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Interview with Odilia Norquest (oral histories transcription)

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Odilia Norquest

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This transcription was approved and edited by Odilia Peña. It contains minor orthographical changes in comparison to the original transcription that was done at the Border Studies Archive in collaboration with the students that conducted this interview.

Group H Transcriptions, Odilia Norquest

The proceeding is a transcription of an interview conducted with Mrs. Odilia (Odie) Norquest. Odilia Peña married Carrol Norquest, Jr. over forty years ago and together they have lived in the Edinburg region for most of their lives. Mrs. Norquest's family has a long history in the Rio Grande Valley. Her genealogy can be traced back over two-hundred years in the Valley and in Northern Mexico. As a lifelong Valley resident Mrs. Norquest provided us with valuable insights as to how the region has progressed and changed over the years. Our interview helps to contextualize the impact the Norquest family has made in the Edinburg region over the past four decades and provides a unique perspective on the rich Norquest family history. The interview was conducted by Lupita Olivarez, Samuel Victoriano, Michelle Martinez, and Geoffrey Schwarz.

[Odie Norquest, Michelle, and Sam walking to interview area]

ODIE: There's the outhouse

MICHELLE: Oh my God! We should take a picture of that.

MICHELLE: So how long has that outhouse been on your property?

ODIE: Ever since this house was built. That house was built in the forties...forty-eight.

MICHELLE: Oh wow.

ODIE: My husband said it's been here since nineteen forty-eight. So it's been here ever since.

ODIE: We always rented this little house. Actually there was a time we lived here. When my husband and I got married, we lived in a mobile home. I was brought up to believe, even though I loved my mother-in-law to death, that if you were going to get married, you didn't live with your in-laws. You always lived elsewhere. I told my husband I don't mind if I live under a tree. That wasn't the right thing to say. But it was funny so we got a mobile home and we had it parked back behind the big house.

MICHELLE: Over there on the corner.

ODIE: We had it over there. We lived there for about five years in the mobile home. We had two little kids and the stairs were real high so it was time to move. My mother-in-law owned this house. She was ready to tear it down. I was just here with the kids and I said "No, let's not tear it down, let's fix it up". My mother-in-law was into construction so we went ahead and started fixing it up in seventy-three. They had done repairs through the years but the last real major repair. This is where the bathroom, the shower here. This part used to be on the outside, not part of the main house.

MICHELLE: Really?

ODIE: Yes. This back area was a screened in porch.

MICHELLE: Oh!

ODIE: And can you believe all this family that lived here? Yes, in this tiny little area I don't know how they did it but they did. His dad actually sponsored a German family during the war, No, after the war. There was a lot of you know displaced people and they sponsored a German family and they still live in the area.

MICHELLE: Oh, do they?

ODIE: Yes. They still live here. As a matter of fact, we still call this house the Templin house because that was their family name. Doris Templin, was their daughter that grew up here, and she married a man by the last name of Cook. She was a school teacher at Edinburg High School.

MICHELLE: Really!

ODIE: Yes. All the brothers were educators. They've been here for a long time. Their grandson came by one day. He was just wanted to walk and see everything. He says he remembers when he was little coming to see his grandmother. He was quite interested and wanted to know more about the house and see the "old place". It was really interesting when my husband and I got married because there was no drinking water. We had a cistern that we had to depend on. When we went into town, we'd take the five gallon jugs and get water either, from the church or from the gas station or from where ever!

MICHELLE: Really!

ODIE: For drinking water.

MICHELLE: Wow!

ODIE: So the water that we used from the cistern, and it's over there at the big house, was to, wash and that kind of stuff . And of course there was no sewer line. It was all septic tanks, and no paved roads! All dirt roads! We lived here on the corner, and we'd go a mile just passed the University, to the church in slippery muddy road.

MICHELLE: Yes.

ODIE: And that was all dirt roads, so when it rained, forget it, there we were trying to make our way.

MICHELLE: [laughs] that's why a lot of people use pick-ups back in the day isn't it?
[Laughs]

ODIE: Yes, oh yes. I remember. Oh here they're coming.

[Geoffrey and Lupita arrive]

ODIE: My brother-in-law had a pick-up so that's what we used for transportation but it was during Beulah.

MICHELLE: It's tough?

ODIE: Yes, it was hard. You think we have it hard now?

MICHELLE: Exactly!

[Recorder was stopped at this point after the rest of the team arrived and restarted after everyone was situated in their places].

ODIE: Dr. Hamme was the local doctor, Ralf Hamme, the son, was the one I knew. The father was also a doctor. He was the one that delivered him with his nurse. They would come and do home deliveries. So I don't know if all of them were delivered here or if it was just him but I know he was.

LUPITA: So it was in that house on the corner?

ODIE: Yes. That house is almost a hundred years old. It was built in 1913 and from what Patrick will probably tell you is...that it was one of these Sears Roebuck kits. So we

didn't know that until he started taking off wallpaper. He started doing some construction work there. That was quite interesting for even us because we had no idea.

LUPITA: That it was a model home?

ODIE: It was a model home.

MICHELLE: The mail order catalog?

ODIE: Yes, that's exactly right. And you know, one of the things about the house was that I went into the internet and I found one very similar, and it says, how many thousands of nails were needed. You know, so many pieces of lumber, and they were all numbered including hinges. Every single thing. It just had it on there. I thought that was so interesting.

[Michelle laughs]

ODIE: I think I...

MICHELLE: Kind of like a child's toy now with instructions and everything.

ODIE: Yes, exactly! Absolutely! It was really neat. I enjoyed that but yeah that's...that's pretty much it.

LUPITA: It's very interesting that the house has stood

.

ODIE: Yes, yes it'll be a hundred...

GEOFFREY: Now we have terrible homes

ODIE: Do you know that we can't even nail nails through there. We have to drill first and then hammer it because it is just so hard. I called it petrified wood.

[Laughs]

LUPITA: [to Geoffrey] well, you want to get started?

GEOFFREY: Oh, yeah.

LUPITA: Did you get a chance to read all the questions?

ODIE: I did. Some I cannot answer. Some probably I wouldn't be able to because either it wasn't something that I was interested in or didn't know about it.

[Geoffrey hands a copy of the questions to Odie]

ODIE: Oh! I told my husband, I said, I'm going to take mine. He said, no, he said you're not going to follow those questions.

[laughs]

ODIE: Are you just going to go down the line?

LUPITA: Yeah, you want to go down the line? You want to start with the very first question? Okay... How has your relationship between Hispanics and Whites changed in the Valley and how has your personal outlook changed?

ODIE: Well, I never saw any difference. My parents were the type that they never told us there was such a thing as black and whites and colored or rich or poor. I thought I was just as rich as the next person or just as poor. We never really talked about it. But what I think, that maybe, people realized, more of it was the social economic. They may had

looked at that more than I did and then of course there was always the English language barrier. They maybe, kind of looked at things, people, different, but we never did it. We just never were really associated with a...

GEOFFREY: It seems natural.

ODIE: Yes. I went to school, elementary school and junior high in Monte Alto. That's where. My little friends were Anglo friends. I didn't have but one Hispanic friends. All my teachers were from Iowa and from out of state. They were all Anglo. I remember one teacher. She was a Spanish teacher and her name was Ms. Gomez. A beautiful, beautiful Hispanic woman. I she wasn't my teacher, so I must have been in elementary school and I just thought she was the most gorgeous woman I have ever seen. But that was the only Hispanic teacher that I knew about. So I never had any real problems.

GEOFFREY: That seems so strange in the Valley, that no Hispanics...

ODIE: Now, that was back probably in the early fifties? Yeah, early fifties.

GEOFFREY: My professor had mentioned to me that you were actually born in Mexico.

ODIE: I am. I have dual citizenship.

GEOFFREY: Yeah

ODIE: Yes, yes. There was a time when you could go to the Consulate and get all your paperwork, and apply for dual citizenship and so I did. My brother-in-law asked my sister, "Why is she doing that?" and my sister said, "Because she can."

[Michelle laughs]

GEOFFREY: Have you ever taken advantage of this dual citizenship?

ODIE: As a matter of fact I did before all of this stuff went on with a...with Mexico and violence and stuff. I did go before I had my dual citizenship. We used to do a lot of traveling into Mexico because I worked for people in Mexico. I had two different jobs. One of them was a restaurant equipment company and one of the owners was from Monterrey. The other one was a doctor. He was also from Monterrey. So I went with my friends to get the permit to go into Mexico. They had change what the requirements so I didn't have the right documentation. I said to the lady in conversation with a friend, that I was born in Mexico, and the lady that was actually doing the paperwork, said "well if you were born in Mexico you don't need any type of permit. Once a Mexican always a Mexican. It's kind of what the Catholics say, once a Catholic always a Catholic. [laughs]

ODIE: And so I said, "I didn't know that" and then I thought, "I'm going to be the only one that doesn't have any documentation. What will happen to me I'll be left behind? So anyway it didn't work out that I got my permit that day, but we did. We just decided that we would go and get all of our papers and so we went to Roma? and Miguel Aleman? Apparently my daddy didn't register me when he was supposed to, So I had to get a certification showing that my parents were married at the time they had me so that they could go ahead a grant me my paperwork for that.

MICHELLE: And when did your family come over here from Mexico?

ODIE: In 1947. My daddy was raised in Kennedy County. The story goes that his father, his grandfather, no, no. Let's see...my grandfather back in a...in 1913 during the revolution was kicked out of Mexico. He was a judge and wealthy rancher that was kicked out of Mexico during the Carrancistas and the revolution, all that stuff. They had run out of money. My grandfather had given them all the money that he had, all of the cattle. They had taken him for everything. So when they went asking for more money or more goods he said "I don't have anything" so they took him to the cemetery to be killed. One of the soldiers spoke for him and said "No you know he's a good man. If he says he doesn't have anything more to give you, he doesn't have anything more to give you" so

the soldier that were trying to get more money from him said “well, we’ll leave didn’t know where in the heck they were going, the just took off and just kept going”[laughs].

So they wound up in Karnes City. Actually it was good for the farmer. The rancher didn’t know how to rope. He didn’t know anything about horses and animals. The rancher had the ranch, but he really didn’t know how to ranch. My grandfather didn’t have a ranch but did know how to ranch, so he taught him how to work his ranch. My dad was born in 1913 so he was two months old and he lived there till he was twenty-one. His mother is buried over there. When his dad left, to go back to Mexico, after his wife died, my dad married my mom. And then of course that’s how we came back to the Valley because there was family that lived here already. They were familiar with the Valley and all this kind of life. He had allergies, asthma and stuff and they said “go to the Valley its better over there”

GEOFFREY: Yeah, the Valley has really good air that’s nice and clean.

ODIE: Yes, for bad coughs and stuff.

LUPITA: Do you still visit family in Mexico?

ODIE: No. No. When I was kind of semi-retired from my job, I did go visit Miguel Aleman, and Ciudad Mier but now with the, with all the, you know...

LUPITA: Violence?

ODIE: We haven’t been over there. No. Not at all.

GEOFFREY: You mentioned that you had, you worked in Mexico with a business. Do you own businesses there?

ODIE: No. No. Actually I worked for two different companies. One of them was a restaurant equipment company and had their office here in McAllen. They used to come

and visit all the time. Whenever they wanted us to go see something in Monterrey, we'd go to the *empresa* over there and see stuff.

GEOFFREY: How was that? I'm assuming that businesses from Mexico were mostly males. Was it different for you being a woman in that business world?

ODIE: Well I...you know it never really occurred to me but no, not really. It didn't bother me in the least but you're right. All of the employees were...see, we used to have about ten or twenty salesmen and I was the only woman. So, it didn't bother me. I sometimes feel I can work with men better than I can with women. [laughing] Because, and this is not true, but this is the way I always thought that women are more sensitive about so many different things and men I think can handle criticism better. So anyway, but it's not true because I know of some men that are very sensitive. [laughing] Yes so it's not true but that was my mentality. I used to think that since men are men and their tough and this and that, you can be tough with them and with women you have to treat them with kind gloves and everything because their more sensitive. That's not necessarily true. [laughing]

MICHELLE: Going back to the Hispanic and White changes, did you ever see any of...did they speak about how you couldn't speak Spanish in elementary in school? Did you ever come into contact with that?

ODIE: Yes. Every single day. No, not in elementary school; but in high school, nor in junior high. I graduated from Edcouch Elsa. I went to school here for two years and then I went to finish in Edcouch Elsa. I always tell this story about this friend of mine that came to visit during lunch and so there was a school teacher from New York. She was not in high school. The schools were together, junior high and high school. This guy came on campus and was talking to me in Spanish and I of course, being me, I talked in Spanish back to him. I mean if you start talking to me in Spanish right now I'll switch and talk to you in Spanish but if you're talking to me in English, I'll go ahead and talk to you in Spanish and this is what happened. When the bell rang and the guy left, I was heading to

my next class, this woman (teacher) approached me. I really didn't know her but she was a school teacher. She came over to me and she said "you insulted me" and I said well "how did I do that" I didn't even know that she was there. And she said "yes, you were talking Spanish." I didn't even know, I mean I switched so much that I don't know when I'm talking Spanish or English or what. She said she didn't understand me and I said "I'm sorry I was talking to him. I wasn't directing any questions or answers to you." Anyway no big deal, so I thought, until I went to my class. There is this principal that comes and knocks at the door and asks for me. We're standing at the hall by the door and he's getting after me for talking Spanish and insulting this lady. I said "I didn't". I said "I didn't insult her." He said "you have to apologize." I said "I have nothing to apologize for. If anything she needs to apologize to me" [laughing]. And then the principal, didn't know what to say. He says "well if and so and he gave the name of the guy", (I still remember his name) "If he is going to college he would never make it because he doesn't speak good English and he's a football player. He will never get in as a football player alone". So what does that have to do with me [laughing] and me speaking Spanish? It was just weird. That was one of the many episodes but that was the one that just kind of stuck with me.

GEOFFREY: How did you pick up Spanish so well? Are you Hispanic?

ODIE: I was born in Mexico. I'm Hispanic.

GEOFFREY: Oh. O.K.

ODIE: My parents are...yeah. My dad had like a second grade education. My mom was a school teacher in Mexico but did not speak any English. My English, I learned I guess from my teachers in elementary school and then I had older sisters that they all spoke. So we would speak English but then when we got home we would speak Spanish. That's just the way it was.

GEOFFREY: So Spanish was your first language?

ODIE: My...yeah. I always thought Spanish was my first language but several years later I was working the sale yard and a lady asked me “how do you think in English or Spanish?” And I had never heard that! And I said “well, I think in English”. You know, if I’m trying to say something in Spanish or trying to read something, I have to concentrate on what I’m doing, but for the most part, I guess now it’s in English more than anything.

LUPITA: You mentioned you were from Monte Alto? When your parent’s moved from Mexico they moved to Monte Alto that’s where you grew up?

ODIE: Yeah.

LUPITA: And then you went to school in Elsa?

ODIE: I went to school in Monte Alto. It was an independent school district so, we could go, since there was just a junior high, we could go to Edcouch Elsa or Edinburg and we all opted to go to Edinburg. But then, when my younger sister, she had asthma and was pretty sickly, my dad decided it would be better if I joined her cause my other older sisters had already graduated from high school, so then I switched over.

LUPITA: Is that where you meet your husband in Edcouch Elsa?

ODIE: No, actually I met my husband in church [laughing].

GEOFFREY: That’s a good place [laughing].

ODIE: Yes we’ve been Lutherans all of our lives. I moved in with my sister in Pharr after high school. She was already coming to church here. We knew the family because we used to always have church gatherings and stuff, but we went to church in Elsa. We would go to church here in Edinburg. So one day we just sat there and started visiting at a function. I think it was like a pot luck or something. So we started visiting. He was the

choir director. I always like to say I ran away with a choir director. We had a nice wedding [laughing]. It sounds more exciting to say otherwise.

GEOFFREY: That seems like a good segue to the fifth question? How has courtship changed?

ODIE: Well, actually, we didn't date very much. It's such a small little town and you would make friends at school and stuff like that but if you had a boyfriend you wouldn't invite him to come to your house and pick you up for a date. You would meet him at the drug store, you would meet at the park or something like that. Delta Lake was a big courtship place but never, never at home. And since I was living with my sister it was easier for me. I remember our first date when my husband invited me to go see a movie which I had already seen but of course I wasn't going to tell him that [laughing]. So he did come and pick me up at the house but then I was already, what twenty-six, twenty-seven years old.

GEOFFREY: Oh, wow.

ODIE: Yeah.

MICHELLE: Had you dated before?

ODIE: Yes. Just like my doctor says she only had three boyfriends and she married the third.

LUPITA: And you dated for how long before he proposed?

ODIE: Ten months. About ten months. I dated a young Hispanic young man actually for like five, six years and then just from one day to the other we just split up and that's when I moved to my sisters because I didn't want him following me around [laughing].

LUPITA: And you have been married for how long?

ODIE: It'll be forty-one years in December 30th in a couple months.

GEOFFREY: Congratulations

ODIE: Yes. You know, people used to ask me, they don't anymore "so who were you married to before?" They didn't think that a person could be married for so long for the same person, or that a I guess a Hispanic and a white could be married that there had to have been another marriage somewhere [laughing]. I never thought about that. I know his parent did. My older sister was married to a white, so you know I just kind of fit in. It was easier. I know there's a lot of Hispanic women that would say "I would never marry a white." The parent would just not allow it. But that wasn't our case. Like we say, we were never brought up to differentiate from races or color or anything.

MICHELLE: Oh really?

ODIE: Yes. But that was, that was us. We were never brought up to differentiate from race or color or...

LUPITA: Did you encounter any kind of issues with those people outside the family?

MICHELLE: Any racism or anything?

ODIE: No, and my husband always reassured his dad. He would say "You know dad, we are so close to the university and there is all kind of races there. They intermarry because that is where they see each other. They are more options now. He would says intermarriages are not a big deal anymore like they used to be. In his family nobody had married anybody outside of their own race.

LUPITA: Do you have children? [Odie nods yes] How many children do you have?

ODIE: I have 3 daughters.

LUPITA: only three daughters?

ODIE: Caroline lives here. My other daughter lives in McAllen. The youngest, she and her husband are at the university of Iowa working on their Ph.D.s.

GEOFFREY: PhD's, really? In what field

ODIE: English Literature

GEOFFREY: Oh really?

ODIE: Yes, She said she just turn in the prospectus so...

GEOFFREY: That's so exiting

LUPITA: And they were all born here in Edinburg?

ODIE: Yes, everybody. It's amazing. My first daughter, I think, I paid the doctor about \$75 dollars for the delivery; my second daughter, \$150 dollars and my third daughter about \$300 dollars

LUPITA: And these were delivered in hospitals or...

ODIE: Yes, they were all delivered in hospitals ...yeah and then you know...

MICHELLE: And was in the old hospital that is now in Freddy Gonzalez....was on Freddy Gonzalez, the one that's not here anymore?

ODIE: Mhm, not the Grand View Hospital. That was long vacated, but yea, I was amazed, I worked for OBGYN's and their deliveries were like \$3,500 just for the doctor, plus the hospital. It has changed so much

(Michelle laughing)

GEOFFREY: Um, so how exactly were you and your husband involved in the farming history?

ODIE: I wasn't involved in farming. I was scared of the cattle actually (girl giggle) but when I married Kelly, they had orchard, sour citrus or something here; and they had cattle until they were in the city limits. When they sold all the cattle, they decided that

they were going to uproot all of the citrus trees and use it for farm land so that's what they started to do.

MICHELLE: And what area was that...it was that here in Edinburg?

ODIE: Yes. All of this area. We got like 60 acres. We built our house in 76. And this one, like I said, has been here since 48 and that one since 13 and so the rest of the land he farmed. That is what he said. He has a degree in agriculture, so he did all the farming here and he used to rent land so that he could farm. He used to farm all the way up to Beta school and at one point they owned part of the land where the school is. And then with the taxes and everything started piling up they had to start selling some of the land. He farmed for quite a while until he just decided he could not farm anymore he was getting older. He couldn't do it the way is used to be when he was younger.

GEOFFREY: Farming is really rough on your skin.

ODIE: Yes. And he has had a lot of skin cancers too.

GEOFFREY: Yea, my grandpa he always had like a lot of cancer because he was a farmer as well.

GEOFFREY: So I know earlier maybe a couple of decades back when the laws regarding of an immigration a little more lax...

ODIE: Yes

GEOFFREY: I know it was maybe easier to employ someone who was undocumented. How exactly did that relationship worked between the farm and the workers?

ODIE: Well, Kelly's dad did have people from Mexico come and work the land. They have cotton and stuff, but that was way before my time. I know he's told stories about how they used to go pickup truck loads of people from Granjeno, just across the border and come over here. One of the ladies used to help with the children. They had quite a few kids. They had seven kids, help with the family and the men would go help his dad

do the farming. But I don't know that much about what really transpired before that, just the stories I hear from him.

GEOFFREY: yeah, I actually read that he would take a truck along a canal and kind of bunch them in there. I read it randomly on a book I found on Google.

[Michelle laughing]

ODIE: yeah, my father-in-law wrote the Rio Grande Wetbacks. After he had had a stroke, he sat down and wrote stories.

GEOFFREY: that was your father?

ODIE: That was my father-in-law.

GEOFFREY: Oh, OK.

LUPITA: Did he know, cause I read the book, it was a very good book. So your father in law is now deceased.

ODIE: Yes, since '81

LUPITA: before that, well if you know, before he deceased...he talks about it in the book, did he always keep a relationship with them until he died

ODIE: You mean like the neighbors?

LUPITA: the one's he talks about in his book, the ones they used to come across because in the book it seems like they were just like family...

ODIE: Well a lot of them would come. Even after Kelly and I got married, a lot of them would come and stop in. They would be in town, and they would stop to see the family at the Rancho Colorado. They had a big red barn, so they used to call it Rancho Colorado, it was kind of a trademark, and yeah, they would come and visit, and even now. Not too long ago, there was a family that came to our house and introduced themselves and, of course, Kelly knows all of them and he remembers them. I really don't know any of them

or didn't know any of them but just from what I've heard them telling stories about those people. They still come and visit whenever they're in town.

[long pause]

GEOFFREY: so, you don't travel to Mexico anymore... how often would you cross in your...

ODIE: Ask me when I was single!

GEOFFREY: You would go?

ODIE: I used to drive my car to Reynosa with my friends and sometimes we would go through some little town...what is it? Is it Rio Bravo or something?

GEOFFREY: yeah

ODIE: We'd go to Matamoros

GEOFFREY: Oh you'd take the expressway from Matamoros to Reynosa?

ODIE: from Reynosa to Matamoros

GEOFFREY: oh wow

ODIE: yes, we used to do that to go drinking. What else do you do in Matamoros. There wasn't too many places of entertainment in our small community.

[Michelle laughing]

GEOFFREY: I did that in my younger days as well.

MICHELLE: yeah!

ODIE: I don't drink anymore... but, yes we did. We used to go a lot. And of course, we used to go visit family when I was younger with my parents. We always used to go visit her relatives. Mom's relatives all lived in Mexico in *la frontera*, but still, we'd cross the border and go visit her on a regular basis, but then as I got older and was able to drive, I'd go do it on my own, but then I got married.

GEOFFREY: and do you think there was more crossing back and forth back then?

ODIE: Oh, I think so. I mean there's not as many people. The population wasn't as great, but I think as far as crossing, you wouldn't see the rows and rows and rows of cars, that you do now. Yes, people still risk going, like, my former boss, he's deceased now, his wife, all their family is from Monterrey, she says she still goes. She takes the bus now because it's too dangerous to drive. She used to get a driver to come pick her up and take her, but now she says she takes the bus, but she's got to see her parents.

GEOFFREY: yeah, my mom is basically in the Same situation, she just takes the bus now.

[long pause]

SAM: I'm sorry, you said you used to go to Mexico back and forth and you would go with your friends over there, so I imagine you danced a lot to Mexican music...

ODIE: You know what, I never learned to dance.

GEOFFREY: What?!

ODIE: Never. My mom was an excellent dancer, but my dad wasn't. Now when I would go to weddings with my mother's family I would dance with my uncles at the weddings, but that was all the dancing I knew, I never learned to dance, isn't that weird? And I wanted so bad. After we got married I said "Kelly let's take a dancing lesson". He doesn't dance either so...

GEOFFREY: They're offering lessons at the pan-am recreation center

[Michelle laughing]

ODIE: Now, Patrick is a good dancer and so is my youngest daughter. They love swing dancing and stuff like that.

GEOFFREY: so when you travelled back and forth from Reynosa, this was a strictly drinking endeavor?

ODIE: Yes, yes... to all the places there. That's where most people went to have a good time.

MICHELLE: but back then it was safe...

ODIE: Yes, Oh yeah...

GEOFFREY: did you go to like, Sam's?

ODIE: yes, *La Cucaracha*. I don't remember all the places, but if you mention them, I'm sure I was there.

GEOFFREY: that's weird that we went to the same places.

SAM: what was the kind of music that you used to listen to?

ODIE: kind of music?

SAM: the kind of music that was in style in your era

ODIE: the Spanish?

SAM: the Spanish or English, which was the favorite or...

ODIE: as I was growing up? When I was little, my parents always listened to music, Spanish music, and I remember a lot of the *corridos* that they used to listen to. Then as I got older, I liked all the pop music, whatever was popular back then, and I would just memorize them. Don't ask me to memorize my history book because I couldn't.

MICHELLE: but you sure could memorize a song...

ODIE: Yes. I liked that. But I can't say that in my teenage years, I did much of listening to Spanish music. I did when I was little because my parents did. As I got older I listened to what I wanted I wanted to listen to.

GEOFFREY: so you're no longer a fan of *corridos*?

ODIE: I still like them, when I hear them, I think they're quite interesting, and I'll tell my husband "Oh, we used to listen to those when we were kids" and that kind of thing, brings back a lot of memories of my parents. Thanks for asking.

LUPITA: as you got older what types of music did you listen to? Country? Pop?

ODIE: Country, a little bit of Country, but mostly Pop. You didn't have these, what do they call them, the rappers? You didn't have any of that. You had Frank Sinatra, you had....what was that girl's name? Loretta Lynn.

GEOFFREY: Were you around here for the Vietnam War?

ODIE: I was in High school

GEOFFREY: Oh really? Did you witness like all of the men disappear from the Valley? Did that happen?

ODIE: No, there were a lot of people that disappeared, I mean, that left but I wasn't really involved with that, because like I said we lived in this tiny little town where everybody knew everybody. It's a small community and we were all practically related, so we were all there. But um, there wasn't that many right where I lived, but on the West side there was some school kids my age that did go to Vietnam and some died in Vietnam. Ricky Crossland, was one of my classmates. There's a street named after him.

MICHELLE: the walkout in Edcouch... did you have anything... did you hear about that?

ODIE: No, I did hear about that at the time. I know some people that were in the walkout, but I couldn't understand it. What are they walking out for? I wasn't involved, but I did hear about it.

GEOFFREY: What were they walking out for, by the way?

ODIE: Well, the way I understood it, they walked out because they felt that they weren't having any representation. It was a lot of Hispanics that felt that the school was not representing them the way they should be represented. When I had my class reunion,

twenty years later, that was the only class reunion that we had, I graduated in 63, so it must have been '83, and I went to it. The first thing, my counselor came up to me and said "and do you remember how we were so discriminated?" When? I never felt discriminated. I never did. Like I said, all of my friends were mostly White friends. We didn't have any Blacks. They probably would've been my best friends. But there just weren't any.

GEOFFREY: Did Black people ever come to the Valley?

ODIE: Who?

GEOFFREY: Black people like African-Americans.

ODIE: No. There again, when I was young, there was Rio Farms, I don't know if your familiar with Rio Farms. Rio Farms was like experimental operation. They did a lot of agriculture and stuff. One year, they must have had an abundance of crops and they needed people. So they brought a bunch of Black families into the community. They build this little corrugated homes and I figured it must've been awfully hot. I felt for these people because I just thought, "gosh, they live in"... I mean, we were hot and we had frame houses, can you imagine this corrugated little building? And it was like a little, I called it "a little concentration camp", because it was just all these little buildings... and then I would meet them at the grocery store. They used to shop at the same place we would go. I would see all these tiny little kids, and they were just the cutest things. I'd look at the parents and I'd look at them and nobody looked like anybody, they all looked the same, and I would worry. I must have been like 8 or nine years old or maybe even younger. I would wonder how in the world the parents could tell them apart. I couldn't, but I was such a stupid kid. I was just concerned for the little ones. I couldn't figure them out. I knew who my parents were, and I'm sure they knew their parents too. It's like people with blue eyes; I never thought that people with blue eyes could see? It's like they're blue...they can see?

GEOFFREY: They can see?

ODIE: I thought there's no way they could see, they're blue... but you know my grandmother had blue eyes, but then I didn't know her. She died when my dad was twelve years old. (inaudible)

MICHELLE: you were speaking about shopping. Did you ever feel segregation in the communities, because I know in Weslaco, you could only shop, if you were Hispanic, you could shop only on a certain day

ODIE: When did that happen? I didn't know that?

MICHELLE: I think that was in the 30's or 40's

ODIE: Oh no. That would have been way before my time. But that's probably true I don't know

GEOFFREY: one question that I wanted to know more about was the relationship of the Norquests to other prominent families in the Valley?

ODIE: I don't know so much about prominent families. I know that since the Norquests were musicians, when they got this house, they used to have dances there. His grandfather was a fiddler, so once they heard his grandfather was going to have music, everybody would come. We found this out from a lady that we interviewed because of the house, Mrs. Weaver. She said everybody came, it was word of mouth, would come and dance and have a good time. My husband's grandfather would fiddle and my husband's father would play the piano. They would just enjoy themselves because of the music.

GEOFFREY: More specifically, like the Closner's, or the Shary's or the McAllen's, is there any kind of interaction that you're aware of?

ODIE: No, my father-in-law probably knew them, and Kelly probably knows some stories. I would not know about that. I'm sure he knows. They weren't friends to speak of, it was more business related.

MICHELLE: Those were earlier families that had already been established.

ODIE: Yes, exactly.

GEOFFREY: So, what do you Norquests do nowadays?

ODIE: What do we do? We walk to eat.

[laughing]

ODIE: Well, let's see. I can tell you what our day is like... We get up, we walk to What-A-Burger.

MICHELLE: Really?!

GEOFFREY: Which What-A-Burger?

ODIE: The one on University. We walk over there and we walk back and, well before that, we go over to the church and check church mail and check whatever goes on in church, and then we have errands to run and grocery store, this and that. It's kind of our typical morning. Then we come home, I'm always watching TV. He reads all the time. But I watch TV.

GEOFFREY: so I take it you two are retired?

ODIE: Yes, yes. I still work. I've had this little job for many years, and its only half a day. Most recently I've been working for a doctor's office; just because I want mad money for my grandkids.

MICHELLE: how many grandchildren do you have?

ODIE: two. A girl and a boy.

GEOFFREY: that's nice; you finally have a male offspring in the family

[coughing]

LUPITA: How old are your grandchildren?

ODIE: The oldest is three going on twenty; she'll have her fourth birthday February 4th. And the little one will be two in December.

GEOFFREY: Before you and your husband retired, what did you dedicate yourself to, what was your career?

ODIE: I was an administrator for a five doctor practice. The doctor that started the practice died of pancreatic cancer a week before my mom.

GEOFFREY: Oh, okay, the boss that you mentioned earlier... and your husband

ODIE: He worked for the Texas Employment Commission for 33 years. The day before they changed the name to Texas Workforce, he retired.

GEOFFREY: so he missed out on the Texas Workforce excitement?

ODIE: He was glad he did. So many things changed after that.

GEOFFREY: so was there maybe an event that really flooded his office where everyone was all of a sudden unemployed?

ODIE: Unemployed? I don't know. I'm sure that during the freeze and that kind of things would have impacted unemployment. The veterans after they came back from the war. He was one of the veterans' counselor for several years and that had impacted his work as well.

MICHELLE: have you ever found any artifacts around the property?

ODIE: I haven't. I wish I did. But I haven't. I think Patrick has found some stuff, some tools mainly and things like that. But they've probably been there from the time when they were farming and stuff like that

GEOFFREY: So I guess, question 20. Based on your experience here in the Valley, what do you think, I mean because you know we are very economically underserved, what do you think, based on your life in the Valley, that people should know to grow as a community.

ODIE: I think a lot of it. You have to be informed on what's going on in your community. You have to know the people that you voted into office and how they are helping your community. Also, I think you volunteer. There's so much to learn through

volunteering, I belong to several different organizations that I volunteer for because I want to be informed, and how do you get informed if you don't get involved?

GEOFFREY: so is there like a particular cause or issue that you really support strongly?

ODIE: I support all of them strongly. Yes. I'm the secretary for the Rainbow Room. Laura Bush inaugurated all the Rainbow Rooms in the State of Texas. She came to our inauguration back in 93. The date may not be right.

GEOFFREY: Oh, so you've been there for a long time.

ODIE: And it's in conjunction with Child Protective Services, we provide a lot of support for the CPS counselors who go in into homes whenever there's a report of child abuse or neglect. They have to go in, step in and remove that child. They go into the Rainbow Room and they fit that child with clothing, books, book satchels, or whatever they need to get them back into a regular routine. As a matter of fact we're going to have a 5k run on Saturday; the rehabilitation center is doing it for us. It's to help support the Rainbow Room. So there's that, and the Porciones Society. I've been the treasurer for that since it started back in 83. They've never changed officers, they've never changed the treasurer, they've always changed officers, but I've always been the treasurer. And then the other one of course is church. I'm involved in church in different areas, I'm the financial secretary for the church.

GEOFFREY: so the Porciones society, what do they do?

ODIE: basically, they can help you research, tell you how to research your family roots, how to get started.

GEOFFREY: specifically Edinburg?

ODIE: Anywhere. I guess the first thing is to do like we're doing, oral history. You go talk to your dad, your mother, your grandmother, your great grandmother, whoever relatives, aunts, uncles that know your history, who knows your family and go back as far as you can. Once you do that, you start putting the pieces together. So where do I go from here? I think the internet has a lot of that stuff. Some of it is good and some of its not.

You really have to do the research yourself. We used to go to Mier, Ciudad Mier, where all books are there and do the research the research from there.

GEOFFREY: They have like a really old church, like a historical church.

ODIE: Yes, Yes, that is where we used to go. That is where I am originally from.

GEOFFREY: From, Mier, that city was evacuated recently.

ODIE: Yes

GEOFFREY: For the kind of drug lords.

ODIE: Yes

GEOFFREY: Yeah, my uncle actually took values, some supplies over there, 600 pounds of like foods and stuff. So presumably you have researched your family history?

ODIE: No. Actually, I haven't. My husband has. My husband has written 5 journals on the Peña family dating back to 1600

GEOFFREY: And this is your family?

ODIE: My, yeah my dad's side.

GEOFFREY: The 1600 though, and they are all originally from this area?

ODIE: Pretty much. They come actually from Spain. If you go back that far enough, that is where they originated, but most of them are from this area.

GEOFFREY: Really, anything interesting we've hear of them? Historical figures that we might of heard of?

ODIE: Yeah, as a matter of fact he was just telling me the other day, that I was related to Alonso De Leon?

GEOFFREY: Ponce?

MICHELLE: Ponce De Leon?

ODIE: Somebody like that. (It was Alonzo de Leon. He was the leader of the expedition into Texas in the Late 1600's that founded the French settlement of La Salle.)

GEOFFREY: That was exciting. So you're famous.

[laughing]

ODIE: Its interesting because he will says, "Do you know Tish Hinojosa?", yes, well my wife is related to Tish, 3rd 4th 6th 7th generation, but since he's got all the geneollogy, he makes it sound like we are first cousins. [laughter] It's interesting to hear talk about it.

GEOFFREY: That's like his hobby, genealogy.

ODIE: Yes, his mother had done genealogy, did it for her side of the family, the Nordmeyer Family. I don't know if anyone ever did it for, the Norquest side of the family. When his dad was dying, he felt he needed to do something to keep him busy. And he started doing my genealogy. We would go visit my dad and my mom, and he would start asking questions. My dad he used to tell us about las porciones and this and that. And my mom would say, I don't know where I came from. It's like I was raised from the ground. She didn't have any clue about her family history. So he started researching her roots and that is how he it got interesting in doing it.

GEOFFREY: In doing research from the Norquest, um, we found that they have porciones 69, 71 and 70 here in Edinburg, so that's pretty interesting.

ODIE: Yeah, I don't know. I guess maybe the way the porciones would run. But he was showing me some abstracts? Or something, that showed where it stops in Edinburg and that was quite interesting. He always wondered where, or why. Apparently there was some, business dealings going on at the time, about buying these portions so it was never part of the porcion, it just stops. I thought that was quite interesting. I worked for an attorney and, her dad used to be an attorney and we found abstracts and deeds from 1890's that are hand written.

GEOFFREY: Yeah...

ODIE: Did you see that?

GEOFFREY: Yesterday, we saw Chris, ah, I couldn't read that. I thought I was on to something, or what.

ODIE: Yes

MICHELLE: They are very beautiful

ODIE: They are, yes

MICHELLE: And where did your mother and father meet? How did they meet?

ODIE: Where did they meet? They met at their hometown. It was in Arcabus.
You know about the arcabus?

MICHELLE: No

ODIE: The military men lost their arcabus there. The town didn't have a name so everyone used to say, you know, where we lost the arcabus. So that's how they started calling it Arcabus.

GEOFFREY: Sorry, I have no idea of what is arcabus

ODIE: Oh, oh, I am sorry. It's a gun. A rifle, it's a big thing. Yes, So they always talked about where they found it. My mom always said that she was going to marry my dad, because they were not related and everybody in small towns always intermarry because that is all there was. Well, years later my husband had to find, out that they are related. Distant relatives but they are still related.

SAM: So your parents are both Hispanics?

ODIE: Yes, Son puros mexicanos, todos. *Todos somos puros mexicanos.*

MICHELLE: Did you feel any difference, since I don't mean to say, but your very faired skinned, and compared to other Mexicans, did you see any differences in treatment?

ODIE: No. I never did, maybe that's why the whites treated me so nice. [laughing] I never thought of it that way until now that you mentioned it, I never did. But it interesting that you mentioned that because I have friends, very close friends that, half of their family is light complected the other half is dark complected. This friend of mine, mi *comadre*, Say they would go up north to pick cotton, they used to travel to Michigan a lot, that when they stop on the way to eat, half of their family could go into the restaurant, but the other half couldn't.

MICHELLE: Um, they had to stay in the truck or something.

ODIE: What? Let's see, we never traveled outside of the valley, particularly so we never experienced anything like that.

LUPITA: You said that when you were younger you migrated with your family.

ODIE: No, not really. We did a little bit, but not as a regular thing. If we were going to pick cotton, we'd pick cotton here or we would help my uncle that had farmland. It wasn't my uncle. It was my cousin's father, no father-in-law. They had a farm and he'd call us and asked us to help her with the crop that need harvesting. So we would go in a week or weekend and helped out.

LUPITA: And help out.

ODIE: Yes.

LUPITA: But never out of the state.

ODIE: No! Oh no! We were all girls, we were seven girls. [laughing]

GEOFFREY: Seven girls?

ODIE: Seven girls.

LUPITA: No brothers?

ODIE: No! My mother always used to say, "they will come later". [laughter]

GEOFFREY: Yeah those seven girls

ODIE: “No mas siete, ni un macho”, my mother would say. No she says they will come later.

LUPITA: Wow all sisters! You’ve got all your sisters? There all here in Edinburg?

ODIE: No! I have a sister that retired from school district in Dallas. And one sister lives in Mercedes, McAllen, Pharr, I and Monte Alto. My oldest sister Sarah in Monte Alto.

SAM: Does your husband speak both English and Spanish?

ODIE: He learned it from the Mexican people that used to come and work here.

GEOFFREY: Any Sweden?

ODIE: Yes.

SAM: And so he speaks with your dad that is how he got a lot of information.

ODIE: Yes! Yes, he used to, well my dad spoke English but not all that well. He could probably speak it better than read. It’s funny because he used to work at Rio Farms. He says that uh, whenever he’d answer the phone when nobody would be there, he would say “hello”, and they would start rattling English and then he would say, “no *si* no mas el arranque tengo bueno”. [everyone laughing] Just a hello that is all he could say. He couldn’t really communicate. As he got older he could say words, speak a little better but not fluent.

GEOFFREY: What was the life like growing up with seven sisters in the valley? Half of the town of Monte Alto.

ODIE: Well it was really nice, because I got to wear my older sister’s clothing. But my

older sister, not the oldest, two sisters above me, was a seamstress, and she used to sew from the time she was twelve years old. And, she would look at a catalog, and we'd tell her hey we wanted this, dress. And she would get the material and do it exactly.

GEOFFREY: Really

ODIE: Exactly!

GEOFFREY: that must have been pretty convenient.

ODIE: Yes it was. My mom was also a seamstress. My mom would stay up late at night whenever we had costumes for school, or needed a new dresses because we were going to be at the Ty Cob Show. You all didn't know about the Ty Cob Show...

LUPITA: What is the Ty Cob Show?

ODIE: It was a like a talent show. I think our school had been invited to sing. I must had been in the fourth grade or something. So we all had to have our new dresses.

GEOFFREY: And did you have to perform at the Ty Cob Show?

ODIE: Of course!

GEOFFREY: You did?

ODIE: Yes

GEOFFREY: What was the gig? What was your talent?

ODIE: I had no talent. No. It was just a group, we did a group song. Somebody invited us. We would go, maybe a teacher, which had been invited to go sing at the Ty Cob Show. But there was a gal by the name of Irma Garza, and then there was a gal Sue Garza, she had a dress shop, a wedding, what do you call it? wedding shop?

MICHELLE: A bridal shop

ODIE: Bridal shop, in McAllen that also used to perform. I think it was mostly singing.

GEOFFREY: How well did your parents acculturate to the US? In other words, did you study a lot of Mexican foods? Are they trying to fit into American society?

ODIE: No, we didn't eat the mole and stuff like that. No, see my parents were here from la frontera, and they were meat eaters. Chicken and meat, but never, that other stuff. My mom had an ulcer so she baked everything. So we all ate whatever she ate, just baked food.

GEOFFREY: Baked food that was the bright idea.

ODIE: Baked food, but we never ate mole. My sisters usually would cook on Sunday. We always had a Sunday dinner and a lot of the times we would invite our pastor to come over and eat with us. Meat loafs. I remember, my sister used to make French fries and she would make little tiny cubes, that was the thing with the meat loaf back then, I guess. You know, this is the way we ate and then a vegetable.

GEOFFREY: So

ODIE: But I remember that after school, my mother always had big pot of beans and

fresh flour tortillas. We would eat that for our snack, when we got home from school. That was a given. She always had two cups of beans in one of these *jarros*. [laughing]

GEOFFREY: Can't go wrong with that. So meals in your household were like a family in the community, that you invited your pastors and stuff.

ODIE: We used to just plan it on Sunday. We were so many it was kind of hard, but we always managed to invite the pastor over. He would come alone or he would come along with his family. Yes, my mom used to make corn tortillas by hand with the matate. She would get the corn, and then she would boil it or whatever she needed to do. Then she would cook it and then she would put the cal. (lime) She would do everything. Then she would get the metate and would grind the cooked corn. She had the molinito.

LUPITA: Any of you continue it, the tradition?

ODIE: No I just have her metate out there, but I don't do that. [laughing]

LUPITA: Are there traditions that you and your family have or had that you?

ODIE: No. Actually, we never did have traditions per say. With Kelly's family for Christmas Eve, they always ate oyster stew, that was their Swedish tradition and his mom always made the coffee cakes that was the German tradition. When we got married, we continued that tradition. Before we go to church, I fix the same recipe that she had. Cook the oyster stew: oysters, the celery, onions, salt and pepper and butter, in a big pot of milk. It's delicious! And then when we got married, we started to include the tamales. [coughing] So now we eat oyster stew, tamales and coffee cakes. She always had the table all fixed up, nice. I used to do that too, until church got to be harder and harder to plan a meal around, because

we have choir rehearsals and have to prepared for the choir service and all. It makes it difficult. [coughing]

GEOFFREY: So you've been involved with the church your entire life?

ODIE: Yes I have.

GEOFFREY: How is the church changed from when you were ten?

ODIE: It's gotten better, Yes! When I was little, sermons were so boring because I didn't understand them. It's strange that you mention that, because when I was little, seven years old, we had this minister that was our pastor that was a missionary, several years later, he transferred to the church here. When I heard him preach, I thought wow! He's grown so much! [laughing] His sermons were great!

GEOFFREY: And in terms of the congregation, has that increased, decrease and build character?

ODIE: Yes, very much so. We now have a female pastor, which we didn't have before. When I was young and going to church, the ministers would say, we don't do the sign of the cross. We don't do anything that looks catholic. We don't want people to think that we still have catholic traditions. But now, this pastor believes in doing the sign of the cross. Believes in first communion for 18 month babies; those that sit and kneel and stretch their hands to receive the Sacraments. So we do a lot of the traditional that we had gotten away from. We never had bells during the words of institution. But we do all of that now. And everybody accepts it now. I think because of that, we had so many intermarriages. As far as traditions, they accept that better then before. A lot of them are Hispanic and are from the catholic community.

GEOFFREY: You know that seems kind of strange, that your parents, were your parents with you?

ODIE: No! My mom was catholic and my dad was Pentecostal.

GEOFFREY: Really!

ODIE: Yes!

GEOFFREY: Was he early adopted of being Pentecostal?

ODIE: His father is a Pentecostal preacher.

GEOFFREY: Ok, I mean, I mean, I know. There are some Pentecostals in Mexico, but you know, it's mostly Catholics.

ODIE: Yes!

GEOFFREY: How did your father come to accept Pentecost? Your grandpa?

ODIE: Well, don't know. See he died long before I was born and before my dad was ever married. Yes, he was a Pentecostal preacher and when we moved into the United States. I always said that it was the Catholics, the nuns didn't like u. We were too many and too rowdy. So, the missionaries would come and pick us up. We used to have Sunday School in the school auditorium. The missionaries were trying to reach everyone. They would go from home to home, house to house. We always said that mom just wanted to get rid of all of us so she could get rest, whomever came first, we would go. The Lutheran missionaries had this van and they would take us in this van to Sunday School. And that's how we became Lutheran. We never went to any church prior to....

GEOFFREY: So the church came to here.

ODIE: Yes, the church came to us.

GEOFFREY: So your mom wanted to get you out of the house, so how was the living arrangement, what were, did you have a big house or a small house? To accommodate so many people.

ODIE: Well, initially we just had a house probably not much bigger than this one.

GEOFFREY: With nine people

ODIE: Yes! With nine people.

GEOFFREY: Wow!

ODIE: I remember, my parents had a bed. They brought their mattress from Mexico. I think my mom had made that mattress. Yes! so either they had a bed, I don't know, I don't remember. We would sleep on the floor, we would sleep on the kitchen floor; we would sleep wherever there was room, yes. And then as we got older, and we were able to work, my dad extended the living quarters. He built another room and then kept extending the house until we had enough room for everybody. Then my sisters started marring off, so then we had more rooms. Sometimes we had two twin beds so we would sleep two to a bedroom.

GEOFFREY: So that was a relief, once your sisters started getting married.

LUPITA: So as far as the plumbing, everything was outside?

ODIE: Yes! That's right. All the plumbing was outside. Electricity. we didn't have electricity.

GEOFFREY: No?

ODIE: No!

GEOFFREY: So how old were you when the light came in?

ODIE: I don't remember

LUPITA: How did you cook with *brazas*?

ODIE: No, actually my mother never liked that, to have *brazas*, because we were so many kids to have an open fire. We used kerosene lamps. I remember that when we were sick with coughs, she would give us a little lump of sugar with kerosene and ask us to take it.

GEOFFREY: Kerosene?

ODIE: Yes! To take it to make us feel better.

GEOFFREY: That was it? Did it work?

ODIE: [laughing] that's all we had. Yes! Yes! We all liked it. because of the sugar, I'm sure. [laughing] We did a lot of herbal medicine. When my mom didn't know what to do, she would call her, call? There was no calling! She would write her dad and say one of the kids is sick and I don't know what to do. My mom lost a daughter to dysentery. She was the second from the oldest child. So she was real scared when we'd get sick. She didn't know what to do, because she was brand new here in America. She would write to her dad, my granddad. It would take forever to get a letter back and forth. So he would tell her what to do once she would get his response.

GEOFFREY: In Mexico, she would write in Mexico?

ODIE: Yes! She would write.

GEOFFREY: How did the mail travel?

ODIE: Slow [laughing].

GEOFFREY: What was the conveyance?

ODIE: Basically, if someone was going to Mexico, because people used to travel to Mexico all the time. They would go get supplies on regular bases and visit relatives across the border.

GEOFFREY: So it was something like a messenger.

ODIE: That's what happened when my grandfather died, my uncle was up there, and he came and told my mom that my grandpa was very sick. Her dad was very, very sick and she needed to go up there. So then at night we packed and went. Of course he had already died. They didn't tell her that until we got there. So that's how a lot of times people coming and going would communicate.

GEOFFREY: Did you ever, like you mentioned both sugar and kerosene, did you ever see a *curandera*?

ODIE: No.

GEOFFREY: No?

ODIE: No, I think my mom had enough remedies [laughing]

LUPITA: Do you still have those remedies? Do you use them today?

ODIE: No, I don't I know my sister sometimes does. I will call my sister and ask her what do or what to use. She loves to do the *susto*, (*prayers and remedies*).

LUPITA: Oh yes.

ODIE: She knows how to do that. She, like the egg and all that stuff...I remember, my mom, used to cook all kinds of teas for us. Like *manzanilla*, she'd grow the stuff. We had it there like a regular plant. So whenever you get sick from the stomach or something she always had *manzanilla*, and other herbs.

MICHELLE: Or an aloe-vera plant.

ODIE: Yes, that kind of stuff. It was always, there, just part of the garden.

MICHELLE: Has any of your family ever been or have they used midwives? Were midwives used a lot back then?

ODIE: No, but my grandmother was a midwife. My grandmother lived with us back in 1953. And she was a midwife for the people there in Monte Alto. She delivered a lot of babies, but she always made sure that, because I worry about these people from Matamoros and Brownsville with all these things about needing passports and having the proper documentation and that they couldn't get them because they didn't have the proper documentation, she gave them some type of paper to take to the courthouse and make sure they got the archives or whatever.

GEOFFREY: What was the mortality rate like back then?

ODIE: Oh no! She delivered all of her daughter's babies mostly in Mexico. The only one that didn't get delivered by her was me. because my mom was out of town. I wasn't supposed to be born until a later date. So she thought that she would have time to make her trip and back, not here, but in Mexico. Where was she? Oh at Las Aldamas, she was visiting someone at Las Aldamas and that's where I was born.

GEOFFREY: Where is that?

ODIE: Mexico, somewhere.

GEOFFREY: Do you know the state?

ODIE: Nuevo Leon.

LUPITA: So were you born at home?

ODIE: I don't know I suspect I was. But I don't know?

SAM: After Mr. Norquest passed on, was the land distributed among the children he left behind?

ODIE: Yes, pretty much. After he passed, it went all to my mother-in-law. Then when she died that's when the land got distributed. They used to have stock. The kids would buy shares. Basically it was to support them. Their income was so small, Social security. They were farmers so their social security was really small. So in order for them to a lively hood, they sold stock to their kids. So that's how...depending on the number of shares. They formed a corporation. After it was dissolved, when she passed, that's whe everyone got their shares. My mother-in-law gave stock to all of my children, except the youngest. She was not born yet when my father-in-law died. They were doing that before they dissolved their corporation. So, everybody has a little piece of the land. Some very small, some little portions.

SAM: So you still meet somewhere? A family reunion or something? The Norquest family?

ODIE: Not so much the Norquest family. They were much older. My father-in-law was born in 1901 and my mother in law was born in 1905. The Norquest didn't really have much family here. The Nordmeyer's came from Illinois and they had a lot of family here. They were a large families. They are always having family reunions. We used to have them regularly. But now this Saturday some of their relatives are coming to have a mini Nordmeyer family reunion. So were going to get together with them.

GEOFFREY: As a family? So there's not really any young Norquests?

ODIE: Yes, there's some young Norquests like my daughter. My daughter is going to be 30 in February. But she's in Illinois, no Iowa, she's in Iowa. Yes and Caroline and of course our grandchildren, but they're Vazquez.

GEOFFREY: They're Vazquez?

ODIE: Yes. Christine kept her single, maiden name.

GEOFFREY: What about your family? Do you have a large extended family as well?

ODIE: Yes. I have so many first cousins that I don't even know. I'm serious.

GEOFFREY: Your mother also had a large family?

ODIE: There was like 12, 13, and if that wasn't enough they adopted one, on my mother's side of the family. Yes and pretty much I think everybody. I think she only has one sister left. No two sisters left. I think that's it.

GEOFFREY: Is your mom still alive?

ODIE: My mom died in, it's going to be three years.

GEOFFREY: Oh so it's recent? How old was she?

ODIE: Ninety-five. Yes, in 2008 when she died.

LUPITA: And her sisters are in Mexico?

ODIE: I'm sorry?

LUPITA: Her sisters are in Mexico, the ones who are still living?

ODIE: One is in Mexico, and the other lives in Weslaco.

LUPITA: Oh so you still see one of them?

ODIE: Yes. I see her. Actually my mom is buried at Highland Memorial Park in Weslaco. So both my parents are buried there. We go to the cemetery on birthdays, Christmas, all Saints day and special occasions. We just drive to the cemetery and afterwards we go see our aunt.

GEOFFREY: So do you get along well with your side of the family? Do you guys meet a lot? Communicate?

ODIE: Oh yes. We get along fine. We just we never see them. Everybody's got their own jobs and family. But we get together. As soon as my aunt knows we are coming, she wants to go get cabrito. She'll wants to fix a big feast and she is already in her 80's. We don't let her know we are coming she'll just be rushing to get things done for us. So what we do, we just won't tell her. We just drop in.

MICHELLE: Surprise?

ODIE: Yes. Sorry, we were over at the cemetery so we just stop in for a minute. It says here, how did you dispose of garbage and sewage?

GEOFFREY: I think we made these questions thinking that we were going to get like...we didn't know who exactly we were going to interview.

ODIE: Well I'd tell you when we got married we didn't have any garbage.

GEOFFREY: So what did you do with the garbage?

ODIE: What we did, we collected the garbage, then we had these barrels, and we would put the garbage in the barrels and then when they were full, we would take it to the city dump or the county dump or whatever.

GEOFFREY: I used to live in the country and I would see a lot of people just burning it, I guess.

ODIE: They have a incinerator, that pit over there and that's where we used to do burn a lot of paper and stuff. But we didn't really burn cans and bottles and things like that. They did use it for barbequing and also for burning...incinerator.

GEOFFREY: And what about your sewage? You mentioned you have a septic tank...did that ever get overflow, get stuffed up? Because once a septic tank is...

ODIE: Yes, there's companies that come and clean them.

GEOFFREY: I guess this wasn't so long ago.

SAM: You mentioned you used to get your water from pumps or something before, way back?

ODIE: I'm not sure how it worked with the cistern. But I know that we didn't used to drink from it. Now where I lived before I got married, there were neighbors that had pumps and they had some really good water. We used to go get water from them. There was a time, I don't know if there was a shortage of water, or what, but I remember the water being salty. So everybody was drilling wells and pumping their own water.

MICHELLE: Do remember the date, the time, the year?

ODIE: It must have been in the 50s. I know Pharr still has awful water unless it's changed. My sister lives there.

GEOFFREY: did you ever go to the river? To fish or swim?

ODIE: The river?

GEOFFREY: The river.

SAM: Padre Island? Or the river?

GEOFFREY: I'm taking about the river.

MICHELLE: Or maybe even Delta Lake?

ODIE: No. We used to go to Delta Lake for the picnics. They used to have huge Easter picnics and everybody from all over would come. But there was that accident with amoebas when a young girl from Edinburg died because she contracted the amoebas while. They closed it down to the public. It's hasn't been the same since. They have tried to restore it. But it's never really has.

GEOFFREY: I guess when you were a kid the biggest city in the valley was...McAllen, or Brownsville? Were these...places you would go to? You would never hang out in the big city of McAllen?

ODIE: Where would we go? We would go to Elsa to buy groceries. But as I got older, was working I'd go to McAllen and do all my shopping there. I used to go to Weslaco and shop because I worked there. Before I got married, and I used to do my shopping there. We had a little grocery store in Monte Alto, my parents used to get their groceries there.

GEOFFREY: And that sounds like Elsa and Monte Alto they used to I guess have more people or more economic activity and they've since kind of stagnated, what was that attributed to?

ODIE: I don't really know, but I suspect that the big cities took over. Then they had more big stores taken over the little ones. I know there were family owned grocery stores and businesses that started dying down when the bigger companies came

GEOFFREY: like H.E.B.

ODIE: H.E.B., Piggily Wiggly

MICHELLE: Piggily Wiggly. I was just going to say if that was one of the first...

GEOFFREY: Did that change life in the Valley with the advent of the H.E.B.?

ODIE: Yeah. Bigger, bigger business. And yet I'm surprised that some have still survived. But some of the grocery stores did close down.

GEOFFREY: Because I'm thinking of towns like Santa Rosa, like there used to be a movie theater and now it's just like...

ODIE: I remember in Monte Alto we used to walk to school. Talk about walking to school a mile. I was six years old and I was walking to school, about a mile. There were theaters on the side of the street where I used to go and we could only see the pictures on the outside. My parents wouldn't let us even look at movie theaters.

GEOFFREY: Do you remember the first movie you saw in the theater?

ODIE: I probably saw. What is that guy called? What is it...Billy Graham or the other one?

GEOFFREY: Oh it was a religious film?

ODIE: Yes. It was.

SAM: Was it here at the Citrus in Edinburg?

ODIE: Yes.

GEOFFREY: The Power of Positive Thinking, is that it?

ODIE: Yes. Who is it...Vincent Peal. Norman Vincent Peal.

GEOFFREY: He had like a huge church in New York.

ODIE: Yes. They were giving the life story of him and how he got married and how he started his church. Somehow I wound up going to that, for my first movie. And I remember Doris Day. A movie...If a man answers, you are suppose to hang up if a man answers. (I may have my movies mixed up)

GEOFFREY: So your parents completely, they weren't in the idea of movie theaters?

ODIE: No. That was my father's Pentecostal background. No. We could not go to the movie theaters.

GEOFFREY: Was it just theaters or was it films?

ODIE: Films. Any films. We could watch T.V. The neighbor had T.V. so, we could go and watch it, but not to go into a theater. I was already in high school when I watched my first movie.

GEOFFREY: Really your first movie?

ODIE: Yes. I think I was already out of high school when I went to the theater here at the Citrus.

GEOFFREY: Did you develop a love for movies afterwards?

ODIE: No I think I always liked movies because I watched them on T.V. I wasn't too much into soaps but I did watch a few.

GEOFFREY: So your dad went passing his entire life and just was did not like movies at all?

ODIE: I'm sorry?

GEOFFREY: Did he ever get into movies? Your father? In real life? Or did he?

ODIE: No, my mom, my dad, never watched movies. They never when to a theater. My older sister never went to a theater. She was Pentecostal. She was brought up Pentecostal. Her cousin was Pentecostal. So they used to hang around and went to church together.

GEOFFREY: So for entertainment what did your parents do?

ODIE: They didn't do anything. They worked. There wasn't any time for entertainment. Yes. Everybody worked. Everybody had jobs. Either cleaned house, you cooked, you did that kind of stuff.

LUPITA: They didn't gather relatives and play music or anything?

ODIE: Not my parents. No. My parents weren't into music. Not like the Norquest's. No.

SAM: Was Edinburg's towns square very popular back in the 50s, 60s?

ODIE: I'm sure it was. I just wasn't around.

SAM: Oh ok.

GEOFFREY: Seems like a pretty long drive from Edcouch from, Monte Alto, to Reynosa. How did you get your first car?

ODIE: I had a 1966 car. And that was my car. I think I was 20, 21 years old. I was already out of high school and so, I used to go to Mercedes because I worked in Weslaco and I had friends from Mercedes. So I used to go to Mercedes, pick my friends up and then we would take off.

GEOFFREY: Did you pay for your own car?

ODIE: Yeah.

GEOFFREY: Really?

ODIE: \$2,700. Tax and everything, brand new car.

SAM: What kind of car was that?

ODIE: I don't remember. It was one of these big ol' sedans. My dad didn't want me to get a little car because he would say. "No, you're going to go kill yourself and you need a big car to protect you." So I had this big ol' "granny" car. Yes.

GEOFFREY: So what job did you have that got you that car? Still medical administration?

ODIE: I was working for, as a matter of fact, do you all know Thurman Eye? He's a, Doctor Thurman back in 68 I think. He had an optician in his office and they were looking for someone to help in the new office. He was going to move that office into another. The new laws didn't allow him to have an optician ophthalmologist in the same office. So they moved and then I applied and I got the job. So I worked there for about two and a half years before I got married. And before that I worked in a pharmacy.

GEOFFREY: So you've always been somehow in the medical field?

ODIE: Yes. I don't know why. I never thought I wanted to be anything like a nurse and yet I always worked in doctor's offices. Yes. I worked for a doctor Stewart, which is now my boss' uncle. He was a surgeon here in Edinburg.

GEOFFREY: So I take it you never went for medical treatment in Mexico?

ODIE: Oh no. We never did. No, my parents didn't believe in that. We saw Dr. Dewitt. He was the local doctor in Elsa. That's who we used to go see. Then there was a doctor Diver that came in later. He was across the street from highway 107 and 88 something like that. Do you know those people?

SAM: No. I know the area, 88 and 107.

ODIE: and that's where we used to go.

GEOFFREY: did they do house calls?

ODIE: No. No that was probably earlier on.

GEOFFREY: there's actually still a doctor in Mission that still does house calls.

ODIE: is that right? That nice, I like the idea.

GEOFFREY: you guys have any other questions?

LUPITA: well I was going to ask about, when you were growing up in Monte Alto did your parents own the property where you grew up? Is it still there, and you still have the house?

ODIE: Yes, No, actually we just sold it after mom died. She left it to us. Nobody wanted it, not even my sister that lives there. We had always said that whenever we sold the house or if my oldest sister wanted it she could have it. So basically what we did is was turned around and give her the proceeds from the sale of the house.

GEOFFREY: did you live like in a neighborhood? Or was it rural?

ODIE: Yes. It's a neighborhood.