

Palm_School_De_Leon_Marcos

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Palm School, community education, political participation, family history, Austin Texas, Mexican Baptist Church, racial integration, Salvation Army, childhood experiences, education challenges, cultural heritage, community support, personal resilience, historical context, neighborhood dynamics., Palm School, truancy, poverty, cultural sensitivity, Chicano movement, political participation, education, community service, neighborhood, family, activism, leadership, humility, shared identity, historical context., Palm School, community leaders, alumni, gentrification, veterans, Barrio, Travis County, teaching center, public school, cultural heritage, elected officials, historical artifacts, learning center, Commissioners Court, legacy.

SPEAKERS

Marcos de Leon, Jonathan Cortez

Jonathan Cortez 00:00

Today is Sunday, December 15, 2024 My name is Dr Jonathan Cortez. I'm interviewing Commissioner Marcos De Leon in Austin, Texas for the Travis County oral history project. We are at the University of Texas at Austin campus, Commissioner De Leon. Thank you so much for being with us today. The raw unedited recording of this interview will be archived at the Texas County archives, where it will be available to anyone who wishes to access it. As we said earlier, if there's anything you don't wish to talk about, we respect your wishes. But if there is something you do want to discuss, please make sure that that we talk about it. Please let us know if you need to pause the interview for any reason, and today we are 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. How does that sound?

Marcos de Leon 00:51

Sounds? Great, good. Can you give me your your name again?

Jonathan Cortez 00:56

Jonathan, no Cortez.

Marcos de Leon 01:01

No Cortez. So you earned the title, so you Dr Cortez, correct, and that's how I'll address you.

Jonathan Cortez 01:03

Thank you,

Marcos de Leon 01:05

because you earned it.

Jonathan Cortez 01:09

Well Commissioner De Leon, let's go ahead and begin Tell me about your family. How did they end up in Austin? Because earlier, you told me about how your mother was born in Bastrop and your father was born in Lynn springs. Springs. How did they end up in Austin?

Marcos de Leon 01:23

in 1924 his family decided to come because there were laborers farmwork. My grandfather worked cotton fields up in Lockhart. That's the journey where Lynn springs like five miles from Lockhart and the story goes, this is urban legend. So la story es que 1924 they decided, to come and lower Model T, for it broke down at Congress, at the Congress Bridge. They came south. Probably they kept been through being, we know it Ben White/ 71 they came in from Lockhart, and they got stuck. And in the 1920s our people live in West Austin, west of Congress, Lavaca, Colorado. See the streets live in Spanish. So they threw the Model T 4 over the bridge into the water. So they hiked the rest of the way into what they called back then the man was called me, kind of "little Mexico", or Mexico, which on second and Brazo, second and Colorado, where the city council used to be at. There's where he started. My mother came from Bastrop. From family from Bastrop. It wasn't until 1946 that they met, he was living by himself, worked for the city, and she was divorced had four kids, and my uncle Gray, told my father, "and there's a woman who has four kids. If you marry her before the year is over, you get some tax credits". The problem with my father. He fell in love with my mother. They met, they got married in april of 1946 so that's before the December for the taxes came. He married 1946 on April the 30th and Mace B. Thurman. He was a JP, and later he became a judge, a district judge, and I had the chance to shake his hands and thank you for marrying my parents. And he says, "Commissioner, look what I created." People take credit for stuff like that. That's my mother and my father. My father, Franciso. I always introduce myself. Who are you? Says, I'm the son of Francisco, Frank De Leon and Marianna Armoda Garcia de Leon. That's who the son that I am.

Jonathan Cortez 03:49

And when did they when did they move to the palm school neighborhood?

Marcos de Leon 03:53

We lived in when we lived my brother was born on Sabine street. Then I was born on 606 East 12th Street in the house, and then we moved to Eighth Street, I think zero at eight Street, right about two, a block and a half in the police station. And I lived there until the third grade. So I lived on Eighth Street when I went to palm the first year. And I went late, because I born October 3, so I even though I was six years old and October 3, I couldn't go to school, so I went to Iglesia Batista, the Baptist Church that that I belong to back then. And that's when I first moved to palm when I lived on 8th Street and then third grade, we moved to Rainey Street, and we stayed there until the 11th grade. So my father had a heart stroke, and we couldn't afford we couldn't afford to stay there, so we moved to 11, 1102 Haskell street, and I finished high school when I lived on Haskell street, but that's where my family came from. My mother, was a very devout Baptist as matter of fact, she found the church, the first Mexican Baptist Church on East Third Street. Where she found it was because, according to my pastor, but it is he says, "Tu mama estaba Perdida", we went to East Austin looking for a place to live, and they lost my

mother. This is the story. This is the pastor. You gotta believe, the Pastor. Pastor. Anyway, the Pastor said. "We heard some crying, and we found her in a stable in this property on East Third Street and I 35 "porque estas llorando?" why are you crying? She said "no no estoy triste, estoy muy alegre", "porque?" "porque aci vamos a poner la Iglesia" because I'm happy, because we're going to put the church here", brother, Brother Paredes, "aquí vamos estar". And so they, they bought the land because they used to be under the basement at the First Baptist Church on Eighth Street. Still there, still the First Baptist Church still on Eighth Street. And they were at the basement because it was a Spanish Baptist Church. No, no hablan ingles. And so this is it. And then we're there for years, until 1960 when the highway came so they moved down to brushing. Now they're over there on Ben White Boulevard. There. Church still there. And the original Bapt first Mexican Baptist Church is still in Bastrop, built in 19 started 1908 it was finished in 1924 it's called the "Primer Iglesia Baptista" the first Mexican Baptist in Bastrop of Texas. And we visited, and we put our names that we added our names to it. They were happy to find out they were still alive.

Jonathan Cortez 06:50

Can you remind me of the street on which the church was, where your mom, your mom said this?

Marcos de Leon 06:56

it was, it was east third and I 35 that's how we remember Easter and I East Third Street, and i35 which it's the whole property is gone with the highway. The third is there, but there's a few houses, a few bars there. But

what was the church called?

the first Mexican Baptist church, but it's called Primera Iglesia Baptista Mexicana. They had the name Mexican on it. But not "the primera Iglesia Baptista" It's just in Spanish now, but they dropped the word Mexican, you know, the times and stuff.

Jonathan Cortez 07:27

So growing up through all of these different moves, who did you consider part of your family unit, besides you and you and your parents?

Marcos de Leon 07:37

Well the story goes is this, it was just me, my father and my two brothers. My mother died when I was three years old, and she died in Pharr, Texas, and for many years, I didn't know my mother had really died, because we never saw her grave. My father wouldn't talk about it. She died on the 20th of December, and my father was born on December, the 21st of December. So she died day before his birthday, and he tells us, well, I was sad because everybody, it was suddenly Christmas. Everybody the lights were out, and I had lost my wife, and so far away, 300 miles away, we I finally went myself when I was 24 years old, and I found the grave. And I knew my mother was dead. So, you know how you grow up? Well, you know she's dead, but where is she? Why is this no grave? I can't visit her. And my father was, was very much an introvert. He was real closed. Everybody knew him that way. He was. He never got married till he was in his 30s, until my grandmother passed away.

Jonathan Cortez 08:46

Do you have any indication as to what why she was in Pharr?

Marcos de Leon 08:54

Yes, it was obvious. You know, I can talk about it, my mother, my mother, my grandmother and my father did not get along. He was, he had a reputation in the Barrio, which later helped me get elected, my father took care, my Grandfather died when he was 12 years old, and he became since my father was the oldest, he went to go work in the fields, and he went to work to support my uncle John, Luther and Totardio and Maria and a couple others who passed away when I grew up. I had two uncles and an aunt, uncle Juan, Uncle John and uncle Totario, tio Luther and the Tia Maria who lived in Monterrey, Mexico. She married Mexican to move, and she lived when my great grandfather was born in Monterey. so I knew I had two uncles and an aunt, and when I went the reason that we know is that my mother in law didn't like my father because he was a street man. He triggered the family. He drank and and went down sixth Street, and that's what he was. So she didn't like that. Didn't like the drinking and stuff, and we knew that. And I think she just felt she didn't take my mother away.

Jonathan Cortez 10:15

So tell me about growing up in the the palm school neighborhood, and it just being your father and your brothers. Tell me about your brothers.

Marcos de Leon 10:25

My brother Frank, which you interview here, and then I have a baby brother Gerardo. So the gabachos, the white guys, used to call because we used to bring tortillas with cheese, and they say, look, "there go the three blind mice". When all three of us were in school, we all had little paper bags. We had tortillas they call quesadillas. They just cost less than a dollar but they'll charge you .75 for a quesadilla. it's real funny to us, but anyway, but I remember they used to cause us "the Three Blind Mice" because we had cheese, right? Yeah, interesting. We didn't eat in, I didn't eat into the cafeteria that I was in the fourth grade. Hildebrandt, which I know is it was at Palm school. The principal first of Mr. Boyd, one day we were not going to school, and he looked for us, and he found out we thought we just had nothing to eat. We just couldn't get into school. So he let Mr. Hildebrandt got us free lunch or a nickel, it cost a nickel to get lunch. And I remember one time, "because tu comas tortilla con puro mano", eat with your hands. So that I was in the third grade eating, eating the food again, with my bread getting like a tortilla. And then one little girl said, "Marcus is dirty. He's eating with his hands. I don't want sitting next to him". I remember that.

Jonathan Cortez 12:00

Tell me about that experience.

Marcos de Leon 12:02

It hurt. So that's the way I eat with tortilla. You take and you eat with the hands. They used to give us fork and knives, but I don't forks and knives, I eat with a tortilla. And so there was no tortilla, it was bread. So I used bread. And the little girl and Miss Jones said "you shouldn't talk about that", but she did move her, you know, and I think another, I think Lena Gutierrez because, you know, it didn't bother her.

Jonathan Cortez 12:30

What was the racial makeup of palm school?

Marcos de Leon 12:31

When I went in 1954 was when I went to school my first grade. You know, I was 6 then I turned 7, so I was older than the kids, and I was always older than my classmates. Going to school the first year my limited Spanish, there were a lot of Anglos still, it was an Anglo school mix from the early times. I think in the 40s, they started, los mexicanos started moving to the neighborhood. By 54 there were a lot of us. In the 30s they were, but I think by 54 there were a lot of us, that were really mixed. There were no blacks. It was a segregated school. No blacks were allowed to come. because I had black friends on eighth Street and said, "we got our own school, Marcus. We go to John P, we go to Sims and black shit. We have our own school." I said, "Well, how come we don't have one?" So I noticed that. And by I guess the third, third, fifth grade, it was primarily Raza. And I think my wife did a research with a law student, and the data that she had showed in 1954 to 1960 the Anglo community moved out of the neighborhood because they didn't want to. It was the brown. It was I went to school when the Brown versus the Board of Education to be Kansas, Oliver Brown was daughter was not allowed to go to school, so he filed suit. Thurgood Marshall took the lawsuit all the way to the Supreme Court, and they voted that it was unequal and school should not be segregated. So according to the data, the Anglos fear that the black kids were coming to palm and to Metz, because Metz with other schools all Anglo, because Zavala was a Mexican school and Metz was the Anglo school. So I think the fear of integration, a lot of Anglo community members moved to West Austin, North Austin, and went to to at that time, Jollyville, which is Cedar Park now, and Round Rock, and then moved out of the neighborhood. So by the time I was in sixth grade, it was almost all Chicano.

Jonathan Cortez 14:53

tell me about growing up in the palm school neighborhood in at the time. Before going to school, when it was still mixed with, with, with, with, you know, whites and Mexicans. Like, what was that like? What was what? And then, and then, did you notice a change when, when the Anglos moved out? Like, what's the difference, the difference in your experience between those two moments?

Marcos de Leon 15:19

When we lived, there were Anglo stores, community stores. There were Anglo people there. It's like, we just kind of look at it, and you don't feel it when you are kids sometimes. But then again, it made it easier when I brought my white friends with me. I know it was like, Oh, okay. Like they was okay. But we, three or four of us, going there, me and my brothers going there. They just kind of look at us. Kind of look at us. We just felt it, just it becomes normal, like, okay, that's how they treat us. They don't like it, but we know how to deal with it. And then going to school like, Jerry Jones was a good friend of mine.

Jonathan Cortez 15:56

Can you tell us who Jerry Jones?

Marcos de Leon 00:15:59

Jerry Jones is? Was a former student from Palm school. I don't remember when he left, but we were a couple of grades together. We became friends. Later, when I ran for public office, he was also running, and we talked about Palm and he eventually became Supreme Court justice for the state of Texas at the time that I was county commissioner. So we, we kind of kept in touch with each other a little bit, but not a lot. We just remember and we both went to the same first grade, in a second grade, I think after that, I remember when, I don't know when he left, his family left. You know, there was other students that I remember, but it was Ralph Morgan. He stayed. He didn't leave. Some of the Martinez, they stayed. They would go all together by the time I finished, well, I didn't finish it. Stayed an extra grade. They were we got along. I even had black friends when I went Eighth Street, 11th street didn't go to school with me, but we hung around together during the summer. We hung on together, but we didn't go to school together even Junior high.

Jonathan Cortez 17:10

So what was your let's, I want to kind of expand on this idea of community, so tell me a little bit about your home life. So it was your dad and your brothers, who, who was making your lunch? You said you took lunch the first, the first two years

Marcos de Leon 17:25

my my father would get us up before in the morning to get the beans ready, one would have to wash the beans and clean them out and put them in the pot. And then about before he went to work, about four o'clock, five o'clock, so he had us up early.

Jonathan Cortez 17:41

And what was he doing? Was his labor, his he

Marcos de Leon 17:43

He was, was here Frank. He worked for the Austin sewer. He did dishes for the sewers. He was good at the jackhammer. That was his job. He was the best at it. And he was that's he was just a labor. And he worked for them for 20 years. That's how he had retirement was good when he, when he had the stroke and he was able to retire. That's what, when you get educated. That's how, that's when kids get educated. They're the best resource for their parents. You know, my father barely spoke any English, and he he can only write his he could write his name, but he only went to what the third, fourth grade. That was it. You know, he didn't have that education, you know what I'm saying? So we became that. But growing up with with my two brothers, he was the oldest, and we always thought we could control him, until he kicked our ass, and he was "okay, brother, you're the leader". You know, I was the one that I think I lived in two worlds. I was the one that the conflict. Growing up, growing up with my brother was fine. Growing up with Anglos was fine. I understood him. I could work with them. Some of my friends could not. They this said "this gabacho", and they were want to kick their ass, just beat the shit out em. Excuse my language. I wasn't like that, you know. I know that discrimination happened. I know they were gonna call us names, and I would just sometimes just ignore it, you know, but you don't feel good. But I wasn't one to fight. I was the one to find a common ground to live together. I mean, they're there. Sometimes they're smart. Use them. Growing up, I would gaze out the window at school, and teacher said, you daydreaming? No, ma'am, what are you looking at? That red bird a Cardinal. He

says, "How did God do that? How did he paint that thing red? Why is it red?" Instead of saying, "Oh, just a bird me", I went like, why is it how you create that?

Jonathan Cortez 19:54

Where does that come from?

Marcos de Leon 19:58

I think my indigenous background thing comes from my being a Mexica. I mean, you know, Lakota being a native person, because our belief is that the world is altogether. It's not that absolute. It is we share everything. Why the European, you know, if you read the book of Genesis, and I can't paraphrase the word, but they say we will dominate the world. We're above animals, you know, we're here to dominate. It's dominance. We're an indigenous we share the world with everybody, you know, and I think that's what's inside of me, because I was always getting into conflicts, but now and I will try to work things out instead of fighting. You know why upset? Well, y'all speak Spanish, but that's our language. Sometimes y'all speak English. We don't understand what you're saying. Why don't we do this? Won't you teach us English and we'll teach you Spanish so you won't feel offended. So you see the different paradox there. In other words, I'm not I don't want division, I want unity, but I can respect you. Can you respect me? And that's the way I've always lived, and that's when I was going to school at Palm you know, gonna share with you, my Baptist has been a Baptist, dance is not accepted it's the work of the devil. My father. I love dancing. But in the first grade I saw this movie, there was a voodoo dance that I was just intrigued. So in the first grade, the teacher said, you can do what you want Marcus, Marco they call me Marcos. So Ralph, the white guy, was my voodoo guy. He had a mask on, and I had everybody do the... and I was the victim. They loved it. But somebody told Dr Paredes, my pastor. "Marquitos". And then one time was square dance, that was there were square dances as part of PE and I loved it, and I was square dancing up a storm. And somebody told pastor Paredes and church in the morning, "Marquitos, come here, estabas bailando? You were dancing?". "Who!?" "Oh, so and so told me you were square dancing, que you were the best." Of course, I love dancing. So that was the some of conflicts I grew up with. And then what's the dancing? It's indigena. It's in us. And why we go Chicano dancing. We go in circles. We're doing, we're doing with 1000s of years of dancing going in circles. People like Irish people dance in circles. Indigenous people from Europe do this similar that we do. So it's part of us, and that's the two worlds.

Jonathan Cortez 22:54

I want to pause right there. Gustavo, are we picking up that sound? Yeah,

23:01

just the more recent one, can you and it was when it's gonna be intermittent. So it's something we can can you explain again, why was it that we're looking at that bird, and why is it red and white? Why were you questioning it? And if you can just talk about that, just the original I was questioned. You were why? What are the roots of why you were questioning? Why the bird is red?

Jonathan Cortez 23:27

What made you look at that as a kid and think, why is it red? What? What? What do you think was instilled in you that, that that made you think so critically as a kid?

Marcos de Leon 23:36

I think it was because believing in the spirit world, believing in indigenous is, you know, when you leave here you go in the spirit world. And you don't want to go to the underworld. You want to go to the spirit world. And I think you understand the heart of being the creator, and wondering, how, who does that. You know, I can do it on a on a paper rack and draw red, but how was that created? It's just like, there's no explanation to talk there's just a feeling that you have inside this. There's something's great out in the world that can do stuff like this, you just get, Oh, It's just a red bird? No. Well, how is it red? You know, there's gotta be something there that creates these things. When people talk about the Creator, when you think about people talk about God and Jesus and all that, and create these things, it was the same way as Indigenous person, understanding Mother Earth, understanding what she does, that she's alive, and how that it's in it's in me. I can't get it out. I, you know, I don't believe in Jesus. That is something I don't have. You know, among our people, we know this is Jesus, we know he came. We know he walked the earth. But. Uh, if he just his teachings, you be okay. But if you go beyond that, you're not okay, because you become very repressive. You're telling me, because I believe in ceremonies, because I believe in the Creator, then these are my protections. These are these. These are here to protect me against spirits. This is where my word This was given to me by an elder, because I'm an elder now it's to protect me. But someone said, No, that's paganism, right? I don't believe that. And if you believe Jesus, good, I'm glad it's no problem. That's I think the way I went, I think that helped me in my activism and the things that I do, and the gift is like you, the guy in the camera, the Creator gave him that gift because that's what he does. He's good at it, yeah, here, Dr Cortez, that's who you are. The gift is given to you. The gift that I was given is to what I just explained to you is in Palm school, even though I flunked another year, there were a lot of practice that I worked at Palm school that got around a lot of kids and resolved conflicts with my students, my fellow students, and that stayed with me forever. So I was 60 years old when I realized Hortensia told me. She said, "that's your gift." "What do you mean? I don't understand". "There are people fighting each other, and they ask you to come in, and next thing you know, they're all working together. How do you do it?" "I don't know."

Jonathan Cortez 26:31

Can you walk us through an example that you used your gift while at the Palm school? Do you remember a fight or an argument between people that you were able to quell?

Marcos de Leon 26:40

Yeah, in the fourth grade, it was one of the guys who was in love with this girl, and he didn't want nobody to mess with her. And there were three or four guys who also wanted to talk to her. You know, it's fourth grade, and one of the guys of my friend, Gutierrez and Frank Rios, Marcos de Leon, Quintanilla, Fred, you know. And we went outside, and he wanted to kick my friend's ass and another one. And I asked him. I asked him, "Why? Why? Why are you so mad?" He said, "Well, he shouldn't be messing with my girl. What did she did." I says, "but we're all friends. We're all playing when we play kickball. We're all thinking we're the best team. We always win". I can't kick worth a damn but Frank Rio is the top of school. "Why? Why? Why this? Why do you want to cost this?" You know, and what? The Galla guys agreed not to talk to her if he wanted to be his girlfriend, and they were fine with that, but he if she talked to them, which she did, he cannot assume that they're flirting. "Can you deal with that?" I

told him, because they ain't going to talk to her, but if she walks over to them, don't get mad at them. Don't get mad at her.

Jonathan Cortez 28:11

Do you remember her name?

Marcos de Leon 28:14

I was in love with her, too. She was from Mexico, the prettiest girl. I wouldn't say her name. She may still be here in town, but that's a conflict and making them understand is that you know, porque te enojas if she goes, that's the part, because you know she can talk to anybody, everybody about.

Jonathan Cortez 28:38

Let's, let's talk about the wider community of the palm school. I'm really interested to hear about, what are some businesses or institutions? You know, a few of the places that we've heard other people talk about is the park, the Salvation Army Center. So I'm curious to hear what do you remember about, your neighborhood, your body, all growing up in the Palm school?

Marcos de Leon 29:02

Well one is the grocery store on on Ninth Street, Guajardos, with next to, next to Guadalupe church. Guajardos was run by Mexicanos, and they would have stuff that we that you couldn't find at an Anglo store. And that was very popular until they closed. It was wonderful people.

Jonathan Cortez 29:20

Do you know when it closed?

Marcos de Leon 29:22

I don't remember when it closed. Galindo had the Galindos had several tortilla factories, and then they had an extra store, a big one on seventh Street. Two there were, there was something we get tortillas, Barons tortillas on Third Street. You go in there in the summer, you sweat, but it was worth the tortillas that came out of it, best corn tortillas, you know, the Salvation Army was was one of my places for enjoyment. The Palm Park is one of the best experience for my life. Not only did I learn to swim there, I learned, you know, and play, but I learned how to swim at the pool. The guards were always Anglo, so, but they were nice the rules. There were a couple that were ugly, but they we can complain, and I get rid of them, you know?

Jonathan Cortez 30:16

Tell me about your earliest memories of the Salvation Army Center or the palm park, or both?

Marcos de Leon 30:21

The palm part in the palm pool. The palm pool is 64 we won our first we placed fourth place in Aqua. And I ran and I got my first ribbon only ribbon I ever got in my life swimming second swim in 400 meter. If I had been faster, we might get we might have got first place, but we got second place, and I kept it for about 40 years. So I lost it. 1967 when I graduate high school. Coach Wilson was the coach of Houston Tillotson basketball team, and Reyes was Park supervisor. They hired me to be a park leader

in 1967 out of High School I was 19, and that summer, I spent working Palm Park. And we had the best fun about, I bought anybody, I, you know, we have days. We had days we had arts and crafts, you know, I have we had people built extra games for me, tetherball, and I ran the park and movies and stuff. And later, when I was County Commissioner, I went to speak at coach Wilson's class, history class, and he said, and he said, I want to thank coach Wilson for hiring me in 1967 with Ray Lopez. Coach says, "you see what a leader I created! County commissioner Marcos de Leon" those are the legacy of palm there are a lot of people. I'm a lucky one. I got elected to public office, so did Jerry Jones, but they're people and they came out of palm they have a different legacy than I do, but that produced a lot of leaders in our community. You know, Salvation Army, Salvation army was my athletic position. I didn't work ever work for him, but I won basketball tournaments there. We won football there. We would called the Chinese bandits. "Why? We were called?" The coach wanted to call us the Chinese bandits. We played the African American League in Doris Miller. We played in montopolis in South Austin, and we beat them. We couldn't beat the the, we couldn't beat the black brothers, because they're too fast for us.

Jonathan Cortez 32:45

Do you remember any other team names?

Marcos de Leon 32:49

Ah, see , it was Chinese bandits is there was, oh, the the Red Devils, until we joined the church league. So we had to change it to the Crusaders, with the Salvation we were red devils, we're good. And then we joined the church league and then the coach says, "Marcos, guys, we gotta change our names". "WHY!?" And then Carmichael, who's ran the Salvation army, says, "Well, call them the Crusaders. But when we play over here, the red Devils, we play the church league with the Crusaders." So the case. So we became the Crusaders when we played church league because they didn't want to play us as the Red Devils. Those some of the names we had. And then there were different names. But let me give you the names of the ball players, white out, tippie toes, golgas, hamburger and Treadwell.

Jonathan Cortez 33:40

you think we'll find them in the census under those names?

Marcos de Leon 33:43

No, you won't. And Boole and then there was Baby Huey. And what happened? They passed, and when they put their name, they didn't put their their nickname. So you say, "hey, any wod little baby who's Rio? Where's Baby Huey? Boole que es tu name?" "Haha Alex Guerrera".

Jonathan Cortez 34:08

of the nicknames that you mentioned?

Marcos de Leon 34:12

Well, White Out is, oh, my God. He was Guerrera too and his wife worked at... White Out was real dark. That's what they call, the guys called him that name, but he used to protect me all the time. I was little, skinny kid all my life. You see the portraits I was anyway, I weighed 120 pounds when I graduated high school. That was my weight. I was like, five. I'm 5'5, 5'6, I think I was about five, five, close by six

when I graduate. I was a skinny kid. But no, I don't know. I remember what White Out told me his name, his wife became the the lady took care of the cafeteria at Sanchez. It was the Palm then Sanchez. But I don't remember his I can remember where these... Tippie Toe was Robert Guerra, Hamburger was Terrazas, Alberto Terrazas, Gogo was with Joel. Mullet was Alex and and then there was Possum, Joe, Joe Ramirez. So they had nicknames, but you grow up with names, and they, when you go to these were a Salvation Army at Palm. We didn't have nick names

Jonathan Cortez 35:23

were a lot of these people who you played with that Salvation Army? Did they also go to palm?

Marcos de Leon 35:28

Some did. not all of them, because some live, they lived past Comal. I think Comal or Chicon you went to? They went to Zavala. Some prefer to go Zavala then go to palm. Their choice or Metz. When Metz had opened up to desegregate, because for a while, which was an Anglo school, you know. And so I went to school 54 which long time ago, and there was and then by 1960 they started to do the highway, and that was a big division. It was hard for the kids later on, because having to cross i 35 was very, very dangerous, but that's kind of what happened.

Jonathan Cortez 36:06

Growing up around Palm. What? So you've mentioned swimming, basketball, what other kind of activities happened outside of the school? What? What do you remember?

Marcos de Leon 36:17

(laughs) Wanna talk about my criminal events? Haha when you, one of the things that the Salvation army, not only was Salvation army were involved here in the Barrio on Holly street, but the Salvation army was part of life when it was on Fifth Street, when they used to be on Fifth Street, and they had A center there, and that's where you could get shoes. So they gave away free shoes, gratis. But they didn't last the whole year. By the time you came back, January, April, they started coming apart. So when you got Salvation army shoes, you know, you were poor, but the Salvation Army, known it gave food and turkeys and stuff were involved in that. They were very helping. And then right across the street from Palm was the awesome brotherhood with the church. Was the Baptist Church where the Juarez Lincoln was, and that was a brotherhood. And Hortensia and my mother in law did a lot of work. They took in alcoholics, homeless people, but they also saw the Barrio gave out food and dinners and Christmas stuff.

Jonathan Cortez 37:25

Did you and your brothers?

Marcos de Leon 37:27

No, we never went there.

Jonathan Cortez 37:30

What about Salvation Army?

Marcos de Leon 37:31

We did that we did that for, we did both. We will go for shoes, clothing, for food and Thanksgiving and Christmas. They'll have big Christmas events at Salvation Army, and they will have Santa Claus there. I got into a big fight one time. They were beating up my little brother Jerry, and so I got him in the head lock, and I just started beating him. And Danny Ruiz said, No, not Danny, his older brother. Mr. Ruiz said, "Marcos, if you don't stop beating on him you can't come to the Christmas party". I let him go. Because that was a big event!

Jonathan Cortez 38:05

How old were you?

Marcos de Leon 38:07

I was about there I was about 12.

Jonathan Cortez 38:08

Tell me about the event. Why did, Why were you so excited? Or what, like, what happened?

Marcos de Leon 38:12

You get a bag of fruit, like a candy, and you get a toy, and you get to eat some food. It's free. You know?

Jonathan Cortez 38:22

Were your parents coming or was your dad coming with you?

Marcos de Leon 38:24

No, my dad didn't do any of that stuff. He wouldn't do this stuff.

Jonathan Cortez 38:28

So who were you?

Marcos de Leon 38:30

My brother, my brother, my two brothers. Sometimes we just me and Gerardo my younger brother, Frank. Was Frank was like my father, real quiet, real reserved. He wouldn't get into all the exciting stuff. But me, my brother, we just love all this stuff. We love. Like during the summer, there was nobody home. You know, I talk about my mother, one of the things you do when you have a mother, you have nobody after your father goes to work there's nobody to supervise you. So it's like a lot of freedom, but there's also a big void in your life, not having your mother. But in the summer we were just ran the streets because our friends would get together, we shoeshine. I was a kid sold papers, broke, cardboard down, cardboard stuff sold at the paper company that paid you 15 cents, 100 pounds.

Jonathan Cortez 39:29

Where would you? Where would you get the newspapers to sell?

Marcos de Leon 39:33

We got caught stealing. Sam Altra, which is part of the Lebanese community in Austin, twin twin, twin twin, twin liquors, JJ Tavern and downtown. These are places that they had. They're all Lebanese people. They were all together, Jacobs and and anyway, Sam Altra was newspaper worth the Driskill hotel on the back side, where they had with the white pharmacy, and we picked up a couple of baby ruths, and Sam Altra caught us. We were, I was about nine, and Sam Altra caught us that summer. "What are you boys doing? What you got in your bucket? Did you pay for it?" "No", "put it back. I'll give you a job." So we put the stuff back. He came back, guys says he gave us each two newspaper, two papers, American statesman. He said, "you sell them for a nickel, you come back with a dime, and I give you four. So you two for one, and then then you come back and keep that extra nickel". So that's how I started selling newspaper. American statesman is by Sam Altra. Took us out and said, "You don't have to steal you make money. You can buy it". So I had people, and that's one thing about that. I always have people who taught me lessons, but the same way that I talk was, without any violence without any harsh words, without I didn't need putting a person down. He said, "You guys, what you're doing is wrong. You want money to buy that here. Won't you do this and you have money?"

Jonathan Cortez 41:15

Did you feel safe growing up in the palm neighborhood? Safe? Yeah,

Marcos de Leon 41:19

Safe ? Yeah. As long as I was with my people, yes, as long as I didn't get too close with some not all the anglos were nice to us. Same thing happened to me at junior high, and it happened to me at Austin high when I was jumped on and beat up.

Jonathan Cortez 41:32

Can you tell us about that?

Marcos de Leon 41:34

Well, at the junior high, it was the first integrated school in Austin, Texas.

Jonathan Cortez 41:39

What was the name of the junior high school?

Marcos de Leon 41:41

University, junior high, I find out Dr Moore, which was one of the doctors that worked in the department education. She knew him, and we found out through him, that he was one of the architects who approached the school district and say, we want to integrate. We have a building which is now the social work is now destroyed. But it said, why don't we create a school and takes kids from Allen, which is was, at that time, in 1960s was a predominant Chicano school, and Oh Henry was a predominantly white school, junior high middle school, and John B Wynn was generally black. You take students from each one and bring them to Austin to UJH, in other words, get kids will normally go to Allen, which I was going to go. Can go to UJH, which were closer to it than Allen. People win can come over here and people from Oh Henry they bussed, because they're way, you know, Lake Austin area to come to integrate in Junior high. So we became the very first integrated junior high, the full force. This is 67 this is almost what, 12 years after the 54 board of education versus Brown, and we were integrated. And it

was hard, you know, it was hard for all of us, because we never went to school together. None of us did. We didn't go with blacks. We were the Anglo so we knew what they were like, and the blacks didn't go to school, with either one of us with Chicanos or blacks? I mean, or whites, it was hard.

Jonathan Cortez 43:25

What was the experience of you getting jumped?

Marcos de Leon 43:27

well, did nothing walked Alone.

What happened? Where were you?

I was just by myself. I was hanging around. Should have gone. I should have left with our group. We were all going groups down Red River. The whites got on bus and the blacks got bus. But we would go mostly walked. So the blacks would walk, Martin Luther king and go home. We walk down Red River, which is not really good with it, they messed it up, but we would walk home that way. And I was just alone. The two guys just jumped me. No, I was lucky. They just kicked me, threw me on the ground and blood in my nose, and that was enough. They left.

Jonathan Cortez 44:09

What group would you walk home with? Usually? Who was

Marcos de Leon 44:12

my I was Gutierrez, my brother, my, you know, my two brothers. Sometimes, when Frank got went to Austin high, then it was just me and Gerardo, we would walk together. And then there was, there was my cousin Janie, who lived on third, third street, and couple others, and the rest of us, Guteirrez and the Cunias, and the Ramirez, you know, just it's una tangita we walk together. We just all walked because we knew that would happen. And but there were some fights in the school between blacks and whites and us and but there was a Civil rights incident. The girls, I remember, Janie. Two things happened. One was they wore a Mary Jane shoe and a loafer two different shoes. And they was like "you can't do that", and wonder why. What it was is they had an annual powder puff flag football game between the girls and Janie was good. She had brothers. You know, she knows how to play football. No, I remember. Now. You remember what they did. They were boycatting they didn't want to play because they didn't allow her to be quarterback. They just want the anglo girls to be quarterback. So they protested. So we joined them. We started wearing different socks. That was good for me, because I never had a good pair, but we joined them, and we started boycotting. We started wearing things in our socks, and they fighting at them. They realized the university realized they doing the same thing. They racist stuff. I was my first I remember, it's Junior high. I was like, in the seventh grade, and I remember we were all joining the girls. Yeah, we joined. We so we start protesting with them. It's a quiet protest, right? Just, just don't wear things. Like they want us to tuck in our shirts. We're, you know, we're pachuco, right? We wear shirts outside. Wear black stacey's and camisas we don't tuck in the shirt, and we had to tuck in our shirt, so we showed up one day with a shirt, and we tuck and said, "Why do this?" "Because they won't let the brown Mexican girls play football". And we just tuck the shirt, we

tell them why why we had a shirts out so we wouldn't get kick out, that because they kick you out of school or they put you in detention, you know?

Jonathan Cortez 46:38

So growing up, what how important was the role of education? Did your father talk to you about how important education was? Were you being talked to at the Salvation Army? What How did before?

Marcos de Leon 46:50

Okay, I love school. School was, education was important to me. I love to learn. You see the Indian part and the Anglo part, the two worlds I wanted to learn. I love school. But then again, it was hard. And it was hard because there were no Mexican teachers. There was only two. Miss Herrera and Miss Reyes. Hortensia got lucky she had Miss Reyes. I wasn't lucky because I spoke English. I guess I learned English too fast, I don't know, but there were only two in the whole palm school. But I love school. My father said you need to go to school. Causing a lot of problems in first grade. This is the part being American Chicano in the class we're reading Jane. And no, I know you don't know that if you go back in the 50s, "Jane run, Jane, see, Jane run", right? Simple English, and the teacher would just not call me, you know, and like so I got my so I got my pencil. This is the first grade. And I just, I just tore up the book and they sent me to the office. They call my father, and it's gonna cost him a quarter to pay for the book, and he whipped me all the way home. My father did not spare the rod, old fashioned. And every time the red light come going from First Street, Cesar Chavez, Third Street, and then their lights at Fifth Street, Sixth Street and Eighth Street. And I would push the light, I would just afraid of the green, because every time you turn red, se acordaba what I did right and I he asked me, why did I tear up the book? I said, because the teacher wouldn't call my name. You know, the anglos got girls and guys got the called. I didn't get a call, and I wanted so bad, because I worked so hard to learn those two pages, and she didn't call on me. So I just so.... I was always I was like my father said I was always one. The reason I was that way was because I was born backwards. I was born on the floor. I was breached when I was born.

Jonathan Cortez 49:17

Tell us about that?

Marcos de Leon 49:19

My father. The story is that my father was smoking and he burnt the bed the night before. So he had to put the fresh so that then I was my mother was having contractions. He paid \$50 for a doctor to come get me, deliver me, which is a lot of money in 47 and the guy was 84 years old. He had to get on his knees to deliver me, and I was backwards and he had to pull me out. So I was born ass backwards. I tell them, my grandkids, "grandpa, don't talk like that". And I think that's why my legacy, my my life, is going to be why. The way I am, what I did in my life, the way I grew up at Palm and then why flunked the sixth grade? You know? Why? Because of that, my teaching my second grade to ms Schulze, what I love very much. Who's passed was my greatest teacher. She said, after she learned who I was, after she helped me, after we worked things out, because I was always disrupting her class. And one thing she said, Alright, let's go. And I said, "Where are we going?" This is the bell rang. So everybody go to lunch, "but you Marcus, gonna stay". She walked up to me and she said, "Look. I said, I know you like to play around you prankster". So she said, "You have to learn how to turn it on, turn it off. You got

good you're good kid. You can learn, you know. And I'm going to tell you why you were flunked". I thought because of my grades and stuff, and Rob Morgan was dumber than I am. So he said it, "Marcus, I'm dumber than you. I got passed the seventh grade". He said, "The Teacher flunked you because she felt you, you were not mature enough to go into seventh grade." She said "You need to be another year. And I think she must read the way you are. If you learn how to cut it off when it's too much, then I think you do better". So I just want to do for you, when I say, Okay, that's enough. I'm not talking about the whole class, I'm talking to you, and when I say that, I need you to behave. Can you do that?" And I thought, "Yes, ma'am, I can do that". And that changed me.

Jonathan Cortez 51:52

How did it feel to be held back

Marcos de Leon 51:56

For her? It was okay. It was a learning thing. She did not criticize me. She understood who I was, because later on, she said, would you come? Would you like to come work with me? I said, Well, my can my friend Ramon, come with me? He was, I remember his last he was a friend of mine, and we ended up working together because her, his father did landscaping, so we ended up cleaning her yard. She learned... she paid us. She learned she taught me how to accept money and work. I don't have to steal. I don't have to work in the streets. I can work for her and working for her. In the eighth, seventh grade, I was offered a job as a dish washer, so I already knew how to work. I already new the value work in my labor. She taught me that. So that was was a teaching moment for me, but her spirit was there like mine. Because one time somebody threw an airplane, because we had old schools in the top was would be down so the hot air can get out, somebody threw an airplane to our class in middle of our studies, everybody got shocked. And we thought, normally, a teacher gets up and ah, she goes, you know, that person must was... she laughs. "I think that person thinks that's pretty cool, you know, throw an airplane, something like that. She goes, it's, it's no big deal. Just leave it there. Let's get back". And we're like, wow, this different type of a teacher that doesn't bother what's important is our studies. Don't worry about that. Someone's cute.

Jonathan Cortez 53:33

How do you feel? Like you do you feel like it was necessary for you to be held back? Yes,

Marcos de Leon 53:48

for that to meet her. What was her name? Again? Michelle T Ruth, Schutze. What I did for her? I said I will come to school every day I will not miss the class, and I gave y'all a certificate, a perfect attendance, and you see her name the bottom, T Ruth Schutze, and I made that commitment to her. So that meant I couldn't act up. And I learned a lot from her that so I'm, I'm I'm, I had the label, late bloomer, and the I'm late because it took me 13 years to get out of primary school from the first of the 12th grade. Took routine ...12 years to get my degree, from 67 to 79 and it took me 10 years to get elected public office from 80 to 1990 that's who I am. So I have a lot of patience, but I think, but with palm school did my friends, and I try to follow them, and a lot of them did a lot, some of us, three of us went to school to college, in 67 but I'm only one that survived. That completed it. I mean, I didn't complete it... I'm only one that I know that completed a degree. I don't know. I know Hernandez completed a degree but from my Barrio. Macias and Fernando Luna, I don't know. I don't think they

finished. Do you know their first names, Fernando Luna, Isidro Macias. I don't know if they ever finished school. I know Tony Hernandez, the guy who got shot by, finished his degree, and he worked for Southwestern Bell. This profound, I think I had the only thing I suffered is a Bueller effect, usually the movie Bueller. Remember that scene? He said, Bueller, Bueller, when he skipped the professor could say that happened to me, spider, Orestina, a good friend was in math class, and the math teacher kept saying, Marcus De Leon, Marcus De Leon. And by Friday, he did this every day, and this is the first day Friday he says, Marcus De Leon, De Leon, because back then and junior high, you didn't use first names. It was our first name, De Leon, and Christina says, This is our this is my friend. So Christina got up and said, "Hey, what is it?" "Marcus, yeah, he flunked. That dummy. Flunk you're not gonna come here." She's my best friend. So I don't know. I guess she was frustrated. Finally, later in life, got to meet and she told me, "but I'm so sorry. Marcos, I was just pissed off at the teacher. He should know you're not going to school. They should know that you're not coming." But that's the only thing. When I saw that in the movie, ah, that's happened to me.

Jonathan Cortez 57:03

Do you remember your first day at the Palm school? Yeah, tell me about it.

Marcos de Leon 57:10

I was excited because my brother was there. You know, I wasn't afraid to go to school. I was excited. I wanted to go to school. I love school education, but my own way of never quitting. I started in 67 was married, had kid, and I realized I had to raise and I had another kid. I had to go. I when I met Hortensia in 71 I was nothing. I'm going to school. And then she said, and then ACC was coming up. So we worked with a neighborhood. As a neighborhood, we supported ACC coming in, and she says, "Why don't you go to once you register" This woman? You know, I hadn't Oh, I never passed English at CTC. I never passed freshman English. So in the summer of 73 I took it at HTU at Houston civil University, and I passed it. And then she said, "why don't you go to school? Don't you register? You know? ACC", "I don't know. I don't know". So I registered. I am one of the 1772 students that first register at ACC. I'm also the one that 1000- 2000 students that registered CTC, because Central Texas College a brand new college in Killeen, Texas, and I was one of the first students. And then here I am again. She encouraged me to go to school. She was going to UT. You know, we had our first son, and she was going to UT, and she said, go to school. So I did, but it's too hard for two of us to go to school. So in 75 I dropped out of ACC. I said, let me put you to school. I'll work. They'll take care of our kid. You know, my other kids that I had. So I put her to school and I quit in 75. To me, as part of my training at Palm school, what I went to good things and bad things, bringing things out, facing yourself, and saying, what's the better thing to do? The better thing to do is to go to work full time and let her go to finish school, because she's smarter than me anyway. So she graduates 77 and she said, you know, why don't you go to school this fall? So I registered, well, the stuff that I did, ACC, I finished with a 3.5 I think GPA at ACC. So you know what? UT, did? They roll out the brown carpet for me? The students said, Mr. Daniel, you mean the red carpet. No, I'm a Chicano. They ran the brown carpet out for me. I was allowed to come in with nothing, do nothing, but come in. I had my GPA was so high. And my first year I was awarded the minority academic achievement award that invested for one year. That was it. But that I saw part, I think, what I talked to my students when I was a college advisor is you have your foundation and your parents, your families, your foundation, so where you go to school, where you play, what you do, in your community, in your Barrio, that's your foundation. So when you go to college,

that's that's what you stand on, and that's what these journey beads were about, that I would give to them, that's what they stand on. This is what holds you together, and that's your foundation. So yeah, palm school is our foundation. Every Elementary School is some kids who got to get to go a long time, that's their foundation. That's like the foundation of a house. It stands out. And then you go to high school, it gets built better. Then you go to college, and then when you graduate, you put your roof on, and you live your life, I think that's what the way I look at it. That's why palm schools, it's so important.

Jonathan Cortez 1:01:12

Did you know how to read English before going to the first grade? No,

Marcos de Leon 1:01:16

No. I learned that in the first grade, and I thought I knew English, I thought I could read, but no, and I think that's what she didn't want to call on me, because estaba "quebrado". There were a heavy accent, probably, and I didn't see that. I was just frustrated. But I would hang with what I did with, you know, my Anglo friends. I would hang out with them to learn more English, because there's where you gonna learn it. They'll teach you, because you can hang around with them. I go hang out with anybody.

Jonathan Cortez 1:01:47

You spoke English outside of outside of school. You in Spanish,

Marcos de Leon 1:01:52

No puro Español en la casa. okay? Mi papa hablaba puro Español. Mainly Spanish around the neighborhood a lot of us did, but the older guys were speaking English, so you learn it now. By the time I got out of high school, I was, I was I wasn't Marcos De Leon. I was Marcus De Leon. We laugh about that, but

Jonathan Cortez 1:02:12

tell me about, you know, what kind of clothes do you remember wearing? What kind of food do you remember eating at the Palm school? I'm curious about like, who was Marcos De Leon attending palm school?

Marcos de Leon 1:02:24

and palm when I first went, we had our own site lunch. And then by the third grade, we ate what the kids ate. It was good Fridays. Friday was great. Good pizza and weekly meatloaf. You always had greens. I love greens. I'll eat the other kids greens. Give it to me. Give me the green beans. Give me the squash. I will eat it well, because I'm starting half the time, but going to school, I wanted to always be in there, but it was hard for me. Math was hard. English. I never learned English. Obviously, we'll tell you. We share with you one story about how I never learned English when I was to school. I was in the 10th grade, and I took an English class, and I was turning in hundreds, and then when I got my grade was the B I went to Mr. Ziegler, my report card, B, so I went to Mr. Zigler. I said, Mr. Ziegler, yeah, Marcus, can you? Can I... my test grades? because they have log books, 90, 100, 95 85, 100, 95 was it not an A, He says "I can't give you an A" I says, "why not? He says, "Because you... this class is a remedial class". We no he said this, well, I can't let me. "Let me see a report card". I showed my report card next to my name was a box and it was white out. He pulled his drawer out. Get a you know, a

razor blade. He scratched all off the the white out, and there was an R there. See that R? Marcus. It means remedial. What does that mean? "Marcus, you know, I don't give you go, look it up". You always do that. "Go, look it up". What is it? How? What is it? "Go, look it up". So I went to the library. And now many old library is 19, what? 65-64 anyway, big books open up and look up "remedial". And, you know, at remedial when they read, they have a lot of words. One of the paraentheses said, "retarded". That's all I remember. It said last then, or whatever. But right there in the middle was "retarded". So I went back to my teacher, Mr. Ziegler, said, "get me out of here". Said, "I don't want to be here. This is going to follow me for the rest of my life. I don't want to be here. I'm not retarded. Or remedial". He said, Well, Marcus you are going to struggle, "I know, I don't care". So I got put back. Guess what I made my English, senior English, what? A "D", really it was an "F" but Miss Hathaway was so proud of the way I worked, and I worked so hard she couldn't flunk me. She knew if she flunked me that I couldn't go to college. And D back in the 60s was okay. It's like a 69-70 so she put me a "D". So when I went to college, I never passed English one. I finally did. But guess what? In 1979 when I was graduating, you go through all the stuff, they said, I need to take an English ssaid "what?" I passed English one, "no, you took it at HT we don't accept Black English." That's the exact words. They're not up to par with what UT has? I understand that, and that's been something going on a lot with HBCUs. This is 1960s right? 70s. So guess what? I already graduated 79 but I had to take an English course during the summer here. And I was 33-34 years old, you know. And I'm with 16, 17,18, year old students.

Jonathan Cortez 1:06:28

I think it's, it's, it's, um, it's really interesting, because, you know, at different points you've talked about the legacy of the palm school and the children that have come through it, and but in this moment, I'm hearing the legacy of of language, the legacy of how, even in the first grade, right, you scribbling the book of English, you then struggled with the English language for the better part of your life. And I want to take, I want to go back to this moment where you discover the R what? Why do you think it was there? At what point was it there? And do you know, why was it hidden?

Marcos de Leon 1:07:06

Why was it hidden? Yes, that's what made me mad. Mr. Ziegler is a very good teacher. He's a good man, you know, precious man. He was just wrong? I don't know why, was he trying to protect me? Didn't want me to know. I don't know, but I just was so determined to it's like here, when I took American Indian and then at the same time, I had Dr Paredes, Dr Carnas, and making a novel person, teaching us about our people and how wrong the history is here. So I challenged the professor. I didn't know what to see. I should have gotten a B or an A, but I got a C.

Jonathan Cortez 1:07:56

Do you know the professor's name?

Marcos de Leon 1:07:59

No, but ill tell you what he was the director of the Texas museum over here, next by the Law Building. I don't remember his name, but we got into a big fight. Now, I won't believe my own elder with the truth about our people then. Now that's because the Mexicans, the Texas and the Mayans and all the other folks than him, you and the massacres that were wrong. but then again that's where it is that's the conflict, right?

Jonathan Cortez 1:08:31

Yeah, tell me about curriculum at the Palm school. Do you think that, why was it that you were, you were having a hard time learning English or picking up English. And what was maybe your favorite subject in school

Marcos de Leon 1:08:47

history. History was my very subject.

Jonathan Cortez 1:08:50

What about history? Do you remember?

Marcos de Leon 1:08:51

The thing about it is mainly it was all Anglo history, because they are talking about, you know, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Who else? William B Travis, all the presidents was part of history. Texas. History was the Alamo San Jacinto, and all the celebrations correlated with the history that we learned at the school. The history was not our history. It was mainly Anglo history, and the Mexicanos were were losers. You know, the Alamo was very prevalent about that. But we did ask about Juan Seguin, they couldn't ignore that to the he helped Sam Houston to feed them Santana. So that was prominent, but there had to be more. But there wasn't. We learned about Juan Seguin that he helped win the revolution now, if you go the Alamo, now they have names on a lot of Mexicans who fought at the Alamo. And then now a historian, I forget his name. Uh. There's another battle that happened in Goliad that was run by Mexicanos. It was not Anglos. It was our people. We believe in freedom. But that's what we learned. It was not those Maypole celebrations. There was both of July celebration before school was out, there was about American history. The flag with the pledge of allegiance It was all Anglo history. Rarely anything Mexicano know anything, if it was Mexicano it was negative, like Santana was a dictator, an emperor, trying to be free. And the Anglos, and we didn't know that people fought the revolutionary war in Texas, who fought other mexicano, who fought at the Alamo, the majority were from Tennessee, Kentucky, you know, Connecticut, New York, you know, from the Far East, as you call it. You say, anybody from New York and main from the Far East?

Jonathan Cortez 1:10:59

Tell me about the celebrations you mentioned the May pole, Fourth of July in

Marcos de Leon 1:11:03

May Pole, in May Pole, Fourth of July, September was Labor Day, right? May Pole. We went around the maypole. I could never, I didn't have that kind of coordination to go underneath, and I was tearing it up. So Marcus, you go over... But there was a may pole celebration in September. It was, you know, it was Labor Day. There was no man, kind of, I can't remember in Palm park that was done, but not at the school, about what

Jonathan Cortez 1:11:34

What happened at Palm Park,

Marcos de Leon 1:11:36

we had some Mexican celebrations, cinco the mayo, was celebrated at the park, not by the school. but the PATRINA was the patron of Mexico. September 16 was all celebrated in the churches. And some of the parques, like Zaragoza, Pan Am and we try to do it at Palm but those, those would mexicano celebration, those, we knew that, but not the school.

Jonathan Cortez 1:12:02

Do you remember the kinds of foods or music or games or activities that would happen at the park during those Mexican celebrations?

Marcos de Leon 1:12:09

It was just the little we played the tetherball and we would do the Raspa, you know, the dance, La Raspa? Something like that. Fun for me, but as long as Dr Paredes, didn't know about it, I was okay, but the food was tamales, you know, enchiladas and tacos, burritos, you know, but the la comida and Mexican

Jonathan Cortez 1:12:41

and they will be there, everything free. It was gratis. Who was making the food?

Marcos de Leon 1:12:46

I think las senoras. They make the food. Las senoras always make the foods. And some of the men would make the food, carnes and stuff.

Jonathan Cortez 1:12:53

Tell me about some of the women that you remember from your community, whether they be native, there was, there

Marcos de Leon 1:12:58

There was a gal from the Galindo family, that one that won the Palm School, Tony Galindo, I think it was his aunt, was like a social worker, worker there. She took care of me. She made sure that I got my shots, make sure that I got my clinic card, make sure that was healthy. She also she went to the church. She was part of the church. The galindos were part of the church, the Baptist Church.

Jonathan Cortez 1:13:23

Do you know her first name?

Marcos de Leon 1:13:25

Her first name? No, oh, I think was Emma Galindo. She when I became kind of Commissioner, she came in and was real proud of me. It's cool. I remember Ms Galindo was, was a Mexicana , in Espanol, so she could talk to us. She could talk to the parents. I was trying to remember, the senoras were always somebody's mom. Gutierrez mom, Frank's man, Rio's mom, that come and cook. Some of the dads would come and cook. My dad, no. He never went to any events that I had. He stayed home.

Jonathan Cortez 1:14:04

Were a lot of the kids from from the Barrio. Did they come from two parent households?

Marcos de Leon 1:14:09

The majority, I think, did, I don't remember, the majority of them had two parents. Had a mother and a father that I remember, that's something you didn't ask, but just something that you showed up they were there. And the church, some of the, some of the kids I went to school, went to my church too. And I remember them having parents, two parents. My father was a Catholic. He was raised a Catholic. So he would go to Guadalupe in the mananas, and then we made sure we were at the church by 10 o'clock, and he would go, and sometimes he would go to the church with us, but the men were over here, Bible study, and then we were going to the church, he would sit with us. And I got baptized at that church after I got hit by car. I kid you not. Yeah, I got hit by car. Running to my school dude. I was so excited to get to school I got hit by a car.

Jonathan Cortez 1:15:02

You okay?

Marcos de Leon 1:15:03

Yeah, just bruised my leg. My brother, Gerardo. He not even interview. But Gerardo was with me, behind me. I was meeting him to go across Martin Luther King, if I got caught, there was already a car accident. There some car had jumped the curve. I guess the guy was watching. He didn't watch me, and I was running, and he hit me like a bull, ram me up in the air.

Jonathan Cortez 1:15:26

Did you go to school?

Marcos de Leon 1:15:28

I would, no, yeah. I went, yeah. I went to school. Afterwards. What happened? I got hit. The ambulance came and I was bleeding from my nose. I hit my nose. My nose is bent. And I got here and I was bent. I sat by the curve, and I keep bleeding. I stopped bleeding. The guy said, "You need to go to the hospital. Said, "no," I said, he said "Look, we need to put you in the ambulance"." No, I don't want to go", "Hey, dude, make us look good. Like in the movies", I said okay. So, like in the movies, I laid back. I was just, you know, in the movie, you see the student, guys in the hospital, ah, ambulance is going in. Yeah. That was me, and I was sent by the doctor. My dad came and they checked my blood and I wasn't bleeding, non internal energy, and says, you want to go back to school? I want to go home. There's nobody at home. Oh, no, does anybody at home? No, my dad went back to work, and my mom just passed away, so I have no one at home. Says, Why don't you go back to school, the hospital is on 15th Street. Martin Luther King is four blocks away. Let me walk. By time I got to school, my leg is sweat up my jeans. But guess what? I was already dead. Marcus, you're alive. We kind of Kirk, a good friend of mine. We've been friends. For you were still friends. Connie Kirk, African American. Sing, a beautiful singer, Monica said, "thought you were dead". Well the story was that I got dragged down from Martin Luther King all the way on the San Jacinto, I lost my head rolling down on the highway, on the road.

Jonathan Cortez 1:16:59

It's terrible. There was all these rumors, rumors,

Marcos de Leon 1:17:02

sort of surprised that I was still alive. You know, somebody or school may got hit because I was a Star. I got all the attention now walking every class. "How you doing? Mark, good to have you here". But it just there was a blood clot. I had to take vibration. It's still, it's still, it's still like a little sore here, ninth, seventh grade, eighth grade, yeah, I got hit by car. It was in the newspaper. I was newspaper because just got hit by car. Student didn't have my name as a student, a middle school student got hit by a car, and then the ticket was given to the guy. I said to him, my dad later said, we didn't know. We could have sued the insurance company, but my dad don't know about stuff like that. I didn't know I was too young.

Jonathan Cortez 1:17:56

I'm interested to hear you talked a little bit about, you know, Miss Galindo and the women in the community. I'm interested to hear about any you mentioned some teachers, but any teachers or staff members from the palm school that you really remember well,

Marcos de Leon 1:18:11

Mrs Schue, there was Miss Houston, who was married to the quarterback from University of Texas. She was a math teacher for a while. She was real good at what she did. Miss meadows that I remember in my second fifth grade. I try to remember my fifth grade teacher, but Ms Arman was my fourth grade teacher, and she had a student teacher, I think I remember her name, but I got in trouble with Ms Arman because my student teacher, I think her name was, Miss Harold, told us to buy a Get a cigar box to bring to the school. This was in April. And then she said, I got some felt for y'all, and I chose green. He says, I need y'all to cover this box, cigar box, inside and out with this felt. I started work on it. And then I asked her, "What's this for?" "Oh, it's a Mother's Day box, jewelry box". I looked at her like, "girl, don't, you know, I don't have a mother like?", I said, Okay, I didn't say nothing. And you know, it's a Mother's Day jewelry box. So I put it underneath my box. I never worked on it again.

Jonathan Cortez 1:19:45

How did that make you feel?

Marcos de Leon 1:19:49

I didn't feel bad. so when it came in May with may 18 is Mother's Day, I. Just miss Arman came over. She says, Why aren't you working on your box? Because she had found it in my desk. You know, it was just the felt was stuck. Nothing else was done. This is, you know, I don't have my mother, Miss, Miss Arman, and she made me feel bad. "Well I didn't know that". So, you know, there's gonna get a grade for this, but Ms Arman told her not to grade me, just just that could never happen. You know what she did? She took me shopping for clothes. The student teacher took me downtown, took me to scarlbros, took me to Montgomery Ward, used to be there, and bought me some clothes.

Jonathan Cortez 1:20:58

How did that feel? Feel good.

Marcos de Leon 1:21:01

She said, she apologized. I said, you don't have to do this for me. So no, no, no, I, she knew we were poor. You know how I found out how poor I was? When I got locked up. I was in the fifth grade, and I started skipping school. I missed 42 days. Then I got sick, you know, 42 days, week, year, week there, I got sick, and I went to the nurse, to the nurse, sick. "I'm sick". "Okay, Marcus, let me use lozenges. Go lay in the back and rest me. You feel better". "You got you got fever you're 99 fever, But go lay down." And then Mr. Garcia was a truant officer for possible showed up. "Is that? Is that Marco de Leon back there? Yeah. Well, he's been missing last school", he took me in, took me South got on South Congress took me to June at home and locked me up for a week.

Jonathan Cortez 1:22:17

Yeah. What was that experience like?

Marcos de Leon 1:22:21

The first night, I kicked the door till I got tired, they liked it. They went to the restroom, took shower, and they locked me up, gave me some clothes, took all my clothes off and locked me up for truancy. Didn't tell my father till later. Yeah, I said, Didn't the old days. He was after me. He actually, I finally went down to the waller creek where I used to hide to find my my hideout, the truancy officer, or your dad, this truant officer. My dad didn't know nothing about this. He'd leave at four o'clock in the morning. He came home at six. He come with three or four in the afternoon. He didn't know.

Jonathan Cortez 1:23:07

When did you find out?

Marcos de Leon 1:23:10

As they got locked up, the union got me out. I've spent a week. I've spent the third night, the third day I was there, I had a fight night, I caused there was a guy a gabacho, Anglo guy, one of them, we were watching Bugs Bunny. He said, "No, the long Rangers on" "No, no. We watching Long Ranger". He wanted bugs bunny. So he changed the channel. We had three channels, two channels at Austin, and I went and changed it back to the Long Ranger. He got down. So the second time he got down, I kicked him in the butt. I mean, I got in good, my right foot smack. He just jumped on me. But he was bigger than me, and they came and separated and said, "Who started it" "me" "Why marcus" "Because he was changing the channel". I got solitary confinement for two days. They locked me up. I didn't mind, I had my own restroom. I didn't have to share with nobody.

Jonathan Cortez 1:24:07

How old were you?

Marcos de Leon 1:24:10

I was in fifth grade, so I got I'm older than ever. So, seven, so 7,8,9, 10,11, I was 11, and I was locked up for a week, but this is what happened, though, after I got out, they gave my clothes back, Miss Martinez, I think that's her name, who worked there. She sewed everything up. She threw away my underwear because they were full of holes, she said, but I saw my pants. Patch aqui, aqui, my shirt. My shirt was to be pocket. It was a patch. Then she gave my coat. I had a coat, all right. Had patches on the elbow, patches here, patches on the inside. I. I said, we can't buy any clothes so, I just stitch them

up for you. That's when I saw myself. It's like looking in the mirror. What does that mean? That I knew I was poor.

Jonathan Cortez 1:25:17

the patches, or the experience?

Marcos de Leon 1:25:18

The experience, watching the patches, looking at the patches. I knew I was real poor, you know? And then when I... in junior high, when I got when I got hit, I wasn't wearing any underwears because I didn't have any I remember that. But that's your life, right?

Jonathan Cortez 1:25:43

What were, what do you feel like the expectations of the teachers at Palm were for the students?

Marcos de Leon 1:25:51

I think a lot of the teachers that my teachers, that I had, some were very hard. Some cared. Some did not. But I think that it was the teaching job. And now there were mainly Mexican Americans, very few Anglo, no blacks, but there were Chicanos and and, and the attitude has to be, was for many years, and still was, even to my son at Austin High was, "we don't know if they can learn". It's always been. We don't know, we gotta do away a lot of their ways of life, the way they think, to teach in the American way. That's what they were taught here at the university, Texas State, any university you mean teachers, teachers, teaching the American way. I know a lot of teachers would like to teach cultural they would like to do, but they were not allowed. I think Ms Schulte was very sensitive to that. She would allow us to celebrate Mexican holidays and even talk about it in the classroom. We don't know where else teaches like that that. I think that a lot of them meant real well to do that. They know what they have a curriculum they have to teach has nothing to do with cultural it has to do with society, expecting you to be be a full fledged society when you graduate and become a part of the American society. Think that was what it was, because what we learned was that was all about Anglos and history, but the Texas history was, you know, the governor is this, and we fought in the Alamo. We became Republic. We were a country before state. And then, nah nah nah....

Jonathan Cortez 1:27:33

do you think that the Anglo teachers and Chicano teachers or Mexicans? Do you think they had, they had different expectations of you all, or do you think all the teachers had the same

Marcos de Leon 1:27:44

I thought later on, Ms Herrera, who became a part of Hortensia's life, my wife's life, and we knew her. They fought hard to take care of us, to keep us in class, to keep us in school. They were our advocates ,that I know of. They advocated for us, and they they later, I thanked her. She loved Hortensia as one of her students for characters and family. Ms Herrera, was her family was has a legacy. Mendez is her sister. Mendez middle school. She's part of that family. And we want something for Herrera. Miss Reyes nothing there at the school, for the school district, she was a very they're both very kind, kind teachers, and they took care of us that, you know, they didn't want us to get kicked out, though it was easy to kick us out.

Jonathan Cortez 1:28:41

Do you know anybody, any students who got kicked out?

Marcos de Leon 1:28:43

Yeah, Juanillo got kicked out. Either way he came back to school. One of my nieces got kicked out.

Jonathan Cortez 1:28:56

Do you know the reasonings?

Marcos de Leon 1:28:59

No. you know it's probably because they they resisted. I would resist to a point, then I quit.

Jonathan Cortez 1:29:05

I want to go back to really quickly. How are you doing? Do you need to use the restroom or anything, or no, no, get into the cold. Can

Marcos de Leon 1:29:13

It's getting a little cold. My wife was right she brought a shawl. Do you have a jacket downstairs, or anything? No, I came like this thinking it would be cool. Okay, I'm a hot person.

Jonathan Cortez 1:29:28

Commissioner De Leon, I want to take you back just a little when you said you missed 54 days of school.

Marcos de Leon 1:29:36

Well something like that. 42, 54 days.

Jonathan Cortez 1:29:37

What were you doing?

Marcos de Leon 1:29:41

Fishing. trying to fish in the cold? Where were you fishing? I was just going around. I don't know. I just hit a snag in my classroom, school, anyone? It was a total 52 days. But it was like week, two weeks, three weeks, something like that today, four days. The total was close to 40, 50, days to school that I skipped. Truancy like you know that. Yeah, but they gotta talk to me, buddy. I would just hanging around, you know, living off the street, you know,

Who would you skip with?

myself? Something about myself and

Jonathan Cortez 1:30:11

your brothers would still go to school.

Marcos de Leon 1:30:15

They go to school, school, okay, oh, I go to class and just skip out. I've had a class close the close the cafeteria is easy, just to go out, go through dairies. Where was the cafeteria located? It was just the corner. It was in if you look at a square corner, this is east, that's west. We're on the west side of school next. It was a superior dairies factory that make milk, superior dairies milk. It was easy to sneak out. Just hide in the trucks in the way how you got down Red River. You go down Red River, go the shops. You know, we do within blocks to go to to, you know, woodworth, you know, Scarborough's, you know, Mike bear pharmacy, you know, go fishing. Go fishing. Go in the store, you know, eat some candy, stuff, syrup. You just, just skip school. We don Jim dandies about two blocks down and going underneath the water Creek. Go Jim Danies buy coke go down the creek. Just head on down to the river. We all knew that area, rainy Street was just, you know, next st Mason guild with where they killed chickens, was just down the block.

Jonathan Cortez 1:31:19

What do you remember about the palm school building? How do you what do you remember about the bricks the walls?

Marcos de Leon 1:31:26

Well, palm school building was, it was a wooden floors, and the hard walls, solid brick walls and Mason Dolan, the big windows, the big doors, the windows, no air condition. I didn't have air condition till I was my last year in high school,

Jonathan Cortez 1:31:49

at home or in schools?

Marcos de Leon 1:31:53

In schools, UJH, all open windows, fans. I used to love the fans. I couldn't hear the teacher no more. So if I missed my homework, id go "I couldn't hear you". So, no, I was all no air conditioning, and it was all open windows in the summer and cold winter, even though the radiators were old fashioned, you burn yourself, you forget they're hot, and you get closer, you burn your skin on them. Yeah, that's that kind of school. I mean, it was an old school. It was old.

Jonathan Cortez 1:32:21

When was the school building built? Do you know?

Marcos de Leon 1:32:26

1800s, 1892 something like that? It was a prominent Anglo school for many years. You know the only school, Mexican school was Zavala. Hortensia, her story was her mother took her and said "No, she's gonna learn English", moved her back to palm. So they moved residency so they could be close to palm, you know. So by that time I was there that this students would still say, because we speak English, they're sent to Zavala. That was the Mexican school, you know. They were not integrated, but Metz was our Anglo school. We have Metz. There you have Zavala, you have palm, you know, schools, but there were some were segregated, so we actually couldn't go, because we live so close to it that

they, they allow us to go to palm I was like eight blocks when I walk. Always walked until I had the car accident, I was I always walk to school. We never, we never had a car. My father never drove a car. The day he died was 85 in 1995 and he never drove a car in his life. We learned to drive cars ourselves.

Jonathan Cortez 1:33:45
at what age?

Marcos de Leon 1:33:47
shows what? 20, 19, I drove a truck into the lake. I didn't know stick shift. I didn't know you.

Jonathan Cortez 1:33:54 Whose car was it?

Marcos de Leon 1:33:55
It was a, it was a, I was working at the dude ranch, and it was a ranch. It didn't have no license plate, nothing over. You know, it's all beat up, but they use it for on the ranch. They won't put in the street.

Jonathan Cortez 1:34:06
Do you know that you've now told now, now there are two cars in the lake that belong to your family? Yeah,

Marcos de Leon 1:34:13
that's me. That's my adventures. I've been so dumb. But he's like, I gotta know, you know it's like, I gotta try it out. Yeah, not being afraid from public office, not being afraid to do that. Some people just don't want to do that. Do what run for public office. Then you can do better than that. Guy. I'm gonna run and put with your mouth. But shoot whatever that saying is, put your mouth out, whatever" I do it" didn't know what the hell I was getting into.

Jonathan Cortez 1:34:46
How long did it take you to walk from home to the palm school? You should take

Marcos de Leon 1:34:52
from from Eighth Street? Yeah. Take 5-10, minutes. It was, you walk fast when you're a kid. Rainey was.. I was late to school everyday when I live in Rainey, it was like like you can throw a rock and hit the school, right? I was always late to school, always late. Because I just, It just take me five minutes to get there. No, get up and lay, you run, you come. I'll be running in the summer, I'll be all sweaty in the May. I run to school and I late because you live right there? You know? We lived at 80 rainey, 86 rainey so we're like, 1,2,3, blocks from the school. Did

Jonathan Cortez 1:35:27
you know your neighbors? Did you know the people? Yeah,

Marcos de Leon 1:35:29

The Adrana's, the Desmas, the Castillos, the Anglos, the martinettes, the Anglo that lived there on Rainey. We knew they're as poor as us. So could relate I guess. We had no blacks living in our neighborhood.

Jonathan Cortez 1:35:49

Was there a school bell at the Palm school?

Marcos de Leon 1:35:52

I don't remember. I'm 54 I don't think they needed a 54

Jonathan Cortez 1:35:55

I'm wondering if you would. I'm wondering if because, because you're talking about how you live so close, you could throw a rock. I'm wondering if you would be, if you would have been able to hear the school bell from.

Marcos de Leon 1:36:05

Nah, I just told you guys be there by seven, 7, 7:30, 8 o'clock. And the only alarm we had was, was ourselves. One time I bought an alarm clock, wind it up, you know, it didn't last very long. We just wake ourselves up. We run to school, you know, getting run the Desmonds, the strands and Castillo, the Martinez we would all be late to school. It was terrible.

Jonathan Cortez 1:36:30

What is the most joyous memory you have of the palm school where you experience joy?

Marcos de Leon 1:36:37

It had to be the second sixth grade the most joy, because I learned a lot from her, and I was able to participate. It was lead some things. She allowed me to lead some some prayer groups. Sometimes just lead the pledge of allegiance. I never got to lead the pledge of allegiance, only the anglos at first and later on, the smarter kids, you know. But Miss Schulte allowed me to do that. She gave me that. That was the most joy. I mean, I had fun when I was younger and struggled. In first grade, I struggled. Second grade, I struggled. Third grade, It was horrible. Why? And in third grade, I had an old German teacher, Miss menn, M, E N N She was bad. I don't know why she didn't like me. She's guessing my pr.... jokes and stuff. That's been me since I was a kid. That's my personality that never going to that's never going to change. Two things happened. One, we had this cartoon about blood all caught Disney made about my blood cells and how they travel, and I was to meet her like frijoles. So I was calling frijoles beans, right? She got mad. She put me in a corner. Didn't see it, but I had a stick pin. So I put a stick pin on the map, and I was just looking into the map. So I gotta talk about it later. You, I choose the you. But the worst experience with her was during Christmas, and we're gonna exchange gifts. And by then, my first year, I didn't know about this, right? I didn't have anything, so I found this brand new toy they had, but it was a jeep, 1949 Jeep with no wheels. So I wrapped it up and gave it to my Anglo friend, Ronald Bennet. Ronald Bennet was the only angle friend that I made friends that stay with me forever, even when I ran for public office, Ronald Bennet got my car. I'm so so bad. I got a coloring book second grade. I found a coloring book and I thought I checked it. Nobody page. So I gave it to Yolanda. She gave it back to me. He says, this is, this was used as one page. Someone, I cut a purple

flower. I was totally embarrassed. Here's the third grade, Miss Min. Mean, teacher said, so I know she I didn't have, I didn't we didn't have anything. There's no way I could get a gift. So I think I had picked Christina's name. So I went back to Miss Min and said, Look, I don't have I can't get it to him. I don't have any. We're poor, you know. We just don't have it. My father said, Don't do it. So I told her, and she said, Who has Marcus? Daniel's name? Better over to my name up through the trash. He didn't give a gift to nobody. So I need to give this name somebody else. So she didn't do it well. So she gave. The guy, and looking someone said to my chair, damn. I thought so. This is a true story. Hector De Leon, who's not related, and I'll say his name because he knows, you know, maybe I shouldn't mention his name anyway, this guy said he that they had money, and he'll give me his gift. We're gonna celebrate the 20th of December. So twin shows up. You just a knife, a plastic knife. This you can stab, but it goes inside the sheet. It's plastic, but you stab as a spring, and it just goes in your it goes inside the sheet, so it's no problem. So Webb and I remember Gutierrez was there, and he was with me in Rios, Frank Leah, and he said, I went to get it now. He says, No, I changed my mind. He said, No, you said you were going to give me the present, your present, because you get a lot of presents. And in Rio, the other says, Yeah, you said you could, Marcus can have it. And I'm grabbing, and he's grabbing it back. I'm grabbing and he grabbing back, and then I hit him, hit him in the eye like this. Busted it. Bust his eye. You know, he's putting me after Christmas. He and his mother show up at the school. Either was Christmas or the next day, his mother shows up, and what happened? Her son got beat up. Why did she take care of his man? His man said, It's him. It's him, It's Marcus. So I sat together with him, and she said, What? Why did my son? Then I told the story, and she looked at her son, tell me the truth. Is that true, he goes, You know what she did? She started to feed me. My brother after school, his mom invited us to come eat during the Christmas holidays. What was her name? I don't know. Just Miss De Leon. I remember mother's name, but she invited us to eat, and we ate. We became friends. That's the story. But Miss Min, she would not support me, or not just would not. It was a sad it was real sad. It was not a good Christmas. My father would celebrate Chris. You know why? Right? Right? Because she my mother died during Christmas, so he wouldn't set, but he will give us some toy sometimes. My brother, Frank, older brother, convinced my father that we we can have a tree in our room, not in the living room. He didn't want, he didn't want those lights. Anyone remembered. So I know that my father fell in love with my mother. I know he loved her a lot because he never got remarried. So that's A Christmas Story, the experience that I have that could, you know, traumatize the kid, but, ah, nah, nah. I just that. Just took it. I just because kind things happen. So, so you see what I'm growing got people I think I do bad things and think people are bad to me, but there's always somebody that's nice to me and says, Oh, don't worry about it. Okay, you're human being. Those things happen. There's some good in you. So we'll take that, then I show you some kindness, and when my students would graduate, and some are lawyers, some of you has a law firm. Some are doctors, some are nurses and teachers and stuff. What I always told my students, I said, "Do you want to thank me? Because they will say, Oh, we love you. Mr. De Leon. I said, Well, what I've done for you do for somebody else. Do not keep the knowledge that you have. Do not keep your experience that you have, share with other students, share with other people. And if you, if you ever make it, if you're a big falutin person, and you're walking in a hotel and someone opens the door for you, you say, thank you for opening your door. You have a great thank you for your job. Without you, I couldn't get in this building. And if you're asked to make a speech in any hotel or any restaurant or anything, the first thing you do, you say, let's give applause to the staff who clean this room for us, and this a wonderful room. Let's thank the people who's given us the food.

Let's give them a clap. Then you honor who who asked you to come." That's what I used to teach my students, because that's what I was taught.

Jonathan Cortez 1:44:28

That's something you learned from the neighborhood?

Marcos de Leon 1:44:32

The neighborhood, the people who took care of me, the people who took care of people, people who made food for us, the guy janitor who told me, I have a great job, but you don't want to be me. Was it at the Palm school? Yeah, Mr. Martins,

Jonathan Cortez 1:44:48

would you talk to the janitors often?

Marcos de Leon 1:44:51

I would tell them hello, or they would see me messing around, and they be outside the classroom discipline because time out, because I've been onery. He'd be sweeping floor. And he said "Ah, Marcus, what did you do today?" He says "Que hiciste, no mijo, no vete para atras a tu clase"

Jonathan Cortez 1:45:09

Did Mr. Martinez live in the palm neighborhood?

Marcos de Leon 1:45:15

I think he did. He had to be, he worked there. I don't remember ever see him having a car. I don't know.

Jonathan Cortez 1:45:20

What about lunch? Ladies?

Marcos de Leon 1:45:23

They were sweet. They were only Anglo for a while, then later, Mexicanos came to work Chicanos. But they were nice they were on, they were disciplined. Some were mean. Some were like "get the food". "What you don't want this? You better eat it".

Jonathan Cortez 1:45:38

What was the food like?

Marcos de Leon 1:45:39

For me? It was always good, bland, but good. I mean, you know, eating tortillas in, you know, cheese, queso and atole in the morning. My father would always make oatmeal in the morning, make sure we had oatmeal. Atole in the morning, oatmeal every morning he would make before he went to work, make tortillas, make sure we had tortillas and cheese. Later we got food. So we ate the cafeteria food. Some people didn't like it. But when you don't have anything, you know it's good. So maybe my brothers complained about it. But I, I had our ate, and even ate extra stuff if the guys didn't want any. You know?

Jonathan Cortez 1:46:16

Commissioner De Leon, you've told me multiple points where you you said, you know, you realized you were poor, right through the patches, through maybe this incident with Christmas the toys, I'm wondering, what were instances in which you realized you were brown, or that you realized you were Mexican or Chicano?

Marcos de Leon 1:46:35

Well, when I walked, we walked into a store in South Austin. We have mainly been hung around downtown, me and brother and I went to the store in South Congress. And that's we were must have been about 11, 12, years old, and we met Jerry Gerardo. He was called Jerry for me, that's the name they gave us Marcos and Jerry not ger-, they couldn't say Gerardo so they call him Jerry. Anyway, we went to the store, and the guy told us, he says, "What are you Mexicans doing here?" And we didn't identify as Mexicano, as Mexicans, that's just something, just so we said "what do you mean?" He says "you guys are supposed to be in the back with the trash?" Ugh. Jerry it made Jerry real, Gerardo real mad, you know, we just cussed him out and walked out. That's when you felt it, you know. And because by then, most of the anglos were gone, and most of, the few Anglos that lived in our neighborhood, like on rainy street, they were nice people. They got on Garfield Street, they're very nice, and we just got along. But you begin to feel it. You're Brown, you're a Mexican. We would never called Americans they called us Mexicans. "Spics", I have a poem about that. They call us, yeah, it's called "500 years". They call us everything but human beings and what they call us "savages". It was a "sausage", then it was "spics" "brownies", "Greasers", "wet backs", all these names they call us, but they never call us human beings. But just imagine if we could share the beans with them. What would they call us? They have to call us human beings. It's a long poem, but that's the short of it.

Jonathan Cortez 1:48:35

And I find that really interesting, that you know part of what you got in trouble for in the third grade was this, this joke about beans? Was this joke about frijoles, and blood cells? And I'm curious, was the teacher upset that you made the joke, or that you were speaking Spanish? I

Marcos de Leon 1:48:53

I think both. You know I was making fun of the blood the pellets, the white blood cells? "It look like frijoles!" "Yeah!", everybody laughs.

Jonathan Cortez 1:49:05

You mentioned earlier about square dancing, line dancing, what was PE like? What was playing at the Palm school? What kind of activities and games would you all play?

Marcos de Leon 1:49:15

Well, we, generally, we in PE. You do exercises. The PE teacher would take us out. We play kickball softball. That's about kickball, dodge ball. You know, those were the kind of games we played. And once in a while they would, they would do some do some dancing to the class. And I loved it so much that the teacher just, ah, she got somebody that loves it. I'm gonna bring it back again. You know, "Marcus, will you lead us again?" "Yeah! Como no!"

Jonathan Cortez 1:49:43

And then you get in trouble at church.

Marcos de Leon 1:49:47

And then I get in trouble at church. The word would get out to Dr Paredes and miss. There was a lady, Hortensia knows her name. She just passed away about three years ago. She's a very good lady. Was one of my teachers. Uh. I can't remember her name. I'll remember her name later, but she was appointed, and she served the elderly in the neighborhood. So we worked, later on, we worked together as County Commissioner I would use her to bring people to send elders to her. Good, she was one of my teachers. In Iglesia Baptista, pre kindergarten.

Jonathan Cortez 1:50:23

Do you remember? What was it like leaving the palm school? Was there a graduation? You know, you repeated the sixth grade? What was your last year at the Palm school like?

Marcos de Leon 1:50:32

I don't remember, I'd like to go to but I can't remember. It was like, I knew I was going to go to junior high, and it was like we all celebrated. We all ran out.

Jonathan Cortez 1:50:44

and did you feel ready to go to junior high?

Marcos de Leon 1:50:48

Yeah, I was ready. I was more than ready. It was what I was what 61 and 47 I'm born in 47, 13 years old, 14, yeah, 14, I was old. I graduated from high school I was 19. When I went to college, I was with 17, 18, year olds. I was the old man in the class when I went back to school in 1977 I was what 40? 47 77, 33. 33 with 18 year olds and 17 year olds and 20 year olds. I was old. I was, I'm older than average, you know, older than average, I said, that was the myth to the, you know, well, "you're the myth to go to college, right?" Because not everybody goes to college. Well, I was not. I was I was not only the myth, but I was the I used to say "I was the ghost of the myth". I ain't supposed to be here, but that's always been part of my life. That's always been late. I was, I'm older than than I supposed to be when I'm with you in school,

Jonathan Cortez 1:51:59

And once you left palm what was, you know, you mentioned, education has always been very important to you. How did palm in your experience at the Palm school influence the rest of your educational life?

Marcos de Leon 1:52:12

To try more things. I took German as a foreign language in my freshman year, seventh grade at UJH I took choir, couldn't sing. I can't sing. I cannot, I don't have a tune. I can't sing. I can't play an instrument, okay, all right. I can't compose anything, but I can dance. That I can do. So when I went to UJH, I wanted, I wanted foreign language, Spanish. "No ya se Espanol. I don't need that". But again, have Miss Weber, not miss Weber, Miss Weber. Does she? None? Thought so. and I lasted seven weeks,

eight weeks, nine weeks. Nein. Nine. "You have a Mexican accent. That's not gonna work for German. Out of my class", she threw me out. So I went and took Spanish with Miss Newman. But I actually took German. Think about that. Why would I do that? Foreign language. I thought it would be so cool to learn it something totally different from mine. That's part a thing that I learned from Palm, all that learning that took empowerment, being diverse in my own self, and being open to different things that I think that's part of the nurture that I had in Ms Schulte telling me, go ahead, you know, go ahead and experiment that. And I took German as a language. And I can, I know how to count in German, say a few words. I wanted to take French, but they wouldn't let me. This is how you doing Spanish? Because I did terrible. I met a, b, barely a, b, good. I spoke by then. I post slang. We put, we put a, we put on the board. I put on the board "te sales" T, E. She says, "What do you mean? Tell sale". And she goes, "who wrote tell sale", because you see it, s, a, l, e, and then Gutierrez says "that's 'te sales', you know what that means?", what "that you're out of bounds" and you've been it was terrible. It was by then, by time I was in junior high, "hey ponte trucha watche la jura". Know what that means? "Be careful about the cops." You know, we spoke like that. My Spanish was gone. It's all slang. It was all pachuco. I grew up in the Barrio.

Jonathan Cortez 1:54:56

I'm interested to hear about your I. You know, after palm school, after you know, UJH, after high school. I'm really interested to hear about your political participation, whether it be in like, the early aughts of the Chicano movement, or you know, your your your run for commissioner and and really trying to understand how those moments in your life were were impacted by that your early your early career, your early childhood, you know, especially the palm school kind of

Marcos de Leon 1:55:30

a senior. In my senior year, the threat was Vietnam, and during that period, Cesar Chavez visit Austin, and we were allowed to go out early to go see him at the Capitol. He made a big influence in me.

Jonathan Cortez 1:55:48

What do you remember about that day?

Marcos de Leon 1:55:52

First, he looked like my father. He looked just like my father. And and he said something, "education is like a ratchet". He said, "If you get educated, I got educated that I know how to help my farm workers. It's like a ratchet. Once you push it, you can pull it back. So education, the more education, the more like a ratchet, the more you get. And you can't, you're not going to lose it. You can't push it back because the ratchet works. You get locked. You're locked in that ticket" that's and that just kind of stayed in my mind. You know, that's one of his great sayings that people quote sometimes. And I understood that they made an impression on me. And Fernando Luna came to me and said, this a new college been building; clean. I knew I wasn't going to get accepted anywhere here, like I tell my student later, I told my my students who were going to college, says "I was the top 25 my class". "Oh, really? Mr. De Leon, what were" "of the Cs!" they go?" Whaaa!", you know, because that was true because I wanted to go to school. I didn't want to go to Vietnam. I could have gone in the Air Force. I could have gone like my brother, and avoided going into the army or whatever. But I wanted to go to school. This man said, that's, that's the best thing you can do for yourself. It stuck in my head. So Fernando said,

let's go. I got my father's 1950 Pontiac. Let's get out there. So we hit it out there, and we got into college in the fall of 1967 so those things employ me, and that was political. The word "Chicano" like it says "Chicano power" here it's people ask people, "What does Chicano means"? It means, "we see no borders". It is a political term. And I remember in 1990 Dr Paredes was being honored in The Valley for his name, and he was everybody was..., and a little girl walked up to him and they were filming this, they walked up to him and said, "Mr. Paredes, what does Chicano mean?" He said, "It's a political term. It means that we're going to stand up for ourselves. That's what Chicano means. It means you're going to stand up, you're not going to sit down, you're going to stand up, fighting what we believe about of our people. That's what Chicano means". This is about like a 10 year old girl, he's telling this too. And I believe that, and that started my political, being politicalized, accepting the word "Chicano", if you notice, I use it a lot, being brown and proud, knowing your indigenous roots, knowing that your blood is from here, and part of your blood is from Europe, where you're mixed, but you're from here. So I take that part, that part of me, and I got my politicalized, and now when, even when, when, in the 70s, I was involved with Hortensia, with the boycott, the grape boycott, we organized here in Austin then we went to East Austin. And we visit all, all those people that had Gallo wines. One time we were demonstrating down on Congress Street, picketing and the cops came, I said "Hortensia, you better get in the car, your dad would kill me if you get arrested." and they came up to us, and because we knew our rights. You know, I think the farm workers, this was said in Supreme Court to say that we have the right to demonstrate on public on private roads. I really think that. I think our people solidified on that 14th amendment that we have the right on public, to be able to demonstrate as long as it's a public road. It doesn't belong to nobody. It belongs to all of us. So we are right. We can be on the sidewalk, because that's an easement created by the City of Austin or the County, gives us the right to demonstrate. I know they were beat up a lot earlier on doing the farm workers strike. That was political. But I really believe that our people created that that part of the amendment that allows us to public demonstrate, the right, you know, freedom of speech and all that. and you understand that then that cost me to get real political and get in the movement in the 70s, and then in the 70s is when I really picked it up, more than 68 or 69.

Jonathan Cortez 2:00:30

want to come back to this, but I want to, I want to, I feel like I missed a big part, which was you meeting Hortensia. How did you all meet? What is what would you

Marcos de Leon 2:00:40

how we have been involved, since we married, since we met together. I met her at my brother's house. Was also being interviewed. My two brothers, not literally, with my older brother, my little brother, he was living next door to her, and I was a carpenter. We were carpenters, but this is, you know, early, early November, there's not much work. I think we had just finished the strike. I belong to union corporate local 1266 carpenters United. You know, pipe fitters and carpenters of America. It's 12, union, 1266 and I was a member of that and I was uni... I was we were both cubs who have been trained to be General carpenters, and there was no work so we were both home. So I had \$2 in my pocket. Then I had my 1962 bell air Chevrolet, blue Chevrolet, and I was going to go down to campus to go see a movie. The Varsity was just \$1 on day time, mid time, mid day, day time. This is about close to 12 o'clock. So I visit my brother said do you wanna go he said "no, no, no, I don't want to go. I gotta stay home, clean up. Mary's gonna come out". Said, Okay. Then I saw through to the window. I saw

Hortensia next door. Said, "Hey, who's that?" "That's my neighbor. Name is Hardy". That's what they call her. "Well introduce me" He said "nah, nah, they're real strict. She's going to the university." "Let's go talk to her come on". So he finally relents and we go outside and he says "Hi Hardy, this is my brother Marcos". So I walked to her, she had a purse. She had a hair cut done by clue, the movie clue. And Jane Fonda, she has a layer cut. She has same hair cut, cut that way. And I saw her purse, it said, "Who is Gonzalo Barrientos?" Because Gonzalo Barrientos was running, was thinking about running for representatives. And I knew Gonzalo we used to be neighbors back in the 60s there in South Austin. So I knew him. I said, "I know him". She said, "oh you do you know Gonzalo?" I says, "yeah, he's thinking about running... for" "Yeah, he's, I work for Gary Guterrez." She said, "I'm his only secretaries. And he's, they're good friends, and he's going to support him", and that's whatPOLITICS. Pinche politica se sabe. Right? It was politics. So we talk, and so "where are you going?" "I have to go back to campus." "Well, I'm going to campus. I'm going down the Varsity theater I can just drop you off." "I don't let me ask my mom". So she went inside and said, "Oh, it's Marco's brother," so "it's okay. He's going to campus". So she we got in the car, we started talking. I parked the car, I walked her to where she's going. She said "Oh, you know, what are you hungry?" Said, "Yeah, but I'll be honest, I only have \$2" "Nah, I'll buy for you" because she had a student card. So we went to the commons, you know right here. We ate, we start talking. Came out, "oh I never seen the tower". "Oh, let me take you to the tower". So we went to the tower. We didn't go out, we just talked. We ended up walking, talking all the way to the LBJ Library. She missed all her classes. This is like one o'clock. It's four o'clock. We're going to see the museum. We go, "Let's go to Museum". Went to LBJ, we got the tour. She still has the original pamphlet that she brought in 1971, she kept it. She still has it. It's what, 53 years. Then I said, "You know, I have to go to work". I also was running the very first drive by Mexican food for Los Cazulas. We had little house. He bought a little house. He rented a house, and he brang food over there, I would set it out to go drive by. Only had two tables in the whole place.

Jonathan Cortez 2:03:15

Where was this?

Marcos de Leon 2:03:20

Right there on South Lamar, because the Cazuelas is not there no more but it was South Lamar near Blue Bonnet, and he was closer to where the big building is now, where they used to be the, they used to be the anyway, the draft house anyway, so south, south Lamar, and that's how we met, and we talked, and I got her name. Says, "Can I have a.." She stayed at the little field dorm. Dorm says, so I put this, I thought I put dorm and the phone number, her phone number, well, she kept that too, you know what it says? Says "drone". My English, I didn't know how to spell. I didn't know how to spell. And as is, after 53 years, she can't stand I can't spell. But I wrote drone and I put her name, but she has to have that. So then, for three days, I didn't call her, and I used to work with Peace Corps, and they were here in Austin, and they were in Austin, East Austin, doing their work, and they wanted to go to UT campus, so I went, and I was nervous the three get three Anglo women, and there with them. And what if, Hortensia sees me with them? She knows the story, and so she knows that "boy if I had met you I would never talk to you again." So I was trying to get, "oh, we done yet, girls? So we done yet." "Oh, let me look at this. Let me come on, Marcus." So we they were good people. There are good people. Very good people.

Jonathan Cortez 2:06:06

So would you say that your political consciousness and your relationship with Hortensia kind of happened at the same time?

Marcos de Leon 2:06:14

Yes, because she was very political. She was Chicano. I mean, she was from Mexico, from Tampico, but she was been interesting that she was 35 years old. She's been here. She became a citizen. She was five years old. She's a nationalized citizen. So she was, she calles herself a Chicano. And that started with her, and then went on campus when I found out what she was majoring in. And then they became, then they became political fight to create the Mexican, CMAS program. It was mayo, and I really couldn't join Mayo because I wasn't student here, because I wasn't I was just dating her,

Jonathan Cortez 2:06:56

but in the larger Austin community, or even specifically within the palm neighborhood, what kinds of activity, political activity, were there around, around the 70s, Chicano movement at this

Marcos de Leon 2:07:06

there was, there it was. They were involved politically was Richard Moya in the 60s to get elected county commissioner. We were involved with Don Trevino to get elected city council. We were involved with Gus Garcia to be elected to the school board in Austin and those are the early, early 60s and 70s, the political we got involved and it was Gonzalo Barrientos to run for state representative. So those, those were, there's pictures of us with Gonzalo talking to us that we got his hat on, and all that we're about with his campaign, with John Trevinos campaign, with Richard Moya's campaign, Richard Moya taught us how to knock signs down. He's dead now, political stuff, how to do the pickup truck, so that kind of thing. But we learned those things politically, we got involved politically that way, understanding about running for candidates, supporting candidates, canvassing, walking neighborhoods, all that early on, in 60s and the 70s.

Jonathan Cortez 2:08:07

When did you decide that to run public office? Yeah, when did you and how did you make that we

Marcos de Leon 2:08:13

were I was involved with East Townlake citizens. We worked on the Barrio, getting rid of the boat races. And after boat races, we want to develop the park.

Jonathan Cortez 2:08:23

Can you say something about the boat races?

Marcos de Leon 2:08:27

The boat races were very loud. My son, our son, says that's why he never took a nap, because it kept him up. 73 he was born in 73. They used to trash the neighborhoods. They Oh, there. It was bad.

Jonathan Cortez 2:08:50

What are they? What were they?

They were boat races they would come every summer, three times, and run the boats real loud, jet power, huge, loud. But the people show up. What they did was very disrespectful. All La Raza live right up to the east town, like East town lake. Right up to Chicano Park, which is now every right there on Segovia street. And they would come and they would trash, and they would pee in the yard, defecate, throw up, and then they would block driveways. They called the cop. The cop would say, doesn't, "you know, move, please move something" they would move. We we could have called wreckers. We didn't know that. But there was just ugly and disrespected the people. They would call us name, they call him "wet backs" and stuff like that. It was just ugly. Just the ugly people. There were nice people show up and join the races and go home, but then there were ugly people who just didn't care, you know, and it just got real bad, and we couldn't do nothing. We couldn't get a park there. We couldn't do nothing because of the boat races. We couldn't build nothing there. We couldn't put nothing up because they were teared, down put fences and tear it up. So there was demonstration. And the last demonstration was in 77, they knew we were coming. It was set up. They beat up Paul. They beat up Sam. And they beat up Adela. They beat up Guerra. She was pregnant with Viria. They beat up some of the guys. And the one cop was Duplo. He hated us. He's a bad cop, real bad cop. And he finally got disciplined, but all the charges were dropped,

Jonathan Cortez 2:10:23

and this was while you all were protesting the boat

Marcos de Leon 2:10:24

yes, and, and, you know, involved politically, I wasn't...I was, I would show up at meetings with the suit, with a blue suit, I was mad with the red tie that was going to be cooperative with the blue tie, and I'll be the ones getting educated. I was going to college, and then, and I was the blue that was. And then I thought about running for office. This is back in the seven, but not really. And the boat races, it was a climax to find the City Council voted not to have them anymore, and that day of the demonstration, Paul Hernandez my good friend for 50 years, told me to go to work because I had had to go to work to pay for my education. I worked at 2j Hamburgers, so from 11 to two, so he told me to go and I knew why, later I knew why, they knew something's going to come down. And so I was at work when I heard they got beat up. It was a big fiasco. It was a big, big, you know, his picture is famous. It's shown all the time when the cops got him in there, and then he got nearly killed at the KKK demonstration later, the KKK demonstration that happened later, that's where he really got beat up by police. Paul and Maria Adela and Maria Limon got beat up by the cops, and film is all on video,

Jonathan Cortez 2:11:46

and the demonstration was against the kkk again. What do you remember? What year that was?

Marcos de Leon 2:11:51

79 I don't know. They all culminate together in the 70s. And maybe my wife probably knows. You can ask her later, but he was beat up from there. But going back to that part was after that happened, I went back to school and 79 and graduated, and we were asked to speak about Chicano movement to GT students. So me and Paul went and I parked near the Frank Irwin center before it was was 70. It was 79 early, and we're walking, and he told me this other guy was gonna run for office, and I just went off.

"Nah, ese otro no vale nada". "You know that guy's not been trained by like us, if anybody ran for city council from East Township, maybe somebody who's from here. You know" "why he's from here", "Ya but, yeah, but he's, he's been a professional. He's never he's never been in the trenches like we have, organizing and doing everybody and fighting for things in our neighborhood". "Ill do it" Paul says "tu lo haces?" "yeah, I'll run". "Are you sure?" "Yeah, ill run. Let me run, because he's good, but he's he's going to be eating up". Says "alright". It's 1979 so 1980 I ran for city council. Ran citywide, Gained, 22,000 votes. Not enough for run off, but enough to make the guy, Ron Mullen, pissed off at me, because he, they declared all the incumbents but him. Nine o'clock. And then finally, finally, nine o'clock they everybody. By seven, all the incumbents had won except for him. And by nine o'clock, they finally called his race that he won. He was pissed, he was mad. He was real mad at me for that. And I ran on. I ran. This is how I ran. I ran for the city of Austin. You know, let me share this with you. North Austin is doing very well, this and that, and then West Austin is the best. That's where all the money is, the big homes. You know, South Austin is doing all right. That child is like they are like children. My oldest son, oldest son, oldest daughter. This boy, he's struggling, but he's all right. He's South Austin. Still needs a lot of help. But my baby, East Austin, he's really in trouble. He needs a lot of help. So we need to take little things from each one and help East Austin bring it up with the rest. That's how I talked about East Austin. The truth. We don't have sidewalks. We are the we have dumps in our neighborhood, junkyards in our neighborhood. We have some of the best, the worst schools in our neighborhood. A lot of things we have in East Austin not being done yet. We all pay our taxes. We just won our first share. That's how my political term was. It says we had a three thing, you know, and I just can't remember right now what it was. We had a poster that said it was the most was important. And it's the most important is, is our neighborhood, our families, but most our children. And this didn't come from me. It came from rest. His soul Delgado. Martin Delgado. He's the one that said, "what's most important? Marco", then he went "hey that's a good slogan". So we took his slogan, put it in a poster, put my picture in the poster, boom and we garnered you know this word that this that happened when, when I was in North Austin campaign for city council, that guy said, "Wait a minute. It says, here you married to Hortensia Palmares for 16 years. What Why you she not De Leon? You De Leon?" That's, that's what happened that and I was in East northeast Austin, in an Anglo library.

Jonathan Cortez 2:15:53

for the camera. Can you, can you say?

Marcos de Leon 2:15:55

Well, we said, I told the guys. He said, "Why are ya'll really married? Why is she De Leon? Why is she Palomares and you are De Leon?" This is because I said... I snapped. I said, "Well, she kept her maiden name and I kept mine". The cheers from the women, would clap, "Yay!". I didn't I just, sometimes you just quick on your feet and Paul used to say, "sometimes I like it. Sometimes I don't like it when you speak off your feet," because I did a lot of that. I just talked the way I feel. You know?

Jonathan Cortez 2:16:26

talk to me about running for Commissioner when you when you were elected,

Marcos de Leon 2:16:29

that was... I had ran before I ran two there for council, for justice peace doesn't require law degree, and we barely lost. We lost like 300 votes. Then, for some reason, I ran for constable. Friends of mine encourage me and I lost to Margaret. But then Hank Gonzalez, we had campaigned for him to run against Richard Moore, and we won, but then he threw us out. My biggest was Hank. My biggest campaign free advertising was when he came to the headquarters and he got tired, he put his feet up on the desk, and then the news media showed up, and then he bought the when I walked in and let him know he took his feet off, I said, "No, leave them on. You got holes in your shoes, man". "What?" "Leave them on" until the camera came in, and I said, "Look, he's walked the neighborhood. He's got holes on his feet." It made him great. It was great, you know, it was just like, perfect. He had holes on shoes, you know, like you wear because he been walking, he never took him off. But that was the best thing. But then he got elected, then he threw us out, threw the barrio people out. You know, I ran all the precinct, four precincts in city and the county, and I had captains for every one of them. So when I got out, they left too. But he won anyway. He was terrible. So I ran against them. I told Paul on a run, "it's perfect. We can beat him", I said, and this is politically when they asked him about him, "would he win?" I said to the guy, "yeah, but you want my political opinion or my personal opinion?" "What's your personal opinion?" "I don't like him". "Why?" "he's the cop, "whats your political?" "He'll win" "why?" "he's the cop." And I was proven right. He won. I knew he wanted to cop. I knew he would win. Police officers really get elected. They cool but those other part of him that we didn't know about, we find out later. And so when I ran against him, he didn't do anything. Perfect. So what I did, I took my wife to San Francisco. I have a friend of mine. Gowen Ching, used to run the Chinese resource community resource in Chinatown. I have connections.

Jonathan Cortez 2:18:57 I know him.

Marcos de Leon 2:18:59

You know, do you know? Gowen Ching? No, you're kidding?

Jonathan Cortez 2:19:01

No, I just I, I saw him last year I was in San Francisco, and I saw him last year.

Marcos de Leon 2:19:05

Oh, my god, yeah, you kidding? Yeah. Anyway, so I called them up and said, No, no, that's "Marcus. I put you in a hotel in Chinatown, holiday inn, \$45 a night". I take it. So when I took her, I told her what I wanted to do. "I'm gonna run for against Hank". "What?" "It's true." I said, "we can beat him." "It's a lot of work". "I know we start out now a year from now, we can beat him". We all ran grassroots campaigns. I remember and Gowen took us, took us to eating at good places. Just fine. It was a lot. I love Chinese breakfast. Man, there's a coolest thing, like la Raza, like eating tacos, but Chinese way, you know, like good, good food we love. She introduced me to chinese food to Asian food. Chinese, Japanese. I don't ever eat that stuff, tortilla, hamburger, y ya, that's what I asked her to run for. So we ran. Ran a grass root campaign. We walked. I walked till my back, almost came out on their legs. We walked every neighborhood. We had people help us. We had money. My father helped me. We got some money. We got good camp. We had two campaign people want to work for me, Alan Kaplan and came here with the other guy. Alan later became board director, board of trustee for AISD, I mean, for ACC and we won. By 250 votes, we beat him, and there's a picture of it. Alan said he loved working for

me. We we walked every neighborhood I walk. Jake pickle taught me that when when I ran once you he didn't like Hank either. He says, "I help you out". And so he walked with me and watched how he walked and I will walk neighborhood, and knew what he would tell me, "this is a great community to run for office". He says, "You're the first politician came to my house. What's your name? What do you stand for?" And I would tell him, and I would get their vote. You go where nobody went, I would tell, I went, I would go in the lion's den, so to speak, with people. And the way I knew some people voted for me, even though Hank was in front, shaking their hands when they came out, they would do this to me (winks). These are elders. And smile. I go like, don't say nothing, because Hanks right there. And that's why I knew. We won by turn some few votes. We were happy. It's a picture of me. Estrella remembers my kids were already getting there, nine, eight years old. It was hard. I was away at the house a lot, but grass root, you got to start a year against somebody. But also you have to, you have to have a record, because I could say what I've done. I could say what I was involved with. I could say how I got street signs put in. I could say I got parks put in. I could say I helped build some new home. I could say that people came to me and asked for help. I would help them out. I could say that because I had done it. And that's something. Who wants to run for office, but they're gonna "What are you gonna do for me?" "Well, what do you need?" "Well, I've don't know...". "Well, you know what? Let me call John or let me call Albert. Let me call Mary. Uh, give her a call. Tell her you talked to me. Tell her the problem is she and see if we can be if you don't get help, tell me, I'll find somebody else". Because when you get a position like I did, you meet a lot of people like see, you know when Gordon Chi, When I saw Gordon five, six. I would go over there just just to see him. And one thing is, one of his friends told him they were telling me in Chinese, oh," if he's your friend, how come you don't speak Chinese? How come he can't use, you know, chopsticks," and he would get embarrassed. I'm sorry, Gordon, because it happened to me. They had a big function at his house. And not only there were age, there were people from there were Taiwanese, there were Vietnamese, there were Japanese or Chinese, there were other Asians, and everybody ate con palitos. And I was sitting there and Gordon girlfriend said, "Gordon, Gordon Marco is not eating". He says, "Marcus? "I said, "I need, I need a fork, unless you have tortilla". But that's kind of a story, but, but the side thing about going, about growing up and meeting people and and knowing when we won that race, because we live lasted four years, but we over do a lot in four years.

Jonathan Cortez 2:24:15

What are, what are some lessons that you took from the palm school, from early in your life from around the neighborhood that you carried with you into your adulthood, into this political organizing, into meeting other people, into being a mediator, like, how do you make sense of who you've become? Thinking back to your childhood, the

Marcos de Leon 2:24:34

The what the Barrio does, what culture does if you live, if you have your shared identity, which means you can share identify with someone the brown and the brown, white on the white. You know Asian and Asian woman and a woman gay, or was another gay, whatever. This is, shared identity in the Barrio. When you grow up in your Barrio, in Chicano Barrio, it's a lot of indigenous roots in. And even though we may be Americanized a lot, but there's this thing about being very humble, of never thinking you bigger than anybody else you know. And that was a lot of power. There were elderly people. There people would never come when parents would come to the cafeteria to help out on different functions,

on PTA nights and stuff like that. And then the janitors will always teach you, if you hear listen to them, they will teach you to be humble person, to give thanks what you have, those be thankful what you have. And no one's above you. No one's below you. You know, I used to tell my students, there's no one. I saw a sign that said, "because these two is the best above the rest", and it made me mad so because it may because I way I grew up, there is no best of the rest. So I would tell my students, if they were in the first grade, to their seniors in high school. It says, it says there's nobody better than you, all right? There's nobody above you. There's no one below you. What you do when you get to the top is you reach your hand bring everybody beside you. So when you walk down the aisle, you walk together a breast you don't leave no one behind, and you don't get ahead of nobody. That's what I believed in. Is I was when I was a Parent Support Specialist for AISD in 86 and I was, I work with kids and parents to bring them together. That's what I taught. That's what, I think that's what I learned from the teachers and the staff that work. Miss Campos, who's whose husband ran the only Tejano Music Station KVET in the 50s and 60s, she was the secretary. She worked as secretary. She will teach us that. And one day, she did me and my brother a favor. She said she's in the sunshine camp. We were kids, twice. We were only supposed to go one time. The first time we went, took Ernestine to it because she got late, and then took us in, even though we were not supposed to be there.

Jonathan Cortez 2:27:10

Tell us about sunshine camp.

Marcos de Leon 2:27:12

Sunshine camp was a camp brought by the women League, Women's League, young men of Austin. It's a thing to do. It's one was do gooder things for Anglo, giving back. So they had this camp. And they would take kids from Palm school, from Metz, from Zavala, and you go to summer camp for eight weeks on Barton springs, and you get fed there. And that girl section, a boy section, you get fed there. You get to go to swim in at barton springs every day you go to functions at the hillside. You get to eat good so it was a camp for developing young girls and young guys, young boys, because they shave your head off, lice and shit, stuff like that. Excuse my language. Sunshine camp and we went there. We took Ernestine because she was late in the bus and we were late in the bus, so we walked her from Palm school all the way to barton springs.

Jonathan Cortez 2:28:12

Whose Ernestine?

Marcos de Leon 2:28:13

Ernestine was was Spider, my friend, who later said that about me and she could beat up boys, but she got chosen for Sunshine camp. We thought we did too. Miss campos told us. Nos dijo. So we were there. We missed the bus, so we walked her all the way, and that's pretty far we got up there." So hi, hi my name is duh, duh, And hang on. They went back". So "well, we got, we have Ernestine paperwork. We don't have yours. What's your name and what's your name, you know", "Marcus de Leon and Jerry De Leon." They went back there, and then the director came. He said, "Boys, we don't have you on the list. But two boys didn't show up. So you walked up here". Said, "Yes, sir. We walked up here" "from Palm schools, from First Street?". "Yes, sir". John Roy, we used to come around and sneak into Barton springs because, yeah, it was 25 cents to get in to swim. We sneak in. Ah, "you know what? We got

places for you". So we stayed. I didn't like my head shaved, but we got to stay there. And there's where I coined the word "Go Daddy". Yeah. What is that?" Go Daddy" was I saw Go daddy, Go was a, was a, was a slang of a hippie show that I saw one time, so I did a go daddy coin for him, and now it's sitting up there in the media and stuff. They stole my word anyway. But we the second year, the second year we got approved, supposed to be there, because it only used to be a one shot.

Jonathan Cortez 2:29:59

But we twice in Sunsine camp Miss Campos, do you know her first name? No. Luisa.

Marcos de Leon 2:30:04

No. Luisa, I bet that's her name. Eloisa Campos, if you look it up, she was a secretary, and her husband ran the Tejano program in KVET on six o'clock in the morning to eight o'clock.

Jonathan Cortez 2:30:14

Any chance you know her husband's name? Lalo Campos,

Marcos de Leon 2:30:18

what's her name? Barrio, some people know him. I think Galindo would know, because her family is very much involved in all that stuff. Tony Galindo may, may know more about that because he was there into that entertainment and business, their business family. So he may know. Okay,

Jonathan Cortez 2:30:37

thinking back, what are some of your accomplishments and highlights that you're especially proud of

Marcos de Leon 2:30:45

nurturing six Kids.

Jonathan Cortez 2:30:58

There's tissue on the side if you need

Marcos de Leon 2:31:07

I just need a last moment. Sorry, any any man or woman, they always tell you the biggest accomplish of their children, because you give life. Everything else is what I supposed to do, like they used to be a student here, Ruben Cantu. He used to run a minority entrepreneur school for UT, but it was closed down because the D and I, he's down in The Valley. He called me once. He said, "I'm gonna, I voted for you to get the University of Texas Community Award, what you done in communities". I said "Ruben, I don't that's not what I don't I don't need awards. I just do my work. That's what, what the Creator asked me to do". Said, No, it's done really, really, I did this because you are one of my heroes". And I said, "Okay, rub. What do you need?" "Send me a resume". Says, "Well, I'd send you a book then", same thing. "What do you mean?" He says, "mijo, I've been doing this as I got out of high school, just when I was a park later, and then when I was involved with Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez", and

Jonathan Cortez 2:32:34

I'm sorry, Martin Luther King,

Marcos de Leon 2:32:36

Just when they came down, I was in a demonstration when they demonstrated for for jobs stuff, we were part of the getting the people involved, and then later on, with the black citizen Task Force and other groups. We always invite one another. You know, we have a racist hotel here in Austin, don't you?

Which is it?

These car it was called the Marriot out there on 11th Street. Sister Turner calls me up. "Marcus. Marcus, we got, twelve noon we got to be on 11th Street, the racist hotel," "Dorothy, what do you mean? Racist hotel?", "that racist hotel, the building here on 11th Street, right across from our neighborhood." "What are you talking about?" "they ain't got no windows facing East Austin" I said, "You got to be kidding me". "Marcus, need you and Paul and Francis need to be there. The consilio needs to be there". "Okay, Francis, we'll be there". So we show up. It's true. If you see the east wall of the, I don't know what's called now, I think it's a good night hotel or something. It used to be the Marriott, right on 11th Street, and i-35 the windows, there are no windows facing east Austin. You know how hotels have windows all the way around, even in New York, I was standing at a Holiday Inn, and they were head forward, and you faced another hotel. It has no windows. It was the best thing you did because in the Marriott ended up giving said job for progress, to do all the hiring. I don't know, for just said job for progress, but GI Forum was a Mexican American organization. GI Forum, the one of their businesses, is set for, set for, set for, for jobs, and they appointed them to do all the hiring isn't that great a Chicano organization.

Jonathan Cortez 2:34:23

Can you see that it's what was the name of the organization? It

Marcos de Leon 2:34:25

was said, No, sir. SCR, for progress. You go to GI Forum and you can see the set. SCR, they end up getting to do all the it was a big demonstration. Everybody showed up like the Muslim, the the Chicano Park, you forget it the Muslim. Anyway, it was a big demonstration. The memories last me up, but

Jonathan Cortez 2:34:55

So you were saying, you were talking about how this person asked for your CV, and you were saying it would. Your book because you've been doing this a long time. Yeah,

Marcos de Leon 2:35:02

it's a lot of things that I've done. There's a lot of things. This is what I say. I was involved in this. I didn't say I did it, but my hand was there when they asked me, I'd have this thing like, what are you doing here? Marcus, I was invited. I never show up at a place that I wasn't invited. Somebody will call me. Said, you need to be there. Marcos, this is going to happen. So I show up, then I get back the information. But when I have to make a decision, I don't make a decision there. They said, "Well, what is, what do you want to do about this?" "Well, let me go back to the group and I'll tell you what they want". "But don't you control them". "No", "Aren't you the leader?" I says, "I'm a yes, I'm a leader of what

they want.” A good leader is supports its followers. People follow me. People ask me to speak, because I do have a voice. I don't mind talking. You see me now, so what I tell “I'll be your voice. But what did you want?” “But you tell him”, “I'm not going to tell him if you tell me what you want”. And that's helped me. When one of my leaders had a very hard decision to make, and she was scared she didn't know what to do, she said, “Can I take a break?” And she took me. “Marcos, I don't know”, Mira. Mira. I said, “Look, Rene, look, what is does your neighbor want you to do?” “They want us to do this”. “Then you tell the council, no, this is what the neighborhood wants, if they if they change their mind, if they don't give it to you, you go back to your neighborhood and you tell them they didn't do it. So we go after but if you said, Well, if you agree what they want and what are you going to tell your group that you didn't do what they want you to do? You decided to compromise. So don't compromise. Just go with your fam. Your people told you to do that. That's that's your leaders, and you're their spokesman, and you're the leader. You're the face of it”. So she went up said, “No, the neighborhood wants those lands to be marked from commercial to to single family, and that is it”. And the chief forced the vote six to one, and they voted to make that land family single, ma'am and their 50 owner occupied house was she talked about. That's what I learned, to stick to your to your values and be humble. Because if, if you think you're up here and you forget who you came from, that's what palm taught me. That's what the people, people, the barrio people taught me, is to be humble, is to make sure you carry their water. Because when you carry the water, you get to drink from it. If you carry your own water, they don't drink from it, right? Because you carry your own water, you want to be who you want to be. It's not your water, it's their water. They give it to you to carry, but you can drink from it. You get nourish from it. You can take strength from it. And that's what I grew up with, and that's what taught me that I mean, let me give you an example, how you listen to your leaders. I was at a function. I was dressed like you, with your shirt and Little Jacket, this sweater, black pen, politicing, this man saying to me, Joe Morales, Montopolis, “Mira mijo, if you gonna represent us, you gonna, you better look like the part. That's not gonna cut it. Where's your tie? Where's your coat?” “Yes, sir. Okay.” Never again did I show up looking like that. That's your leaders. That's an elder telling you what you need to do, if you humble enough, if you listen to what he's saying, he's giving you advice. He's just trying to help you. It doesn't sound like it under right? But if you listen, they're helping you. And that's what I learned from being from Palm being from this community. And if you, those are strong leaders, they they carry the water of their people, they carry the food of their people, and what their needs are like. I used to tell the city council, I'm not here because of luxury, I'm here because of necessity, and that's the first thing I should say Council, they will say, “Marcus, you gotta control your people? Why they cussing” in like one time they call the City Council a bunch of bastard, racist bastards. Then I asked him, I asked the council, “Why do you think Mr. Donley is so upset that he called you that, if you stop to think, why is he so angry that he called you that?” That's part, I think, what you learn as a child. If you're humble enough that you want you need to do the other part, remember I was telling you I'm in two worlds all the time, the red world and the white world is my part of the river. It says, “Why are you angry? Why are you angry at me? Why are you angry? Why? Who did you wrong? And then somebody did you wrong. Is it your wife got mad at you, or your kid did something wrong, or your father got after you, so you're getting after me now?” and that's the teaching you get if you listen, like I said earlier that when I when I used to go to lunch, I never sat with the teachers. I'll go sit with the students, and I wouldn't say nothing, but you learn a lot if you listen,

Jonathan Cortez 2:40:59

and this was while you were a teacher yourself, or a

Marcos de Leon 2:41:04

I was a colleague, advisor, college advisor. Now I will recruit that way too, but I was listening and now catch something and say "well why?" So that's how you learn to listen to

Jonathan Cortez 2:41:19

what does the palm school symbolize to you?

Marcos de Leon 2:41:23

the way, like I was telling Hortensia, anyone who drives by palm school, who went to school there, is like, boom, it's like a beacon just lights up. I remember when I remember, I met my girlfriend, like some people, had childhood girlfriends at the school, then they got married later. I've heard those stories. They met at Palm, then they went to Junior high then they went to high school, and then they got married. But that's a beacon. It's a reference of their childhood. They remember. They remember everything. Like you asking me, well, you remember, I remember this, I remember that, and did this. Then Miss Minn did this to me, and Miss Schulte did this to me. I think when they see the word palm school and they see it, it's like a beacon. It's like a light that lights up in their hearts and lights and in their mind. That's why it has to be kept now, the question is, when they see palm school and they walk in, what do they see? Being part of the Travis County steering committee, what we're asked, What do we want to see? I want to know what Palm, I want an alumni to come tell me. I know a lot of people want, but I went to high school. I mean, with the public school alumni, tell me when they walk in, what do they want to see? For me as a person, what I want to see when I walk in there, if I'm in from Tupelo, Mississippi, or I'm from, you know, from Boston, Massachusetts, right? Or from Cleveland, Ohio, or Seattle Washington, or all from city of California. When I walk into school, what do I see? What I want to see is toda la fami. What I want to see, for sure, is like my brother, who served 27-25 years in the Air Force, I want to see how many veterans, how many of our men and women serve our country, someone put their lifeline, somebody went to Vietnam. You know, my brother went to Guam. He was making putting bombs to bomb Cambodia. So he's part of Vietnam, but not in a way that, you know. And I realized that, how do these veterans from Palm get to be known? Is there going to be a part? When you walk into Hall and the wall, you see all these plaques and all these people Graduated, went to palm, and they served their country. That's important to me at Palm park when they have a pavilion or an area and they say, Well, this is named after Mr. And Mrs. Maria and Juan Gonzalez. They lived on East Third Street, and their children went to palm Oh. They came to palm Oh. This building near this, this play scape, is named after the Gonzalez family, the Cortez family. That's what I want, because this is we're gentrified. Me and Hortensia we have a house there on Canterbury and Chalmers Street in the Barrio, still one of the very few people, but soon we be gone. So the building in the point the park is the only legacy we have with the Mexican if you go to mission, Texas, Mission District in San Francisco, it's all totally gentrified. And there something was happening. There happened here where la the homes are not the same when people walk in. Two I did a short poem that day, my mother, my grandmother and my uncle died. The poem reads like "I go to my Barrio calle cuatro fourth street and my grandmother's house, where my uncle live, is a two story, dark house. So today, my grandmother and my uncle died because whatever memories I have of them is gone." So if we're gone from the Barrio, and there's some building there that many of us went to school there and lived our life there, fell in love in that school. Were influenced by people. And from there, we went to different we went all over the

country, all over the state, all over the county. For me, my link is not very much. My thread doesn't go very far. It goes here, lemon street Canterbury, very to Airport Boulevard, to there, and it comes back to the Barrio. And then I go here before the State, I was probation officer, assistant. So I'm a professional job. I was a college advisor for almost 20 years. I was elected official, you know, so word, so, where do you put that here? You know? So, you know, where do how many elected officials? They went to palm graduated became elected official. I know two me and Jerry Jones. You know for sure. I don't know anybody else. They're probably more, but I don't know. So what? What is that? What is going to be in there? Is going to be all artifacts and a couple of bones, of Mexican bones that really were Indians. I don't know. Or is it going to be something when people walk in there, a learning center, a teaching center, and also knowing the people who, who are hidden, who walk the who walk this path and these house contribute to the City, to this county, to the state and to this country. And I know we have people who did that and that, to me, that's important anybody as we lose as the Barrio becomes all white, okay, that that's happening. You can see, look at rainy my brother, he freaked out. My older brother, when he saw Rainey, yeah, they're 15 tall buildings on this little piece of land. It teaches you, how does you want to look in your friend? New York? You've been to Manhattan. Here's a mini me in Manhattan. A mini me because I've been to Manhattan, I've been to New York, I've been to all over New York. I've spent been there eight times, you know, I know how everything's, you know, and it'll be the island, so, yeah, but what happens to the center? What happens to the palm school building? This is why it's important as steering committee reaches out to the alumni and other people get their ideas so we can finalize something that, because the final rests on the Commissioners Court and the architect, and then the concept was doing, gather all these ideas, see how they, get them all together, and present something to the but so we need to give ideas to the Commissioners Court. What's important for us as alumni, we would like to see inside that building.

Jonathan Cortez 2:48:23

Yeah, those are really great ideas. Commissioner De Leon, thank you so much. You've lived an extraordinary life, and I think I fear we could talk for hours more, but let's go get some lunch and you'll have an opportunity to talk more about the photographs that you brought. So thank you so much. It was an honor.

Marcos de Leon 2:48:39

Well thank you, Dr, Cortez.