

Follow Up Interview with Irene Atwood Evins

Conducted by Colin Newton, Richard Pena, Joanie Meave, and Ryann Fink

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Time Start: 00:10:56

Time End: 01:16:12

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**Colin:** Today is Friday October 25<sup>th</sup> and we're here at the UTPA, University of Texas Pan American Border Studies Archives. My name is Colin Newton. I am with the Border Studies CHAPS Class. I am with Richard Pena and behind the camera we have Ryann Fink and Joanie Meave and today we are interviewing, could you please state your name?

**Irene:** Irene Evins

**Colin:** and uh...

**Irene:** Rachel Irene Atwood Evins (giggle)

**Colin:** Excellent! Ok Ms. Evins, to get started, um, while we're here at the University of Texas Pan American, we might as well discuss the school a little bit. Um, we have been discussing your involvement in the school.

**Irene:** Ok my involvement started very, very early in my life. Edinburg Junior College was an Edinburg School and the tax base was Edinburg, It was not valley wide at the time. My oldest brother, who is 12 years older than I, attended Edinburg Junior College and so did my sister Hazel and so did my sister Jean and my brother Jim and I and my youngest brother Bud. We all started our college educations here. When I was, uh, in college here, It... There were lots of kids who were coming from other towns to go to school here and after the war; we had many, many GIs who came here to start their educations. Many of the uh, students, at that time, had not even graduated from high school and many of them needed uh, very pre college level work and they had a very extensive uh, education for those people and then they went right in to the college as soon as they were prepared for doing that. So, it was a fabulous thing to have that facility here for that reason. And so about that time uh, Dr. Ward, I knew he wasn't a doctor but I always called him Dr. Ward, and the Hodges, um, Mr. and Mrs. El... uh, Chase and Elefey Hodges and Elliot, Dr. Elliot, who was a Chemistry professor and several of the people, Ruth Owens, another one, they were very, very involved in the community in many cultural ways. They helped to bring cultural arts to Edinburg, which was a fabulous thing because we got to see renowned artists and would have not seen it down here in this outpost of the valley. So, all of these things began to come together and the idea was offered that we needed a wider tax base, for one thing, and we needed to make this, rather than just Edinburg Junior College, we needed to maybe make it a regional college and we did. So then it became Edinburg Regional College, but then the idea was floated that why not try to extend instead of just the first two years to a four year college, because many kids didn't have the opportunity after the associates degree to go away to another school. So, that became the driving force to get this in to a four year college so that our children and young people from the valley would have an opportunity to finish their degrees and so I happened to be in school at the time that the four year, uh, plan came in to existence and so all of

us students at that time were on the Band Guard. We stuffed envelopes, we did mailers, we went everywhere, and we put fliers everywhere. We worked really, really, really hard to get the uh, vote to be a positive vote and we did and it was a good thing. That's the involvement that I had and the other involvement that I had, is that I served on a committee that helped, It was just this kid stuff, you know, choosing the mascot, choosing the colors, those kinds of things and Jim Brooks, who was brought here as a football coach, they had a football team at one time here at Pan American and that was..., oh goodness, that was back in the..., and I'm trying to remember what year they quit having it, but anyway, the reason Jim Brooks was here was because he came as the football coach and he loved this college and he spent his life promoting this college. One of the things that he was responsible for, was getting the first uh, lights for the first uh, baseball field that we had and he brought uh, Coach Ogletree here and we had a fabulous baseball team and we loved that. I was out of college by then, but Jim was very instrumental in doing that. Well, he was on the committee that I served on to so that and we chose the name Pan American because of our proximity to the border and we, of course, had lots of Anglo kids and a lot of Hispanic kids and we just kind of liked that idea. It makes me sad, I mean not sad, It makes me sentimental to think about all those times and we chose green for the citrus and white for the cotton because at that time it was definitely very agricultural and we chose the bronc because there were people who ranched and had ranches and so that was important, and that's about all I remember about that. But, I, I didn't get to take advantage of 4 year college, because they could only add one year at a time, and since the uh establishment of the university happened right at that time I went away my Junior year to the University of Texas, and I was really glad that they connected up at the University of Texas instead of A&M. (laughing)

**Ryann** (Whispering): We all are.

**Irene**: Because that could've happened too you know. But uh that was the history of it that I, that I was involved in and it, it, it's always been uh, uh, uh, I guess I've been real proud of that because I've seen it grow, and I've seen it flourish and I've seen it do wonderful things for a lot of kids.

**Ryann**: I have a quick question, was parking always this bad?

**Irene**: No, (laughing) no, not, because then, back then uh most kids didn't have cars you know. Uh we were lucky if we had a friend that had a car. Because we just, uh it was, not everybody had cars that was the whole point of that. I had a friend in high school who had a car, two friends in high school who had cars and not very many others. A lot of kids after the war came, they, a bus ran from Harlingen up here, and they, a lot of kids from Harlingen came by bus and a lot of kids from McAllen came by bus. The, there were lots and lots of soldier boys who got their education here after the war and it was a 4 year college. By then they added a year and then they added a year. And they didn't start with as many degrees as you can get now, like you couldn't have gotten an Engineering degree or anything. But they had a pretty broad base you could get a teacher's certificate, Education, uh History I think, you know some things like that. But uh they've added, and added, and added. When I went away to the university, my mother said, "Oh that's such a big school, 17,000 students". Well I think ya'll have more than that here now, don't you?

**Colin**: Yes, we do.

**Irene**: So, so, anyway, that, that was the

**Colin**: So it was very important that the colors and the mascot be representative of the community.

**Irene:** Of the community and the name Pan American, because we have lots of kids that come here from Mexico and so that, we recognized that very early on and thought that was essential that we have that as part of the culture of this school.

**Richard:** Let me ask you an important question, uh, you said, a little while ago that just the fact that developing the name uh gave you or sentimental value, how do you feel about it now that it's about to change, the name is about to change?

**Irene:** Oh is it?

**Richard:** Oh yes.

**Colin:** Now that Pan-Am has merged with the University of Texas-Brownsville

**Irene:** Oh yeah.

**Colin:** umm, now there's a proposed name change and colors may change.

**Irene:** I know they've already incorporated the orange, which I don't object to but uh how would they change it? We're the larger university, why don't we suck them in (laughing)

**Richard:** Some of us happen

**Irene:** like an amoeba.

**Richard:** Some of us happen to agree with you on that.

**Colin:** I'm sure a lot of people at this campus would agree with you and a lot of department chairs would agree with you.

**Irene:** Well it's just I don't know, well because of the medical school, is that the reason?

**Richard:** That's part of it, and I think the union between UTPA and UT-Brownsville there's now what a new board regents, and they're just going to change all this, and there is some protest, some people are protesting, which is why I was wondering

**Irene:** Well I hadn't heard that, I might go and get my placard and go.

**Richard:** Some more grassroots effort, it might just work.

**Irene:** Well I don't know, uh

**Colin:** But there is some opportunity, I mean with the merger of the two schools we'll see more programs available more opportunities for the students and perhaps maybe even bring back a football team with better results.

**Irene:** With better results, well we had fun. I was a Broncette, you know, the, when we had the Broncettes at the time.

**Colin:** And how long were you a Broncette?

**Irene:** Well the two years that I was here.

**Colin:** And what kind of activities did the Broncettes take part in?

**Irene:** Well what do, pom-pom girls do, you know.

**Ryann:** So would your picture be in any of these yearbooks as a Broncette?

**Irene:** It might be, I don't, I don't remember. I've always been photo-phobic, so I don't know; whenever pictures were being taken I ran the other way as fast as possible. I was here in '52, I have no idea.

**Joanie:** That's the one where you look very adorable in.

**Colin:** I believe we might have

**Joanie:** Yes

**Colin:** a page marked here. Ryann would you like to

**Irene:** Oh yeah.

**Colin:** come over?

**Irene:** There I am. Yeah, all these kids see I went to high school with these, kids, yeah all of these are

**Ryann:** What year was this?

**Irene:** 52, this was my uh freshmen year. I remember Jerry; oh she was such a beautiful girl. I don't know. We uh, didn't have the football team when I was here but we still had the vestiges of it the Broncettes. Am I there?

**Colin:** Oh there we go.

**Ryann:** Great

**Irene:** where am I? I'm not sure I'm there. I wasn't there. I could hardly add two and two. I should be here but I'm not

**Colin:** Well we have two more yearbooks. Back when you were in school, what other schools did the sports team play against?

**Irene:** You know I really don't remember too much about it. Because like I said the football team occurred before I got here and it was already done with. But Jim Brooks stayed on as the Phys. Ed, head of the Phys. Ed. department and he was very instrumental in getting the very first field house built, course now it's gone and they built the big gymnasium. But he was very involved in that part of the university.

**Colin:** And what do you think of the growth of the university?

**Irene:** Well I think it's fabulous. I, I mean that's what we had hoped for. And I'm really interested in this medical school that's going to happen. They're going to put it in Harlingen, is that what they said? Did somebody, did I hear wrong, or did I just hear a rumor?

**Joanie:** Well Harlingen has their own community college don't they?

**Colin:** Well yeah, but the, the

**Irene:** Well actually it's uh

**Colin:** University of Texas Medical School down here

**Irene:** But Harlingen's uh school is like a vocational school isn't it?

**Colin:** No, uh I do believe that Harlingen was one of the locations they were talking about because it was central between both universities.

**Irene:** Yeah that's what I heard, but the college that they have there is technical college, isn't it?

**Richard:** Texas State, TSTC

**Irene:** It's a vocational school, I mean they don't have an academic university do they?

**Colin:** No.

**Irene:** No, I didn't think so.

**Richard:** Mrs. Atwood, I'm going to take it a little bit further back, when you were uh before your college uh, your college days. Some of the students are very interested, interested since uh since I did mention this was uh history course, and a lot of them want to know about the tension between the White community and the Hispanic community. I, we do realize that this uh down here in the Rio Grande Valley it is a border town it is, could be considered a frontier uh where the two cultures do mix and blend a lot. Uh some of the students had mentioned to me that they saw pictures of uh where their grandparents and their great-grandparents were, were growing up here, and pictures where you know uh Hispanics weren't allowed to go into certain places or Whites wouldn't go to the south side of town or they weren't allowed to come to the north. DO you remember anything like this?

**Irene:** You know I'm sure that occurred because I've heard people tell of it, I do know that in Edinburg. But I don't, the reason for it was academic. In my view, they had an elementary school on the east side of town where most of the Hispanic population lived, was called, uh, what was the name of that one. Sam Houston School was on this side of town, and whatever the name of that other school, was uh, right now I'm, I don't do names anymore. Umm, anyway the reason

the children who were Hispanic went to that school is because they didn't have the language and they were taught English there. And then in 4<sup>th</sup> grade everybody went to the same school, the language was learned and that was the reason. That, it, that's as I understood it. Now if there were other nefarious reasons by the powers that be, I was unaware of it. I grew up in such a way that, I grew up out in the country and all the only children I had to play with were Hispanic. And I thought of them as my friends and I didn't have any animosity in any way. My father, when they moved here he realized right away that he needed to know how to speak Spanish and he went about learning to speak Spanish. Uh, all three of my brothers were fluent in Spanish. I'm not, I wish I were. I didn't have any negative feelings, toward, if it occurred, I was unaware of it and I did not participate in it. Some of my very, I hate this expression because I think it's so tacky, but some of my very best friends were Hispanic. And my mother's best friend was Hispanic.

**Richard:** Would you, would you say, would you consider that uh, like when I was looking at some of these pictures uh I also went off on my own and did a little bit more research, I noticed that a lot of this type of segregation occurred inside the city of Brownsville, inside the city of McAllen. But yet, would you think or say that because Edinburg was a rural area there was a lot of farmland over here that you were away from that?

**Irene:** Well, it wasn't, it wasn't urban, for sure.

**Richard:** Right.

**Irene:** Umm, and like I said part of the reason that there might have been segregation was just a language barrier.

**Richard:** Right

**Irene:** And umm socially I think people tend to stay with their own type. I mean umm, we were friends with the people in our church and we were friends with the people in our school and we were friends with people that we socialized with. I don't know, you know it, it, there may have been some ugliness, I don't know. Because we, like I said, my family didn't participate in it, and I wasn't a part of it. So, I can't answer, I can't, uh.

**Richard:** Do you remember when desegregation occurred?

**Irene:** Yes I do.

**Richard:** Do you?

**Irene:** As a matter of fact, I was at the University of Texas and I was in a post-graduate class, I wasn't post-graduate but they were making an accommodation to me because I needed that credit. And it was a seminar class and there were 12 or 14 of us in that class and in that class was uh a black man taking the class. There weren't very many black people on campus because until post-graduate the school's colleges were segregated. But that summer the Supreme Court came down with the decision, the Brown decision

**Richard:** Right

**Irene:** and I remember that, really, kind of, it took over the class as far as discussion was concerned and so forth. Well the black man in our class had mixed emotions about it, and he was a very nice fella, and we all liked him and accepted him into the class. But you know, we didn't feel any uh discomfort with him being in our class and he was quite the, you know, he had mixed feelings about it. Because he, he was in the education system and he was coming to the university that summer to get some advanced degrees to go back and teach in his situation, and he was afraid, and with reason, that if they integrated too quickly that people like him would be kind of moved out and white people would come in and take the positions away from the teachers who were black and in that teaching profession that, that was his, he was happy about

the desegregation on one hand, but on the other hand he was thinking about his own uh professional career.

**Richard:** Right

**Irene:** And of course it didn't turn out that way. I also remember that the very next year when I came here to teach, my first year of teaching, there was a little school over on east, close to east van week over there that was the school for the black children and uh Mrs. Betts, she was such a good teacher, she was a fabulous teacher and she taught, actually a one room schoolhouse because she had the 1<sup>st</sup> graders up through 6<sup>th</sup> grade I think and then the children were bused to school in McAllen during the desegregation period. We didn't have enough black people to even notice when we had integration because there were about 12 kids, you know, and we didn't even notice that integration, it worked out fine here. We didn't live in an urban area where that would have been a real shock to everybody's system. So I can't speak to that either. I remember Mrs. Betts umm was so gifted in so many ways that she was elevated at the time to consultant and she went from school to school and she helped us tremendously with arts and crafts and how to do things in our classroom that would help the kids. And she was wonderful. I think they named an elementary school after her now, haven't they? It's been a while but I think one of the new elementary schools was named for her. We had such regard for her.

**Colin:** When you began your teaching career, where did you begin it at?

**Irene:** I taught it at Lincoln school, and that's another interesting thing. Umm, it was, do ya'll remember hearing about Al Ramirez? He was uh mayor of Edinburg at one time and he was my principal, my first principal when I started teaching in 1955. And we had just built a brand new elementary school but the thing about that school was that it was for over age children. I thought it was a fabulous idea. These were junior-high age children who were lacking in the skills they needed to be proficient in high school or any other place because they didn't pass children on when they, if they were in first grade and they couldn't speak English and they couldn't read umm first grade level and they couldn't uh be proficient in the things they needed to be proficient in, they didn't pass them. They kept them in the first grade and then that same thing in the second grade and the same thing in the third grade. Well you could see what happens, these little children are 9 years old and in the fourth or the third grade, that doesn't work. And we begin to see this problem of these children stacking up well, Al was very broad minded and very far looking and he said, and he was a good one to do it because he was very smart and he said, these kids need a school where they can do junior-high activities be junior-high school kids and have their peers all be the same you know, junior-high age. So he proposed this school. So what they said is, if you are a certain age and you haven't attained a certain grade, then you will be provided for at Lincoln School and they had self-paced work. So any kid could gain as much as two years in one year if they had the drive and the desire and the teachers were focused on that very thing. Getting them proficient enough to get into high school and be competent to do their grades and it was such a good idea and then somebody thought it was racist and they said no more and I was saddened by that because... My first teaching job was a Phys. Ed. Teacher and that's another story, but, anyway, we had team sports and things that junior high kids do. We didn't have baby games like they do in elementary level and so it had some... and we had dances and had things kids that age liked and we had that self-paced uh, IPI is what they called it, Individual Prescribed Instruction and it was wonderful because the kids who had the drive and desire moved on so fast and it filled a real need, but we don't have that anymore. We just pass them along and then they graduate from high school and they can't be proficient and then they have remedial classes in college and then they drop out and then what so they have?

**Colin:** Do you remember what year the school ended?

**Irene:** Oh, by then I had moved to a different school. Uh, that would be in the archives I'm sure somewhere, but I think it lasted for several more years and we really liked it. Uh, I, that was my first teaching job.

**Colin:** Excellent, and where did you move on to after that?

**Irene:** Well, I moved on to motherhood

**Colin:** Motherhood, oh ok.

**Irene:** (laughing) We, I had to stop teaching because I had my first child and then, when she was old enough, I went back to teaching and taught in elementary school third grade.

**Colin:** Which elementary school?

**Irene:** At Lamar right over here. You all own it now

**Colin:** ok

**Irene:** Yeah, Pan American owns that building and that property and then I had another child and stayed home for a while and then when I went back, I went back and taught fourth grade and I'm trying to remember how it happened, but, that, Oh! I remember now, um, and then I had another child and we moved away to Florida. And when we came back, they desperately needed a P.E. teacher at Sam Houston School for elementary Phys. Ed. So, I taught there for a time until I was starting to build my house and I said I can't do both. So I stayed home to watch the house being built and then when I went back, I went back as a sixth grade English teacher and then I finished my career as an English teacher.

**Colin:** At what school?

**Irene:** At the uh, South Junior High School.

**Colin:** South Junior High School, ok. Um, you mentioned you had to build your house, um, that leads us into another topic, uh; that we had heard about as far as your house is concerned. Your husband had mentioned once you raised the house, you ended up with a plethora of snakes underneath the house.

**Irene:** Oh yes, I felt sorry for those plumbers that day. (Laughs) They, well, we have a lot of black snakes around there. I've came face to face with them more than once. I was working in the yard one day and I was digging weeds out of a flower bed right there close to my ho... close to... right there by the wall and I met Mr. Black Snake and he was about six feet long and I don't know who was most afraid. I ran one way and he ran the other way. I see them out there in the back yard frequently. We don't kill them because they are good snakes to have around. They uh, kill a lot of rats and they are also the natural enemy of rattle snakes and so we like that feature. \

**Richard:** The, the, uh, Indigo?

**Irene:** The Indigo, Yes, So we have them around there, but, one talking about plethora of them. One time we had to have some pretty severe plumbing work done under the foundation of the house and they had to dig way under there and the plumbers ran into a whole nest of those snakes. I don't know how they went back in there after they... Jimmy said they came out of there so fast (laughing) but then they realized they were not dangerous snakes and I think they did something to chase them out. I don't know what they did, but yes that was quite an exciting...

**Colin:** So, many generations of the snakes still reside underneath the house?

**Irene:** Yes they do

**Colin:** ok

**Irene:** Yes they do and I see snake holes around, um...

**Colin:** But have you seen another rattle snake since someone got bit?

**Irene:** My sister was bit by a rattlesnake, but she was a little child and I wasn't around at the time and when my uncles had to go to Brownsville to get the anti-venom, they probably had a Model A car and they drove all the way to Brownsville, which was a pretty good trek that time and they got back with the anti-venom and she was ok.

**Colin:** Excellent. But ever since that nest has taken up underneath the house, you haven't seen a rattlesnake?

**Irene:** I haven't seen a rattlesnake around here, no I haven't. I haven't seen one since I lived there. There may be some out there, but I haven't seen them.

**Colin:** Very good, very good.

**Richard:** Wha—what, wh...can you remember about the oil and gas well?

**Irene:** You know, I don't remember a lot about it. I remember that they leased the property and mother had leased it many, many times before and never thought anything about it, but it was, uh, the company that leased it was Mokeen and that is a Kennedy company, the Kennedy, President Kennedy's family and that was their oil company, a lot of people don't know that the Kennedy's were very heavy into oil. So umm, that was their company and they brought all that exciting rig out there and they started uh drilling, and they found oil.

**Richard:** How long did the drilling last out there?

**Irene:** I don't remember. Wasn't too long, it was a shallow well wasn't deep. And, umm, I imagine it took them two to three months to drill it. And I remember when they flared the well; I thought that was kind of exciting. They set fire to that, you know they flared the well, I don't know why they do that but uh we watched that for a while and then they capped it and then they did something, they put a pipeline in and they also piped a byproduct called distillate to some tanks up close to the road. The well was further back and then up close to the road they built a pad of caliche and some tanks, a tank farm. And one of those pipes took the byproduct called distillate and put it in those big tanks. And every so often a truck would come and fill up with that, and I don't know what they did with that. Somebody said it was similar to kerosene, I don't know, I'm not a, my brother was a petroleum engineer and he could've told you but I don't know.

**Richard:** I was uh reading the transcript from Hazel's interview

**Irene:** uh huh

**Richard:** and she said that, I believe your brother Alan became a petroleum engineer

**Irene:** Yes, uh huh

**Richard:** Was this because of the well that was there?

**Irene:** No, he was already a petroleum engineer

**Richard:** already a petroleum engineer

**Irene:** And when they dug this but, Bud, we called him Bud, uh he didn't work in the profession too long he worked for Halliburton for a time away from here and I don't remember why he chose not to, but he came home for a time and he actually farmed the land. And then he married, and uh stayed here and uh became a teacher and he taught uh in Pharr I think, and then he uh ran for congress, for the state congress. And he was uh state representative for 4 terms and then he became ill and we uh watched him just get sicker and sicker and sicker it was uh terrible degenerative disease that uh just did him in. And uh, so he never did actually practice petroleum engineering but maybe a year or so and then he came home. So...

**Richard:** Why Bud?

**Irene:** Why Bud? Well uh, actually uh (Laughs) Tony the fellow that worked on the farm for daddy, for my daddy, called him *botas*, boots because when he was a little bitty boy somehow he



got into the irrigation boots and they were as tall as he was (laughs) and Tony thought that was so funny so he started calling him *botas*, and Tony thought that was so funny and so he started calling him Botas

**Richard:** Wow.

**Irene:** And uh, I don't know we just, it just transferred into Bud and that's how we called him Bud.

**Richard:** B--, when you mentioned Tony you, uh, as uh, I'm reading some of the transcripts this past week, you, uh, you talk about Antonio right?

**Irene:** Antonio

**Richard:** Anton---

**Irene:** Guerrero.

**Richard:** And his sons? They lived in--

**Irene:** And his son Meme. Uh-huh

**Richard:** They lived there in the jacal?

**Irene:** Uh-huh

**Richard:** And uh, were they, when they were working for you, I'm assuming they were ranch, ranch hands that were working there?

**Irene:** Well daddy, daddy was not a rancher per say, he was a farmer, a row farmer. But he had cattle and he had animals, you know mules. Then, at first when he farmed he used the mules to pull the plows and the stuff. Then he got a tractor of course but I don't know Tony was just a farm hand and he lived there on the place and he helped daddy do whatever needed to be done.

**Richard:** Now were they on payroll or...

**Irene:** Oh yeah...

**Richard:** Yeah?

**Irene:** of course.

**Richard:** They were on payroll. Yeah I know that the system th, th, that turned into like th the uh before that when uh the Pi6n Patron system came in there was a lot of indentured servitude

**Irene:** Oh no. No. Not Tony.

**Richard:** Th that. What, at any time did Tony ever cross paths with the Braceros back then?

**Irene:** Oh yeah.

**Richard:** Really?

**Irene:** Oh yeah. He was still alive when the Bracero, but he helped my mother...

**Richard:** Uh-huh.

**Irene:** with that whole situation. My father died when I was just 12 years old. My mother was 45 and she still had children to raise. And so she ran the farm herself and ha-, needed all the help she can get and so when the Braceros came well Tony was you know he was kind of a medio jefe.

**Richard:** Like the, the, the, what the, what would they call them back then? Uh, can't remember the term they used to use.

**Irene:** Medio jefe is all I know.

**Richard:** Like a, ugghhh. It's Spanish. I have it in the tip of my tongue. Um, but he was like their boss. He was...

**Irene:** Yeah, over the Braceros.

**Richard:** Yeah.

**Irene:** And then later my grandfather and uh, grandmother, when my grandfather retired from the Santa Fe Railroad then he came and helped my mother and lived with us.

**Richard:** Oh.

**Irene:** So, uh.

**Richard:** How long was he living with you guys?

**Irene:** Oh, for a long time.

**Richard:** 'Til he passed?

**Irene:** Yeah.

**Richard:** Really?

**Irene:** Yeah.

**Richard:** And his children? What uh became of them?

**Irene:** Who? Papa Jones's children?

**Richard:** No, I'm talking about Antonio's

**Irene:** Oh Tony's children. Well Meme. Uh, Estefana got married and went away. And Tony, I don't remember exactly how, but Tony wound up raising Estefana's children.

**Richard:** Really?

**Irene:** Two of the boys.

**Richard:** There on your property?

**Irene:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And Meme married Julia. And they had children there.

**Richard:** Wow.

**Irene:** And they lived there, of course not in the jacal. They built their o-- (laughs) I mean as things got better, everybody improved their lot, you know. We started with a one room house and then as we, they had children, daddy would build on to it. And when we got electricity we got an inside bathroom. And you know, and everything's in its own time, um people improved their situation. Well so did Tony, so did Meme and. Meme worked not for uh, mother but he had a job. He was an educated man.

**Richard:** Right.

**Irene:** And he went out and did whatever he did.

**Richard:** So they were raised uh, correct me if I'm wrong, but, they were raised in the same property that you guys are on?

**Irene:** On that corner over there.

**Richard:** Right and so would I go as far as saying that when you would see them, because you grew up with these people, uh, that you would consider them like family members?

**Irene:** Well, sort of, yeah. They were just there.

**Richard:** Something every day, someone every day.

**Irene:** Yeah, there were Tony, Mikes and Nina and, and you know...

**Richard:** That is so nice to hear.

**I&R:** (laughs)

**Richard:** It really is. Uh, the, uh, some of the other transcripts that that you guys farmed corn and cotton?

**Irene:** Uh Hm

**Richard:** Was there any other...

**Irene:** Well, when daddy was uh, farming, he farmed tomatoes, he farmed grow crops, uh; I remember a big patch of radishes that we had tomatoes, bell peppers, carrots, uh he grew lettuce. I- you know, all, but that was when we were growing vegetables here. I don't know when we quit. Some people still do down here on the river, grow vegetables, onions and things like that but, back when my daddy was farming everybody grew vegetables. It was a, it was a main crop you know.

**Richard:** Be- being the fact that your brother became uh, State Rep, Is that correct?

**Irene:** Uh Hm

**Richard:** And I believe your brother-in-law became District Judge?

**Irene:** Uh Huh

**Richard:** Was your family very involved in politics here in the valley?

**Irene:** They were very political, very political.

**Richard:** Really?

**Irene:** My uncle was a Water Commissioner, uh; my daddy was behind the scenes. I'm not going to get into all of that, because there was a time when Edinburg- There was a regime here that was less than... Everybody is still around and we don't talk about it. But-

**Richard & Irene:** (Laughs)

**Richard:** (Unintelligible)

**Irene:** It was the A.Y. Baker era.

**Richard:** Yeah, Yes!

**Irene:** When he was the sheriff

**Richard:** The sheriff

**Irene:** And it was kind of dicey to say the least, and my father uh, was a member of the Good Government League and they were working in trying to unseat that situation.

**Richard:** Uh, uh, don't you find it amazing that, ye--, so many years have gone by and you still have that kind of, that some of the family members that I think you're talking about are still there?

**Irene:** Yup

**Richard:** And in power?

**Irene:** Well, not so much in power any more, but, um, they were nice people. I mean they were really nice people and uh, how do say, you co-existed.

**Richard:** Right.

**Irene:** And you were cordial and some of them belonged to your church...

**Richard:** Right.

**Irene:** And you didn't talk about it.

**Richard:** Really?

**Irene:** That's right. Some of my best friends I didn't talk about it to.

**Richard & Irene:** (Laughing)

**Irene:** And I still don't feel comfortable

**Richard:** Oh I understand Uh...

**Ryann:** Never discuss politics...

**Irene:** That's Right!

**Ryann:** Religion and money.

**Irene:** (laughs)

**Ryann:** That's it.

**All together:** (Laughing)

**Richard:** Let me see um... One of my students- One of the students had a question. Is Antonio the same as Mr. Polocapio?

**Irene:** No, Polocapio was another man and I don't know how he came on the scene or how he left the scene, but he was there for a considerable amount of time and I think he was a co-worker of Tony. Uh, but he wasn't like Tony. Tony was there, Tony was part of the scene, and

Polocapio, I think, was probably brought in when they needed extra help. And Uh, he would, I don't know exactly what that whole thing was, but He was there a lot, but not permanently.

**Richard:** Right

**Irene:** as tony and his Family were

**Richard:** Um Huh

**Irene:** You Know what? Polocapio was a very good mechanic, and huh, he may have had other work as a mechanic, but I know he did a lot of tractor work for, for the family so I don't know anything really about

**Richard:** do you remember by any chance, uh, I think it was the Pharr Riots. And when it happened

**Irene:** I don't remember the Pharr Riots

**Richard:** you don't remember the Pharr Riots, I was going to ask you if it affected any kind of racial tensions up here in Edinburg when that Uh.

**Irene:** Probably not because now when we think of the valley, as a place, you know, and back then there was, McAllen, there was Edinburg, there was Pharr San Juan Alamo, you know it was... Each place was individual, and so what happen in Pharr stayed in Pharr, and what happened here stayed here. We didn't bout, bout, we played football against all of them, and we knew most you know a lot of the kids cause we used to drag Main in McAllen and we knew the kids in McAllen, and they came over here, Uh we ran into them, and of course we played sports with them and uh all that, but as far as being involved in any of the, grown up stuff, uh if it happened I didn't know about it.

**Richard:** one more question I guess before we end, if I was to ask you to name one thing that made you very proud to be a person from the South West, from the valley what will it be, with the history that you've lived here. Where you can go back and say. This was the Accomplishment, I was proud to be part of this, and Uh, suddenly you just

**Irene:** Well Uh, I don't know why I stayed, I never did want t leave, and when we got to Florida, I didn't want to stay there, I wanted to come back. I don't know what it is there is some kind of magnetism about this place that I feel very part of, uh I mean uh I guess, it's the river water in my veins HA!

**Richard:** There you go!!!

**Irene:** I don't know what else it could be, but we got back as soon as we could, we've been here ever since

**Richard:** Paradise?

**Irene:** Um... hum ...well we love it We, We, We love it! And I can't say what that one thing is.

**Ryann:** I have a few questions for you, um; it's about your parents, we, heard a little bit here and there about them, where were they born?

**Irene:** Well both of them were born near Cleaver Texas, I'm not Positive, but that's where they went that's where they grew up, my mother lived in Grand berry and she lived in Sand Flat but all of those we little bitty towns around near the cleaver area, when my mother when my mother finished school in the country school her father, my grandfather took her to Cleburne, and boarder her with a family so she could go to high school, and huh, so she lived in town, and huh, just lived with that family

**Ryann:** And what were your maternal grand Parents Names?

**Irene:** Jim Jones or JD James Berkley Jones and Cordelia Irene Rogers Jones.

**Ryann:** Irene, very nice, very nice, and your Mother's name?

**Irene:** Jewel

**Ryann:** That's right, that's right, ok, huh, when, when were they born your parents?

**Irene:** Mother was born in 1898, and I guess my father born probably in 1896, I think he was about 2 years older than she

**Ryann:** Ok. What drove your Parents to move down here?

**Irene:** you know they asked me that question the last time and I simply do not know. It said this, the whole family, my paternal grandparents of Webster and Rachel Atwood had a bunch of kids, they had nine children, and but for whatever reason, they were I don't know, I think they went or heard of the valley from some of the land companies that were up in that area advertising, and I think they just thought it sounded good, and they came the whole family came, my father and mother were the only one's of the children who were married at the time, my uncles and my aunts were not. When they came they came as single children with their parents and hum, and I think I told it in one of my other interviews that my uncle Harmond met his bride here and they stayed and had their family and farmed and all of that. My uncle Kirby met his bride in Kingsville and she was an Indian. Her name was Clara Lightfoot

**Ryann:** What Tribe was she from?

**Irene:** I don't know...HA ha ha

**Ryann:** You don't know ok

**Irene:** we don't know, but any way he met her and married her and moved back and came back from Kingsville to the valley and bought property on San Juan Rd east of town and started their family, and started their family here. And my Uncle Price did not stay. He went back to Cleburne when the parents went. And my uncle Floyd went back with his parents. And my aunt Ester Ruth met her husband in Kingsville because for a short period of time they moved up to Bishop. Met her husband in Kingsville and they moved to Forth Worth because he was a business man. He was not a farmer. And they moved up there. My aunt Rema met her husband here and they stayed here and he farmed. So farming was the big industry down here. Um, my uncle Cone never married he went back with the family. And that's all of them I think. And so that, that's sort of, and I don't know why they came and I don't know why they went back.

**Ryann & Irene:** Chuckling

**Ryann:** All right sounds good.

**Joanie:** Ok, um, when your family moved down here the house that's there on the property, was there a house there already or did your family build?

**Irene:** They, they built. My, my daddy built that.

**Joanie:** And it was a one room?

**Irene:** Well it was a you know they built what they had to have, probably a living room, and a kitchen and a dining room and you know a bedroom. But that's what they built because the only family they had at the time was my uh, brother Lambard

**Joanie:** Yeah

**Irene:** He was just a little baby when they came down

**Joanie:** So as you all started coming...it started getting bigger.

**Irene:** Then they had to build a house.

**Joanie:** ...add on

**Irene:** and add on, yeah.

**Ryann:** Chuckles

**Irene:** they added things along.

**Joanie:** And when did your siblings begin to leave the nest. What was the purpose?

**Irene:** Um, well Lambard, my oldest brother went into the Army and uh, I told all about all his uh, work in the Army. And when he came back he went to work at the Edinburg Co-op Gin. And then he left when he was in his thirties to Mexico to uh, be a cotton buyer for a big cotton company out of Mississippi. So he went. And my sister Jean, when they married, she married uh, an ex-Marine who survived the war. And uh, they went, he went to A&M and became an Electrical Engineer and Jean was a business woman. And she bought cotton and she um, worked in a uh, packing shed that uh, packed oranges, grapefruit, that kind of thing and uh, worked all the time. That (clears throat) Allen was in college and then when uh, he was graduated from A&M he was an Electrical Engineer and they moved to the Valley and he worked for CP&L his whole career. So they moved where they, you know were told to move by the company. They finished their career in Harlingen.

**(Papers shuffling)**

**Irene:** And Jean and they moved to Harlingen. Started college at the, well she had already done first and second year of college before she left. But when she came back, after she had raised all of her children, Allen had three in; he had Jean, his wife and two children in college all at the same time. And Jean came back up here and got her uh, teaching degree and she wound up her career as a principal in Harlingen. And Hazel Grace married uh, John Baldrige. And they moved to Mexico and lived at the ranch until very recently. She has moved back uh, here. Her husband died some years ago. And Jim, my brother whom I have not talked about very much, um, when his, when he, his class went through uh, public school, he was the last group of kids that graduated at the end of eleven years and then they added the twelfth year. But he didn't have to go that twelfth year. He'd finished high school when he was about sixteen. And he was very, very bright.

**Ryann:** That's interesting (**very low**)

**Irene:** Yeah. He was really bright. And he came here to college for two years. So when he left here he was about eighteen. And he went to Texas Tech and got his degree in Chemical Engineer. And he never did come back home. He stayed gone. Nobody, I mean....

**Ryann laughing**

**Joanie chuckling**

**Irene:** .....everybody else kind of stayed down here except Jim. And he moved all over the country. But you know, uh because he was with the big uh, chemical companies. And he never, he didn't have that Rio Grande River water in his blood.

**Ryann chuckles**

**Irene:** He just never did come back. And so he hasn't been part of this whole growth period of the Valley. He comes back to see us and he's, marvels at how it's grown. But he hasn't been here every step of the way. He lives in Kansas.

**Ryann:** Nice.

**Irene:** Yeah.

**Ryann:** Quick question, who is Juanita Atwood?

**Irene:** She married my cousin Edward.

**Ryann:** Ok.

**Irene:** And she was from Freer. And Edward Lee uh, met her when he was in the Army. And he brought his bride home. And she was wonderful, wonderful person. She died a couple years ago.

**Ryann:** Sorry to hear that.

**Irene:** Yeah. Well then Edward is very ill right now. He's in a nursing home. And he is my cousin, he is Harmon's son. So he grew up here and farmed after, you know he took over for his

daddy. And they were extensive farmers. They had citrus, and cotton, and corn, and grain and everything, you know?

**Joanie:** Um, do you have any scars from being your basic curious child?

**Irene:** Do I have some scars? You see this right here? One right there and one right there. I fell off the tractor. And those sweeps you know?

**Ryann:** Mmhm.

**Irene:** I hit right (laughs) there.

**Ryann & Joanie:** Oh

**Joanie making hissing sound**

**Irene:** And that was hurtful.

**Ryann:** I would've imagined.

**Irene:** Yeah that was bad. That was bad. Um, I have a, you know, back in the day, medicine wasn't as good as it is now and if we ever stepped on a nail or something and we did, or we got a big mesquite thorn or we got um, a splinter, my sister, I remember, oh she was running and stepped on a board and had a terrible splinter and she got it in her foot and they had to take her to the doctor and have it cut out and that was pretty serious. We always had to get tetanus shots because they were afraid we would get tetanus from all that stuff. Yeah, we got hurt. I didn't ever break a bone though. I was never broken in any way. (Knocking on wood) For sure! My sister Hazel, she has a lot of bad things happen to her. She was bitten by a snake; she had an appendix burst. Back then that was very dangerous. That was like a death sentence and um, she also was in a pretty sever wreck that broke this occipital bone here and she, I remembered, she was in pretty bad shape. I had pneumonia and mother tells me, I don't remember any of it uh, but I was a pretty small kid and uh, in the 30s and uh, I was very sick and that was when doctors made house calls and old Dr. Homme came out and he walked in down the hall and to the bedroom where I was and I don't remember any of this, but have heard stories, and he said, Oh Jewel, she has pneumonia, and mother said oh my god that was like saying she's going to die and he said but don't worry, we have a new drug that is really successful and he called it Sulfa drug. So that was when Sulfa was first invented, of course, now we have penicillin and things and they don't say you're going to die if you get pneumonia. That was a pretty serious thing. Medicine has come a long way.

**Joanie:** And with the children you have, did you want to have more children, or were you finished?

**Irene:** I have RH negative blood and when Jay, my son, was born, my doctor said no mas. So that was...

**Joanie:** But did you want more?

**Irene:** Well, I, you know, I was thankful for all the ones I had, I didn't really yearn for anymore because three was plenty, but uh, I wouldn't have hated it if I had another one, But they said no mas.

**Ryann:** Ok last and final question. Are you guys done? Ok last and final question. What has been your favorite childhood memory growing up on the farm?

**Irene:** Oh goodness, there are so many.

**Ryann:** (Laughs)

**Joanie:** First one that comes up.

**Ryann:** If you could pick one to relive again, which one would it be?

**Irene:** Oh I just I, My...

**Ryann:** All of it?

**Irene:** My childhood was really, really top drawer.

**Ryann & Irene:** (Laughs)

**Irene:** There were things that were bad. There were things that were ugly. There were things that were, you know, I could probably dredge up, but for the most part I was really, really a happy kid. I was really a happy kid.

**Ryann:** That's awesome.

**Colin:** Alright, well we would like to thank you Ms. Evins for doing this interview and thank you for joining us.

**Joanie & Ryann:** Thank you

**Irene:** You're very welcome.