

909-1 Tpc47

MEXICAN-AMERICAN ARCHIVES

Interviewee: Mrs. Catherine Reyes
Date: February 28, 1978
Interviewer: Irene Ruiz

Tape 25A

- 003-015 Mrs. Reyes, a librarian-clerk at Switzer Elementary School, was born March 22, 1931 in Independence, Kansas. Her father was Enrique Padilla and her mother, Maximina Otera.

- 016-024 Her parents returned to Mexico when Mrs. Reyes was one year old. She grew up and attended school in Mexico City. They returned to the U.S. in 1949 when she was age 17.

- 025-033 Mrs. Reyes has 2 brothers and 2 sisters. Her father was a laborer; her mother a seamstress.

- 039-063 They came to Kansas City with friends of her parents, knew no English, and had no winter clothes. She got a job inspecting clothes in a clothing factory for 75¢ an hour.

- 064-094 She married the son of the family she had been staying with 6 months later in June, 1949. She saw marriage as a way out of her loneliness and difficulty with English. She had 2 children in 2 years and returned to work as a seamstress part-time.

- 095-103 Her husband worked for the Missouri Pacific Railroad until the flood of 1951. He is now employed at the Darby Corporation.

- 110-125 She loved drawing as a child and her parents paid for her to take lessons.

- 126-204 Recollection of a painful childhood episode when she was asked to give a speech welcoming some returning Mexican soldiers from WWII. At the last minute the honor was denied her because a teacher remembered she was not a Mexican citizen. She vowed to return to the U.S. even though her father warned her that she would encounter much discrimination.

- 205-226 Her parents returned to Mexico because they could not obtain U.S. government aid during the Depression. All the children had been born in the U.S.

- 227-251 Her older brother was stripped of his rights as a U.S. citizen because he did not report for duty during WWII. He later regained citizenship and entered the U.S. permanently in 1953. Her mother came permanently in 1964 after her father's death.

- 266-281 Flood of 1951: Her sister-in-law lost all her possessions.

- 282 She worked off and on as a seamstress, saving money in the Union Cultural Mexicana, a credit union for Mexican-Americans. After 8 years of living with her in-laws, the Reyes purchased a home. They had twins.
- 315-332 She worked days and her husband worked nights to afford the house plus sending the children to a Catholic grade school. They had 4 more children (8 total) and decided to take action to prevent further pregnancies.
- 333-338 Mrs. Reyes felt trapped working and caring for the family. She enrolled a brother who had just come to the U.S. in English classes at a church at 24th and Benton. She ended up studying English and math herself.
- 339-433 Her brother quit, but she continued and took 3 neighborhood women with her to school.
- 434-482 The supervisor at the night school got her interested in workshops. She began attending various classes and seminars. Her husband at first objected.
- 483-509 She came down with pneumonia in the fall of 1974 and was told one lung had been damaged by the chemicals at the clothing factories where she had worked.
- 537-558 By January, she was depressed and nervous. The family was running short of money. The doctor suggested she apply at the Board of Education for a bilingual job.

Side 25B

- 001 Details of job interview with Dr. Franco. She was assigned to Douglas Elementary as a teacher's aide. She spent 2 months with first graders, than transferred to the bilingual program.
- 048-097 Description of job in bilingual program. Some teachers resented her and felt she was intruding in their classrooms.
- 098-176 She spent the next 2 years in Switzer Elementary in their bilingual program. She attended classes at Penn Valley and found few Mexican-American students there.
- 177-205 Funding ran low in the bilingual program, so she was reassigned as head of the Switzer resource center.
- 207-246 Her older 2 children have completed college courses and the 6 younger ones are still in school. Her husband has adjusted to Mrs. Reyes' work and activities outside the home.
- 247-268 She some day wants to become a bilingual teacher.
- 269-302 People in her past who encouraged her to develop her potential.