

Spring 1-1-2010

Oral History Transcript - Josefina Ramirez Barrera

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The Life of Josefina Barrera

Q: Name

A: My name is Josefina Ramirez Barrera.

Q: What is your birth date and place of birth?

A: I was born on October 26, 1926 in Los Ebanos, Texas. There were no hospitals during that era, and was delivered by a Midwife. That was very common during my time.

Q: Parents name?

A: I was born to Narisco Ramirez and Josefa Sanchez from Los Ebanos, Texas.

Q: First language and other languages spoken?

A: I was brought up speaking Spanish, so that was my first language. After attending school I learned the English language and am fluent in both languages.

Q: What was your occupation?

A: People were poor and had no means of going to see the doctor when they became ill. The main means of healing were done by home remedies. My goal was to help sick people and decided that I wanted to be a nurse. I worked in a doctor's clinic for over 18 years. I aided many people during my time there and even assisted the doctor in the delivery of many, many babies – I stopped counting after the 100th delivery.

Q: How long have you lived in the RGV?

A: I was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley and have lived my whole life here, all of my 83 years.

Q: Where do you live and what is the address?

A: I presently reside at 917 N.3rd Edinburg, Texas, but Mission, Texas is my home town after having moved there from Los Ebanos when I was 2 years old. We lived in Mission until 1974 when we moved to Edinburg.

Q: Do you rent or own your own your own place?

A: My home is actually owned by my granddaughter. We sold our home and not wanting to deal with all that is involved in owning a home; my granddaughter was gracious enough to allow me to live in this home until the good Lord takes me home. I am responsible for all the utilities, but any repairs and taxes are handled by her. Can't get any better than that – huh?

Q: Who sold it to you?

A: Like I told you before, my present home is owned by my granddaughter.

Q: Tell me about your family?

A: I lived with my mother and was 1 of 4 children to be alive after birth. My life as a child was a happy time, despite the fact that we didn't have all the amenities. We had a close relationship with all my aunts, uncles and cousins. I thank my mom for the morals and values she instilled in me and for my upbringing.

The Life of Josefina Barrera

Q: Any ties to RGV?

A: I married at a very young age, which was a very common thing during that time. My husband came from a well to do family. After my father-in-law passed away, we inherited close to 1,000 acres of farm and ranch land in Puerto Rico, La Reforma area. The Puerto Rico Ranch located in on Farm Road 1017 and U.S. Highway 281 in northwestern Hidalgo County. My father-in-law, your Great-Great-Grandfather was a pioneer settler back in the 1920's. During the 1940's Puerto Rico had a population of 40. The community did not have a post office and all mail was sent through Linn, Texas. Our home was located on 130 acres and was about 5 miles north of Puerto Rico. We lived there several years and later moved back to Mission.

Q: Does your whole family live in RGV?

A: Yes, all my close family lives in the Rio Grande Valley, I do however have some aunts and cousins living in North Texas.

Q: Was the land a grant from the King of Spain or the Republic of Mexico?

A: No, my father-in-law purchased the land and or acquired it through barter.

Q: How was the land used?

A: The land was mainly used for farming and ranching. Cotton was the main crop that was harvested during that time and we also had a small garden behind the house where we grew our vegetables. Cattle were raised on the remaining part of the ranch. About every three months a calf was butchered to provide meat for the family.

Q: How was work divided?

A: During the olden days work was usually divided by gender. Men performed all the hard labor; women stay at home cooking, cleaning and tending to the house chores and the children.

Q: Was there air conditioning, water, electricity, grocery stores restaurants?

A: Air condition was not a common feature during my time – during the summer and warm day's windows were kept open and all our doors had a screen door which allowed the breeze to come in. During winter or cold days we would keep the house warm by burning logs in the big iron stove and slept with heavy hand-made woolen blankets. Water was scarce, we had little running water and I do remember going down to the river and bringing back water in buckets. There were no indoor plumbing or toilets. The water was usually used to wash clothes with, we would normally boil the water first prior to using it. Electricity was also not a typical resource; we would minimize its use and utilized kerosene lamps. There were no grocery store chains all we had were Mom & Pop owned stores that had only the essentials.

Q: What food was available?

A: Our basic foods consisted of rice, beans, potatoes and corn tortillas. Tortillas were made primarily from corn which was a lengthy process. Corn had to be soaked, ground on the metate, made into masa and hand formed before cooking on a large comal. We had seasonal vegetables such as corn, tomatoes, onions, turnips, cabbage and carrots. Other items include watermelons, cantaloupe, grapefruits and oranges, grapes (we had a grapevine) and pomegranates.

The Life of Josefina Barrera

Q: What was school like?

A: We received basic education, at the beginning it was a one classroom, which taught all different grades. Later on we had individual classrooms for each grade. I only attended school through the 8th grade.

Q. Did you travel?

A. Traveling was limited, our towns was small, so we usually walked to all the places, such as to school, church, going to the grocery store, the local theater, the dance hall. However, unless you owned a car all travel was mainly done by riding the bus. I do remember that when needing to cross the river in Los Ebanos, we crossed it by riding the Chalan. After I got married we owned an old Chevy car.

Q. What were the roads like?

A. Growing up our roads were two lanes and made of dirt and caliche. When coming to town from the ranch it seemed like forever getting from one place to another – cars didn't run as fast as they do now. When it rained travel was near impossible due to the mud, cars would get stuck and need to be pulled out.

Q: Have you found artifacts on your land?

A: Yes, arrow heads were common pieces found when digging in the backyard for a privy or when preparing the dirt for gardening.

Q: Was there a cemetery on the land?

A: No, the town had a local cemetery. The wealthy influential people were the only ones who had a private cemetery.

Q: Were there old buildings on the land that are no longer there and do you have pictures

A: Yes, there were barns and corrals and even a wooden store building, but there are no pictures available.

Q: What memorable thing happened as you grew up?

A: I remember growing up during World War 2 and the sacrifices we all went through such as rationing of food, scarcity of metal products, and the personal sacrifice of losing a loved one to the war. The assignation of President John F. Kennedy and the start of the Civil Rights Movement started because of Rosa Parks and led by Martin Luther King.

All in all I've had a very memorable life and am grateful to have lived my life, and enjoyed my Grandchildren and most of all my dearest Great Grandchildren. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to have lived to enjoy my Great Grandchildren.