

Palm_School_Quintanilla_Cat_Foto_Voz_Transcript

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Travis County, oral history, Palm School, 75th anniversary, newspaper article, Rainey Street, family home, neighborhood changes, childhood memories, Manual Flowers, Native American, family business, immigration, Austin Texas, 1960s.

SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Speaker 1, Linda Quintanilla, Speaker 2, Cat Quintanilla

Speaker 1 00:00

Already are ready. I went ahead and click Start so you can start.

Linda Quintanilla 00:07

Hello. Today is Sunday, December 15, 2024 My name is Linda Quintanilla, and I'm conducting a photo voz with my sister Cat Quintanilla in Austin, Texas for the Travis County palm school oral history project. We are at the we are recording at the University of Texas main campus. Thank you, cat for agreeing to this interview. We will now take, be taken five to five second pause to record a room tone. Please do not make any sounds during this time. (pause) Okay, we will start with photo one, and this is a newspaper article from the local paper, and it shows you age nine at Palm school. So what do we see in this photo?

Cat Quintanilla 01:16

Well, you see me with a bobby pin on my hair and my bangs cut crooked. But what's funny about this is it, they have me posed up against a model that was made, not in my class but in another class. And what, which was kind of odd. I believe the the newspaper showed up and they were doing a little human human interest picture about the Diamond Jubilee for the 75th anniversary of palm Elementary. And one of the classes put this little I don't even know what that little building is, because it looks nothing like a school, but they put that together, and someone called me to come out of my classroom, which was across from the office, and I was well known as, to the administration, because I would run errands. Was one of the errand kids. So they came in here says, Will you come and stand next to this little building and look inside the porch of the little building. And I did that. They took my picture, and the rest is history, reproduction,

Linda Quintanilla 02:25

reproduction of the predecessor to palm school.

Cat Quintanilla 02:30

Oh yeah, it kind of looks like a shack, but that, you know, I had nothing to do with that, other than they needed a kid to stand there and be cute. So I did that. You had done it. Just looking at the picture, you would think that I found that a little disconcerting later on in life, but yeah, that's what that picture is all about. And the newspaper actually was pretty good about coming out and taking pictures and things of stuff at the school, of course, there weren't that many schools, so wasn't that hard a job? Question?

02:59

When was this?

Linda Quintanilla 03:03

century? February 1963 February 1963. what is the jubilee?

Cat Quintanilla 03:13

The school itself was 75 years old, and so they had a big celebration that the school was that old. Palm Elementary was 75 years old.

Linda Quintanilla 03:37

Okay, and this is photo number two document Oh, sorry, document two. And what do we see here?

Cat Quintanilla 03:47

Oh, that's just the appended article that went with the explanation of how they why they were having that festival at Palm elementary for the 75th anniversary. You screenshot. No, that is right there. Yes.

Linda Quintanilla 04:05

Can we go on to the next photo? Okay, the next photo shows a bunch of beautiful young girls in costume. Can you tell me who's in this or something about it, when it was, where it was?

Cat Quintanilla 04:27

Oh, well, it's a picture of a bunch of young gals, and I'm one of them. There was a stage that was on one end of the cafeteria at Palm Elementary, and so they had a lot of choir and dance. And, you know, type presentations up there. I don't recall being up there in that can can outfit, but there it is. But I did participate in a whole lot of lot of little stage and plays. And. Stuff there. So that's what that is. Do you

Linda Quintanilla 05:02

have any idea what grade you were in? That

Cat Quintanilla 05:05

looks like? About the fourth grade? So my probably 63, 64 it's not written on the back there. What's that

Linda Quintanilla 05:14

saying? This is March six. Available 56

Cat Quintanilla 05:19

oh, available for 50 they sold that. Wow. No wonder. Could you point out which one you are? I am the one in the white shoes in the middle. They look like they're way too big, don't they?

Linda Quintanilla 05:49

Okay. Now, this is photo two. Now, what do we see here?

Cat Quintanilla 05:54

A little over exposed. This is a picture of 51 Rainey Street, where we we grew up, and it was a little a small like three room building originally, and my dad added onto the back of it. It was probably an oversized lot at that time, lower part, I think it was two lots that he had joined into one lot. I think that's what it was. So we had a nice big piece of property. This was on the lower part of Rainey Street, which was unpaved and prone to flooding. It was never paved, yeah, and so it was prone to flooding because there were, there were no sewer system. What do you call it? storm source down there? And so our backyard sometimes would be three or four feet under water after big rain, and it would take a while for it to settle in.

Linda Quintanilla 06:52

Also, there weren't a lot of dams that were, you know, yeah,

Cat Quintanilla 06:57

I think it was more of a localized drainage issue, just speaking from and

Linda Quintanilla 07:02

then in the in the background, what do we see that building

Cat Quintanilla 07:05

there? That building was a number of different things. It's a three story, and it was at the time of this photo taken, probably in the 50s, and I think it was a nursing home, and it's facing East Avenue. It's facing East Avenue, but the properties at that time also had a back alley, so there was, it's back on the back property line, back alley, and that'd be that big white skyscraper in the background. None of that's there now at all, and can't see the sky because the skyscrapers are so big.

Linda Quintanilla 07:40

Okay? And in photo number three, what do we see here? This is the same house,

Cat Quintanilla 07:45

yeah. What year does that say on there? 5656 so I was just talking about the extension that our father built Sam onto the Small Cottage that he purchased at 51 Rainey Street, and it had a basement on the bottom, which was where his little kingdom was. And it shows, I think myself and Anita looks like, no, what year would that? 56 that would

Linda Quintanilla 08:12

be 56 Yeah, she was six.

Cat Quintanilla 08:16

Yeah, I can't tell from the future two. But anyway, so that was the extension construction. It was on the back, back side of the house, previous one,

Linda Quintanilla 08:25

Unlike other houses, it was brick.

Cat Quintanilla 08:28

This is, this is technically called cinder block, the original part of the house. The original was yellow Elgin brick, which is a local product. This is cinder block. So I they add the back half of the house? So they added a two bedrooms and a bathroom and a kitchen. So before, before, it was a little bitty house that, you know, I think it had an outhouse to begin with, and it was a two bedroom with a little the way they did it then is the little kitchen would be on the back of the prop back of the house, a little bitty thing, and then they would have outhouses. So my memory is when he was still working on that. Well, like forever,

Linda Quintanilla 09:17

the size was triple what it was originally. One time he finished

Cat Quintanilla 09:22

the too, but it was a cute little yellow I believe Elgin brick had a little arch. It was a quaint little thing. That neighborhood was really part of old Austin, and we think of it as being a Barrio, but it was really part of the center core of being the original mayors. Original governor's mansion was down there at the end of Red River at one time, wasn't it? So this was really core to the center of the neighborhoods that constituted the original Austin. Them. Only later did it become like a Barrio.

Linda Quintanilla 10:06

And so, yeah, the original neighborhood was white, all white, professional, law, professional,

Cat Quintanilla 10:14

yeah, and it. And so then, as it became more ethnic, people would would buy there and then do improvements on their houses. And that's what my dad did. He bought that house, I think, in 1946 46 Yeah, for \$2,000

Linda Quintanilla 10:33

we were the first resident, as far as I know. Yeah.

Cat Quintanilla 10:36

Well, yeah, what it he bought the house and then made it bigger. So after

Speaker 2 10:42

the extension, it had four

Cat Quintanilla 10:50

bedrooms, an attic, kitchen, yeah, it was probably still like 13, 1400 square feet all together. I Okay.

Linda Quintanilla 11:05

Now this photo, this is the fourth photo, and it shows the house. This just shows the south most side of the house, and you can see the extension there,

Cat Quintanilla 11:18

and what had happened in that neighborhood that would be the lower part of Rainey Street, which was closest to the river, when they were doing some of the expansions and road works that kind of became a dumping ground for, like, what they scraped up be Concrete, you know, Rubble, because this city of Austin Public Works Department was right there at the end of, no, what? It's not Holly. It's called River right there. You know where the Mexican American Cultural Center is now. That was the Public Works building. So they were in charge of, like, tearing up, curving and and working on roads. And they needed a place to dump extra dirt and rubble, whatever it was. And it happened that they they were doing that behind this location, which is 51 Rainey Street, the mountains and mountains of this rubble, which would be combination of dirt and concrete, and people would build their houses on top of it, not the most stable foundation, but this picture showing from one side, the reason it is that high is a lot of that is rubble that was brought in because previously there was a car junkyard there, and so they just covered up the old cars and the seats and tires and everything that had been dumped there with this rubble dirt. And so it became like a mountain. So I'm sure when they built those skyscrapers that are there. Now they had to scrape all of that out of there, because that's not a true foundation, but that's how it was down at the end. But that shows a different angle. And at this time, it was empty. There was no no house on the yeah, there, yeah. There's no next door. There were actually, there were a lot of missing. There were a lot of vacant lots on that lower half. For a long time, they would

Speaker 1 13:24

dump it while y'all were living there. So y'all would see, like, the pile up?

Linda Quintanilla 13:28

Yes, it's kind of like a dump next to

Cat Quintanilla 13:30

our house, but it was like, not trash. It would be like building materials. Yes, that's true. I did, I did play with I was a fond memory was that they had like they looked like little mountains where they just would dump this big thing of dirt and stuff, and then they would leave, and the grass would grow on it. And we go there to run up the little hill and run down the little hill and run up the little hill, or roll and carry on. You know, because nobody cared if you were playing in a vacant lot. I mean, nobody cared that property was owned by the next door that was owned by the quizenberries was the name of the family that owned that lot, and they just bought it as an investment. Later on, there was a they put a little small house in one corner that they rented out. But it was, it was pretty big. I would guess that that property was probably about 250 wide and about 150 deep. That was next door, but it had been a junk yard, so you can see, I mean, that's how much they thought about the land that they the people that live on the wall. Yeah.

Linda Quintanilla 14:34

Okay, so going to photo five. This is a neighbor. They were, they were good friends of our family. And this is in the same block, about 57 rainy

Cat Quintanilla 14:48

it's a third house down on the right from the intersection

Linda Quintanilla 14:51

Henry and Grace Duff lived there. So tell us about them. And then also, we're in. We're in the front, front.

Cat Quintanilla 15:01

Um, that's the siblings there. Brother, Ralph, sister, Anita, Linda, I guess you're holding me up. We called him Uncle Henry and Aunt Grace. That's where I got my middle name. My middle name is Grace, little wood frame house, probably about 950, square feet. He was a veteran white guy, and he was born in 1880 and married a Mexicana, her name was Grace and much younger than him. She was exactly 20 years younger. So she was she was actually born in 19, 1899 and so he was retired military. He'd been in several wars, Korean, World War One, World War Two. He said he cheated on his age and got into the Spanish American War, which was like 1890 something, that he was too young to go in there, but they Yeah, that he got into that one too. So he'd seen a lot of scrapping, and they were real nice folks. He planted those three trees across the front, which are called catalpa trees, and they were the first time we'd seen catalpa trees on that block. Big Leaf has a ornamental bean that hangs off of it. Real nice people.

Linda Quintanilla 16:25

So they're part of my childhood. What year was this? This? This? Because it was various years I have 1957,

Cat Quintanilla 16:36

that's about, right?

Linda Quintanilla 16:39

I'm not sure, but that's

Cat Quintanilla 16:40

Well, based on my size, you would have been four. Yeah, that looks about right, three or four, okay,

Linda Quintanilla 16:49

in the mid 50s. Okay, so that was 57 rainy st.

Cat Quintanilla 16:58

no, yes. Was that 57 Okay, so they gave numbers to the lots then, okay,

Linda Quintanilla 17:11

okay, going to photo six. This is you as what basically a toddler,

Cat Quintanilla 17:22

yeah, that would be about four and a half.

Linda Quintanilla 17:26

This says 56

Cat Quintanilla 17:29

No, younger, huh? Okay, so this is the picture of me. I wore overalls. I was a tom boy. Kept my hair cut short. We raised chickens, which I thought at the time were pets. Did not know they were dinner. And so we had a pretty good size back yard. We raised one time we had a pet bull, I think that was before me, a bull and rabbit squab, which is a pigeon, peacock, peacock, yeah. So we had critters growing up, and here I am with chickens, which I'm not sure are alive. They don't look too lively. We also were involved in picking feathers, which wasn't fun. If you've ever done that, it's not fun at all. But yeah, so we had a lot of animals growing up. And I was always really fond of chickens. Chickens. I do. I still have chickens now

Linda Quintanilla 18:28

and then. Behind is that nursing home. We see part of the nursing home, yeah,

Cat Quintanilla 18:34

see that that? It's on that little hill right there. They also had a lot of the city dumping "escumbro" is what we call it, in the building up the land. And so you can see how they the build. Building had to be on stilts, yeah, because that that be public land back there, because they put alleys behind houses at that time. But it got eaten up with up them, dumping all of that material there. Yeah, my dad liked peacocks. Yeah. In that time there were feed stores. There were several feed stores. Capital feed store was on Congress Avenue, South Congress Avenue, I think it's a restaurant now, Guero's or something. And then there was another one down on East Fifth Street, where people would go and buy feed, because a lot of people had chickens, and you could go buy baby chickens, and in this case, baby peacocks and food for them. And you know, there's some people still raised hogs. So you would go buy livestock food like Callahan's is now. So I go and buy stuff at callahan's and but they had, there were numerous feed stores where people would go and get things for their livestock at home, and they would sell little baby things you. Yeah,

20:00

so it was chickens, baby peacocks,

20:02

like what did y'all have

Cat Quintanilla 20:04

mostly chickens. My dad raised squab, which is a type of pigeon that he intended to eat, but then he got attached to them. We raised White Rabbit, which I didn't know we were eating, but we were eating. Yeah, chickens, eggs, critters,

Linda Quintanilla 20:29

okay. Photo seven. It shows the all the children in our family. So can you let's see what year it says, 1956, again, somewhere in the front yard, 51 Rainey st.

Cat Quintanilla 20:42

Again you can see in the background, we had a pretty good size yard. We had a swing. We had a slide in through there in the nice yellow brick arch that was the facade of that house shows us in our Sunday best. Apparently, I don't know where we'd be going, but a stylish mid DRIF outfit that you have on right there, I would have to say

Linda Quintanilla 21:04

my mother dressed us well.

Cat Quintanilla 21:07

Yeah, she liked to and there's Anita. Would you know she had a little bit of a sullen expression, but that's, that's the family. Could you name them? From left to right? Would be myself, and then my sister, Anita Quintanilla, my brother Ralph Quintanilla, and the tall one that they cut her top of her head off with that picture wouldn't be here, Linda, Linda Jean Quintanilla,

Linda Quintanilla 21:35

and you don't see in his picture, but there, my father planted trees. Wherever he lived, he loved trees, and so there are some trees in the lot. You just don't see them here. Another picture, okay, yes, this another picture of our house. Numero ocho. So, yes, so there are the chickens. Again, it's just a view, long view from across the street.

Cat Quintanilla 22:11

The story behind this one is it does show the house fairly complete. And again, we always had the chickens. They were We were not alone. Everybody in the neighborhood had chickens. And if chicken come over and it wasn't yours and it stayed, it was yours, the story on this one is, you'll see in the front these logs that my dad cut and made into kind of a quasi fence that could be moved. He did that so you could move it to Mo and then you move them back into place. The city of Austin used to have an event they call Aqua fest, and it was down at the river. And there at the end, they had it to the Fiesta gardens location, which was built in the 60s. But it became so popular that when they would have those events, it was they had speed boats, they had fireworks, and people would come and just park everywhere. They would pull up into your yards and they would park and it was really problematic. So he made these little movable fences to where it would discourage people from just pulling up in our yard and being abusive. They eventually had to get rid of that event because it was not compatible with the neighborhood anymore, but that part of East Austin endured it for years, and a lot of protests and violence driven it was just unbearable to, I mean, it's like having, you know, Willie Nelson festival in

your backyard, and people were quite disrespectful that came and so that was why he did, that was his little political statement on and quit pulling up in our yards.

23:59

Did ya'll ever install like a proper fence?

Cat Quintanilla 24:01

No, he wasn't big on fences. We, I know he put, like a portion of a fence that had aluminum on it on the other side, because the dirt that that had just been haphazardly dumped there tend to try to migrate into our property and up against the house. So he did build some little barrier, short barrier things, but it was not completely enclosed ever mountain. It was highly elevated, yeah, but you could still see into, talk about snakes. You could still see into it, because you could see like a cavern where there's a part of like this, you know, 1950 or 1940 Model T or whatever sticking out of the dirt. Because they, when they do a, you know, a junkyard, they just kind of smash them and they stack and in between that, that would be like the seats with the coils and the vinyl, or, well, nice leather, stacking up like that. And they use those in rows, and then they filled it with dirt. I mean, you like, could not get away with that these days, but that's what we grew up next to, is that that mountain, which was quite adventurous as a child, but thinking back at it, it's like, how did we survive? Because I used to play on them all the time. Yeah, lots of rattlesnakes. You know, big event, somebody "rattlesnake!". Everybody come running with their hose and murder the poor thing. It's a big deal.

Linda Quintanilla 25:31

A photo nine, I believe, now, this is Ralph, Anita and Kat in front of 81 and a half the first house that my father bought, the the house in the background is 82 Rainey. So do I have a year on this? This is 1958 and so can you tell us about that manual? Yeah, that's manual flowers.

Cat Quintanilla 26:05

We had a family friend, and that's a couple of doors down from their house. Then, yeah, we had family friends. As neighborhoods are given to, do you know? You get to know your neighbors a little bit, sometimes a little bit too much. And his name was Manuel Flowers, which is he was actually Native American, and so his last name was flowers, and he and his wife lived up the road, and they had no children of their own, and so they liked spending time with myself. I still maintain they were trying to give me away to that family.

Linda Quintanilla 26:39

Well you mean your parents, but yeah, I my, my thought, My memories are what I heard, that they wanted to adopt you,

Cat Quintanilla 26:47

that they wanted to adopt me, and I think they even went so far to take me to San Antonio, but I was home sick, because I was pretty attached to my dad, my mother, not so much, but yeah, so I spent a lot of the time is a child with him as they they call him, we call him aunt and uncle. I'm sure Daddy would not have heard of that.

Linda Quintanilla 27:10

He got a lot of flack because people assume that he his real name was Flores, and he changed it to Flowers, the anglo side. But you know, his name was flowers. His father was even a chief, and then the chief, so he's an indigenous and hit. But what made it more complicated is his wife, Mary. She was Chicana with an accent,

Cat Quintanilla 27:37

so she had a heavy accent too.

Linda Quintanilla 27:39

So, you know, they did, you know, that just kind of confirmed people suspicion he was Mexican American because she was Chicano, but, you know, he was really Indian,

Cat Quintanilla 27:48

and they were just real sweet people, and they didn't stay in the neighborhood long. He was with U Totem. When did with HEB? It was with U totem to begin with. And then he went, they moved to San Antonio, and he went to work for HEB. You don't know what UTOTEM is, do you it's like 711 like a stop and go. But there was, there were a lot of them. They were called UTotems. And he was in administration there, and then moved into HEB, which he be, is a sweet gig, if you can get it. It's a good company to work for.

28:22

Ok, small question, so in the photo, use that. The

Linda Quintanilla 28:24

back. That's 82 rain, correct? And the house that we're actually looking at is 81 and a half the first house that my parents bought,

Cat Quintanilla 28:36

yeah? So they sold that and then they bought the house that they reap, yeah, because it had a lot more space, and he liked a lot of space.

Linda Quintanilla 28:54

But manual flowers actually lived two or three houses north,

Cat Quintanilla 29:00

I think it was a beer joint. It might still be. They made beer joints. Now they've made everything into beer joints over there. Well

Linda Quintanilla 29:12

now no and

Cat Quintanilla 29:14

a wall of skyscrapers, unbelievable. It's just like, Yeah, but that's okay. People got to live somewhere.

Linda Quintanilla 29:20

Okay, the last photo is our Father. We talked to him, talked about him a lot. This is a photo, but I don't, I don't, we don't have the year on this.

Cat Quintanilla 29:28

Looking at the picture, my guess is that that was about 1960 because he had a portrait made based off of this. He had an artist that he was subletting on East sixth street behind his office as a studio. And one of the ways that man paid his rent, and he did our dad's portrait, and I think it was based off of that photograph.

Linda Quintanilla 29:55

He would get, some people would pay him in kind. And. So he would not, wouldn't always get money for whatever service he provided. I think that's how we wound up with this bull. We had this baby bull for a while, until it got to the switch.

Cat Quintanilla 30:14

Yeah, and they seldom complain. But I think that that's what it is. Our dad was born in 1916 in, in Jaral de progreso in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico and came over on 1920 during the Mexican post Mexican Revolution migration. Um, lots of other stories there, but his father proceeded, coming here to Texas first, and then didn't like look back, and so his mother took off and came to Texas to find her husband. So that's how he came to the United States with Aunt Carmen and Polomo? Bralio and Connie

Linda Quintanilla 31:02

and I came later, I

Cat Quintanilla 31:03

thought, and and at for at the age of four, yeah. Well, the story he told me

Linda Quintanilla 31:13

His siblings were born in the United States. He did become a naturalized citizen, but that was after I was born in Anita and Rob, so you so he was a citizen.

Cat Quintanilla 31:24

So you say you might get deported, yeah? Because, like, You are the, you're what they call an anchor baby.

Linda Quintanilla 31:31

So I'm saying she, so she was,

Cat Quintanilla 31:34

You will be the only one that's safe. I'm the only one that owns a house in Mexico. You can come visit us. Yeah. Okay, so he was born in in 1916 1916 came to the United States in 1920 in Jaral de

progresso on j, A R, a, I, progress on the progress in the state of Guanajuato. You could just put GTO Mexico, and he moved to

Speaker 3 32:16

the US 1920. What did he settle first? Did he come directly?

Cat Quintanilla 32:25

Yeah, because that's where his dad was. His dad had come like to come ahead and then send for the family later, and then he didn't. And my grandmother, I don't know about that's what they told us,

Linda Quintanilla 32:39

but that's a typical pattern, the father would come, first, get a job, and then the rest of the family would join. That was just the typical process. But all of our most our family, the POS and TSA, many of them, they were professionals, and Sarah was a teacher at home,

Cat Quintanilla 33:05

and he put her through school. Uncle Pepe Well, Coach way, Coach way. Uncle

Linda Quintanilla 33:10

Pepe was a pharmacist. He had to, he won. He finished from UT and had to go to South Corpus Christi because he couldn't get a job, couldn't get a job in Austin as a Mexican and Sarah, course, who would have a degree of UT as a teacher. But anyway,

Cat Quintanilla 33:37

you know, the one became a police officer, the other one kept the family business. Palomo kept the family business for we're from a family of Zapatistas, and so they we called it the shoe shop, and he kept the shoe shop. And he was also photographer. What was your father's business? Initially, he was a top salesman for a beer company, Falstaff beer. And then, and the near the civil route, yeah, and then, in nearing the 60s, because that's really physical labor. He went back to school and got business degree of some, some sort of certification. It became a insurance agent. So he was a automobile insurance agent forever in East Austin, four different locations on East Sixth Street. We counted em.

Linda Quintanilla 34:27

Always on six Street and motorcycle and all insurance. It

Cat Quintanilla 34:31

was called Excelsior insurance

Linda Quintanilla 34:34

Excelsior is the name of his company.

Cat Quintanilla 34:38

So it was the 60s through almost the end of the millennia, right? 1990 Yeah, end of the millennia. So for Yeah, so for 40 years, 40 plus years.

34:53

How do you spell Excel? Excel,

Cat Quintanilla 34:54

E, X, C, E, L, S, I, O, R, Excelsior. which was a common name for newspapers, yeah, there, and I think that's right. Think that's it. No,

Linda Quintanilla 35:20

well, thank you, cat.

Cat Quintanilla 35:22

You needed a note to tell you how to say that

Linda Quintanilla 35:26

just stopped recording. Now, okay, this is the end.

Cat Quintanilla 35:29

Adios! Hasta luego! Happy Trails. Yeah, yeah.