

Sergio Daniel Sifuentes (editor)

*La Independencia, an Original Orange County Colonia:  
Recollections by Nellie Pando Rocha (1982)*

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California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).

The Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History.

Project: Orange County Colonias.

O.H. 3851.

Oral Interview with Nellie Pando Rocha, conducted by Lucy McDonald,  
June 23, 1982, [Independencia,] California.

*Introduction*

The oral history transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "Orange County Colonias." The interview with Nellie Pando Rocha was conducted by Lucy McDonald, on June 23, 1982, in [Independencia,] California. The interview is 1 hour, 2 minutes, and 27 seconds long, and it is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in 2022 by Sergio Daniel Sifuentes.

Nellie Pando Rocha was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1916. In 1924, she and her family arrived in Independencia, a *colonia* community situated between Anaheim and Stanton. Due to Mexican migrants settling in Orange County after the 1910–1920 Mexican Revolution, Independencia was designated to serve as a neighborhood for the growing Mexican and Mexican American population in 1923. *Colonia* Independencia constitutes one of the original and last surviving Orange County *colonias* still recognized as an unincorporated municipality. During the Depression, Nellie decided to drop out of school (while in ninth grade) to work and help support her family. Recalling her time at Anaheim Union High School, Nellie points to her school's discriminatory policies. Despite being composed of a majority Mexican-origin student body, Spanish was only spoken on rare occasions. Nellie describes Independencia during the Depression years and the great flood of 1938, one of the largest floods in Southern California history that impacted Orange, Riverside, and Los Angeles County. Her husband served in World War II, and they purchased their first home in the community for \$600. Nellie portrays how women in the community worked picking or sorting walnuts, strawberries, chilies, and oranges. She characterizes the community as it was during the 1930s, mentioning businesses and various entertainments such as movies. The church was a central part of the Orange County *colonias*. According to Nellie, church celebrations and various social events were at the heart of community life. Nellie discussed the different roles of men and women in the community and the double standard imposed on women. Nellie also explains

what she believes the Mexican American community contributed to Orange County, emphasizing labor in agriculture and the city's infrastructure. Nellie also discusses her children and mentions their professions.

Nellie Pando Rocha's story reveals the dynamics of community life in the historic Orange County *colonias*. Told from the perspective of a Mexican American woman, this oral history provides insight into the way women experienced and interpreted daily life in the Orange County *colonias*, shedding light on the everyday politics of social interaction and participation within the community. Her story also depicts how the Mexican American community became affected by historical events, such as the Great Depression, World War II, and the Vietnam War. Nellie Pando Rocha was a committed member of the community and a beloved mother. Her story would be of interest to historians of the American West, California history, Orange County history, and the Latinx diaspora. Scholars in ethnic studies, especially those specializing in Chicanx and Latinx Studies, will find immense value in this oral history. Finally, community activists currently residing in the *colonias* and advocating against their incorporation by the city of Anaheim, should also tap this and similar oral histories as they serve as counter-narratives and counter-mappings of the Southern California landscape.

*ABOUT THE EDITOR: Sergio Daniel Sifuentes of Jurupa Valley, California, earned three A.A. degrees (2017) at Riverside City College and a B.A. in History and Spanish Linguistics (2020) at the University of California, Riverside. He is currently pursuing an M.A. in History with concentrations in Chicana/o Studies and Public History at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), where he is a member of the Theta-Pi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta (History Honor Society) and the recipient of the 2022/2023 Lawrence B. de Graaf History Student Fellowship. He is a first-generation Chicanx college student.*

*The primary-source edition published here originated in the "History and Editing" course offered by CSUF's History Department.*

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### *Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 3851)*

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: Nellie Pando Rocha [NP]

INTERVIEWER: Lucy McDonald [LM]

DATE: June 23, 1982

LOCATION: [Independencia,] California

PROJECT: Orange County Colonias

TRANSCRIBER: Sergio Daniel Sifuentes

- LM: This is an interview with Nellie Prado here in her home. Could you please tell me where you were born?
- NP: Nellie Pando.
- LM: Where's that at?
- NP: I mean my initial name. Nellie—
- LM: —Prado—
- NP: —No. Pando, P-a-n-d-o.
- LM: Pando! (pauses) Okay, Nellie Pando Rocha is your full name?
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: Okay. Could you please tell me where you were born?
- NP: I was born in, um, El Paso, Texas, in a little town called Val Verde.<sup>1</sup>
- LM: Mm-hm. Were your parents— where were your parents from?
- NP: My parents were from the state of Chihuahua.<sup>2</sup> And in a little town called Guadalupe.<sup>3</sup>
- LM: Uh, could you tell me the year you were born?
- NP: I was born August the 31<sup>st</sup>, 1916.
- LM: What year did you arrive here in Independencia?<sup>4</sup>
- NP: We arrived here, um, October—I don't ex—I don't remember the, the day, but I remember the month.
- LM: Year?
- NP: Nineteen twenty-four. Uh-huh.
- LM: Do you happen to know what the reasons for choosing this area was? As your home. Did you have family here already?
- NP: No.
- LM: No relatives? No.
- NP: Well, we had an uncle living in Anaheim<sup>5</sup> at that time and, um, that's where my parents settled, in Anaheim. Uh-huh.
- LM: And then they— when did they move right here into Independencia? Was it nineteen twenty-four?
- NP: Nineteen twenty-four. Uh-huh.
- LM: And you didn't know anybody in the community when you first moved here?
- NP: You mean here?
- LM: Right here. In Independencia.

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<sup>1</sup> Presumably an incorporated town within El Paso, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> A state in Mexico.

<sup>3</sup> A city in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

<sup>4</sup> *Colonia* settlement, established in 1923, remains unincorporated in Orange County, California.

<sup>5</sup> A city in California.

- NP: Uh, yes. We knew, um, let's see, there were the Castillos<sup>6</sup> living here at that time. And then, uh— (pauses) a few months, I think, then, uh, the Nieto family moved in also.
- LM: Hm.
- NP: And then there were the Albanez. Oh, and then Cesario Rodarte.
- LM: Oh, so you knew quite a few people when you moved in?
- NP: Ye-yeah. Mm-hm.
- LM: Oh. Did you attend school here in the community?
- NP: Yes, I did.
- LM: And what grade?
- NP: As I told you I'm not very good on dates. I, I think was in the seventh grade.
- LM: Mm-hm.
- NP: Um. (pauses)
- LM: Could you, uh, describe what the school was like when you first started going to school? Here—
- NP: —Here?
- LM: In Independencia, yeah.
- NP: It was, it was, three rooms. And, um, what I recall is that, um, my room that I was in was fifth, sixth, seventh, and eigh—eighth grade. And, uh, I remember my, my teacher was a school principal at that time, Mr. (inaudible).
- LM: Okay.
- NP: Um-hm.
- LM: What kind of activities did you have at school that the parents could participate in, too, with the students? Like, was there a PTA<sup>7</sup> like there is nowadays?
- NP: (pauses) Not that— there wasn't. At least, at least, I recall my, my parents— we were raised by my, my grandmother. Um, my mother died when I was very young. And, um, (pauses) at least my grandmother wasn't at— not that I recall, that there was any.
- LM: Were the majority of the students in the classroom, uh, *mexicanos*?
- NP: We were all Mexican.
- LM: All Mexicans. And, uh, did all these Mexicans speak English when they were at school?
- NP: Yes, we did, and we were supposed to—
- LM: Mm-hm.
- NP: —at that time, uh, we were told that, uh, it was one of the school rules that we were to speak—
- LM: Yeah, I've heard that, no—you weren't allowed to speak Spanish.

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<sup>6</sup> Presumably a family who lived near Nellie's family home. As a general rule, unknown individuals are not annotated in this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Presumably "Parent Teacher Association."

- NP: No, we were never allowed to speak Spanish. Most, all of us – did – spoke it, but were –
- LM: How about when, when you were out in the playground? Did you speak Spanish then, or it was just English, too?
- NP: Well, some of the kids would, would speak Spanish, I remember. But I, but I probably was very obedient in school, and I, I know that I, I, I, um, spoke English all the time. I was interested in, in learning.
- LM: Could the teachers speak Spanish at all? Say, like, you get a new student in school that understands no English at all, could the teachers communicate with the student? Could they speak a little bit of Spanish whatsoever? Or was it just strictly English?
- NP: (pauses) Well, English. I don't recall none of the teachers speaking Spanish. (knocking on the door)
- NN: Grandma –<sup>8</sup>
- NP: I don't think they spoke Spanish. Not that I recall. I remember myself, uh, taking some of the, some of the children that were starting school and, uh –
- NN: Nellie –
- LM: So how did they handle a student who had just arrived and couldn't speak any English at all? Do you remember what, how they handled that situation? Or was the child just left by himself so he can learn the language?
- NP: I think so, because I don't recall teachers speaking Spanish.
- LM: Up to what grade did you go to school here?
- NP: Just, I went to school here we used to walk up Magnolia,<sup>9</sup> there was Magnolia No. 1 (inaudible).
- LM: There was Magnolia No. 1 and Magnolia No. 2,<sup>10</sup> right?
- NP: Uh-huh, and then, they built the school here, and it was called Magnolia No. 2.
- LM: Nice.
- NP: And then, they, um, then, um, we, we all attended school.
- LM: Up to what grade did you attend school?
- NP: I, I was in the seventh grade.
- LM: Was that your last year of school?
- NP: No, two years. Eighth and ninth grade. But the activities were like, like, um, I remember when we graduated, the commencement exercises were at No. 1. And then, like, uh, what's the big test? They would divide up who was to be salutatorian and valedictorian. And I remember of course, being disappointed when another girl from here Sophi, Sophia Chaidez – I missed it by just one, just one sentence. I was disappointed. But, um, she

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<sup>8</sup> Unidentified individual present during the interview.

<sup>9</sup> Presumably early names of the schools in the Magnolia School District.

<sup>10</sup> Magnolia No. 2 was the school for Hispanic students, while Magnolia No. 1 was for white students. In 1955, the district integrated Magnolia No. 2.

- was the valedictorian at that time. And, in other words they, um, divided us for the graduation exercise. But it was held at Magnolia No. 2.
- LM: Oh, so when you graduated from high school, it was right here in Magnolia.
- NP: When I graduated to what?
- LM: When you graduated from—
- NP: From grade/primary school you mean?
- LM: Oh, from grade school?
- NP: Uh-huh. At that time it was up to eighth grade. It wasn't like now, junior high and, and at least it wasn't when I attended school. It was only up to eighth grade, and, we graduated and then, um, we go to high school. And I attended Anaheim Union High School<sup>11</sup> for about a year and maybe over a year and then, uh, and then there was the Depression.<sup>12</sup> And then we started, uh, we started going out to work, and then it was hard for me to come to school. I didn't.
- LM: So, uh, did—what effect did the Depression have on your lives? Was, was everything—
- NP: On me, it's the fact that, um, probably, uh, uh, I would have been able to keep on with school, um, than, uh, a life with work. And then, my father was working for the Gas Company at that time, and he was, he was laid off. And then he started—in fact we used to live six months here and six months in Coachella Valley.<sup>13</sup>
- LM: Oh.
- NP: And we used to, uh, not only Coachella Valley, Bakersfield,<sup>14</sup> and San Jose,<sup>15</sup> and—
- LM: What affect did it have on the community in general? The whole community? What effects did the Depression have on the community that were visible? Did a lot of people start going back to Mexico with the Depression?
- NP: Um, no. Although, we were left here, it was like a personal thing with me at the time 'cause my, my father's parents, my father's, um, mother.
- LM: Mm-hm.
- NP: Was living with us at the time and then, um, my father's brother also. And he would sort of take care of her, and my father did, too. It was important that they had a living quarter that, uh, my father and grandparents built, um, for them. And, um, we got my father's consent and without him, um, telling my father anything he, um, uh, then several people, uh, were, they left for Mexico. Maybe there was—on account of death—someone dying,

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<sup>11</sup> Established in 1898, currently goes by Anaheim High after a 1957 name change.

<sup>12</sup> Presumably the Great Depression.

<sup>13</sup> Located in the Colorado Desert of Riverside County in California.

<sup>14</sup> City in central California.

<sup>15</sup> City in northern California's Bay Area.

but I mean I don't know. The rest of the, rest of—there were some families here that did go to Mexico. I remember, I was, uh, I think that it was like, uh, they were given free consultation and voluntarily—they had to sign that they were leaving the United States and, uh, going back to Mexico.

LM: Oh, didn't know that.

NP: And my, um, as I say, my, uh, uncle and, uh, signed up my grandma and she was a very old lady at that time. And, of course, my father was very upset but there was nothing he could do—I, I know there were some families, but I don't remember how many or that there were some that left maybe there was a family problem. The hardships, they were very—you know, but we, we didn't have any, really any hardship during the Depression. My grandfather used to work for, um, several, uh, ranchers here through Gilbert Street. And they would share him.

LM: Oh.

NP: He would work, um, one week with, with, with, one and then another. Uh, I think with Mr. Long, that I recall, and Mr. Siever and Mr. Smith.<sup>16</sup> And, um, I know one had at the dairy, at that time. So, uh, we didn't, uh, suffer too much.

[00:12:50]

LM: Well, since we're talking about the thirties, let's talk about—see what you can remember about the, the orange picker strike that was in 1937.<sup>17</sup> What affect did it have on the community? Did they get involved in the strike?

NP: I don't remember that part because my (pauses)—

LM: What about the, the Long Beach earthquake<sup>18</sup> that was in 1933?

NP: Oh, well the Long Beach earthquake, uh, we were, we were there at that time. And, um, well it didn't affect us too much, I don't think. We didn't, we didn't, there wasn't an emergency here where people, uh, had to leave the vicinity. Although, that we were told that we were supposed to. And then, uh, um, what I recall is that, uh, um, the, the, the, um, store keeper here, um, at the time Mr. (inaudible), uh, people would rush up there and get something and with all the excitement and, and everything well, um, he would say afterwards you know that, um, some, some of them came and some of them didn't but we, we didn't actually have to leave the community.

LM: What about the great flood<sup>19</sup> that happened here in 1938?

NP: We were—

LM: —Describe it.

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<sup>16</sup> Presumably of Smith Ranch in Irvine, California.

<sup>17</sup> Presumably 1936 Orange County agricultural strikes by agricultural workers.

<sup>18</sup> March 10, 1933, earthquake in Long Beach, California.

<sup>19</sup> 1938, one of the largest floods in Southern California history, affecting Orange, Riverside, and Los Angeles County.

- NP: Oh, we were not here at that time. But I was talking to, um, to a cousin of mine, and she says that, um, all she remembers is that this big roaring noise and then, uh, all this water coming down, but, eh, it didn't affect the people so much. We were not here at that time –
- LM: – Was that when you were working somewhere up north?
- NP: Yeah, we were in in Indio at the time.
- LM: Oh, I see. Let's talk about *estilo de vida*,<sup>20</sup> style of living. School. We already talked about your school. How about your, uh, what kind of jobs were there in the community?
- NP: Oh, we, um, we used to, uh, some of the girls here in the vicinity were, uh, orange pickers and sorters and used to work at Anaheim, uh, Packing House<sup>21</sup> and, um, would pick strawberries and walnuts and, uh, um, let's see.
- LM: What was the salary? Do you happen to, happen to remember?
- NP: Salary –
- LM: And the hours and the working conditions?
- NP: Well, we, we, we used to all, I know we used to sort chilis, and, and, um, uh, it was called at that time, we were working at the *secadora*,<sup>22</sup> where they dry all the chiles.
- LM: Uh-huh.
- NP: And, uh –
- LM: All this work was right here in the community?
- NP: Not here. We used to go out to, uh, like to, like picking strawberries. We, we, we would be in (aircraft sounds) like, in a strawberry, uh, uh, places where they have now.
- LM: Yeah, let's talk about the jobs that were available right here in the community in Independencia.
- NP: Independencia.
- LM: Uh-huh.
- NP: There weren't any jobs within, here, here in our vicinity, no.
- LM: Not in the orange groves or surrounding the community?
- NP: Oh yeah, but, I mean, I thought you meant within our vicinity, here.
- LM: Yeah.
- NP: Yeah, I recall my brothers picking oranges and my father, and, uh, my father's (inaudible), but I recall not steady. Most of the work that my father and grandparent – my grandfather, he was a rancher. He worked for all these, uh, ranchers and, and, then he does fumigating work also. You know, fumigating the orange, the orange groves.

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<sup>20</sup> Spanish for “lifestyle.”

<sup>21</sup> Established 1919.

<sup>22</sup> Spanish for “dryer.”



- LM: Did you ever work at a job within the community right here? Pick out in the – picking oranges or packing oranges or picking walnuts?
- NP: Yeah, we picked walnuts, but I mean not, not here in our vicinity and our community.
- LM: What were –
- NP: This was always the four streets as we see now. With the exceptions of people that have, like, some of us, we demolish our own homes. And, and, uh, like these two homes are broken – were, you know, they were, um, built, people moved in.
- LM: Yeah, but the areas that you worked in were nearby –
- NP: Nearby, yes.
- LM: – or fairly, fairly close.
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: Do you remember what the working conditions were like? The hours that a person would have to work at a job, say, picking oranges.
- NP: Well, they were maybe seven to five or, or later. It was mostly piece-work, you know, like, uh, picking oranges for the men. We used to – and, uh, how about, uh, in the Packing House, I can tell you that I didn't, I never did that kind of job. Mo – Most, I remember, most of the girls here, and girls here from our vicinity, we, we were all orange pickers.
- LM: Mm-hm. Let's – can you describe the area? What it was like when you first moved in, the houses, what the streets were like –
- NP: Oh, when we first –
- LM: – yeah, when you first m –
- NP: It was nothing but, uh, empty, empty lots at the time.
- LM: Really? Not many houses?
- NP: Dusty and, eh, the few houses there, there, like this family that I recall, they lived in tents. It was a tent. And, like the, the Nietos also, their first place was a tent, and then they started. Uh, my, my, my people – they, I remember, they hired a carpenter from La Jolla,<sup>23</sup> and I remember our home was, uh, two rooms, and then they, they started adding up.
- LM: Were the names of the streets still the same as they are today?
- NP: Yes.
- LM: Haven't changed?
- NP: They haven't changed.
- LM: When did you have your streets paved do you happen to remember what year it was? Was it a long time after you moved in?
- NP: Well Gilbert<sup>24</sup> was paved, I remember.
- LM: Mm-hm. Yeah, it was a pretty main street. How about Garza<sup>25</sup> and –

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<sup>23</sup> Presumably La Jolla *colonia*, near Placentia, California.

<sup>24</sup> Presumably Gilbert Street near Anaheim, California.

<sup>25</sup> Presumably Garza Avenue near Anaheim, California.

- NP: But that came later, uh, this my best –
- LM: That-s fine.
- NP: – but I’m not really good at dates.
- LM: That’s all, you know, yeah. Did most of these houses, did the people have gardens in the back?
- NP: Yeah.
- LM: What kind – of – did they grow fruit?
- NP: Well, my grandfather would, uh, he would grow sugarcanes.
- LM: Sugarcane?
- NP: Mm-hm. And, uh, he, he, would at that time, um, we didn’t have a little church here yet, but we would – there, but they had, um, a big *fiesta*, you know, for the church in La Jolla, and my grandfather would cut all his sugarcane and, uh, he would sell it over there, and, of course, it was something that our vicinity looked forward to.
- LM: Yeah.
- NP: And then then we had, uh, um, or, uh, we had, uh, fruit trees, Name it, and we had it.
- LM: Did you plant – have – tomato plants –
- NP: Uh, yes. Mm-hm.
- LM: Chili plants –
- NP: Chili plants and all that.
- LM: Did you have gardens, flower gardens?
- NP: Oh yes, my grandmother had the garden. Uh, uh, we didn’t have any lawns, it was, it was all flowers.
- LM: What kind of animals did you have in your yard? Did you have chickens?
- NP: Yeah, we had chickens. Mm-hm. And, um –
- LM: *Puercos*?<sup>26</sup>
- NP: Well, um, that I recall my grandfather butchered two pigs only. I recall and, uh, but other than that it was just chickens and, uh, uh, rabbits.
- LM: Rabbits? Okay, uh, do you remember when you got indoor bathrooms, electricity, gas, when you had all the conveniences you have now? (laughs)
- NP: That’s what I mean. I’m not really good at dates, but I guess it was, uh, maybe –
- LM: Oh, it doesn’t matter. What I was going to ask you, I don’t know if you’ll remember this, but do you remember what the rent was like when you first moved into the community? I know you were young at the time but –
- NP: – We never rented –
- LM: Oh, okay well do you remember how much the property was to purchase?
- NP: Well, my, my grandfather paid six hundred –
- LM: Oh, for –
- NP: – for this lot.

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<sup>26</sup> Spanish for “pigs.”

- LM: For the one you're on now?
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: That's a good size lot.
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: Do you know if he bought it from another *mexicano* or —
- NP: No.
- LM: an American?
- NP: No, it was, he bought it from a Mr. Stanton. I think it was. It was like a company.
- LM: Mm-hm. Within the community were there, were there any kind of, uh, businesses? Stores, for example?
- NP: Yes. We had, um, the first, uh, store, I recall, was owned by, um, Mr. Chaidez. It was, uh, he had (inaudible) quarters, and then he had a store and, and the pool, uh, like, um, like a — recreation —
- LM: A pool hall?
- NP: No, a pool hall — I guess it could be like a pool hall, and at the same time it served as, um, like entertainment. And this, um, company would come and show movies and people would, uh, um, would attend. You know, and, um, like, um, dances also, they were held there, too.
- LM: Do you happen to remember the name of the company that used to come in and show the movies?
- NP: No.
- LM: Were there any restaurants in, within, nearby the community or in the community?
- NP: No.
- LM: What about — which was the closest hospital to the community?
- NP: Orange County Hospital.<sup>27</sup>
- LM: Is that where everybody would go in case of an emergency?
- NP: Mm-hm. Yes. Mm-hm. It was probably Orange County Hospital (inaudible).
- LM: I was going to ask you about the stores that were right here next to the community. In the stores did, they sell Mexican products like, say, chiles, *tortillas*?
- NP: Yeah, but (inaudible), and well, what I recall, there was another little store and then, um, his bigger store, and then after the Chaidez moved away, they, they went to Mexico. They sold that and went to Mexico. Then Mr. Guevara came in. And then, later on, Mr. and Mrs. Trujillo. They were the ones that had the store — up until the time that all these, uh, uh, places were condemned. And then they sold out, and ever since then there hasn't been any, any, any store here in the community.

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<sup>27</sup> Presumably Orange County Global Medical Center, Santa Ana, California.

LM: So, usually there were two stores right next to the community on Katella?<sup>28</sup>

NP: At that time, when we first moved here, for a while there was only two stores, and then there was only one.

LM: What type of transportation was used in the community? Or where did you have to go to catch a bus or –

NP: The streetcar.

LM: – streetcar?

NP: Mm-hm.

LM: Where did you pick the streetcar up?

NP: At, uh, on Gilbert near, near Chapman.<sup>29</sup> Mm-hm. – We would take a streetcar into Santa Ana<sup>30</sup> and into Los Angeles.<sup>31</sup>

[00:26:25]

LM: Do you remember how expensive it was?

NP: – And there was a big day – Oh I don't remember how much we used to pay. I'm sorry.

LM: No, That's alright. Did many of the people who lived in the community have their own vehicles?

NP: Yes, most of them did. Mm-hm.

LM: Let's talk about the authority within the community. Was there someone who was in charge, say, like a sheriff of the community? Or how did it work? When you had a problem did you have to call the sheriff?<sup>32</sup>

NP: Yes. Mm-hm.

LM: To come on in?

NP: Mm-hm.

LM: Do you feel there is much more crime now in the community than there was when you first arrived here?

NP: Naturally, yes. In – when – during our first years of – there wasn't as much, you know. But then I think it's all over now.

LM: What about gangs? Is there gangs now or was there gangs –

NP: – No. – That's one thing, there never were gangs around here. Well, there's some of the kids that got in trouble – but –

LM: As you were a child do you remember there being any, uh, any singers, any poets in the community – artistic people I should say, painters?

NP: Hm, no.

LM: What about, uh, the women – did they, uh, spend time, uh, knitting, crocheting, sewing? You know, the hobbies?

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<sup>28</sup> Katella Street in Anaheim.

<sup>29</sup> Chapman Avenue near orange, California.

<sup>30</sup> City in Orange County, California.

<sup>31</sup> City in Los Angeles County, California.

<sup>32</sup> Presumably the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

- NP: Oh yes, most, most of them, there was a thing in those days like, young girls when they were young, we were taught embroidery, crocheting. It's like I tell my granddaughters now it's like, we didn't have time to be bored, you know, with nothing to do. And mostly, I remember – that I recall, women didn't go off to work. It was only the young girls at that time that would, um, uh, pack oranges, and, uh, or we would pick strawberries, or work wherever. No, it was the, the Mexican tradition, you know, when we grew up, we would help out –
- LM: – Yeah. Do you think many of the women now they still crochet, knit? – Or has this tradition, kind of, died off?
- NP: You know, I think a lot of women still do. I mean, I still do. Not as much, you know.
- LM: What about your daughter? Do you have any daughters?
- NP: Yeah. I have one daughter.
- LM: Does she, dos she crochet?
- NP: No. – My, my, um, daughter is a very thorough person. But, you know, that's one thing that she never did learn, how to crochet, but she won't take (inaudible). She's, she's. she's a good, um, dress maker –
- LM: Artistic in her own way.
- NP: – yeah, uh-huh. She's a wonderful cook.
- LM: That's a talent, too!
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: Let's talk about the church, the role of the church. Was it very important in the community?
- NP: Oh yes. Mm-hm. Definitely.
- LM: Uh-huh.
- NP: That was part of our, of our, entertainment. Making the *jamaicas*<sup>33</sup> –
- LM: – Describe them for me. –
- NP: For the benefit of the – Well, there were several, uh, um, *jueces*.<sup>34</sup> And they used to say games and Bingo and, um, then, uh, they – some of the ladies would bring, um, their, um, well, things they made, hand-made, you know, like, uh, um, put them up for sale. And then they would, several, uh, women would, uh, would, uh, make, um, *tamales* or, or, um, well, usually *enchiladas*, and all that and then sell. And my aunt, uh, um, *se necesita elotes*,<sup>35</sup> um, in those *jamaicas*, and they would – she would – some of the ladies would sell (inaudible) supposed to be for the benefit of the church. And then, they would have, um, a band, you know, and there was dancing. And, uh, there was, uh, mostly, the social life at that time was parties in the people's homes and, then, dances –

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<sup>33</sup> Mexican hibiscus beverage.

<sup>34</sup> Spanish for “judges.”

<sup>35</sup> Spanish for “we need corn.”

- LM: How did you celebrate, uh, baptis—baptisms, first communions, weddings?
- NP: Well—
- LM: — Generally the same way?—
- NP: — The same way —
- LM: — When everybody united in one person’s home?
- NP: Mm-hm. Yes.
- LM: What kind of entertainment would you have? What kind of music would you listen to?
- NP: It was usually Mexican music.
- LM: Can you remember what the name of the church was?
- NP: Uh, Sacred Heart.<sup>36</sup>
- LM: Uh-huh. Is that the same name it has today?
- NP: Yes.
- LM: And is it still in the same location?
- NP: Yes, only it’s, uh, the old church is, uh, is a building that they use now for, uh, like, uh, where people go. And then they, then they built a new church.
- LM: Do— Would you happen to remember what the Father’s name of the church was, within the time you —
- NP: — Um, Father Brown.<sup>37</sup> —
- LM: — Father Brown?
- NP: He was a priest. And, and, and then, then they would have catechism classes also.
- LM: What would you— Did the people still practice the tradition of having a *velorio*<sup>38</sup> or wake within the community?
- NP: At the house, no— yes. Well, at that time —
- LM: — When you were young —
- NP: — most all the wakes were at home, but not anymore.
- LM: I see. What kind of organizations were there in the—in the church? Was there like a women’s club? —
- NP: Yes! We would, we would—we had, uh, um,— we belonged to this, uh, club—
- LM: — Women’s club? —
- NP: Usually, uh, um— Well, women getting together and, uh, usually was, uh, activities for the church— And then there was, uh, well in the meetings, there was, um, uh, getting ready for the month of, um, May, where, um, little girls would go and offer flowers. And then, uh, in June was for the, for the boys. They would offer flowers. Mostly, the— At that time, the activity was around the church —

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<sup>36</sup> Presumably Sacred Heart Mission, Anaheim, California.

<sup>37</sup> Presumably the priest of Sacred Heart Mission.

<sup>38</sup> Spanish for a “wake.”

- LM: Was there a club for men within the Church? Like, now a days, I know they have the Knights of Columbus.<sup>39</sup> Was there such an organization then?
- NP: No.
- LM: And these women's clubs, would they be in charge of—
- NP: Well, that came later, but then I married and, and, and moved. I remember there was a, uh, we had an organization hall in (inaudible). And teachers would come, and they would, we would have classes in English for the people, for the older people. Some attended and some didn't, but, and then, there was dancing also, there, and like families. I was—I didn't dance at that time, uh, and, let's see, that must have been around nineteen—well, during the Charleston<sup>40</sup> and—
- LM: —Oh—
- NP: —I remember the older girls also dancing. And, and, uh, our parents dancing also. It was just like a family thing, you know?
- LM: This women's organization, would they take care of, uh, decorating the church? Like for, uh, weddings, first communions? Is that their function?
- NP: Um, no, not really. It was just getting together and, uh, and, uh, we used to pay our dues that they would use for the church activities. And, you know, I was, um, uh, we all had our turns cleaning the church. And, um, like we used to decorate it for a, uh, every woman had their day to decorate the altar. And, and, and take flowers and, uh, and, uh, we're just small girls I say. I thought they did too, where they wear a yellow or, uh, white dress. and we would, uh, um, say the rosary, and we would, uh, take the flow—flowers to the altar.
- LM: I think. Yes? How did, uh, they celebrate, in the community, *Navidad*,<sup>41</sup> *la semana santa*,<sup>42</sup> *el doce de diciembre*?<sup>43</sup>
- NP: Well, the twelfth of December they always got the *mariachi* music. It would come and serenade the, the Virgin.<sup>44</sup>
- LM: Alright. How about Christmas?
- NP: And, uh—Well—Nothing that I recall that was unusual for Christmas other than the people were very, in those days, when we—we never had a Christmas tree or anything like that. It was just—But later on, you know, like when I grew up and married, and had my ch—my kids, well then, I did have, and all the vicinity, the Christmas trees, and pretty much just now. But, during at least when I was growing up we never had any tree, at least we didn't, I don't recall if any of the families did or not, but we didn't.

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<sup>39</sup> Established in 1882, a global Catholic fraternal service order.

<sup>40</sup> Popular 1920's jazz dance.

<sup>41</sup> Spanish for "Christmas."

<sup>42</sup> Spanish for the "Holy Week" celebration during the last week of Lent.

<sup>43</sup> Spanish for the twelfth of December celebration dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>44</sup> The Virgin of Guadalupe.

LM: What about *la Semana Santa*? Or Easter?

NP: Yeah, there was, um, the regular, uh, uh, church. You know, we were, we were told we were not supposed to eat meat, weren't supposed to sell, we weren't supposed to go to dances, and we weren't supposed to participate in anything until, until it, uh, was over. And then I recall it, like on Saturday, that, uh, *Sabado de Gloria*,<sup>45</sup> most of the people would go, go after holy water and then, we would get to see our dates. Because then we knew that, uh, right after that we would attend dances. So, we could, uh, but I recall that, during all that time we, we used to fast. We didn't used to, um, have breakfast (inaudible), like a, like a sacrifice, you know. Then we were supposed to give up something for Lent also. So, I recall in those days, we, well, we, let's put it we were more religious background –

[00:39:09]

LM: –Do you think the customs of celebrating these, these specific dates has changed, in comparison to how we celebrate it today?

NP: Well, um, some, but yet here in the vicinity, um, there's still, uh—I don't recall but, um, for all the time I was growing up they would give the *posadas*<sup>46</sup> to the people going out in sort of a procession, like with candles, and there was singing, passing everybody's house and sing, and they were supposed to let them in and give them sweet bread or hot chocolate or whatever.

LM: Yeah this was a custom that is in practice nowadays.

NP: I don't think so. They used to do that here (inaudible).

LM: Yeah. Did the community ever celebrate sixteenth of September<sup>47</sup> or *Cinco de Mayo*?<sup>48</sup>

NP: (Train horn and dog barking) Well not really let's see. –Yes they would, they would, they would make, um, let's see—But that was within the convent area several girls that were chosen from different towns would go out and the girls were, would sell tickets, and vote, and the ones who sold more were the ones that probably –this, uh, and, and one time one of my cousins was one of the ones that was the queen for the sixteenth of September. And, uh, one of the controversy, I recall, well, we ended up –she was the one who won against the girls standing. She gave it up, I think. But, they, I remember our vicinity doing a lot for her making, um, um, uh, *jamaicas* and *fiestas*, you know, to raise, uh, uh –to sell votes.

LM: Do you feel the relationship within the community members has changed?

NP: –Oh yes. –

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<sup>45</sup> Spanish for the “Great Saturday” celebration, Easter Eve.

<sup>46</sup> Religious celebration between December 16 and 24, celebrated in Latin America and parts of the United States.

<sup>47</sup> Mexican Independence Day.

<sup>48</sup> “May the fifth” celebration of the 1862 Battle of Puebla in Mexico.



- LM: Are you as close as you used to be?
- NP: No, definitely not.
- LM: Do people still have *compadres* and *comadres*?<sup>49</sup> Do they believe in that tradition, practicing?
- NP: They still do. Mm-hm.
- LM: Let's talk about the role of the women. Do you feel it's changed a lot?
- NP: Well, um, I know it has with me—(laughs, pauses). Um, let's see, uh, I, um—I think that most of my married life, um, doing housework. And, uh, I always thought that, uh, I didn't believe in the old-fashioned way of the, of the women not going out to work. I thought that, like I did, I had my father that I, I had my father for eighteen years when he went blind and that was one of the reasons I came back. And, uh, then after, when my girl was fourteen, I started working again.
- LM: What was a general attitude of the men in the community as to— their wives going out and working outside the house, having a job, did they, did they accept the fact that their women wanted to go out to work and—?
- NP: Some, um, I don't think there were very many, at that time, I recall, you know, like, um, with my generation probably yes, but when I was growing up no.
- LM: So generally, most of the women stayed home?
- NP: Mm-hm. I don't recall, like my—No, I don't recall anybody in my family that I, that are closer—It was usually the young girls at that time. That would, uh, women that, uh, usually stayed home.
- NP: What about when a woman was going to have a baby, was— did she usually go to the hospital or did some women give birth at home?
- NP: Well, um, some, uh,— as I say, my mother passed away when I was about nine years old and, uh, my younger brother was about a year and seven months. So, uh, I remember the, I remember, let's see, my younger brother was born at home, and I, I remember, the child prior to him, they had to rush my mother to the hospital in an emergency.
- LM: When your brother was born at home, was there a doctor to deliver the baby or a midwife or—
- NP: —Yes. It was, uh, at that time was, um—a doctor, from Stanton,<sup>50</sup> he was the one that, uh, and then, in the earlier days in the vicinity was Dr. Gents that I remember from Anaheim. Mm-hm, and, mostly, the women used to have their babies at home. And, at that time when I was growing up—
- LM: Uh-huh, and doctors would come and deliver the babies while the women had them at home or— did somebody?
- NP: Yes.
- LM: So, the women in the community know how to give—

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<sup>49</sup> Spanish for “godfather” and “godmother,” also a term of reverence and friendship.

<sup>50</sup> City in present-day northern Orange County, California.

[00:45:00]

- NP: No, mostly, what I recall, so I mean personally what I experienced back then, they had doctors.
- LM: Let's talk about the role of man. Who was the disciplinary in the house? Was it – When you were growing up, it must have been your father since your mother passed away, or your grandmother raised you.
- NP: My grandmother.
- LM: Uh-huh. What about with your children? was it you or your husband who was the disciplinary?
- NP: Both of us.
- LM: Both of us? You shared the responsibility?
- NP: But, mostly, it was my husband. You know, like, um, well, it was like, "I don't know. Go, ask your father."
- LM: Do you feel that there was a double standard in, in bringing up your children, say like, with your daughters and your sons? Did your daughters – Did your sons have more freedom than your daughters?
- NP: Oh yes. Mm-hm.
- LM: And –
- NP: – but I didn't let her date until she was about sixteen. And I remember the problems I had – as I'd said, I, with my father, with him, he, he would get really upset and said that, uh, that wasn't the way he raised me but, like, I, so my father –
- LM: See, that's what I was looking for. So, you were raised different when you were a young girl, when you left, when you would go out, you would have to have an escort, right? You weren't allowed to date, you would have to bring another person –
- NP: – No, well no, we never did, uh, um, at that time, um, our, we used – we would go to dances. There was like, um, in Santa Ana (inaudible) hall and then to the, uh, let's see American Legion<sup>51</sup> here on, um, in Anaheim. But always, our, um, our, um, our mother or some, uh, um –
- LM: Elderly pe –
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: – would have to accom – that's right. Uh-hu. As far as a man, he wouldn't have to have an escort somebody who, to accompany him right? Who would go out on? –
- NP: – Oh yeah –
- LM: See, that's what a double standard is. Did these double standards still exist when you were bringing up your children?
- NP: No. I, I, um, – as I said I had problems with my father concerning my girl but, like, I would tell my father – "It's a changing world." And then he said, "Well, I didn't, I didn't raise you like that." I said, but, look, I said, well, it's

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<sup>51</sup> Wartime veterans service organization.

- true. We would, uh, they would let us go to a show or to the dance—one thing we didn't, um, as I said our mo—our mothers went with us to the dance, but they would let us go during the day, to the show, you know. And from there we would, of course, we would meet our boyfriends and go with them, but we—like I said with my father, I said, “Well, we would have to be sneaking around.” Like I, my father, I said, “and this is the best way. At least I know, um, the young man that, uh, who she, who she is with and where she's at.” And, I said, “and did you know where, what I did?” No, I mean, the boys we used to go out with, the boys would pick us up on the street, and that's the way it was.
- LM: What would the men do for entertainment in the evenings after a day's work? Is there a bar they could go to? A pool hall?
- NP: A pool hall, at that time. Mr., um, (inaudible) was the one that had the pool hall. And they, they, um. And of course, there was—It wasn't supposed to be, it was against the rules but there were *jugadas*,<sup>52</sup> that the men would play poker, you know—
- LM: Oh.
- NP: For money. It wasn't right but they did. (laughs)
- LM: (laughs) Yeah.
- NP: And of course, the women didn't like it and there were problems concerning that, you know, but the men would get together and playing poker, and they would play for money, for the poker games.
- [00:49:27]
- LM: Let's talk about dating when you were young?
- NP: Okay.
- LM: How did men and women meet? Was it usually at dances?—
- NP: —At dances. —
- LM: —and *fiestas*?—
- NP: —and *fiestas*.
- LM: And, uh, what was—What did a man have to do to ask for a women's hand in marriage? What was the procedure? Would you just go up to the girl's fa—parents and ask for her hand in marriage or how did he do it?
- NP: Uh. Well when I—Personally?—
- LM: —Mm-hm.
- NP: Okay. Um, my in-laws sent this other, this man, a very close friend of theirs. And, uh, my father and brother came (inaudible). There was some days for the priest, for the priest to come. And, uh, and right after that, well, the unity, you weren't supposed to see your boyfriend until the wedding.
- LM: Oh.
- NP: And, uh, as I said, we have to sneak around.

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<sup>52</sup> Spanish for “games.”

- LM: Yeah. What was the age that most women got married at and the age that most men got married at?
- NP: At that—Well, it all depends on the person. Well, I, I didn't get married until I was about twenty-three—And, as I recall some of my friends, um, were married when they were young.
- LM: Did they usually marry men from the community or outside of the community?
- NP: Mostly within the community.
- LM: Do you remember if there were divorces when you were young?
- NP: Well, um, no. I don't recall anybody getting a divorce. There weren't as many.
- LM: Yeah.—Let's talk about politics a little. Can, um,—What political party do you think most of the, um, community members belong to?
- NP: There was a few that, that, ever voted I guess. I don't think in those early years there was much voting. There wasn't, well, our parents didn't have, weren't educated, really—
- LM: —Okay. Now, speaking your generation here—
- NP: My generation well, uh, well mostly, uh, there was a lot of Democrats.
- LM: Do you think a majority of the people that live here in the community now that are your age considered themselves American, Mexican, or, maybe, Chicanos, even?
- NP: Well, I think that, we all think that, well, personally, well, me, I don't know but I'm Mexican. And I consider myself—I, I, I wasn't raised in Mexico but I always felt that, well, I always feel I'm more Mexican.
- LM: That's right. Since we're talking about political politics and—Let's talk about historical events for a little bit. Can you remember what it was like during World War II and the *pachucos*<sup>53</sup> at that time?—
- NP: —Oh yes—
- LM: Can you just kind of describe the effects of these movements?
- NP: Well, one, one, I recall, one time we were having a dance and the dance during our, um, uh, this Americanization hall that they had built here and some other, um, young men came—from the other towns, not, not folks from here. And, and, of course, they, uh, it was, it was, it was, terrible I remember. And, uh, they would come, they would come in and have chains and they would just pick a fight and, of course, the people here had to defend themselves.
- LM: What about World War II, and what effect did it have on your life personally?
- NP: Uh, not, not, not very.

[00:54:27]

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<sup>53</sup> A youth of Mexican origin dressed in a zoot suit.

- LM: Did any men in the community go off to war? Any family members?
- NP: Well, uh, my, my husband, he was drafted, and he was, uh, but he was, but he didn't go to—
- LM: —But he was in the service during World War II?
- NP: Oh yes. Mm-hm. Yeah.
- LM: How about, uh, Korean War<sup>54</sup> in the fifties?
- NP: Well, no that didn't affect me, uh—My son was small at that time.
- LM: Okay since your son was young during the Korean War, how about when the war in Vietnam<sup>55</sup> in the sixties? How did that effect your life?
- NP: It didn't—
- LM: —Your sons weren't drafted or anything?—
- NP: No. It wasn't—I think he was at that time, he was, um, getting apprenticeship in plumbing. —
- LM: —Oh—
- NP: And I just, uh—
- LM: Wha—What was the general feeling in the community when they heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated? Do you recall what?—
- NP: Well,—we all felt, uh, very bad naturally. We knew that he always try and help the poor. And, um, well I'm not only, I work in the, as I said, I always used to do housework and, I recall that my lady that Democratic that they showed racial, racial pride, well of course they showed.
- LM: Do you feel that most of the voting members of the community went out and voted for President Kennedy?<sup>56</sup>
- NP: I think so.
- LM: Well, I'm going to change the subject now. I was going to talk about the superstition and beliefs in the community. Do you think there's still a lot of, uh, superstition for the people that live here? That was brought over with them?
- NP: Well, I used to see—well mostly the people now, they are, most of the early settlers are gone away or passed away. And, as the present, uh, most, like sometimes when I go to church in, um, uh, which I haven't for quite a while (inaudible) my husband and living by myself. And, um, but there's a lot of, uh, annuals, you know, Mexicans called *braceros*.
- LM: What about *leyendas*<sup>57</sup> like *la Llorona*?<sup>58</sup> Is that something that still exists in the community?
- NP: I don't think so. Well, personally me I, I, I, um, all like witchcraft and all that, we was aware about it—

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<sup>54</sup> Korean War (1950–1953) between North and South Korea.

<sup>55</sup> Vietnam War (1955–1975).

<sup>56</sup> John F. Kennedy, U.S. President (1961–1963).

<sup>57</sup> Spanish for “extraordinary tales.”

<sup>58</sup> Mexican legend of a mythical vengeful mother.

- LM: – what about stories like short – like *leyendas* – *la Llorona*, did you ever hear of *la Llorona* when you were a child?
- NP: Yeah –
- LM: Did you pass this story on to your children when they were little?
- NP: No, but, but I had an uncle. He would, he would tell us, uh, all these stories and we would sit around, you know, in the evening and, he knew a lot of riddles, stuff like that. But with my children, no.
- LM: I was going to ask you to kind of finish off the interview, uh, what do you feel that the major contribution that Mexicans made to Orange County is?
- NP: Well, uh, it's been all the labor that's done all the work, really.
- LM: That's true –
- NP: Like my husband, he's for a number of years in construction. In fact, he worked during all that time that they were building, um, uh, Disneyland.<sup>59</sup> –
- LM: –OH! –
- NP: And, like, now my, my son-in-law is a plumber. And, uh, he's very, uh – Well, I think that a lot of the work done here, the buildings and all of that that's mostly, uh – Well that's all the Mexican men – Well, it's all the Mexican labor.
- LM: Labor?
- NP: Mm-hm.
- LM: What professions do your children have if you don't mind me asking?
- NP: Oh my son's a plumber. Uh, that's not a profession, but I mean –
- LM: – That's a trade? –
- NP: It's a trade.
- LM: Your daughter's a housewife?
- NP: My daughter is a housewife and, uh, her husband, um, is a plumber also.
- LM: Oh. This, I know you might find a little personal but I was going to ask you, uh, what was the happiest moment in your life? Or, I should say what was what was the saddest moment in your life and then what was the happiest moment in your life?
- NP: The saddest was when they told me my father was going to get blind. He was only forty-four years old. And, uh, the happiest is when my children were born.
- LM: (laughs). Would you happen to have any photos of the community?
- NP: I have a school picture.
- LM: That would be great, if we could see it. Any documents? Or, would you be willing to let us use this photo to make a copy of it?
- NP: That's fine.

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<sup>59</sup> Theme park in Anaheim, California.

- LM: That's great. Do you have any *tejidos*<sup>60</sup> or any, any artwork, or, things like that that we can probably use to include in our exhibit? Everything will be returned to you.
- NP: I, I, I, most of the stuff, let's see, all that I have would be old.
- LM: Well, that's fine.
- NP: Most of the stuff –
- LM: – Maybe you could just, I can give you time to look for it. I'm going to be in the community, I could call you, and I can stop by.
- NP: Okay.
- LM: That'd be great.
- NP: Let me see if I could find it. Most of the stuff, I remember, I, I, I gave away, you know, and that kind of thing. You were supposed to, it wasn't, uh.
- LM: Mm-hm. So, can I take this picture with me to make a copy of it and I can return it to you? That would be great. And I want to thank you for your time.
- NP: Okay. Well, I said I feel like (inaudible).
- LM: Do you happen to know if any other people? If they would be interested in being interviewed?
- NP: You know who you could interview? Mrs. Rosa Guerrero.<sup>61</sup>
- LM: I interviewed her already.
- NP: Yes, because she's one of the old timers and, uh, well the ones that are, that are closer than mine. There's a Mrs. Rubio, but she came here in 1935.
- LM: Rubio?
- NP: Mh-hm.
- LM: Would you happen to have her phone number?

[01:02:27]

END OF INTERVIEW

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<sup>60</sup> Spanish for "knitted materials."

<sup>61</sup> Possibly another interviewee in the Orange County *colonias* project.