

MEXICAN-AMERICAN ARCHIVES

Interviewee: Magdalena Rodriguez
Interviewer: Irene Ruiz

Tape 32A

- 001 Magdalena Rodriguez was born on October 2, 1933 in Kansas City, Kansas. Her parents were Natividad Hernandez Flores and Carluto Rosales Flores. They are from Cerritos and Tampico, Mexico. Her family came to the US as migrant farm laborers in 1914 because of the Mexican Revolution. They settled in Kansas City because her father's brother was already here as a Baptist minister.
- 043-058 Her parents lived on Fitzgerald Street (now I-35) until 1940. They moved to Melville Street, where her mother died in 1947. Mrs. Rodriguez was 13. Eight siblings are still alive.
- 059-079 The neighborhood was called a "colonia" or colony of Mexican-Americans. Blacks and Anglos also lived in the area, but the three groups never mixed socially. All the families were poor. Her father worked at Wilson and Company meat packers.
- 080-094 She recalls neighborhood parties in the summer with dancing, Mexican pastries, and homemade wine. The parties were called "mini-jamaicas".
- 095-105 One house became a recreation center in the neighborhood until it was sold. By then, the Armourdale community center was built.
- 106-116 There were no Mexican stores in the neighborhood (Rosedale area). For Mexican foods, etc., people went to the Armourdale or West Side neighborhoods.
- 117-182 She attended the Mexican annex of Major Hudson Elementary School, a wooden 2-room building with an outhouse. Up the hill was a modern brick school for the Anglo children. There was one teacher for grades 1-6, who alternated between the 2 rooms. Mexican parents were not allowed to join PTA. There were many examples of prejudice and physical abuse. Most Mexicans dropped out by 7th grade.
- 183-215 She attended Rosedale High School from 1946-1955, when she graduated. She dropped out from 1949-1951 to stay home with younger siblings when her mother died.
- 216-242 Her father became an American citizen to gain more rights and to be able to fight more effectively for his children's rights. Mexicans, Blacks, and Anglos all had separate dining facilities at the packing plant.
- 243-259 Her parents were reared as Catholics, but switched to the uncle's Baptist church in the U.S. The children were brought up without formal religious training.

- 260-293 She attended socials, dances, read children's classics, fairy tales, and autobiographies.
- 294-329 Except for family outings to the zoo or a movie, the girls were expected to stay home. She recalls having to sit in the balcony of the movies, "El Tampico", a Mexican movie house, and at the Monarch's ballgames.
- 330-347 Her mother never adjusted to the climate and way of life in the U.S. She never learned English.
- 348-386 Her father was active in the union and often spoke at "Jamiacas". He learned English by reading children's textbooks.
- 387-407 She recalls discrimination in the union.
- 408-424 She remembers her parent's financial worries during the Depression.
- 425-494 The family was very patriotic in WWII--there were five brothers in the service at the same time. There was a strong community spirit--victory gardens and trading or giving away ration coupons.

Side 32B

- 007-021 A just-married sister lost her home and all her possessions in the flood of 1951. Mrs. Rodriguez's future husband's family also lost everything.
- 022-043 She married in 1955 and had 3 boys in 5 years, and later a daughter. She believed a husband should support his family and a wife should stay home. She encouraged her children to get an education.
- 044-074 Her husband was employed 25 years by the Santa Fe Railroad. Mrs. Rodriguez is now a protective services worker. She investigates cases of child abuse and neglect for the state of Kansas. She got her job through an HEW pilot program and is now attending college part-time.
- 075-091 Details of her job.
- 092-111 Her siblings vary widely in educational background from a brother with a Ph.D. to a sister who attended school only through the 8th grade.
- 112-143 Her father did not believe girls needed much education. Later the Father changed his opinion, but the girls felt they had to fight against the social system as well as their father. The oldest brother was very influential in changing the father's mind.
- 144-159 Memories of oldest brother.
- 160-174 She considered her mother the cornerstone of the family. The family broke down somewhat when the mother died.

- 175-199 Mrs. Rodriguez is now a licensed social worker in Kansas and eventually will get a degree.
- 200-239 Mrs. Rodriguez describes her PTA activities.
- 240-263 She is active in the Antioch Church of Christ. She stressed family honor in bringing up her children.
- 264-327 Her other activities include involvement on the Human Relations Commission, community development, the United Mexican-American Voters of Kansas, and other social government and civil rights agencies.
- 328-343 Her husband at first complained that she was becoming too "Americanized" but he now understands that her efforts are to benefit future generations, and are not just for her own pleasure.
- 342-368 Various awards.
- 398-446 She feels racism still exists in the U.S., but is more subtle and she feels the social services still lack people trained to deal with Mexican-Americans.
- 447-485 She would like to see more Chicanos, especially girls, enter professional fields. She wants to see them get jobs because they are qualified, not because they fit in a minority quota.
- 486-499 She thinks women should fight for equal rights, such as their own credit ratings.

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