

Palm_School_Quintanilla_Cat

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SPEAKERS

Cat Quintanilla, Sergio Barrera

Sergio Barrera 00:00

Today is Sunday, December 15, 2024 My name is Sergio Barrio. I am interviewing cat Quintanilla in Austin, Texas for the Travis County oral history project. We are at the University of Texas at Austin campus. Thank you, Miss Quintanilla for agreeing to this interview. The raw, unedited recording of this interview will be archived at the Travis County archives, where it will be available to anyone who wishes to access it. As we said earlier, if there is anything you don't wish to talk about, we respect your wishes. Also, if there is something you want to discuss, please do make sure we discuss it. Please. Also let us know if you need to pause the interview today, we're going to talk about your life experiences, particularly as it relates to the palm school. We'll also discuss your relationship to community education and political participation, and if you're ready. Ms, Quintanilla, let's begin.

Sergio Barrera 00:45

sure.

Cat Quintanilla 00:50

So the first thing that I want to ask you is, please state your name and also, what is your relationship to the palm school?

Cat Quintanilla 00:55

Formal name is Catherine Grace Quintanilla, I go by Cat because I'm an artist when and I can get away with that. I was born on 51 rainy so that's about they're short blocks, about two and a half blocks from palm. I attended palm 1960 to 1966 lots of stuff went on during those years in the neighborhood.

Sergio Barrera 01:20

So if we could start off with describing what your childhood was like

Cat Quintanilla 01:24

before going to school?

Sergio Barrera 01:25

or like Rainey in the neighborhood,

Cat Quintanilla 01:31

We were the river rats, so we were the lower part of Rainey, if you can imagine. And it was not paved, so Rainey Street, that was originally part of kind of Austin. When Austin was smaller, had a lot of older homes there that didn't have original owners in them, but little Victorians and that sort of thing. And it was right against the river. Of course, the hobos live down in the river. So it was a hybrid community. When I was there, it became more and more Latino as the years passed. But the lower part where I lived, we had a diversity, Germans, Jewish, Anglos. It was a big, it was a very much of a mix. So that's where I was raised up, you know, and kind of free, styled as a child running up and down the streets there and then, you know, eventually went to elementary school.

Sergio Barrera 02:31

So in terms of your family, what was your family dynamics like?

Cat Quintanilla 02:35

Oh, it wasn't that great? My dad was born in Herra de Progreso, so came over after the Mexican Revolution in 1920 and married my mother, who was already a second or third generation here, and so it was a little bit of a struggle. He did better than most. He was a top salesman for Falstaff beer, but the family was not their relationship was not cordial. So I think some of us in our family create, created strength from that, and others didn't. I. I always say, you, you become who you are because of or in spite of, so I'm in spite of and, and I've always had a good relationship with my dad, my mom, not so much. And I just developed the personality that was out there and was not afraid of anybody, and that's taken me a long way in my life. I, you know, have my degree from the University of Texas. I own my own business. I became mayor of a small city. I'm fairly well known sculptor at this point, and I'm not done so the dynamic from your family and also the dynamic from what goes on in your community, that all just sort of becomes who you are, and then you decide where to take it from there. Does that answer your question? Oh, yeah, okay, cool. That was beautiful.

Sergio Barrera 04:11

I also understand that you have two older sisters and a brother, correct?

Cat Quintanilla 04:16

Yeah. We are a family of four, and everybody went to Palm Elementary, so, and, you know, then we split UJH from there, and then Martin, and then Austin High. So that was what that area was. It was at the time when the i h 35 was being built, and that previously, that was East Avenue. And so I think that caused more of a schism between the communities, because it became like more Latino off your if you're east of I 35 and more downtown if you were west of I 35 so there, there was that, that it did have an effect on Palm I think in the population there, but when I went, it was like 99.9% Latino period. And like, I think there was a black person, I'm not sure. I knew there were a couple of Anglos, but so we're

talking about a school in an environment that was 100% essentially Latino, but nobody was allowed to speak Spanish. So there's we can talk about that.

Sergio Barrera 05:27

Yeah. So actually, that's a great segue, because the next question that I had is, growing up, were you raised bilingually, or what language was favored at home?

Cat Quintanilla 05:38

when my dad came over, he was just four. The family, his his family, which is dominant in my my upbringing. They spoke all Spanish when he came over, and then some years later, he became naturalized citizen. That was kind of that era of the melting pot, and you were supposed to the, I don't want to say encouraging, but the dynamic was that you needed to, you needed to become like American. He changed his name from Manuel to Sam, because he wanted the most American name he could possibly get. And the joke is, you know, the nieces and nephews his he is Uncle Sam, so he chose that American name, and when we came along, made the decision not to teach us Spanish, which on his death bed, when he passed at 89 he had two regrets. One was he didn't protect us from our mother, and the other was that he didn't teach us our language, because it was was foundational to our connection to our people. So subsequent to that, when we began, my husband and I began to travel in Mexico after 2016 which we know what that meant. I deliberately went to try to visit the area that he was from as an homage to him, and I began to learn Spanish this. It's called "Tercer edad" at that is what you call people that's that are our age continue to study retention. It's not that great. But as I have a home now and an art studio in the capital of Guanajuato, and part of that's homage, and part of it is, is just kind of a little bit of a rebel spirit against what has happened to the loss of culture for the sake of acculturation. And that, that memory wise, that that is a prominent memory from having gone to Palm Elementary. I'm sure it was not unique to Palm Elementary, but I it's my personal mission to bring the culture back to myself and to my children and grandchildren, and that they know that the the border, that apparently we just have one, the southern border is, is not a barrier, and it's, it was a fluid situation of people coming and going forever, and if immigration law hasn't been fixed, that's, that's on the law, that's not on the people. So I very much am active talking to people about returning to at least know their roots and be conscious of the fact the experiences like at Palm elementary that pretty much you know, beat it out of you literally, is not something you have to take to your grave. It's never too late to return and become more than you are now, or what you have been allowed to be. And so I'm kind of, I'm kind of that way, yeah, I

Sergio Barrera 09:14

really like that. I think, I think it's really important that we recognize, you know, that there is a time for us to make up for that loss

Cat Quintanilla 09:22

of education, at least try. You know you can try.

Sergio Barrera 09:26

And in speaking of of of that role, how, how did you think your parents felt when you were growing up about the role of education in your life?

Cat Quintanilla 09:36

Of course, it is, it is foundational to most Latinos that the path to success is education, and that was really emphasized in our household. We all have college, three of us out of four have a college degree. I have a BFA from the University of Texas right here. And sole proprietor and business owner, elected official. I've done many things, and that's based on, you know, you need to be the one who is the smart one. You have to do above and beyond. You know, you have to not measure your worth by what somebody else is doing, but what you're doing. So my dad always said, don't pay attention to what everybody else is doing. You just take care of what you need to be taken care of. And have taken that into my entire life, and I tried to instill that in my children and grandchildren too.

Sergio Barrera 10:35

Did your parents ever tell you that they had certain expectations about your educational journey, or were they just more supportive?

Cat Quintanilla 10:44

I think it was more supportive. There wasn't a lot of pressure, if that's what you mean, but it was like, you know, this is what you ought to do. And it wasn't, I think, like in some family dynamics where it's like, you gotta do this. It was more like, you know, my older sister, who's a, you know, retired professor, now, she went first. And if you are in a family that doesn't have the experience of someone going into higher education, it's it's a little harder, because you do you know, you literally don't know the ropes. You don't know how to save money. You don't know how to do what most people already in the family go, yeah, you go to orientation, and you you choose your college and all that kind of stuff. In high school, and I went to Austin High School. It was discouraged that I be on the plan to go to college. I was pulled in to the counselor's office, saying, we notice you're on the college plan. I go, Yeah, my sister went to UT, and I plan on going to UT. Well, we really think you need to take typing something to fall back on. I said, if I need something type, I'll get somebody to type in for me. And I just got into this big fight with that woman, because she really, she's, you know, she just had already said, you know, you're probably going to end up pregnant and married and you don't, you need to learn how to type, you know. And that just infuriated me. So I've always kind of been up against that wall where I'm going, man, you know, you can't be telling me what you think I ought to be and a little out there about it too, because I don't think I should be told what to do.

Sergio Barrera 12:29

Yeah, I mean, it's strips of your agency, right to do what you want with your life.

Cat Quintanilla 12:33

Well, if you, you know, take ownership of your life. Other people, they kind of like okay. And I've never been an okay. Respondent,

Sergio Barrera 12:44

so tell me a little bit about I know that you all would live down the street from Rainey. I mean, and Rainey down the street from Palm school. What was it like getting to palm school? Did you have to walk? And if you did, was it a road that you took by yourself or you went with

Cat Quintanilla 13:03

when I was young. You know the when you're little bitty, they let you out of school early. And my dad would all because he worked for himself. He had an insurance agency, Excelsor Insurance on East six Street. He would be the one that would drop me off and pick me up as I got older, maybe third grade, I would walk by myself, and usually go down East Avenue, and then, you know, cross First Street, which was a big dangerous thing to do. But they had, we had crossing guards, so I did walk to school, back and forth for most of the time.

Sergio Barrera 13:36

Did you ever go to school with your any with your sisters? Did they accompany to school?

Cat Quintanilla 13:39

I'm four years younger than the next one up, so I was usually by myself, but because they were on to other things, or had already gone to junior high, I'm sure there was times when they walked me. I don't have a memory of that. Yeah.

Sergio Barrera 14:00

Do you remember by any chance, the first day of school at palm, palm school, or general sense of, I

Cat Quintanilla 14:08

remember my first grade class? Yeah, I can't remember her name, Weaver, or something like that. And it was fascinating because they had, like, modules and little little, little mocks up of rooms that you could go into learning the alphabet. I probably was a little ahead of the game because my mom was raised in an institution, so she had a little better education than, I guess, run of the mill, so I already knew my letters and numbers and how to read a little bit before I went to school. But I you know, I remember the classroom. I remember where it was. I remember the windows because I think I told you before. I'm a visual thinker, so that's how I remember things. Is by photographs in my brain. So I have pretty vivid memories of the first grade class and, not necessarily the first day, but you know what it felt like to hold modules and to be in in that environment, and learning my numbers, and they would make you write your name a certain many times, and then you could go play. But my name is Quintanilla. Catherine Quintanilla, and it was like it would took me forever to fill out the whole page with my name, because it's not a little bitty name.

Sergio Barrera 15:26

So you tell me you're a visual person. So can you walk me through the visuals of what was that first grade class like?

Cat Quintanilla 15:33

Sure, the lady was very tall. That was our teacher. I think it was Weaver. And you would go in there and you would smell crayons, I think and tennis shoes. You know that smell, that school smell, chalk, chalkboards. Of course, everything's like scale down. The chairs are little in the first grade, and the tables are little bitty. And I do very much remember the corner unit, which was like a little partition that was supposed to be a room, and it had the little wooden kitchen things, and that was, if you were good,

you got to go play in that corner, small desks that were in one unit, where it's the desk is attached to the chair, and just a whole lot of stuff on the wall that were what teachers do. Because I'm married to a former teacher. It's all the little bulletin boards with all the little del lollies on it and that kind of thing. And getting into the routine, you know, you do the Pledge of Allegiance in the morning, and you get marched to go to music or whatever the special thing of that day was, either music or whatever, they would march you and the little line like, like little penguins, and you go down the hall and go to lunch, and that sort of thing. The lunch room was, I think it was probably built second, because it was a little bit separate from the building, it was to just to the west, and so you had to go through a little wing to get there.

Sergio Barrera 17:07

So I've heard, and I'm assuming you refer the lunch room to the cafeteria?

Cat Quintanilla 17:10

The Cafeteria,

Sergio Barrera 17:11

so I've heard that it was a space where it also had, like a theater, like it had a stage?

Cat Quintanilla 17:15

Yeah, I was really involved in a lot of that. Not sure why. And so we would have presentations. And, you know, they were very they were very big on giving people certificates for this and that, and having little musicals and the choir there was, it was very active. I have nothing else to compare it with, but in my impression was, there was a lot going on, and I tended to be involved in it. I, like I said, I'm not sure why. I don't have any affinity for acting or or theater or anything like that, but they definitely gave, I felt, a pretty broad Fine Arts exposure to everybody that went to that school there. It was, it was, there was rigor, but, yeah,

Sergio Barrera 18:05

some flexibility,

Cat Quintanilla 18:07

yeah.

Sergio Barrera 18:08

Do you remember taking, like, packing your own lunch, or taking your own lunch? Or did you eat cafeteria?

Cat Quintanilla 18:11

Well, the funny thing about that was, I always bought my lunch, but I didn't really like what they made, and I thought it was really glamorous that other my friends got to bring a sandwich. So I was big on trading my lunch. It's like, oh, wow, Bologna Sandwich, that is so cool. You know, would you like my salisbury steak? And I would, I would trade my lunch many times because, like, dessert was a prune. What's up with that? You know, I'm just going, they're either trying to keep us regular, or, I don't know,

somebody owns stock in the prune company, but they would, you would, they would give you, you know, the wet prunes and the graham crackers. I was like, oh, man, no.

Sergio Barrera 18:56

Do you have any recollection of maybe an outfit that you like to wear while you were going to palm school or, you know, a color or something like that.

Cat Quintanilla 19:06

Little girls at that in the 60s would wear just cotton ruffled dresses, you know, just ruffles here, and little wasted and little ruffles there, the cute little socks with the little lace that come up little cuff, and then Mary Janes, that was like the uniform. Let's see. I think they did invent the black and white Oxford while I was there. So I may have had a pair of those.

Sergio Barrera 19:32

In terms of your classroom experiences, how would you describe them to be?

Cat Quintanilla 19:36

What level? Well, it depended on the teacher. Because, if you know anything about education, the environment in a classroom is 100% the teacher. And so it really varied. You know, I think first grade, they did what they need to do. You know, second grade, I. I know exactly where that. It's behind one of the palm trees, and on the first floor, as you walk in in the building on the left hand side, they all had good rigor. They all the curriculum was very much on target, as I recall. And so I I enjoyed learning. I still enjoy learning. I'm a lifetime learner, and so I didn't have any difficulty with studies, and I enjoyed that challenge. So, you know, just third grade was right across the hall, Miss Jordan again, under the library. Got into math. You know, really, it was a good experience as well. I enjoyed the architectural environment inside each one of the classrooms because the teachers are the ones that would set that up, the book shelf, the little reading area, all that kind of stuff. Fourth grade, your awareness starts to increase and you get into that age, and that was the year that the school experienced John Kennedy being assassinated, and the entire city, the entire school was in high gear because his motorcade was going to be coming down east First Street. And I remember in that class, we we made posters and signs and banners, and we were allowed to go and put them out on the fence in front of the school, and we were all going to go out and cheer and and wave when the motorcade was be going to the Capitol from the airport. And then he got shot, and it was actually announced on the PA and the whole the whole school, little kids, I mean, like we didn't know, but we were so excited about the event that he was not going to live, teachers, administrators, they were all crying. And, of course, the kids are crying, and they made us to go outside and take the banners down. I thought that was a little cold. I do remember that experience fourth grade. Fifth grade, I was in a split class that was half sixth graders and half fifth graders. I think there was a they didn't have enough enrollment to get another teacher for half a year. And then they brought in a teacher, I think her name was Battle, aptly named. She had some psychological issues and had recently, well, this is what they told us, that she'd just gotten out of the big house that you know, to help fix her, and that wasn't the best experience, and she she could not manage a classroom, and so that was kind of wasted time there, and she didn't stay in the profession, big on paddling and so and then sixth grade went back to the teacher I had before, who was great. She was like, all about respect, no fear but respect. And I learned a lot from her mannerisms. So yeah.

Sergio Barrera 23:08

Could you describe a little bit more about your fifth grade teacher? What was, what were the paddlings like? What was the reason why you well,

Cat Quintanilla 23:15

you know, it came from a little bit of a difficult childhood where there, there was a lot of violence in our household, and so I didn't seem abnormal for there to be hitting. It seemed normal, and there was a lot of paddling, and that was just, you know what, what you do? I mean, I don't think they hired like weirdos. Well, maybe, but that was the number one thing you would do to get paddled would be to speak Spanish. And I have a couple of pretty vivid I mean, I only got paddled once because I I chewed gum. You know, it was like center to the pen she do. She'd come and I got paddled in the fifth grade by that woman. And you know, I do have one vivid memory, because you were not allowed to speak one word of Spanish, and so I didn't speak Spanish. That wasn't an issue. But my friends, if they spoke Spanish, you know, it was like they would get called up on it, or they'd get sent to the principal, think his name was Hildebrand, to to be dressed down for that. And I do remember one friend that they took him out back, and two male teachers held him down, and they were just wailing on him with a paddle, and he's just screaming. And I don't know whether it was because he was speaking Spanish talk, but they did it right there where we were walking by to go to lunch, so everybody could see that he was just getting, you know, the crap beat out of him by a couple of male with a teacher and or somebody, and so I am not sure how much that is of value pass about the fifth grade, where then it's going to be like, you hit me, I'm gonna hit you back, kind of thing. But yeah, it was paddling was the norm. I think it was more of a humiliation thing than anything myself.

Sergio Barrera 25:28

Yeah, I mean, a lot of it is fear, right, to instill control also.

Cat Quintanilla 25:34

Well it's embarrassing, because they do it in front of everybody, you know, and it's just like, and then you get teased. I it, but that that was not abnormal. I'm not saying that the rest of the world wouldn't get whooped on either, but in particular, it was you can imagine living you can imagine going to a school full of Latinos and not a word of Spanish. So that didn't really hit me till later again, because I was not a Spanish speaker. That didn't real. I didn't really realize the ramifications of that and how it was used as a tool, until you know you you have perspective when you get older, when you're experience it, you're just you're just living it. So, you know there's people to this day that I'm American, and go, Yeah, you can be American, but you can still love your culture. You can still say, why did you why did you not allow me to learn everything that there was about me as a human being and as a family and as a tradition and my heritage and that, why did that have to be, you know, aplastado? Why did it have to be stomped out of me? Give me all of the information, and let me make my choice. Allegiance to a country is one thing. Allegiance to your family and your heritage is separate, and they don't have to stomp each other out. They don't have to be to the destruction of the other side.

Sergio Barrera 27:12

In talking about these sort of allegiances, I've heard of people who are like and yourself Admit it, you know every day was kind of pledging allegiance to the flag. I've heard of people that are like, Oh, we used to learn songs. Did you have any vivid memories of maybe routine things that you would do in the classroom?

Cat Quintanilla 27:32

That's about it, the Pledge of Allegiance, you know. And I, as I told you I went into government. I was a council person and a mayor of a city, and I was real conscious of the fact that, you know, we do the Pledge of Allegiance, which has evolved over the years and didn't always have, you know, "under God", under that, I'm an atheist. My whole family, we're all atheist, and so we, you know, we lived, we, we lived in a society that said, Okay, you will be American. You will speak America, you will speak English. You will say in God, we trust. You will blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and at some point you're just going, okay, so where's the freedom part? Like, I'm missing the freedom part to be who I am, what I am, and so I don't have, you know, that one just sticks out, because that's always kind of stuck in my craw, that that I appreciate teaching children and giving them the tools to be who they are, But indoctrination is in a whole other pancake, and I, you know, I take, I take exception with this, you know, sort of rectilinear thinking that, you know, instead of a creative way to raise children,

Sergio Barrera 28:59

in thinking about your cultural heritage, right? And you're saying you don't have to "aplastar". Do you ever have or do you have recollection of anything that was related to your heritage that maybe happened at Palm school?

Cat Quintanilla 29:14

Oh, I think during dance class you might have gotten to do the cha, cha. You know, that's probably about it. I don't remember any cultural things. You know, they the pinatas or or in learn some things in dance. I vaguely remember that sort of thing, but mostly they were teaching us to waltz. You know, maybe the polka. But I don't remember learning anything of my heritage, because that was up there with speaking Spanish, you know. And again, that was the era of the melting pot, which I. I apparently worked in some places. It's funny, because my whole life, I am one of those, you know, you don't you're not Mexican enough to be Mexican, and you're not Anglo enough to be American kind of thing. And it takes its toll, you know, it takes its toll. You know, it's always been difficult for me to learn Spanish because of that barrier of even like an Anglo person saying, "Why don't you speak Spanish? You know, aren't you Mexican American?" I mean, and they'd be friends, and I'd say, "Well, what's your heritage? You know, do you speak like Belgian or French?" You know? Oh, well, I'm, you know, I'm anyway, so I would get that a lot my entire life. And so "why don't you?" I walked into a store one time when I was going to UT a gift store over here, and the the lady who started talking to me in Spanish, and she was, she was not Mexican. She was just kind of showing off her Spanish. And I'm going, "I'm sorry I don't speak Spanish". She goes, "Well, why don't you?" And I'm going, Ow, bye, I'm not gonna shop here kind of stuff. So the presumptions that you have to be a certain way and then you get chastised because you are has been a wound my entire life, and I just got old enough and mad enough to do things the way I wanted to do it, and so tried to live my life, you know, particularly in the last 20/30, years, like, you know, don't mess with me. Don't mess with me. And it served me well. And I've served my community, and I, you know, I've done lots of things because I just don't take it from anybody. And if

that makes me, you know what they like to call me, that's fine, but I get it done. Yeah, as you should, yeah.

Sergio Barrera 31:55

I'm also wanting to think about what curricula looked like at the Palm school. So when you and maybe this changed throughout the years. But what subjects were you exposed to? What subjects were they teaching you while you were at the Palm school?

Cat Quintanilla 32:06

I would say the curriculum was very strong, because except in the fifth grade, which was the last year to the teacher who should have not been a teacher, I would say that I got a good foundation. Probably my disadvantage was that I was I've always been smart and probably didn't study study as much as I should be. Should have, particularly in the later years. But I do remember reading, writing, music, band, a lot of fine art exposure through to Choir, Geography. I do remember those basics, and I do remember them being taught. So they probably had a strong curricular that they were following. There wasn't a lot of testing. I think maybe one test. There's a lot of testing going on these days. There's a lot of people asking for for results, and they don't take the time to teach them what they need to have their results. So it's a little bit different now. But the teachers had their their curriculum, you know, they had their little syllabuses and all that, and they worked it. And because it was a more disciplined environment than I think perhaps might exist today. There stuff got done. You know, we learned what we needed to learn. Pull down the map, you know, pull down the other map, pull down the charts. All of that we learned what we needed to learn.

Sergio Barrera 33:41

When you say discipline environment, do you mean that there was just, like, a lot more structure, or were they also trying to discipline? Maybe, like, social character and behavior?

Cat Quintanilla 33:50

I don't think you can separate those two things. Once you've sent, once you've set the template, and especially with a child, the expectations are known. You don't have to be whooping on them all the time. They know that's the environment. This is what you do. This is what the routine is. This is what is expected of me. I think it's probably more structure. And you have the occasional kid that like, would act out and stuff. But that was not, in my memory, the norm, because it's kind of like jail. They know, you know you got the routine. You know what you're supposed to do, and you know what the consequences are. Sometimes people don't do that. They just do their time and get through it. But somewhere in there, you learn some more than others. Does that make sense? Yeah, yeah, because

Sergio Barrera 34:45

I'm thinking about you, you mentioned your sixth grade teacher, and I don't know if you remember her name, Rhodes, Mrs. Rhodes.

Cat Quintanilla 34:53

Well, I guess she was married, I don't know.

Sergio Barrera 34:54

And I've had other participants may mention a Mrs. Like shoe. Schlutz or some, and she's sixth grade, so I was wondering if she was the same one. But you say something particular, you said something that really stuck out, and it was about sort of this discipline, right? And the rigor that she had. Do you remember? Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Cat Quintanilla 35:15

she never had to raise her voice? And I always admire teachers that can set up an environment of mutual respect, and you did what you were supposed to do, and she did what she was supposed to do. So it's rare, I think, not to have a teacher that gets angry at you. Because I'd had angry teachers that yell, you know, coaches do it all the time. I do not approve of that. You know that she was able to calmly ask you to do what you need to do. She didn't have to come up and get in your face and she set the tone. And I've always known that you set the tone in the room. You know, if you're doing your job right, you set the tone in the room. And you just have to, like, give the grandma Look, stop, and you know that you're doing something you shouldn't be doing. Again, a kid, kids come from home, stuff's going on, they're going to have, like, bad days. But my grandson is in education, and I always tell him, it's about their respect. You know, they show you, show them respect, and you show expectations, and they will meet those expectations, and they'll have bad days. They'll have good days, but it's you set the tone. El tono, you know you set the tone. And if it's not confrontational, usually that won't come back at you as confrontational. So that I learned not just substance, but style from some of the teachers there and then it goes scattered to the wind once you go to middle school, because you don't have the same teacher all day, and you, you know you have to, like remember what class you're going to, and it's a whole other thing. But elementary school was academically nurturing for me, despite the umbrella of oppression above it, which you don't even know, because like that it is what it is when you're in it, and later on, you're going, Oh man, that was a bad thing. So, I mean, it's about perspective, and your spec, your perspective changes as you learn more. I always say you don't know what you don't know, until you know what you don't know, and then later on, you feel like, Oh man, I was you know, but what choice did the teachers have? The school district is a school district, and that school was a Latino school, and so the standards were set there. And in some cases they may have had, might have had it to where, maybe a school on the west side, the kids were given the teachers more, you know, more headache because they got away with stuff at home. But generally speaking, you know, the Latino culture is stronger in family. It's stronger in the in the kids, knowing what expectations are and not necessarily pressuring them. But culturally, it's like, you know you're the family you represent. You know you what you do out there is represents what's going on in a family. So I think there's a massive cultural, foundational heritage difference of a Latino going to school versus maybe a different heritage. And I see that strength still alive in Mexico. I see the little kids going to school. I mean, they're just spit ball ish, you know, got the trenzas already in the bows, and their mom spent an hour getting them ready to go to school with pride, not to pick a fight with the teacher, not to be confrontational. I see that still today, the joy in the children going to school in Mexico, here not so much. They're there to pick a fight.

Sergio Barrera 39:11

So I want you to walk me out of the classroom experience. And now think of, I've heard of stories about the library. I don't know if you have any memories of the library?

Cat Quintanilla 39:20

I do. Okay, so Palm had big windows because there's no air conditioning. I guess this was before global warming, warming, but we had fans. I didn't understand why they didn't have screens, but it had big windows. Palm elementary right now only has one big palm tree. That variety of palm is a palm of Washingtonian, and one of them died a number of years ago, so it just has one palm up. That just ain't right. It needs to have two palms at the front door. But I do remember the library because I was a voracious reader as a child, and. And librarian was a little rough, but, you know, it kind of goes with that. It's not uncommon. So I do have images of sitting in the library reading that was one of my favorite things to do in the palm This is the second story. It was in the upper east, south west, south east corner. Okay, I do remember the windows being open and the breeze coming in and the palms lapping in through the window. And I just thought that was way cool that the you know, because the bottom part of a palm tree is like dry and like a skirt, and it would come in the window and it would make you sleepy, because it would be doing that. But I did a lot of reading, and I had had one run in with that librarian, it kind of turned me off to reading for a while, but I was really fond of that room.

Sergio Barrera 40:59

Do you remember what was it about reading that made you be interested?

Cat Quintanilla 41:06

I think I started reading really young. I don't read now, and my next sibling up was four years, a gap, and so I think I spent a lot of time with books. My dad was one of those that bought the Encyclopedia Britannica, and we had, like, the whole set, and I I read the encyclopedia and I copied pictures out of them. So, I mean, I always had a good relationship as a child with with books. And that was just way cool. There was so many books, you know, and I would check out stacks of books and go through them. And, yeah, you said you had a little bit of a running with, Oh, my man, to this day I remember that.

Sergio Barrera 41:54

Could you talk a little bit about what that was about?

Cat Quintanilla 41:57

Well, you know, they're a little librarians. They're little. They're little. They're wound a little tight. And this was back before computers. It was a little card catalog, and you put the little card in there that you've checked out the book and that kind of stuff. And I remember one time I had checked out some books, and I was like, you know, I wasn't gonna, like, not return a book. So I remember she got been from, from the class. I can't remember if you had to pay a penny or something. It was if it was like, she would say, Oh, Miss Quintanilla did not return her book. And blah, blah, blah. And I said, Excuse me, I did return a book. Oh, no, you didn't, you know. And this went on for a while, and then I got up and I went over to the shelf. I said, there's the book. I returned the book. And she didn't apologize. And so I I took exception to that, and I just like, I'm not going to take that off, you lady. And so I guess that was the beginning of the rebellion there. But I to this day, I remember it because most of my teachers were very respectful, and I didn't believe in lying ever. I still don't. To this day, my dad would always say, if he had to be on a desert island with a murderer or a liar, he would pick the murderer. He said, because you

know, at least they done the deed. You're not the one they wanted to kill you, and you know where you stand. He says, with a liar, you never know where you stand, because it's, you know, moving target, you will never be able to trust that person. So I never been a liar. I'm not smart enough to remember the lie to begin with, but to be kind of accused of lying in front of everybody that that that was harsh, yeah.

Sergio Barrera 43:45

Do you have memories? I've heard of the park, the Palm Park, and it was, there was a pool there. Do you have memories of what the park looked like, or whatever these were happening?

Cat Quintanilla 43:56

Sure you know, you got to go outside and play. That was, that was the highlight of the day. The school proper, up on the corner, had a side yard, which got smaller when they expanded i35 it became more narrow. Flag pole up in the corner, south the south east corner, and then around the side, the playground began. Well, that was actually the playground for the school, but then it was a public park that was attached to it that dropped off a little bit to the back, because, you know, it goes to the creek over there, so the land drops off a little bit, and that's where the city park was at the we us kids use that as well. Spent a lot of time there got scars to produce... to prove it, falling off of, who invented the seesaw geez. Man, I think, I think I got brain damage from from that. But do remember going out to play, we wouldn't do the pool because that was only summer time, and they have. And I think they still have the nice little pool house or the bathrooms in it. I haven't been there in a million years, but it was good size, yeah, got the breath knocked out of me one more than one time running into stuff or falling off stuff or anyway,

Sergio Barrera 45:17

I've also heard that that pool in particular used to be segregated. Do you have any recollection of that happening to you, or hearing stories about that?

Cat Quintanilla 45:28

No, I learned to well, I didn't learn to swim. Actually. I gave up by the time I was coming along and of age to use the pool in the summer for the lessons. I don't recall any segregation. Yeah, when you're all Mexican American, it's like, who are you going to segregate against? Because that's what the population was in the 60s when I was there. Yeah, it's kind of la de da now it's condos and all that over there.

Sergio Barrera 45:56

I also want you to walk me through, if you remember, because I know you said that the school was very focused on the art. So there was music, band. Were there any extracurricular activities that you participated in that you remember?

Cat Quintanilla 46:10

Well, I was on all of them. I think probably art was my favorite. They, Those are called special area. So, you know, you would have a rotating schedule. I think, to this day, I think the schools still do it that way. So you have a music teacher and you have an art teacher, and on your music or art day, you would go

to them. And I always appreciated the art I was in the choir. I don't think I had a choice on much. So, yeah, I I felt it was a fairly broad and because I have a Bachelor of Fine Art, and so I felt it was a pretty broad exposure to the arts. And I think subsequent to that, that they that's been a place, they cut financially the school districts from the curriculum, because, like, they got to get ready for the test, so, but I felt that I got good exposure there. In fact, I sort of missed it when I went up into middle school, and it wasn't the case.

Sergio Barrera 47:17

Do you feel because you're an artist, right? You you went to school, you've owned studios. Do you feel like maybe the exposure to to the arts in Palm school was contributing to this later, you

Cat Quintanilla 47:30

know, was already drawing and sketching when I was a toddler, basically tracing stuff. So it may have, I may have built on that. I don't know that that next necessarily created that direction. I got more of that in high school. I had always had interest in commercial art, and I became a graphic designer. I had a graphic design studio for 25 years here, doing promotional design before I went back to fine art. So I think it was if it had, if I hadn't had it, there had been a void. But I don't know that that would have taken it away from me, because I think I'm sort of hard wired for that creative outlet.

Sergio Barrera 48:13

I also, as we were discussing earlier, your sister, Anita, yesterday, as I was talking to her, she mentioned about how there were these classroom dynamics in which people would get voted queens,

Cat Quintanilla 48:24

oh yeah,

Sergio Barrera 48:25

would win. So what is your recollection of this?

Cat Quintanilla 48:27

It's about the money. It's just about the money that that was like, who could sell the most tickets to for the Fiesta, or whatever they called it. They didn't call it jamaicas, they might have called it fiestas anyway. Every year fundraiser, you know, sell the tickets to the, it was not a lotto, like you would win something, I think, but whoever could sell the most tickets became like the king or queen. So this like money. It was about the money, and I and she was did it one year, and I did it another year, and got to be recognized.

Sergio Barrera 49:00

Was there any, like, special privileges that you got?

Cat Quintanilla 49:03

Like our own park and space? Not, not in elementary school? No, not, not that I know of you know, it was more a situation where, I mean, a dynamic with some of my other schoolmates would be, again, I wasn't brown enough and I wasn't white enough, and didn't really understand that my mother was an

albino, and so personally, that was difficult, because not only was I not brown enough, I didn't speak Spanish, and they would call me half breed, so bullying was kind of accepted in that era. And it's like, I just, I just got a little tougher, but so, you know, I know it was more the frog in the bucket. It's like, Don't you be hopping up too high, because we're gonna step you back down. And didn't understand that until I took leadership training probably 100 years later. But yeah, no privileges with that, it was just, can your family sell more tickets than anybody else? I think now they make them sell chocolates or something, but that's how it was then.

Sergio Barrera 50:14

So Anita also spoke about these fiestas, and she said that it was an opportunity for community members to come and sell their their goods and things like that.

Cat Quintanilla 50:23

I have no memory of that.

Sergio Barrera 50:25

Okay, yeah, she mentioned that something about your mom making some fudge that she would sell?

Cat Quintanilla 50:31

I have no memory of that. Yeah, like I said, there's a little bit of an age gap there, so I think they're ready to be done by the time I came along. So I know she was but

Sergio Barrera 50:42

and you're speaking a little bit about, you know, before, before this about the bullying, and would you get the sense, or do you recall that being most of your experience? Or what was your experience like with your classmates?

Cat Quintanilla 50:57

It was not uncommon. I actually got along better with boys than girls. Yeah, and my whole life, I've kind of presented myself. I never had too many problems with guys because I that, I think they perceive me as one of them, because I didn't, I didn't play the little girl game, and so in government and everything else that I've done, I'm within 30 seconds I have, you know, I'm, I'm on your same level right here. So don't, don't give me that girl stuff. I guess being a tom tom boy and I, I could probably change my oil quicker than they can. So drove a 57 Chevy in high school, so I didn't I, you know, yeah, so I got along probably better with boys than I did girls, and because there, there's a lot of games involved in being a young female. Of course, they they learn that. So the bullying I did get was from from girls.

Sergio Barrera 52:06

Do you remember anybody being your best friend?

Cat Quintanilla 52:10

Oh, sure, I had lots of best friends. Yeah, boyfriends too, you know, West practice. Yeah. Girlfriend was a friend of mine, Emily and she was my friend. Most of high school lived up on the tracks off Red River. Yeah.

Sergio Barrera 52:26

Do you have any, any memory like any, any distinctive memory about a time in which you and Emily or any other of your friends, something that sticks out that maybe you did or got in trouble for, I don't know?

Cat Quintanilla 52:38

I didn't much get in trouble. I got that authority thing going, No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't want to get in trouble. And I did spend a lot of time by myself. And the lower part of Rainey street has a fancy hike and bike trail now, but they were just trails then, and I spent a lot of time by myself on my bike going up and down the river line all the way down to under the Interstate bridge and back again, and running into the occasional hobo, because they lived up on the tracks are right there behind the school on Third Street. And so that we had a lot of hobos that lived up on the shore and run across them, where the Mac is now closely. Well, in that corner used to be, let's see, it used to be the city works department where they have the street cleaners and the dump trucks and all that kind of stuff. That's what all lived there before the condos and the Mexican American Cultural Center. And it was all paved real nice. And so I spent a lot of time going on my bike back and forth through there. I guess that was as adventurous as I got, yeah.

Sergio Barrera 54:04

Were there any particular special day, special commemorations that you think about your time and you know, did they maybe have a celebration for Mother's Day? Or, I don't know this, is this 16 de Septiembre? Maybe? Who knows?

Cat Quintanilla 54:16

Yeah, that no, but I do remember, while I was there, they had their 75th anniversary for palm Elementary. I don't recall what year that was. You could probably count backwards. I do remember that was a real big deal, and everybody participated in that. Like I said, the big things that jump out that you remember are weird, but we had like signs that said 75 years. So I do remember that.

Sergio Barrera 54:47

Did they do like a little parade, or like a little gathering where they brought alumni? Or what do you remember about that?

Cat Quintanilla 54:54

I have no memory of that. The school also was like a center for you, know. So they invented this thing to help prevent Polio, and it's the sugar cube. And so the I do remember that as a site in the community, that that is where we went to get those new immunizations, kind of like when the COVID shot came out. It's like we didn't go to our doctor. We went to a center. We went to to when that first started. That that's how that was done there. Palm was where they started immunizing, immunizing the community against polio. And I did come up with some friends who had the polio, you know, where the braces on their legs that were fortunate enough that that was all that they they had, because it was still a scourge at that time. And of course, that was when, that was where you would go and vote up in the

cafeteria. So I, you know, I remember those things. I remember i35 being built. I remember the dust. I remember the noise that went on for years.

Sergio Barrera 56:19

In terms of the dust, the noise, the construction. Did you ever feel like that interrupted your education?

Cat Quintanilla 56:25

A kid would not think that. That's not how a kid later on you're going, oh, man, but it was just there for so many years. Austin, again, was a small you know, you have, like streets with letters and numbers. It was a small, sort of round city when my dad was growing up. And then, you know, the big old street that went north to south was East Avenue, and it cut down next to Rainey Street. And it is sort of day lighted toward Manor past UT, and it was a nice big Boulevard. That's where i35 cut through at that time. A lot of the Hispanics, Latinos, whatever you want to call us, lived in West Austin, like off West Sixth Street. There were pockets, there, communities there when the city started to grow. And you know, Austin is very linear. It's very, very linear, north, north to north to south. A lot of that definition happened when i35 went in. It became it became a Frontera. The black communities primarily were east of i35 the Latino community became more focused at that time, east of i35 up and down Holly Street, all the way down to the river. They call it something else. Now it was the river, you know, and then all up to like 13-14, street. And then it became black population, population there, and then, primarily Anglo west of i35 and then, then there's the railroad tracks. So, you know, you got a two-for there where people lived. And subsequent to that, you know, they would that affected the way the city grew. Of course, it's all la de da. Now it's all been gentrified because, you know, close is close, and so that's that's all been kind of addressed, or it's in the process of being addressed, now the change.

Sergio Barrera 58:59

I want to transition a little bit about talking about the Palm school in a larger scale. Okay, and I want you to say to tell me, how do you think that the palm school fits within the larger Mexican American community of Austin?

Cat Quintanilla 59:12

Are you talking about as a school or as a future facility?

Sergio Barrera 59:16

Let's start as a school, as a as a as a legacy of education.

Cat Quintanilla 59:21

Well, there weren't a whole lot of schools. And that was one of the original schools that and Wynn, when there was Wynn and Palm and then the one that's down on 12th Street, I forget. So we're not talking about a ton of schools. So foundationally for people in the 50s and 40s, 50s and 60s, that was where you went. So I think historically, you know, it branches from there people who lived there and went to school there. So I think that it has a lot of significance from that standpoint, the fact that it has survived, and it's not become like, you know, a Jack in the Box is is remarkable because it is at a cross road first, and i35 and you just look across the street, well, you would be able to look across the street, except there's buildings that are 80 stories tall right there. So I think that a city that has elements of

culture in it and has an opportunity to preserve something that somebody can say, my grandmother went there, my grandfather went there, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah does nothing but enhance the experience, both for the people that went there and the people in the future that don't have a clue, because most folks that live in Austin are not from here now. You know, we're we're native Austinites. Me and my family. So I think the significance is, is high.

Sergio Barrera 1:01:03

How do you think your family feels about Palm school?

Cat Quintanilla 1:01:06

I think it's like old school is so it's old school. You went to it and in I again, as a visual thinker. I see things I feel things like when I'm in Guanajuato and all of the rocks that have been carved that are the edifices of the building, I feel that, and I know that person is no longer alive who carved that in the colonial style. I think the same goes for a building I spent time in the Travis County Courthouse, because my dad would go and file papers, because he was a notary, and he did a lot of different things. I remember how the floor felt. I remember what the wood felt like, the same with an old building like Palm Elementary to go back to it would be a visceral experience to know, course, everything's probably a lot tinier than we remember, but to know where the stairs were and the banister was and the base went, where the poor people in special education had to take their classes downstairs, just just the space. I think you can't underestimate space as an experience for young person that they they take into their their dreams and they take into their adulthood. I'm sorry, did I blow your mind?

Sergio Barrera 1:02:41

I mean, no, I I'm like, thinking about these places, because I'm not from here, but I think of my home in The Valley, and how certain things have, every time that I go down. I'm like, there used to be this, and there used to be that, oh yeah.

Cat Quintanilla 1:02:57

It gets worse as you get older, yeah, you got to stop that, because you're like, Oh yeah, you're old, yeah,

Sergio Barrera 1:03:01

and, and, and it's the thing that like, there's a lot of memories that are tied Yeah. So I see the significance of preservation of the preservation of the physical structure, but I think you also describe it very beautifully in the sense that those hands that built those things are no longer there, but we still have the physical reminder of their legacy.

Cat Quintanilla 1:03:22

Well, it's called a sense of space. And again, it's particular to me as an artist. But I carve monumental size, like 500,000 pound sculptures. That's what I do for a living. And I always say this will live longer than I would, and then I and you have to know that that a place can be an ambassador between times, just like a book or a writing, you know, or some or even a law, in some cases, you know, you can create things that are your ambassadors to the future and a place that has served the transition of the populations here in Austin, like Palm of course, naturally, I think it needs to be an art and cultural

center, but with a sculpture garden. But is we in? I talked to my children about this. I said, you know, it's like, I don't throw anything away. Well, like, you know, food and in the society is such a disposable society right now, it's like, that shirt doesn't have to be a great shirt, because I'm just going to buy another shirt and I'm going to but that one goes in a goodwill box, and I wasn't raised in a depression, but I also have an appreciation for something that has a quality of lasting, and give it a chance to be in your life, whether it's a shirt or a piece of art or a building. To say the new one might not be what serves my soul, but the old one may serve my soul and the soul of my grandchildren. It's a difficult it's a difficult task because ownership is ownership. If somebody buys something and they want to tear it down, they will tear it down. And we can lament it all day long, but it helps to tell the story so people have a little bit of an understanding maybe what was there before and how that impacted you as part of your life, yeah,

Sergio Barrera 1:05:45

how do you feel that people who care about palm school remember the school and maybe the surrounding neighborhood, especially Rainey street, you know? How do you think the sentiments are?

Cat Quintanilla 1:05:58

You know, we live in disturbing times, and I don't know what's going to happen in the next four years, and I don't know how much people, certain people, feel they need to divorce themselves from the past, and but that's a real thing. I see a real thing of people, it's just too painful to to know that something that you had can never be the way it was before, and they have to get a divorce from it. And there's other people who says, No, it's worth saving. It's worth saving. It's worth saving. You go, No, the futures. The future is very uncertain. Let's just turn the page and start all over. So I think you're going to get as much variance in how people think and value something that has age to it, versus someone who is all about tear it down, feel something new. So I think if you asked, you know it'd be 50/50, there are people saying, well, I don't know anything about it. Or my kid didn't go there, or my grandparents didn't go there. Community is, community is a concept more fragmented now than it was before. Neighborhood is a concept that's more fragmented than it was before. The the reliance on a virtual community, that is what the younger people are involved with, their their, their their their worlds are online. That's not brick and mortar, you know, that's, that's a, sadly, I think that is less human. And so when you have physical places that people saw it get built, and I know who built that, or someone went there, that's a physical community, and that doesn't exist in in the virtual world. So the value of something that is, you know, brick and mortar probably is more diminished than it was before. I'm hoping, because, like I said, as an artist, I you know, there's people can buy a sculpture from a big box store, and then I have clients that come and say, I want something that the human hand touched. I want something that that I know my artist, I know this art and that that has come in waves during a craftsman period, people then is a backlash to the industrial they they say, oh, I want hand craft, you know, I don't want machine stamped out. And I hope that can happen on a societal level, where people say, you know, I'm really done looking at the same glyph on whatever I want something that the human hand touch. I'm hoping that there will be a yearning for that which the human hand had its hand on, and that has that uniqueness, and it resonates the energy that that person put into it. I'm hoping that we will return to that. I've already seen it with my clientele on a certain level. They said, Yeah, I can afford that, but I want that you made that, and then you know and that I know you and that I've created that. I said, well, that talks to connection and and people will either be connected or disconnected, and maybe it's easier to be disconnected, but it feeds the soul to be connected on many levels, whether it's your culture, your art,

whatever it is, I don't. If that's going to happen, I don't know if it's a thing about age or experience. Think travel helps. You can see how other people live and and go, you know, I don't have to live in a disposable society. I can, I can say things that includes people, that includes, you know, you throw people away, and sometimes you got to give people a chance. So it goes, kind of goes across the horizon, yeah.

Sergio Barrera 1:10:32

Yeah, I think you touch on some really great points of rekindling. I'm thinking rekindling with a humanity that is kind of robbed from us because of corporate greed, because of capitalism, because of all these things and and I think that the palm school is that connection of unity community, family and this kinship.

Cat Quintanilla 1:10:55

It can be if it's managed well, you know, if it's not made into a cartoon kind of stuff. But I think that you see a lot of people who experience loneliness in this, this day and age, and I never felt that, but that, you know, they will "sit harder they were looking for something and they wouldn't know it when they found it," kind of thing. And, you know, less less searching and more I'm here kind of attitude, but I really think that place is physical and places in the mind, and it can start with honoring the physical space. And physical space creates opportunity for community. Community is, is the little microcosm that family lives in. So you've got family, community, neighborhood, you know, and it goes in a concentric energy from there. And, you know, if you can appreciate one rock, you can appreciate one building. If you can appreciate one building, you can appreciate one neighborhood. And then that sort of from from small to big in the connectivity is kind of a universal concept that I believe in.

Sergio Barrera 1:12:21

and thinking about this, this idea of community, right? Obviously, I've only been in Austin for two years, so the Austin that I know is very new, yeah, you know.

Cat Quintanilla 1:12:34

Newbie, newbie.

Sergio Barrera 1:12:36

Yeah. But what we're in, if you remember, what were kind of the signature, maybe mom and pop shops or businesses that, oh, my goodness, that were along the rainy neighborhood, community close to palm school.

Cat Quintanilla 1:12:45

Well, you know, that was a in my time, was just a residential not that they had zoning. Well, we kind of don't have zoning again, but there was, like one little tiendita on the lower part of Rainey old man Blankenship run it. And it's, you know, the penny candy little store with the loaf of bread in the front room and lived in the live behind it. If that house was 850 square feet, you know, I'd be shocked, kind of so that was only in detail there on the neighborhood. By time I came along in the 60s and had awareness, they already had the dairy there. Superior Dairies was already stationed on either on the river side and First Street, big, you know, they like brought milk in and poisoned it with ammonia or

whatever it was, and dumped it in the creek and shipped milk out in those big tanker thingies. So that was already there. I think there's a barbecue joint on Red River now. That's Weigel, Weigel Barbecue. It actually was a blacksmith shop. It was a working blacksmith shop, still right there on Red River. And first, so that's on that side of it, and then across the street from Palm Elementary was just they had demoed a bunch of houses, and that was Park and lot for the people that worked at the at the dairy processing. So there wasn't a whole lot on that corner. And they put a gas station on first in the Red River on the on the south side. And of course, they would sell junk there. And then slowly some little more commercial type, printer and some other things moved into the neighborhood. But again, there was the wall. There's i-35 that that defined that neighborhood after it was built. On the east side of i-35 proximate to palm Elementary, yeah, there were small businesses there, the little drug store. Can't remember the name of it now, two blocks in and national Five and Dime. You know what a five and dime is? It's like a little general store that you would go and buy stuff. You don't know what Woolsworth is either, don't you? Okay, it's like a little five and dime. They call it five and dime, which because it's little things. And you go in there and have bins, and then, like, this has all the little key chains in it, and this has all the little pencils, and you would go and buy stuff. So it's a national Five and Dime. I think the building is still there, and then further down HEB on First Street. So, yeah, there were little businesses. But again, when you have the installation of a high speed corridor like i-35 it really becomes a physical barrier, and it changes the dynamic of what businesses will or will or will not survive. Is it neighborhood oriented, or is it because it's convenient on convenient for people to drive there? Because, of course, increasingly, we've become a driving society, rather than walking around the neighborhood society. Some places walkable, the walkable society is still going.

Sergio Barrera 1:16:37

As you've mentioned. You know, the construction of i-35 was happening while you were in school. But also, we know that a lot of it had to do with the fact that Palm school was kind of, you know, there weren't any repairs, and the conditions for students were really bad. You finished Palm school in 1966 correct? I think it's reported that it closed down in 1976 so you were still in the area. Do you remember the conversations that were happening when that, when they were closing it down?

Cat Quintanilla 1:17:09

I don't remember conversations about them closing it down. I don't think that's something that kid thinks about, because I would have been in junior and high school after that the general movement and in the area was that when you have a big physical change, like a highway going through, the property shifts, so it's naturally most people don't want to live, right but right up on the highway originally, There were these big old homes that were really cool, that were part of East Avenue, again, that was part of the original layout of Austin, like the turn of the century. So those had all been moved out, and you have a dynamic change when a highway goes in that affects everything. In particular, the rainy street neighborhood went into kind of turmoil, because when you sit on a piece of property and you know it can no longer be what it is for much longer, you have to decide, do you sell? Do you repair? If you're a renter, do you invest in repairing? When you think you're just going to turn it, you're going to sell it, you know, flip it. So it may have been that same dynamic for the school that the district may have said, we're going to build a new school anyway, which I think they built, where the Salvation Army was across the way later, and to replace that school. It's not unusual. I would think for someone to de-invest in a property that they're not going to hang on to, and I think the county might have been the

one that bought it. I think there was somebody in between there from the school district. So don't think that's it as unfortunate as it is, I don't think that's an unusual dynamic. If you're going to sell or tear down your house, you probably don't put more money into it, but it is extending to the neighborhood. It was a lot of turmoil on Rainey I remember because about the same time, maybe a little bit later than the six then the end of the end of the 60s, early 70s, the city of Austin announced that they were going to build the new convention facility. And they had several places that they were calling out that they wanted to to put that, and one of them was in the palm pal, Palm school, Rainey street area. They they talked about condemnation. So that whole neighborhood kind of went into free fall as far as, what do we do? What do we do for. They're gonna make us leave anyway. They're going to buy us out, or we're going to spend money on fixing the street or fixing the house, if the city is just going to take it, or at least dragged on forever. Of course, the carpetbaggers came swooping in, and we're buying people's property up and either boarding up the houses or turning them into rent houses, which is a special kind of slow death for a neighborhood, in particularly the lower part of Rainey, improvements on homes just stopped because there was uncertainty. And that's what happens economically when there's a change like that. So again, it could have just been that ripple effect from transition, not knowing was that going to be torn down and repurposed into 7/11 and or was that going to stay and it by hook or crook, it's managed to survive the not so much across the street the old adiwac college that had the mural on it didn't survive. Developers can be pretty pushy, and they and they'll commit a sin and ask for forgiveness later. It's a very common ploy, and I was able to use some of that background understanding of development, you know, later on, when I served in public office, the city that I live in went through that transition where 290 was expanded. We called it Ben White Boulevard. You call it 290 we called it South Lamar you call it 290 up by the in southwest Austin, where my little city is, and that served me well. I was able to know that that I've experienced this before, the highways going through, the carpetbaggers come flying in. They want to pick up the land, and they want you to do rezoning to the detriment of what lived there before. And so I think that I was able to reach back and take that into the future. It helped.

Sergio Barrera 1:22:06

So in thinking, how do you in thinking back right retrospectively, how do you think that palm school in the neighborhood have helped or shaped the person that you are today?

Cat Quintanilla 1:22:20

I think I talked about it earlier, that some people are who they are because of, and others are in spite of. And I think I've been able to do both personally and relentless. Relentless has been an adjective used to describe me before. And so I think I'm happily have a talent to take what I need and bring it forward into the situation that I might be in, and create that experience base. And so it's, it's, you know, it's, it's a big combo, and part of that would be, I'd like to think that you have some anchors in your lives, and some of them are buildings. And they may not be doing the same thing they used to do, but it's still there, the familiarity of that, the fact that that has been that buildings been able to persevere for what is it? 125 years now? Yeah, 125 years, I have that same appreciation for the buildings and near the place that I live in Mexico, that they they have survived. They have seen many faces, and many faces have seen them. So again, the physical space is important to me, the experience of something surviving is a lesson to be learned, that the last person who tells you something isn't necessarily the truth about what that place needs to be, that some spaces, some trees, tree, oak, you know, They are greater than what

they are, because the people believe in them. So I think all of that has gone in toward me being who and what I am.

Sergio Barrera 1:24:15

I want you to talk also a little bit about post Palm school. So where did you attend junior high?

Cat Quintanilla 1:24:24

At that time? University Junior High was right here on Red River. I think they're going to tear down if they haven't already done it on Red River. Oddly enough, Red River has changed configurations, and has moved left and right and up and around. But up here off MLK and Red River University Junior High was a owned by the University of Texas, and it was either leased or somehow became part of the school district, and so most of us went to university junior high, which only was open for a couple more years. I think I was just there one year. The university wanted to take it back and make it an educational annex. So they took it back from the school district, and they built another school in East Austin, right up off the off the river, called Martin junior high. And most of us, most of us went there. I remember the last day of school at university Federal, University Junior High. That was the name of my bank here. They made us carry the car the to the cargo vans. They made us carry the chairs out like you know, then we got to put the nail in the coffin and get the furniture out and put it in to be taken to the new school. That was pretty funny. At the same time we were involved in deseg, and as we called it, where there needed to be integration, and bussing was part of that. It was either Texas or the country. I forget which one reclassified all Latinos as white. So in order to be able to use us as numbers to integrate with blacks, so apparently there's just black and white, we were like the digital world, you know, and when they wanted to prove that they had integrated the schools, AISD had integrated schools, they classified us as Anglo, and they put 50% black and 50% Latino at Martin junior high, and we were integrated. And so that was amusing, sort of, and then it was, you know, the bussing fiasco, which didn't solve much that was all going on between junior high and high school. Went to Austin High School after that, and that was in the heart of people protesting about bussing and and desegregation and everything that went with it. And after that, went to University of Texas,

Sergio Barrera 1:27:12

when you're talking about bussing, is it? Is it? You're talking about access to bussing, or just like the seating in bussing.

Cat Quintanilla 1:27:19

No, bussing was what they called a solution. And so if you had, like, a lot of black kids here, and then you had another school that was white kids, they had to integrate, they had to do deseg was you had to by law. And their solution was, you can stay in your neighborhood, but we're going to send busses to the black part of town, and they were going to make you go to school in the white part of town. And vice versa. Course, vice versa didn't work out too well. That's where you got your white flight coming out of the city because they didn't want to deseg. And it was just a mess. It was just a mess. Okay, you get up early and you get on a bus so you can satisfy some dictate uh, in the premise, if you back it up even further, were the inequities of funding of various schools. So, I mean, I don't, I can't point to Palm and say it was defunded because it was Latino. I think it was defunded because of a property issue. That's my perception and it, but it's classic that the money, of course, gets spent with the people who know

how to ask for it, and most minority neighborhoods don't know how to ask for what they need to be vibrant. And so I you know that had a big effect in that that was a dumb solution to districting and figuring out where people put their resources so that there was the premise from is the equal opportunity. That's equal opportunity doesn't mean that you physically uproot someone from their neighborhood score. That means that you create a school that is so good, and they did some of that too, that by choice, people will want to integrate it. But the premise that you have to be a certain color to be to have the equal opportunity is is dumb, because it's like it has to do with the funding and the energy you put into that school in that neighborhood, so that education is as good, if not better, than the other schools. And so I always just shook my head. I didn't it didn't make any sense to force people to lose time and energy to be yanked out of their neighborhood and put somewhere else. But they didn't ask me.

Sergio Barrera 1:29:45

So in looking back to your life, and I know, I know you, you served in public office, you've been an entrepreneur, you know, own your own studio, multiple homes, what do you think a. Is some of your biggest accomplishments and highlights that you're very proud of?

Cat Quintanilla 1:30:04

Well, to still be above ground. For one thing, I'm 70 and in good health my family, you know, I raised two strong women, you know, and and I tried to make my and educate and got their degrees and have their businesses and jobs in my grandchildren, which I don't have as much influence over as I would like to because, you know, I'm not their mother, but I think if you live by example and you're honest, that you can be proud of the effect that you have on other people around here, married 50 years, that ain't no, that ain't nothing, same man, you know, it just worked out that way. And public service, that was something I had no idea I was going to do, but I felt the need to step up. When the development was engulfing our little city and carpetbaggers were trying to run rough shot on me, I tend to get in front of the train and say, no, you're not. And we were able to preserve hundreds of acres of conservation land in the process of the development, by negotiation and by planning, because I am a planner by heart. So really am proud of that, that I've been able to help manage, finally, family finances, that we can afford to have a little place in Mexico, that we can live the lifestyle that we're living now, where we spend half our time in Mexico and half of our time here with our family, and that we can pull that off, you know, because we don't live lavishly, but that that's a logistics and planning thing, and I'm good at that, so I think I'm proud of that, and I'm really proud of my art, that people love it so much that it's emotional for them that they have just delivered a large piece to a client the other day that she had it on layaway, bless her heart, and we delivered her large sculpture and installed it at her house. And it's just, it just chokes them that they love it so much they get up in the morning take pictures of it and send it to me. And he says, We just love this. We love that your hands were on that and and brings them to tears. And I don't mean to make people cry, but it happens that I can bring that physical thing into someone's world and make them that happy. I enjoy the power. No, I just really enjoy something on that level, and I want to continue my my quest is right now is studying the art disciplines of art de popular in Mexico, is my way of learning my culture and my language. And I'm planning of bringing the workshops and having them here to help other Latinos. Say, you know, this is, this is your culture. My my grandparents and Uncle they were zapatistas, and they, they made shoes. I mean, that's like, that's art, and that's, that's kind of to make something is in my blood. And I think other people have that in them, that it hasn't

woken up yet, and I would like to be a portal for people to help say, oh, I can do that. I can go to Mexico. I can I can look up where my people came from, and I can be proud and not feel like I abandon them. Let me let them in the they're in the graveyard over there and forgot about them. And that's kind of my future plan is to try to bring that about more, and you become a resource, and people ask you for your advice, and they listen, and I see you do what you want to do. But you know, my experience is blah, blah. I get more and more of that, people wanting to pick my brain. And I'm fine with that. I'm fine with that, you know. So, yeah, those are you know, that I've been able to do the good fight and live the good life.

Sergio Barrera 1:34:39

I have a final big question,

Cat Quintanilla 1:34:41

Uh oh. Ooooo ouch.

Sergio Barrera 1:34:45

Who is the CA Quintanilla that is sitting in front of me today?

Cat Quintanilla 1:34:49

I'm smart, accomplished, loved by some, feared by some, respected by most. I. So I think that's an important way to live your life. Yeah,

Sergio Barrera 1:35:05

well, with that, thank you so much. As I told you off camera, I'll tell you on the record, this has been wonderful. You're very brilliant. Oh, thank you. And I just love the way that you have been able to lay things out from an artist perspective, from a community member's perspective, because you're taking us to a different realm. Yeah, I think is very important that is captured, and it's not just descriptive, but reflective, that I think is really important for this project to have. So from the bottom of my heart, it has been a pleasure.

Cat Quintanilla 1:35:35

Oh, well, thank you. Sit here and never stop thinking. No, yeah, never stop thinking and questioning and thinking, especially thinking about yourself and what you can do to do service.

Sergio Barrera 1:35:45

Thank you so much. You.