he's (David) the next generation.

David Lopez:

I remember I went boxing downstairs at St. Cajetan's. Also went to school at St. Elizabeth's. Cousin Eric and I went to school together there. We used to walk over to grandmother's and grandfather's house and she'd watch us until we got picked up by mom. Then we moved to California. I remember we came back when I was ten and we stayed with them awhile - about six months - we lived upstairs. Then I stayed with my auntie Ellen, my godmother.

Julie Torres-Lopez:

So you see - family. I mean family is so important because I remembered dad saying, and I'll always remember this as long as I live, "We take care of our own."

That's true of most Chicano families. We take care of our own no matter what.

Agenda Stoner:

We never asked for help or relief. We did it all ourselves. We worked and helped each other. I did house work from the time I was fourteen to pay my way through school. My mother couldn't afford to send me to school. I was the four pointer (4.0 GPA) in the family. I attended St. Elizabeth's and Baker and West High.

Ellen Torres:

So did my mother. Dad graduated from West High School. Dad went to Benjamin Franklin School and Baker Junior High School.

Phillip J. Torres:

Let me tell you something funny. Remember Washington School. I went there as a student when Dr. Strong was principal. Later it became Lawrence Street Center. I went to Washington School and then Franklin (school) on Colfax, then Baker Junior High School and then West High School and the rest at Denver University and University of Colorado at Denver.

What did you study at D.U.?

Well they studied me. Actually, I studied social work. Also, accounting. Tom Currigan sent me to school. I worked for the Mayor back then. I was in the Audit Division.

Julie Torres - Lopez:

Our father also was owner of the Mexico Theater on Larimer Street for many years. He basically had four jobs. I worked at the Mexico Theater. All I knew how to say in Spanish was chocolate and naranja and you could get by with that.

We used to have the farmers come in from Fort Lupton and Brighton. We owned the Mexico for many years so dad had four jobs. He'd run the Mexico Theater doing all the bookkeeping. Then he'd work in the afternoon at the center (Lawrence Street Center), come home at 5:00p.m., eat dinner, go back and be the director of the Youth Center, because it not only was open in the afternoon but it was also open in the evening, and then he had to raise seven children as well.

Phillip J. Torres:

How do you think I lost my hair!

What games did children play?

Julie:

Street games, kick the can, hide-and-go-seek, red rover, and baseball. There was always an open lot.

Did your family ever talk about the old folk tales?

Julie Torres-Lopez:

La Llorona! We had a Llorona who lived in the back of our house. She was a real Llorona - this was true! She didn't pay the rent and she was very dirty. Dad finally had to say, "You have to move. You know we have to get the place cleaned up." She was a real Llorona. She even looked like one. She had black hair and black clothes and she put salt on our front door step because dad had to ask her to move. Then the house was burned down. So I think she must of had some kind of hex on the place. I think she did us a favor because it saved us from having that little place torn down. It was a carriage house where servants lived.

They - at one time - had servants on Ninth Street. It was a two story house and dad would rent it out to people for practically nothing. This lady wanted to live there for nothing but not keep the place up. I think she was a real genuine Llorona.

Phillip J.Torres:

You know, when she had it she'd pay, and when she didn't have it - well - then finally she really scared these kids.

Then of course I had little stories of my own and my dad and mother had stories. I just buried my mother two weeks ago. She was ninety-six years. So between them, they'd tell these stories about the Llorana and the kids would just sit there and you could hear a pin drop because they were so scared.

Ellen Torres:

I remember about the salt that the Llorona left. It must mean something.

I remember the salt - on the door - in the back - at the entrance and exits.

This woman disappeared early in our life.

Julie Torres-Lopez:

We have stories for dad's fishing. Dad was quite a fisherman. Now that's a story, a fishy story. But he found time to do all of that. Plus he was the president of the credit union for many, many years. He also collected money for church as an usher. Gee dad, what else did you do?

When did you move out of the neighborhood?

Julie Torres-Lopez

It was a very, very sad time. People wanted to hold on to each other.

They would have meetings and talk about this like it was just a very bad scene - leaving. When you're united like that and then not knowing where you're going to end up - or where you're going to go - or will we see you again - or when will we see you again. It just divided everybody. But it's funny

because you can pass people now along the street and always know that they're from Ninth Street because you've got that bonding, that beautiful bonding.

Ellen Torres:

Then there was also the thing about the church - because the Archdiocese really let the church down. St. Elizabeth's got to stay but St. Cajetan's didn't. That was really unfair. Archbishop Casey was really unfair. What happened was...I think he wanted to disband the Hispanic Community. The Theatine Fathers have always been dedicated like they still are to St. Cajetan's and Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Theatines are a very special kind of priest. They take their orders from Spain - not from the Archdiocese. They were able to buy property and now (the new) St. Cajetan's is really a place to be. I don't know if the church is paid for yet - but it's a real thriving community. I think for my mother, that was really sad - that the church went. The school had already gone. The other thing that's controversial is - there were supposed to be arrangements made for the people who grew up there for education. They would be able to get their education there at the campus. That's still something that's argued and that never came about.

Phillip J. Torres:

My feeling is that if you promised them, let's keep the promise. And mind you, I was leading the group that didn't want to sell.

Was there ever anything written down about this promise of education?

I don't think so. If so I'd like to see it.

Ellen Torres:

I wasn't privy to any contracts. If anyone would know, it would be John Nieto because he has spent so much time on this.

Agneda Stoner:

What I can say is that St. Cajetan's was very important to us. It was our social center, our life center. We just lived around it. Without that, we would not have had the experience, the music, dancing and theater.

Frances Torres :

Although I was the last generation in terms of the schooling etc., it was just a real special kind of upbringing that a person could have. You just feel a part of your church, you feel part of your neighborhood. It was not only a breakup of the Auraria Community, but it was also a breakup of family. Also, to be a little bit more objective about it, there were some families that it was okay for them to leave because the homes were big. Some of the homes weren't in working order and there were people who needed to make a move. That's progress and I don't think anybody wanted to impede progress.

Ellen Torres:

I think of my mother a lot.

Frances Torres:

I hope we do get to talk more about my mother, because she was very, very instrumental in the Adult Education Program that was started at St. Elizabeth's. She was one of the founders and a board member.

Agneda Stoner:

Let me talk because I have a lot to say about her.

While we were growing up, we were very close. She and I went to St. Elizabeth's and she was a very talented lady because she always played lead roles in all of their programs that we had in school. Pepa would sing. She had a beautiful voice. She used to sing at the Greek Theater. She went to The Lamont School of Music to learn singing. She sang in the choir. She sang with the operettas at the City Auditorium. Pepa had an alto voice, my sister was a soprano and I was a contralto. And we had a good childhood. I used to blindfold her and take her to the neighbor's door and ring the door bell and leave her there and run away. Those were the kind of games we used to play.

Frances Torres:

My mother was a very loving person and as we said earlier, she had taken part in raising a lot of neighborhood children. People still remember her. She was very charitable and she knew a lot of people. She was also very intelligent, political, very articulate and very supportive but she was also very ill and I think that the stress of having seven children and some pretty serious health problems contributed to her death when she was just fifty-nine. And it's a very sad thing for us to remember, but at the same time, the amount of love and support that she gave to

our family and to our neighborhood just outweighs three lifetimes. Anyone who knew my mother would agree with me. Everybody. She loved music. I remember she was supposed to pay the phone bill and she'd pay half the phone bill and half would go on music, no matter what. I went shopping for furniture when we moved from Auraria to Tennyson Street. She called it the white cockroach district. But we went into a furniture store and she'd just pick whatever she wanted. I'd say, mom, that's so expensive and she'd say 'Oh well". She had no sense of money because her life was her value. She's probably up there listening to me right now and not wanting to take the credit that she is due.

Julie Torres-Lopez:

There really is so much to say about my mother. She was a unique person. She was very giving. I always said she had a heart of gold and no matter what, she'd never say no to anybody. People from the neighborhood could always count on Petra giving the last egg or last loaf of bread that she had. She never had any bad feelings about anybody. And of course - us - her children and our children - we all came first with her - and then the whole neighborhood's children. So when you say that you're Pepa's daughter, you say a whole mouthful. She was just a special lady - a real lady - very smart - very intelligent. Pushed education to the max. She was very close to God. She was a very good friend of Dr. Ford - a very good friend to everybody.

Ellen Torres:

I remember her with clothes for some reason - sorting clothes on the table.

Also, they still gave sandwiches at St. Elizabeth's, but if they (the poor) were early or late, she would feed them. She'd feed them at the back door. She'd give them our last piece of bread and the peanut butter. What I can remember, during the holidays, are smells. The other day somebody made panocha. I remember that and the bread pudding. But cooking really wasn't her forte.

She'd make things stretch and stretch.

David Lopez:

I want to talk about how my grandmother gave me her blood. I was very young and I wasn't healthy and I needed blood to get well. My grandmother came forth with it and gave it to me.

The Lopez sisters: Isabel, Antonia, Petra, and Agneda (Nea). Petra's children at lower right: Antonia Rebecca and Julie.

Julie Torres:

This was when you could give the blood directly. It came right out of her to him. And that is why he had all that pretty hair. She never went to the beauty shop. We could never get her to go, or to buy shoes, because she said she was an Indian. When we buried her, we buried her with her face to the mountains because that's what she wanted, to face the mountains like an Indian and she said she didn't want to wear shoes.

Phillip J. Torres:

Sometimes it was very hard being Mexican. Some people even had to change their last names.

Ellen Torres:

Something happened to our Aunt Nea when she moved to South Denver.

She lived at her house for forty years and they wouldn't even let her go to church at St. Francis de Sales back then. Last year, she received the parishioner of the year award. We all went to that. She just stuck in there.

Well, they (mom, dad, aunt) were all subject to discrimination and racism. My dad got away with some things because of his looks. He also had Jewish friends. It's just like my daughter Martina who is so light. And Julie - most people think she's Julie's daughter. Julie, at the bank where she worked, they thought she was white, but it has always been Lopez or Torres, never, never been ashamed of it.

But I'm convinced that we lead a pretty good life because of our education. I know women my age and they're raising children and their situation is hard. When you're a single parent, it's hard, I don't know how they do it. Without an education, we could not live the way we live, or have the opportunities or give those opportunities back to our children.

The other thing I think we really miss are the nuns. Where would we be today without the nuns and the education we got from them? Dad and mom did a lot for that too. To pay for that education. My mom worked the First Friday Breakfast and dad would always go pick up the rolls. My parents were always involved. My mother was president of the P.T.A. and would bring in speakers. Dad always supported her in doing all those things. Bringing people together, putting on plays, insisting that when we were in school we'd do the "Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day" play. My mother worked the bingos - we did lots of things. We nickeled and dimed it, but we stayed involved with the church.

Phillip J. Torres:

Okay, where I sit, I've been through the mill. I've watched this, I've watched that - how the Anglos would not ever sell you a paper because you were a little dark, had a moustache, had an accent or couldn't speak English. At one time, half of the state of New Mexico moved here.

Ellen Torres:

My dad's family lived here in Denver but my grandmother was afraid she wasn't going to get good medical care, so she went back to Mexico and had my father. Then they came back to Denver when my dad was six weeks old. My grandfather was on the wrong side of the revolution. He was with the Federales and he was a telegrapher. See, his brothers and sisters were born all along the railroad tracks through Albuquerque and places like that. And then they all settled in Denver.

Phillip J. Torres:

My father brought the family to Denver.

Ellen Torres:

Now here's another thing that's interesting. My father was born in Torreon, but my grandmother was born in Chapas, Mexico. Then my grandpa Jimmy was really Mexican and he was born in Palacio which is next to Torreon. My grandpa Jimmy was really Mexican. I don't know as much about my father's family as I do about my mother's family because my mother used to repeat it, and repeat it, and repeat it. You have to be able to go back at least five generations. I had another aunt who was very Spanish. Her parents were cousins and they married so that they wouldn't marry with the Indians. When they were very little, they had Indian servants. Then they came to Denver.

Ellen Torres:

Dad (Phillip J. Torres) is a diabetic. In fact we almost lost him in 1986.

Frances Torres:

To give you an idea of what a strong man this man is, he went in for a quadruple bypass on February 28th of 1986. He had two other bypasses before. His heart was in good working order. It was his

arteries that had to be replaced. After the operation, he stayed in a coma. The hospital said he was just waiting to come back and that there was nothing wrong. After that, the doctor told us that he was dead, clinically dead, no oxygen going to the brain, no reading. Actually it looked like he was dead because his pancreas had gone and his liver was secreting some really ugly stuff - but he was moving. So we hung in there for a really long time, and I guess it was two weeks after that we had to turn off the life support system. We had to make that hard decision to turn it off, but we made it.

Julie Torres-Lopez:

Except Mateo (Matthew), my nephew Eric and my own son (David) never gave in. I let him go.

Frances Torres:

After we took him off the life support system he kept moving. He wasn't gone. It was like we were going through different stages of loss.

Ellen Torres:

And also, tell them about Julie. Julie was the brave one when the nurses stopped really taking care of him. Let me tell you why they did it. Because twenty-four hours a day somebody was there. Julie used to go in and clean him up herself. We never left him. But it was really hard on us because I remember this leading neurologist saying, "If you kids had any brains, you'd be planning his funeral." So we did. We stayed there and planned his funeral. We would argue about the color he was going to wear. But it's amazing. It really is a miracle. See, I think part of it was that all the people my dad knew, they all came to see him. Father Pete Garcia came and blessed Dad three times and the third time he came he said, "This guy is not going to go." So a lot of these people came to see my dad and there was this old nurse who used to keep talking to him all the time. Then we got the dirt from the Santuario and we prayed. Matthew would put Mexican music in his ears. We would rub his legs. We did all that stuff but we never left him and we would sleep in the room that we finally took over. My aunt Nca would do her knitting and stay with him during the day. Then at night, we'd stay. We'd have parties there just to not leave him alone. I think it's an important lesson to learn when you talk about grief, and about talking to people when they're almost gone. We were calling him dad and my friend said, "He may not answer to dad but he may answer to Phil." So we called him Phil, Phil. And that was on a Saturday and all of a sudden he said, "What"? Even after that, the doctor still didn't accept it. I still think they thought it was like an involuntary muscle response. They were making all kinds of excuses for him being alive. There was a woman neurologist who became angry because we questioned her. At first she thought we were stupid. This was at St. Anthony's. They thought we were dumb Mexicans, but little did they know who they were dealing with. So finally what happened was that he came around.

We were so relieved. It was a sense of complete relief like all the world that was on your shoulders was lifted.

My dad had to learn how to talk and everything all over again. He had to learn how to walk, how to talk, how to brush his teeth, how to comb his hair...(he's bald). And he still lives alone because that's what he prefers, so nobody really takes care of him.

Interview by Lucila Altamirano

Louise Vigil (Mother)
Don Vigil (Son)

Vigil family picture, left to right: Louise (mother), Don, Linda, Gene, Ben (father)

Tell me about your family.

Louise:

My son Eugene was born in 1939 right there around the corner from St. Cajetan's in some terraces. Well, he wasn't born there. He was born at St. Joseph's - but that's where we lived at the time.

Don:

Her husband's name was Ben...

Louise:

I should have said that. He's been dead twelve years...Ben R. Vigil.

Don

The youngest daughter's name is Linda.

Don:

We lived there in Auraria and we had a cousin who lived with us named Annie Ochoa. She was an orphan at Queen of Heaven Orphanage and at sixteen, I think it was, they turned 'em loose in those days.

She had nowhere to stay so she grew up with us at that house.

When and how did you come to Denver? Did you come here with your family?

Louise:

I was born here. I was born on Thirty-Eighth and Walnut. My folks came from Las Vegas, New Mexico. First my mother's parents came. Then my father and his mother came.

Don Vigil

Linda Vigil

They married in Denver so therefore we were all born here. I came from a family of six girls and one boy. I lived over here on Eleventh Street when I was four years old.

Do you remember the address?

Louise:

Oh, heavens no. Golly - I was four years old and my sister went to St. Elizabeth's. I started over at Franklin school but then we moved over to the Eastside for just a little bit.

How did you meet Ben?

Louise:

He was already twenty-three, and I was eighteen. It was at a dance over here at Westerner Hall - over at the Tivoli - and that's where I met him.

Tell me about the dances at Westerner Hall, were they held every weekend?

Louise:

Yes, and the men paid a quarter and the women paid 10 cents.

Live Music?

Louise:

Yes, a lot of them used to go over to the Casino, but I wasn't allowed to. That was in Five Points. I still had to have a chaperon to go over here.

We had a lot of fun. I met him (Ben) in January I guess, and I married him in November.

Louise Vigil

Ben Vigil

Were you living in the neighborhood when you were eighteen?

Louise:

Well, I was living on Thirteenth and Kalamath with my parents. And then after I got married, we started to live in Auraria - my husband and I. That's where they (the kids) grew up.

Don:

There was a firehouse there (9th and Colfax) and there were four houses on the rest of the block. We lived in one of those homes. That was 1948. We lived there for about two years, would you say?

Louise:

Yes, the house is still standing.

Don:

It's on the block with the homes that are restored there (1017 Ninth Street). A duplex but I don't know the address now.

Louise:

It's an office now. We've been in it I don't know how many times.

They've done a pretty nice job restoring all those little houses.

Don:

Oh yes, it was nice last time I saw it. Wasn't quite that nice when we lived there.

Elmer and Gene Vigil

Do you all remember the little family-owned restaurant there?

Louise:

Oh yes, the Mayan - Casa Mayan.

Don:

The Gonzalez family.

Louise:

We knew everybody in the neighborhood.

Don:

They were across the street from where we lived. We all went to school there at St. Elizabeth's.

Louise:

You started at Franklin in kindergarten.

Don:

In kindergarten, yes. St. Elizabeth's didn't have a kindergarten so I went to Franklin. Then we all pretty much went to St. Elizabeth's

What did you do for fun?

Don:

Well, the way I remember it, it was the old type of neighborhood where you knew everybody's business. We didn't have toys like kids have today. We'd make guns, rubber-band guns, home-made toys. The whole neighborhood would make them and then we'd play that way. In the winter, we'd make our own sleds with sheet-metal or whatever we found.

Louise:

And then they'd get out there and play football. I remember the street that they'd play football on.

Don :

We had a porch swing, but it didn't swing because the porch was too small. Before television - before 1952, everyone would sit out on the front and watch people walk by - and we'd play games like guessing games and hangman and guess the movie stars and things like that. It was a different life - it was altogether different. And all the teenagers at St. Cajetan's, they had what they called the...

Louise:

Oh, that was the Legion of Mary.

Don:

Yes, and they would have dances for the teenage boys, kind of a little canteen-type dance every other Saturday or something like that. And the teenagers would walk around the streets with their jackets and look mean. But there was no trouble...

Louise:

No, there wasn't.

Don:

No, everyone knew each other, liked each other and helped each other.

Louise:

And there wasn't this gossiping type of thing. Really, I think everyone just tried to get along. That's just the way we existed, I guess not too much entertainment.

What did you and Ben do for fun? Did you all play cards or do anything social?

Louise:

Yes, we played a lot of cards. He (Ben) was a musician and he'd go find jobs here and there. I stayed home. But he would go out and do his thing.

And then my oldest boy graduated from West and he got a scholarship in music. In his senior year he got an award and Paul Whiteman happened to be in town at the time. He's the one to give him the award. It was real thrilling.

Don:

Paul Whiteman is an old Big Band leader. He went to West High School and they give an award in his name every year.

Louise:

And you know, in those days not too many kids were graduating when Gene graduated. What year did he graduate in?

Don:

1956.

I didn't realize how poor the times were until I grew up and look back at it. Kids didn't get new toys. We got new toys. We were lucky. Some of the parents would go to the Goodwill and buy wagons and bikes and paint them. That was what the kids got for Christmas from Santa Claus. The parents would do the best they could and that was it.

Louise:

Times were hard.

Were you all part of the church? Was it St. Cajetan's?

Louise:

Oh, yes! The kids went to St. Elizabeth's. They were altar boys.

Don:

Her father (Elmer Tenorio) helped organize the Credit Union at St. Cajetan's.

Louise:

He helped build St. Cajetan's.

Don:

He helped build it and he also was one of the charter members as well as an organizer of the Credit Union. And that Credit Union was kind of the center of the entire community. That's where everybody went for all their banking needs. It was right next door to the church.

Louise:

My dad was a juvenile officer for Judge Gilliam. He worked with him for years - until he retired.

Don:

So he organized the Credit Union and he was also on the Board of Directors which would approve the loans. You were dealing with your neighbors and felt comfortable going there. We were involved at St. Cajetan's to that degree, but because we went to St. Elizabeth's, that was our church and most of our social activity was at St. Elizabeth's.

Louise:

Most of the time I went to St. Cajetan's. Except for Mass.

Where is St. Elizabeth's?

Louise:

Right there on Eleventh and Curtis. The big gray one (1061 St. Francis Way on the campus).

Don:

There was a third church there too called St. Leo's at Colfax and Stout Street. There was St. Cajetan's, then a block away was St. Leo's. It was funny, most Hispanics went to St. Cajetan's, and most of the Anglos went to St. Elizabeth's. I don't know who you'd say went to St. Leo's - renegades?

Louise:

Before they built St. Cajetan's we used to have our Masses down in the basement of St. Leo's while they were building St. Cajetan's over on Ninth Street. They were trying to get up enough money to build it so my sister performed a lot on stage. She used to do Spanish dancing and stuff. And my folks, I remember they'd practice plays and stuff. I remember my mother with a rose in her mouth and my dad singing. I was little. I can't remember that much about it but they really worked hard.

Were you all married at St. Cajetan's?

Louise

Oh yes.

Don

Baptized and married there.

Louise

They went to school there at St. Elizabeth's, but really and truly deep down - everything else was at St. Cajetan's.

What was the cultural makeup of the area - it wasn't all Hispanic?

Don:

Oh, no it was quite a mix actually. I'd say it wasn't even 50% Hispanic. The projects - you found a lot of Hispanics there. I can give you an idea. The people on the corner and then the two old ladies were Anglo. Then next to the two old ladies was another Anglo family. Then us and then Aunt Rose. It was really mixed.

Anyway, St. Elizabeth's was 95% Anglo. As a matter of fact, I used to take some trouble from my friends - my Hispanic friends - cause I went to St. Elizabeth's. It was expected that I should go to St. Cajetan's.

Louise:

Yes, but at that time there was St. Cajetan's School and St. Elizabeth's. I don't know why I picked St. Elizabeth's.

Don:

Better education, that's why.

Louise:

I don't know, I just didn't want him to be sticking around with the wrong groups. There really wasn't anything going on. Well see, my sister Stella went there, to St. Elizabeth's when she was younger.

Don:

I liked it. I was glad.

You were happy to be there?

Louise:

Oh, they loved their school, yes they did.

Don:

I was altar boy. I was on the football team.

Louise:

He was an altar boy at all three churches. He and his brother both.

Don:

Sometimes we would serve two or three Masses on a Sunday. They would call us - the nuns had a convent half a block away and they had our phone number if someone didn't show up to serve Mass. We'd get a call and we'd run over and dress real quick. It was because we were close. We'd do all the night services too. The priests and the brothers would give us things, you know, candy bars and cakes...it was fun. It was great! It was a good life.

Louise:

And then, years later, after they were all grown, I worked there. They never had a lunchroom there at St. Elizabeth's. I raised my kids and then I went to work. This was in 1963. My mother passed away and I thought I'd better find a job. So I came down to St. Cajetan's, they told me they needed somebody at St. Elizabeth's. They were going to open up the kitchen there so I opened it up! And I was there for ten years and they tore it down for Auraria. I felt so bad cause I just loved it there. So then I went and worked over at Sacred Heart. I worked there six years and then they closed that down. They were closing down all the parochial schools. So I said, I better quit before I close them all down.

Don

There was a thing you mentioned - what we did for fun? There was a recreation center on Lawrence - Eleventh and Lawrence?

Louise

Yes, Eleventh and Lawrence. That was an old school. It was called Lawrence Street School at one time.

Don:

Then it became Lawrence Street Center. At the center, they had pool tables in there and you could go and learn to box. You could go in there and play basketball. And every Friday, Phil Torres, who was the director of the center, he lived right down the street - two doors down from us - he would get these Three Stooges movies and Abbott and Costello movies and every Friday for 10 cents you could go watch the movies. My dad was a candymaker at the time and he would sometimes donate the candy or sell it real cheap. You could get a bag of candy for a penny, and popcorn, that was before television, so all these kids would flock in and watch movies on Friday nights and after school. It just attracted all the kids in the neighborhood. They'd go down and play pool and punch the punching bag.

Louise:

My boys were real occupied with Highlander's at that time.

Don:

Yes, and that was another thing too. There was an organization called Highlander's Boys Band, and the Junior Police Band.

Louise:

Yes, Gene was in the Junior Police Band. Don went into Highlander's Band.

What did the girls do?

Don:

They went to the movies.

Louise:

I don't know because my girl was too small then.

I think a lot of them went to that Lawrence Street Center, too.

Don:

I don't remember any girls. It was all boys hitting each other and stuff. You know you put a guy in the ring and you'd have 'em put on the boxing gloves and go at it - like Boy's Clubs they have now.

Louise:

Girls stuck pretty much to home. You know, they all had big families and we were over there making tortillas or something - helping around the house. I know that's what I did when I was young. I didn't get to go out anyplace. I was busy helping bring up the kids.

Don:

The only time I saw the girls was on Friday night at the movies.

Louise:

Not one of my grandkids is married to a Hispanic - not one.

Don:

Well, we all moved out of the neighborhood.

Louise:

Yes, I told my kids, "You're going to marry your own."

Don:

In those days there was no question.

Louise:

There was a lot of discrimination then.

What other problems did you have?

Don:

The biggest problem was employment. I remember distinctly that Public Service Company would not hire Hispanics. The reason I know that is because when I got out of school I went to work for Public Service Company in the engineering department. I was the second Hispanic hired, and that's late! I went there in 1969 - and I was the second one. My dad would have never accomplished what I did - he was extremely intelligent - but the doors just weren't open.

Did you go to the Tivoli?

Louise:

There was nothing there, only the brewery and the dance hall.

Don:

No, there was a bar on the corner.

Louise:

Well, yes, right out on the very corner there was the Tivoli - it was called the Tivoli. It was just a bar.

Don:

Yes, but people could dance there. My dad played there.

Over the years we're still in touch with a lot of those people.

Louise:

We went to a rosary last night and saw everybody down there from the old neighborhood.

Where did you see these people, at what church?

Louise:

St. Cajetan's.

Don:

People still go to the same church.

Do you gather with your old neighbors anywhere else?

Don:

We see a lot of them at the lodge. It's called the Eagles. It's like the Elks. We see them there - a lot of them - at different affairs. You know, they have dances and different social events.

Were there any celebrations other than the usual holidays?

Don:

St. Cajetan's. They had a big bazaar. The first weekend of August - and they still have that.

Louise:

Oh yes, that used to be a big, big thing.

Don:

All the women would get together and bake and cook.

Louise:

Your grandma would make tamales.

Don:

Yes, donate all the food and then turn around and buy it back to support the church.

Was the neighborhood decorated for Easter and Christmas?

Don:

Not the decorations so much, but everyone went to midnight Mass. On Easter everyone would have their new suits, new clothes, whatever. Seems like everyone would get a new outfit for Easter and Christmas.

Louise:

But this Sixteenth of September and the Fifth of May, that came in later - much later. And another thing enchiladas, tostadas, and all this stuff like that - I didn't ever eat them until I went out to California one year. That all came from Mexico. Now you know what we used to call burritos? Tacos. We used to call them tacos, and they're actually burritos.

What about green chile?

Louise:

Oh no, that we had - green chile and red chile.

Don:

Most of what we call Mexican food today came later. We never ate corn tortillas and stuff like that.

But Cinco de Mayo was something that was looked down on because we wanted to be Americans. We were all born here. Born here and I don't speak Spanish - my brother doesn't.

Louise:

Yes, your brother does speak Spanish.

Don:

He says he doesn't. It was pretty much intentional because lot of people didn't want their kids growing up with accents. And so they only spoke Spanish among the adults.

Was there a lot of ethnic pride back then?

Don:

There was ethnic pride but it was in a different spirit. It wasn't like it is today - we would hide our lunch, I'd go off and eat it by myself so the kids wouldn't laugh at me. Because they would. They'd say, "What are you eating?" And they'd make fun of you. So there was pride - to a degree - in that you would never deny who you were or where you came from.

Louise:

My husband - one time I went out and I was eating a tortilla and he said, "Oh, don't do that! Put it away, put it away!" And I said, "The heck I'm gonna put it away!" But when I was going to school, my folks never spoke Spanish at home, but I had a grandmother who spoke Spanish to me and I'd answer in English. One time she told me, "I don't ever want you to come here again untill you answer me in Spanish." When I went to school, I never spoke it because I spoke it terrible. You know what would happen if you got caught speaking Spanish? You got sent to the principal's! So you didn't dare.

Do you remember how the Auraria project affected everyone?

Louise:

Oh, it was sad, because everyone just didn't want to leave.

Don:

But we had moved.

Louise:

Yes, we had moved - they didn't buy from us. Don's aunt was there and her son lived on our side. That's when I was working at St. Elizabeth's that all this started. They started knocking down all those houses. And to this day they say, "Why didn't they leave us alone so we could still live there?" We had already moved to Thornton.

There is still an organization of people from the Auraria area.

Louise:

Oh, we belong to it!

Don:

As a matter of fact, we have a newsletter that comes out periodically. We're suppose to have some kind of reunion this summer somewhere, They haven't told us where yet. We've had a couple of reunions. One on Ninth Street as a matter of fact. I tell you, it was kind of funny. Everybody sat in front of their house. The house they used to live in.

Interview by Kelli Baldree

Maria Gonzalez-Zimmerman

Where were you born and in what year?

I was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Billy the Kid's territory, in 1916.

And how long did you live in New Mexico?

I think my parents were there for two weeks. They were on their way to Denver. I just happened to be born in New Mexico as my parents were on their way to Denver.

So were they traveling for a long time?

Yes, my parents were peaceful people. They did not want to get involved in the revolution and they had friends on both sides of the revolution - they decided to leave the country (Mexico).

When did your parents move to Auraria?

1934 was when they bought the house (at 1020 Ninth Street).

Was this the first place you were settled in after your parents had been traveling for so long?

Yes, that was the place where most of us were raised.

During the depression my mother would give a lot to the neighbors, and to the friends.

We had homeless people come to the house and ask to rake the lawn for food. My mother wouldn't let them do the work, but she would serve them food. My family loved to cook.

It sounds like your family was very self-sufficient through such a hard time.

Yes, it was a happy family because our family loved to sing, dance, read poetry - it (the house) turned out to be a gathering or a cultural center, even before we started our restaurant, Casa Mayan.

You went on to further your career as an opera singer in New York?

Yes, after Denver I went to New York. Before that, when we were very young - there was a teacher that organized an orchestra. I played the cello, my sister played guitar and my brothers played the drums. This orchestra came out of Rudy Park Center.

Maria Gonzalez-Zimmerman, 1945

Maria, five years old

How old were you?

Twelve years old. I had a very bad habit. When they were singing, if a tenor or soprano couldn't carry a part, I would sing it for them, My teacher would get angry with me.

She told me I was taking their part, but I would protest that they weren't doing it so why couldn't I?

I finally stopped going to rehearsals because she wouldn't let me sing all the parts. The next thing I heard was that she had gone to the Lamont School of Music, which is the University of Denver now.

She got me an audition, but they wouldn't accept me because I was too young.

I had grown up with my uncle, who was a fan of the big stars of the 40's. So I learned all the older music, very difficult flowery opera music. Then the Lamont School of Music gave me a scholarship. I had no training but I had been subjected to all of this great music.

I went to this school. I went through all of their classes although I was still in high school.

What did you like to do best?

Well, many big families of Denver would invite our family to sing then. That was a lot of fun for the whole family.

Was music what brought your family to Denver?

No, they were avoiding the revolution in Mexico.

My father was a pressman and my mother and father both loved music. My uncle Jose Angel was the musician. He studied music at the Conservatory in Mexico City, He had a beautiful voice. In fact, when I first heard Placido Domingo sing, he sounded like my uncle. My uncle was also an artist and architect. My father and mother were both professional photographers. After the Ludlow massacre near Trinadad, Colorado, they went there to photograph the miners and their families who survived. The people couldn't pay for the photographs in money but they paid with chickens and eggs. My mother and father went back and forth from the United States to Mexico several times around 1916. One time on their way back to the United States, the government closed the border at El Paso and they had to stay in Juarez for awhile. My oldest brother was born in Juarez at that time. While they were in Mexico, my mother and father used Pancho Villa's carriage. They knew him quite well.

Do you still have their photographs?

Yes, I've kept quite a few. As a matter of fact, one of my grandnieces, who is still in high school, is taking photography and has worked a lot with my parents' photographs. I think she is very talented. Anyway, both my parents were photographers and she may have inherited their talent.

Do you have memories or stories that stand out?

Well, there are so many. I remember we'd go to the Lincoln Park Pool that we used to swim in every single day.

Mom would get so mad because we'd come back so dark skinned and she could barely tell us apart. I loved to swim.

We also used to rollerskate around the block. My mother would get so angry because I'd skate after dark. Nobody would ever find me.

It sounds as though you were all so lively and outgoing. Do you think that today's youth is that active?

No, I must monitor what my grandson sees on television. That seems to be his main activity.

But I guess radio was pretty popular with us. One thing I will never forget. When the Orson Wells show was on, all of a sudden we heard that people were jumping out of buildings because people from outerspace were invading.

People were running and hiding and killing each other. We couldn't believe it.

Was your family scared?

No, no, no. We were Orson Wells fans and we knew radio was our big thing.

We used our imaginations.

So you spent a lot of time listening to the radio?

Yes, and we were always well supervised by our parents. They were very strict.

We could go some place with them, but as young girls nowhere on our own.

Were you allowed to date?

No. The boys came to the house to see us. We had a lot of boyfriends but we didn't date them.

When were you finally allowed to start dating?

After the war. A lot of things changed as the war ended.

So your memories are generally very happy.

Yes, definitely. We were a very happy family. We once performed for the Humphreys family and my sister was very talented, but she hated to perform. She had on a beautiful dress. She was dancing down the stairs and everyone at the party threw their hats at the tail of her dress. She swore she would never perform again.

Where did you meet your husband?

The first one went into the army as a volunteer. He went into the Air Force and got to be second lieutenant. He was one of the bombers that bombed the Germans.

That must have been very frightening for you.

Yes, in the beginning his letters were all marked up. After that, they got so busy that the letters weren't looked over and I got all the inside information.

Did you have children then?

No, when he came back he was going to transfer to South America to work as a pilot. They hired him in New York, so that's where we went.

When he was away at the war, were you still living in Auraria?

Yes, I went back home to live with my parents.

At that time, if you wanted to rent a city hall, you had to ask Mayor Stapleton. So I went to see him and asked him for the city hall for the Sixteenth of September to have a big celebration. The Mayor said that it was no problem. I said I needed part of the symphony, too. So he gave me some musicians. I said I also wanted some advertising on the street cars. He said I could have that, too.

If you think something is impossible, you just ask for it.

I had a lot of work to do. I went to the migrant workers and gathered guitarists - about six. I brought them back because they had to transportation from Brighton. On the way back to Brighton, we stopped at a restaurant and the restaurant had a sign that I will never forget. The sign read: "No Mexicans or dogs allowed."

What year was that?

1946, I believe. There was a lot of prejudice back then.

My father was very light - skinned and some people thought he was Jewish. For fun, people called him Mr. Gonzalstein because he looked Jewish. One time he went to work for a Jewish lady in West Denver. He was doing some carpentry work. He took my brother Ray with him. She fixed dinner for them. She called, "Mr. Gonzalstein! Your dinner is ready and bring that little Mexican boy in with you!"

Did you experience racial prejudice at Auraria?

No. In my childhood it was very important that you knew where you came from.

I didn't speak English until I was eight years old because I was raised by n y grandmother and she didn't speak any English.

She had a big influence on us. She was very strict. When we crossed over the front doorstep, you could not speak English, you must speak Spanish. It was very important to her because so many children in the neighborhood were forgetting their language. In fact, now I'm teaching some of the grandchildren Spanish because so many people concentrated on learning English, but they forgot Spanish.

And your family owned the Casa Mayan restaurant. Its fortieth anniversary is coming up soon, isn't it?

Yes, It's a family reunion. There are many memories. It was a cultural center. The Classical Guitar Society started there. Also, some very famous people came to the restaurant. Let me tell you a cute little story about my granddaughter. When I was living in Lakewood, she was staying with me. I put her in the car with her seatbelt. She was continuously talking. She said, "Grandma, are there any Mexicans living around here?" I said, "Well, I know of

one that lives here." She said, "Oh yes? Where does she live?" I said "Well, she's driving the car." And my grandchild said, "Oh then my mother is half Mexican." I said, "Yes!" There was silence on the back of the car for awhile then all of a sudden she says, "Oh grandma! You know what? When I am as old as my mother, I will be half Mexican and then when I'm as old as you are I'll be full Mexican!"

What holidays did you and your family observe?

Well, the Mexican holidays would be the Fifth of May, Cinco de Mayo and the Sixteenth of September. The Sixteenth of September is the bigger celebration.

Was Auraria mainly Hispanic?

Yes, when I was there. Although there were some Germans. There was a strange family of three women raising a little boy.

We finally figured out that one was the grandmother, one was the mother, and one was the aunt. He was a little feminine because he was raised by three women.

When we first had to leave, it was very difficult. The restaurant was where the Guitar Society started and Poet Society started. We felt that it was the end of the cultural center. My mother was in her eighties, and nobody wanted to take over the restaurant. It was very difficult for us to move but I think it's wonderful that it's becoming a tradition of Denver. I hope they will have a place of music, poetry and dancing once again. It was almost like an international house. We had no prejudice against anyone.

Interview by Jennifer Smith

Casa Mayan, 1958, left to right: Oliva High and Trini High (both daughters of Maria Zimmerman), Ramon Gonzalez, Carolina Gonzalez, Martha Gonzalez

Maria Gonzalez-Zimmerman, 1941

Maria Gonzalez-Zimmerman, 1985 television role in a documentary, "We Are One"

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