Palm_School_de_Leon_Jr_Frank_Foto_Voz_Transcript

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Oral history, Travis County, Palm School, Frank De Leon, Rainey Street, family relationships, childhood memories, Austin Texas, 1960s, Air Force, cooking, neighborhood, sports, Salvation Army, UT football.

SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Frank de Leon, Speaker 2, Sergio Plaza, Speaker 1, Speaker 4

00:00
Board, okay, okay,

Speaker 1 00:02
well, just in case, I'm gonna clip this microphone back on you again.

00:12
All right, so,

00:38
join everyone off to the side. You. So

Speaker 1 00:49
we're gonna do the same things before we're gonna do the preamble, we're gonna pause, and then we'll go into the photos again.

Speaker 2 01:02
Okay? I y'all can start

Speaker 3 01:11
whenever you would like to Frank, you ready? Yes, I am ready. All right,

Sergio Plaza 01:15
so hi. Today is Sunday, December 15, 2024, my name is Sergio Plaza, and I am conducting a photo vos with Frank DeLeon in Austin, Texas for the Travis County palm school oral history project. We are recording at the University of Texas at Austin main campus. Thank you, Mr. DeLeon, for agreeing to this interview. You're welcome. We will now be taking a five second pause to record row. Tone. (pause)

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All right, we will now start with photo number one, which you'll see here on the screen. So Frank, can you tell us when this photo was taken?

02:02
I think maybe 1965 64

Sergio Plaza 02:07
and where was it taken?

Frank de Leon 02:11
It's taken at our home on Rainey Street, 66 Rainey Street.

Sergio Plaza 02:16
And who's in this picture right here

Frank de Leon 02:19
The center is my father, Francisco, and on the right as Gerardo Jerry, and on the left is Marcos middle, Gerardo, My brother, younger brother, small. He's number three.

Sergio Plaza 02:41
So, can you tell us real quick, give us a spelling for their names?

Frank de Leon 02:47
No, okay, I'm coughing, Marcos is m, A, R, C, O, S, and Francisco is standard Francisco. I Cisco, and Gerardo in her audio is G, e R, A r, d, O, I believe

Sergio Plaza 03:13
what is happening in this photo here. What do you notice?

Frank de Leon 03:19
Well, I noticed quite a few things, I've noticed that the sign the number of the house, it says six, but it's actually 66 looked like Jerry's block in the first six, and that was, I made that a school Project and wood workshop, and that was high school, because we didn't have anything like that at junior high that I can recall. So I was in high school then, and didn't realize you had a chair sitting outside either looks like a couch of some kind. I don't remember that at all.

Sergio Plaza 04:07
And it's a was it? Was it the three of you?

Frank de Leon 04:13
Yeah, that's my there's two brothers and myself, it's three. And then my father just, yeah, Who's the oldest? I am the oldest, then Marcos on the left, and then Gerardo on the right.

Sergio Plaza 04:27

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What was, what do you what do you remember about your relationship with your brothers, and how that? What do you remember about your relationship with your brothers?

Frank de Leon 04:35
Well, I remember that we were we're good friends, we're good Best Buddies. We took care of each other. We went on adventures together. When I say adventures, we know we were on our own. We kind of had free reign of East Austin by sixth. We didn't get no trouble. I think they did, but I never did that. I don't. They have some stories, but they may not want me to say about anything about them.

Speaker 4 05:11
Are there any stories that you that you would like to share, anything that you can tell us?

Frank de Leon 05:15
Well, not about them. That was that would be up to them to share that part, but for myself, there was in the back, the in the back of that house, there was the only paved alley in the neighborhood, and the reason that was paved is because behind the other side of this house is this an alley, a drive, a drive, a street. He didn't have a name, but it was a maintenance facility for the city of Austin, I think was the streets and roads that would do the repairs, road construction, and the the back entrance was the Alley was the back entrance to the place. That's why it was paved. And we, that's, that's how we went anywhere we would go through the alley to go to town. That was that alley took you up to Driscoll street and into Red River and into First Street, Cesar Chavez and then Red River take you to town, or you get on, or you would get, we will get on a bus go up Congress. I mean first street, and that would take you to Congress and in downtown Austin, to the state capital, things like that.

Sergio Plaza 06:49
You when you say you had free reign on East Austin, what do you remember about that free reign?

Frank de Leon 06:55
Well, we just get it. We would want to go somewhere. We would go. We had friends all over the area. I can't remember them, but I remember going to friends houses. Some of them lived in Montopolis area. I remember walking, driving my bike over to some part of Montopolis over there, by by Brooks from Air Force Base. And there's a listen, there's some there used to be neighborhoods up there, and I used to walk or ride my bike. I had friends over there that lived in that neighborhood. And we go, there we would, we'd walk or drive, driver back to to barton springs, the swimming Pool Barton springs, we go swim in there, sneak in. You have to pay. But somehow we got in without paying Zilka Park and that part of Austin at putt, putt golf port, bit about that. There's to be an old naval station there, reserve Naval Station. I used to pass by there. That was really nice walk too. Used to walk through the side of the river, town lake. That's nice.

Sergio Plaza 08:21
What can you tell us about your your father and your relationship with your father?

Frank de Leon 08:24

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Well, our relationship with our Father was pretty standard. It was, it was, he was a head of the household and he he worked for the city of Austin. He was a jackhammer. He'd go straight to the rock to laid sewer pipes, water pipes, whatever pipes they needed. And he was the very experienced jack hammer individual. Marcos has some stories about him. You know, that's what he did for the city of Austin. And he retired from the city of Austin. He got a small pension, set him up, I guess, I don't know if he had so, I guess he did pay Social Security, but he did, he did have retirement for the city. So he was able to, you know, provide for myself after we, after we, after we left home.

Sergio Plaza 09:30
Go ahead and move on to photo number two. When was this taken?

Frank de Leon 09:35
Yeah, that's the date. Here we go. I can't tell that's the same, not the same age looks like, and that's like, maybe, like, late six. No, not late six. I wasn't here. I guess 64, 65 Yeah, just uh, pitch number three. He's got my head, I don't he's small. I was 63 so I would say , 665, yeah, where was the statement? Same place? 66 Rainey street. You can see this house number right there, to the left, or to the left of Gerry's head.

Sergio Plaza 10:17
And this, who's in this picture?

Frank de Leon 10:19
That's Geraldo on the right, left and Marcos on the left, alright, Commissioner De Leon. And what do you notice about this photo? I know the Gerardo suck his gut in, and those plants over there, I don't realize we had plants. It looked like it was summertime or spring, because there's some weeds. We never had any grass that I recall. I remember these to be an ant bed right there. Front of those plants there, you don't see those ants anymore. They're those big old red ants here. I don't think else those, those are non existent now. Uh, uh, somebody told me why they disappeared. Back then, you used to get these The ants used to make a big, big, big ant bed. And it could, they would clear everything around for about a foot, foot and a half around their their hive, there would be a center, a hole in the hive, in the middle of the center of their higher quality. And there was no grass, nothing. It was all dirt. And you could tell where the ant hill was because any vegetation around, I say foot, a foot and a half around it, it was, it was all gone. But you don't see that no more. I haven't seen any kind of that for years.

Speaker 4 11:46
Your brothers look kind of dressed up here. Do you think maybe there's any kind of event or they have church?

Frank de Leon 11:51
no, that was we, we we wouldn't ragged. We didn't we would always wore decent clothes that I recall my father provided for us. He gave us, you know, we didn't dress shabby. He looks like we looked dressed pretty nice. It was just pretty casual, huh? It was just the style, yeah, that was a style, yeah, shirt and pants still is the belt, yeah? Marcos, look at the words about sweater,

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Sergio Plaza 12:21
yeah. What can you tell us about the house, 66 rain Street, yeah.

Frank de Leon 12:26
Well, it's a three room house, the front room, well, in the window, that was my dad's room, and then next to that was a kitchen. We had a kitchen, and we had, we had a gas stove, table, some benches. Would he have a sink? We used to big. He used to have a big old bucket to pail, we don't call it, to wash dishes with the heat up the water on the on the stove, and there used to be a fireplace there, but it was covered up. And I remember he used to we, my dad used to keep, like a 20 pound bag of flour in a big old can he make those the us all the time. Forgot about that earlier.

Sergio Plaza 13:19
What other foods. Do you remember? What other foods do you remember eating as a kid?

Frank de Leon 13:24
Well, I remember eating breakfast, oatmeal. I probably used to make oatmeal for us before we left for work. He'd leave real early in the morning, but six, maybe five o'clock in the morning. Have no idea how, but I caught a bus. I don't know which yard he worked at, but I think it was up there in the Montopolis area, so he probably took a bus over there. What was the rest of the question? I

Sergio Plaza 13:52
just What do you remember about food and eating growing up and whatnot?

Frank de Leon 13:57
Yeah, the food? Yeah. Well, let's see food. We always ate beans. My dad always ate beans, made beans. And then I learned, I mean, after a while, after I got into high school, I would make all the I would make all the food he would cook for us. Remember him cooking? I used to watch the way he cooked, and I just duplicated what he did, he cooked most of the meats were like, what you call it, round steaks, pork chops, I don't recall hamburger meat, potatoes, they used to cook all that. He used to cook for us, and then Houston may have a dish with potatoes. And then I guess you call today, you call them ranchera potato, ranchera potatoes, they were cooked at and beans. And he like goat cheese. And then later on, we started eating cereal box cereal. Always had weenies, bread, tortillas. We always had tortillas. He made tortillas. I learned how to make tortillas, not as good as him, but I used to make him. But he made tortillas. He also made what they call trail bread or cowboy bread. It's just a big old like a big tortilla. But he wouldn't roll it out. It was about in a half inch thick, but like that. Did you roll it out? Stick in the oven, warm up, just cut it up, pieces of bread that would be our bread. And then when I, when I got later on, when I was in high school, I would I would go and make steak and eggs. On the weekends, Gerry and Marcos would take off, go somewhere and up, still be in the house. I get hungry. And he was always by these round steaks, real thin. Back then, meat was cheap, I guess, and that will cut me a piece and fry it, then find me some eggs, and that will be my lunch. I used to do that all the time. I forgot about that. That was fun. Yeah, sounds like quite the chef there. Yeah, he Yeah. He taught me how to cook.

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Speaker 4 16:19
Was that something they all did together as a family of her just kind of all cooking together?

Frank de Leon 16:23
Well I don't remember these guys cooking I did after my dad, after I got to high school, I started doing all the cooking. It automatically just turned over to me, you're the oldest, yeah. And I, when we come up, when I got out of school, I would make supper for the guys, I mean, and then my dad would come home. Is there anything?

16:43
Is there anything? How are y'all sitting together? There was a family, maybe weekly?

Frank de Leon 16:48
Or no, we had we had it. We used to always eat at home. We never ate out. We know we did go eat out once in a while. Once in a while, we go eat out and you know,

Sergio Plaza 17:00
you know, you starting to cook when you were in high school. Were you because you were the oldest? Do you have that, that leadership role for your brothers? Yeah,

17:09
I think so, yeah. I

Speaker 4 17:12
think Do you think that they they listen, they follow because I know I'm the youngest and I don't always listen to my older brother. So did they always kind of fall in line.

Frank de Leon 17:20
What? Well, it was quarter automatic. We just played by ear, I didn't give out any orders that I recall. We just did. We had our I guess we all knew what we were supposed to do, and we did it. It's, you know, yeah, I cooked. They ate. And before that, my Dad cooked, and I ate with him too. But I don't, I don't recall when I was being I was, I guess I didn't feel that I was in charge, but I knew that I was the oldest, and I took on the responsibility I think I should have done. You know, it's kind of, you know, back then you kind of assume roles as as life goes on.

Sergio Plaza 18:10
Has that role continued as you've gotten older with your brother?

Frank de Leon 18:13
Well, I think we reached a equilibrium, so we're kind of, I don't think there's a pecking order so but I see my brother Marcos, kind of not the head, but sort of the, somebody need advice, somebody you know, to look up to so I'm real proud of him, and how he turned out and he did it all on his own, you know, we went different. We were different routes. We all, we all want to be successful, not financially, you know, but successful in our lives, with our family and friends. You know, Marcos became a

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commissioner. He also went to graduate from University of Texas, and he held several position, important positions in community. He's an activist, and he's pretty well everybody in town knows him, all the big senators and people in Washington and all over but Gerardo. He was the first Mexican American carpenter union president, the Carpenter Union in Austin. So he had some weight there too. So he did good and him and his wife, they raised good kids. They bought a home. You know, that's good. So and me, I went to the Air Force. I did pretty good, I guess, adventurous life in the Air Force, involved in two conflicts, three. I think maybe I. But, but now we're not, I would say we're an equal. We're all equal, and we all have respect with each other. We always have fun when we get together. What kind of fun, I just talking about the old days and things that happened to us, like I said earlier, one thing that Marcos always brings up about we live here, we were arguing. We have a railing on the on the porch. And I was in the kitchen there, if I recall, and he was out in the porch, and he was arguing about something. He called me a name. I don't know what it was, so right out there, and I was going to push him over the railing, and he moved out of the way, and I flipped over and fell on the ground and started laughing.

Sergio Plaza 20:48
So an argument just turned into something silly.

Frank de Leon 20:53
Yeah, we , He reminds me about all the time. It's funny. It's funny. I remember beating up on him too, you know,

Sergio Plaza 21:03
brother on brother, yeah, yeah, we had

Frank de Leon 21:05
that kind of stuff. We got, we ganged up on each other and but we protect each other, you know, we, we were, we used to go your the to the Salvation char salvation army center there on Holly and interstate 35 or actually, San Michael Street. And there were some tough guys there, but they knew they didn't mess with us. So we were always together. Yeah, we protected each other would if, yeah, couple of times gotten a chance we help each other out.

Sergio Plaza 21:46
Yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to say about this picture before we move on to the next one?

Frank de Leon 21:52
No, we could go, I just noticed, yeah, yeah, that was

Sergio Plaza 21:56
so now we have photo three. When would you say this photo was taken?

Frank de Leon 22:01
That looks Oh, 1963 you can see Gerry smaller there. I'm taller than he is, skinny kid. The I'm dressed there. I remember that jacket because I got got some Yeah, we didn't dress shabby. So look.

Sergio Plaza 22:24
How old do you think you were in this picture?

Frank de Leon 22:25
I think of 17. Yeah. And where is this? This on Rainey street. That's the part of the house.

Sergio Plaza 22:35
And this is you and your brother?

Frank de Leon 22:36
Geraldo. Yeah, we're football fans. Yeah. What a UT, UT fan, yeah.

Sergio Plaza 22:45
And what do you notice about this photo?

Frank de Leon 22:50
Yeah? Well, the pun is, yeah. Looks Yeah. They used to be to the left of Gerardo, there used to be a tree. There's a tree there. And we used to China berry trees, and they were calling. You heard of a China berry tree? They used to be around all over the place. They were pretty green. They're real. The wood is very soft and breakable, and they little berries grew on them return in the winter, and when they grew up in the summer, they were green. And you could pull those out and hit the guy like they like marbles. They throw them at each other. And sometimes we had sling shots. They put them in a sling shot and shot at each other, but we had a rope on it, and on the on the right, it would swing rating, and you notice the street is still it's not paved, and it's it's high, It's about a foot two, maybe two feet off the street is two feet down from the ground level.

24:10
I'm curious. Have you ever gone by the area again, just to see like all the change?

Frank de Leon 24:13
I was there a couple of June, I believe coming visit Marcos and let's go. We're going to go visit our deceased, my mother, my grandmother and some uncles. And we went. He took me to Rainey street, and I saw that all that's all gone. And, yeah, it's been, it's tall buildings and high rent, I guess you, uh, the whole neighborhood is gone,

Sergio Plaza 24:51
where your house was. What do you know it's there right now?

Frank de Leon 24:56
No, it's not there anymore. That house is. Yes, there's another house next to that, coming this way. There was a house that's 64 and we had, I remember there was the MARlos, Marlos, I believe was their name, Marlo. They lived there. And also another Hispanic family lived there, but the Marlos were, can you call them hillbillies back then we call them posteros. I don't know if you heard the word

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posteros. That's another word for them. Some people call them cedar choppers. We're talking way back. You don't talk that way no more. But it stays, what stays here, stay here, right? But anyway, they were, I guess, yeah, poor white folks, but they were real nice neighbors, I remember, and we played, they were part of our we used to play football, sports. We used to go to the park. They were and we had some other friends, the Bennetts. They were there. They live right on the river. This guy named Ronald Bennet was a good friend. He was the only one that had a TV in the neighborhood, and Saturday mornings we me and my brothers would go to his house. He lived on right bed. He live right by the river, well, town, Town Lake, Lady Bird Lake. Before it was a lake, the it was you could along the side of the river. There was a drive, a small street you could go up there. And they live right up top Hill. And they his father, his uncle, Uncle Jack, he raised roosters to to fight, and he had a TV. We would go see TV at his house,

Sergio Plaza 26:56
which I'm looking at the street here, which direction was so behind you? What direction is that? That's north.

Frank de Leon 27:07
That's north, looking that way. It's north. You keep going. You pass Driscoll and another street, and then First Street, palm school. Straight ahead. Yeah, straight ahead. If, if they would cut a road all the way to palm school, be right in front of the door, and then the palm door, the main door

Sergio Plaza 27:28
the direction you're facing that's south, south the river. Yeah,

Frank de Leon 27:31
Yeah, south of the river. How far away was the school? Well, it's, this is toward the end of rainey street, one, one house, you know where before it hit Holly. So that's the whole block. And then, and then you have, I think, Driscoll, and then there's another, another block. But I can't recall the name of the street, but this like more houses. So this is about three or four blocks long, blocks to palm school.

28:07
So how would you typically go to and from school?

Frank de Leon 28:10
Okay, when we lived here, we didn't go, we didn't go to palm This is high Junior High High School. When I was going to I used to live in Willow and Eighth Street when I lived, when I went to palm school. So this is, this is junior high, high school for me, Jerry could be still going to palm. No, no, I'll probably be. I think maybe I was in junior high right here, and probably Jerry was right in sixth grade, I don't know, but palm school straight ahead, going that way north.

Sergio Plaza 28:48
And how long did you you said you were somewhere else when you were at Palm How long were you at this house for?

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Frank de Leon 28:57
63 to 65 that was 65 about three or four years, four years, no more than four years, this neighborhood. Because, see that picture was taken in 63 because, for some reason, that's the only one that's got the date on it. And I left in 65 January, 65 where'd you go? I joined the Air Force. Didn't tell nobody too. No, why not. I don't know at the time, I guess I'm independent thinker. I guess I don't know at the time. I didn't, I didn't think about it. It was my decision. I think I was 18 or 19. I think it was 19 and 18 back then you're man, you're on your own. So I didn't, I didn't think I had to tell him.

29:55
So it was it just a surprise to them to find out?

Frank de Leon 29:57
Yeah, I'm. Graduated from high school the next day, I was on a bus to San Antonio. How did they find out? When you, I wrote them a letter already, they weren't wondering where I was. You want to tell you need to ask them about it. How they Yeah, but the way Austin High, I was going to Austin High. And there were several routes to Austin High you could go, get on. You could go, the normal way would be, go to, you know, from from Rainey, get on on Cesar Chavez, and then go straight up to red, up Red River, and then turn on six Street and go all the way to Congress. Go up Congress, and then go go to the Capitol. Get on 12th and and walk to the to school 12th and Rio Grande, or take a bus, and that's the same route the bus would take. But there's another route. You stay on Congress and go all the way to to Rio Grande. Between Congress and Rio Grande, there was a courthouse, and they had that recruiters were. And a couple of times I would, I would come home on on sixth street, Via I would get to go down Rio Grande and go down to six Street. Rio Grande is a real nice had real nice house with sidewalks, real nice place to walk, and I was in no hurry, you walk. And now one day, I stopped and talked to a recruiter and started talking and yeah, when you turn a certain age comes, you will sign the paper. So when I graduate, I graduated mid term. I didn't graduate. I was supposed to graduate six, May or June of 64 I didn't have enough credits, so I took a next semester. So I graduated mid term in January. So I signed the papers. Had everything set up. I didn't have to have any signature. Because I was over 18, I signed the papers. That's what I wanted to do. I always wanted to be in the Air Force, ever since junior high. So I got I signed up. We had a graduation in June, in January, everybody was there. And the next day, woke up, I didn't have any clothes. I just bought a hat on my back. I think I had a small bag, you know, toilet articles, that kind of stuff. And they gave me a bus ticket. Got on the bus, spent the night in San Antonio. The next day, they picked me up, the recruiter went to the process of San Antonio. In the meantime, I heard they had planned a graduation party for me,

Sergio Plaza 33:19
and so you weren't able to attend the party.

Frank de Leon 33:20
I wasn't about to attend my party, but it was supposedly a surprise. I didn't know nothing about it. I didn't find out about it until six months later. I was already stationed at I was out of boot camp. I went to training school in Amarillo, then from Amarillo, went to Carlslough Air Force base that was my first assignment and but I came back sometime, let's see a guy sometime in March or April, because it gave me a week off between, you know, my my training, my school, my training for my supply center, and so

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I came home, and that's when I they got after me, but they didn't tell me there was a suprise party till later. Later. Yeah, he surprised them, yeah.

Sergio Plaza 34:23
So looking here at this photo, you said that the street was was still gravel, yeah, yeah. How did that work with weather and things like that?

Frank de Leon 34:33
Well, I just remember it's dry, and then when it's when it was wet, it was muddy. You know, I don't know if you see gravel when it's wet, it's just ugly, it's messy. But again, we didn't there was no sidewalks either. So anytime we wanted to go to town, we always took the paved alley. It was coming to Yeah, and then, and then we want to go to. It was that the Holly street, I think part of it was paid going to the across 35 which was 81 and then go to the Youth Center, Salvation of youth center.

Sergio Plaza 35:17
I've been around that area. Is it? Is it flat? Do you remember it being flat or no?

Frank de Leon 35:22
It's, yeah, no, the area is, here's Holly, here's San Marcos street. So it goes all the way to Ceasar Chavez, and it's in, it's real large, and it's flat, and it has a little hill, small hill, but it's mostly flat, but then it's a little hill to the top, because it's up like that.

Sergio Plaza 35:48
It seems like you all got your exercise?

Frank de Leon 35:51
Yeah? We walked everywhere we I said we used to walk all the way to montopolis, yeah, but there was no big deal with we walked to Barton springs a couple of times we walk. You heard a deep Eddy. We used to walk there. I forgot how to get there, but we would walk there or take a bus. We walked everywhere. No big deal nowadays, but no big we walked everywhere. I mean, Junior our high school. My junior high was on 19th Street in Red River, right next to Memorial Stadium. We used to walk, but along the way, Red River had a lot of stores, places to stop and drink good cokes or whatever. It was a nice walk. There's always a bunch of us just playing around going home, just like in the movies, the old movies, you see a bunch of guys walking into it, not getting in trouble, easy life.

Sergio Plaza 36:46
Well, we're on the subject. You know, Jerry's obviously wearing a football. Did you all play sports growing up?

Frank de Leon 36:52
No, we didn't. We played. We didn't play organized sports. I think Jerry did, because he got the uniform tonight. I don't know why he got that uniform. Where he got it. We may have bought it at Goodwill, I don't know. Or he may be, I think he was part of some kind of group at the Salvation Army Youth Center, I don't know, but we just played, we played football, baseball, whatever, kickball. It was a bunch

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of us guys. I had a lot of cousins, male cousins, and we all get together and play. Would play at the Youth Center down there on Town Lake or the grass down in the winter time, in the fall the grass is dead. Or we would go, they lived on somewhere up there, on Lamar, Burnet, and Lamar somewhere up there. And there was some baseball fields. We played football there. We played a lot of football, baseball stuff, organized sport, but just, you know, standing lot, pipe stuff, nothing but coaches. We were no coaches. We just we learn from watching Texas and the Longhorns back then too. Yeah, yeah, just regular stuff. Man.

Sergio Plaza 38:14
Is there anything else you'd like to say about this photo?

Frank de Leon 38:18
No, I don't see no grass. Yeah, you're about 10. Feet from the street. Yeah, about 10 feet free, but it's about but foot and a half. I remember that see my my elbow, and there's a behind us. There's a driveway there for the other house, 68 rainey. And I remember this beautiful slope there, like that, so just to drive up, yeah, but that was a good neighborhood, yeah, that we only knew the people. It was in three or four houses. You made one or two of the houses. Yeah?

Sergio Plaza 39:03
Yeah, so we've gone through three photos. Anything else you'd like to say before we conclude this photo voz interview?

Frank de Leon 39:10
No, no. Thanks. So unless you have something else,

Sergio Plaza 39:17
thank you, Mr. De Leon, we're going to stop the recording now, as this is the end of our auto interview.