

Palm_School_De_Leon_Frank

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Palm School, Frank De Leon, Travis County oral history, childhood experiences, East Austin, community education, political participation, safety patrol, family dynamics, neighborhood description, school memories, Air Force, career achievements, Mexican American history, segregation.

SPEAKERS

Frank de Leon, Sergio Barrera

Sergio Barrera 00:00

Today is Sunday, December 15, 2024, My name is Sergio G Barrera. I'm interviewing Frank De Leon Junior in Austin, Texas for the Travis County oral history project. We are at the University of Texas at Austin campus. Thank you, Mister De Leon, for agreeing to this interview. The raw, unedited recording of this interview will be archived at the Travis County archives, where it will be available to anyone who wishes to access it. As we said earlier, if there is anything you don't wish to talk about, we respect your wishes. Also, if there is something you want to discuss, please do make sure we discuss it. Please. Also, let us know if you need to pause the interview. Today, we are going to talk about your life experiences, particularly as it relates to the palm school. We'll also discuss, discuss your relationship to community education and political participation, and if you're ready, Mr. De Leon, let's begin. Okay, so the first thing that I want to ask is, could you please tell us your name and your relation to palm School.

Frank de Leon 00:58

My name is Frank De Leon, Jr. I was a student at Palm school from 52 to 58

Sergio Barrera 01:06

Thank you. And if you could describe what your childhood was like?

Frank de Leon 01:14

in 52 to 58, I guess is what you're asking?

Sergio Barrera 01:18

Well, your childhood in general in East Austin, oh, and he started,

Frank de Leon 01:21

Well it was pretty normal. It may not be normal today, maybe, maybe we'll see it a different way. But for me, it was pretty normal. I was raised by my father, so we were pretty, pretty independent. I have two other brothers, and we kind of did our kind of their own thing, very little adult supervision. But we never

gotten in trouble. We walked to school at the time, in Palm school. We lived at, I think, Willow Street, and then also on Eighth Street, right there, eighth and interstate 35 which is today to speak highway 81 but we walked to school fix our own lunches. Sometimes, I think my dad, we used to buy lunch. I believe he was provide the funds. It was once a month, I believe. But, but as far as my childhood, it was, like, pretty normal. I can't think of anything real drastic, you know, it was just me, my brothers and my dad, and we had cousins, but, you know, it was just the three of us, mostly up in, you know, after the sixth grade, everything kind of changed. Kind of went our own way, but that's bout the early years. You want me to go back to junior high, high school? I can.

Sergio Barrera 02:53

yeah, so I'm interested in how you remember their normalcy. So what seemed normal to you of your childhood?

Frank de Leon 03:02

Getting up, having breakfast, going to school, going to playground, doing whatever different school activities. I remember school, going to school, you know, different classes, trying to one of the things I wanted to do would be a safety patrol. Back then, they used to have students crossing the street, because at the time that was highway 81 First Street, Second Street. Lot of traffic back then, not like today, but we had safety patrols, and that was like the fifth and sixth graders. But once in a while they would come and pick if you went on safety patrol, they would need extra guys, and they would come to classes and select somebody. I got picked once, and I think that was exciting.

Sergio Barrera 03:52

So I want to talk about the safety patrol, and I'll make a reference of that. I want you to describe what your family was like in East Austin?

Frank de Leon 04:03

Well, just my brothers and my dad, and we had other members. I don't know who they they were, but there were other people, but they were mostly adults. So it could have been a house where there were other members, because it was a it was real large house. I remember real large backyard. And I remember we, this one individual. I think he was there was a lady that would come and take care of us, feed us, I guess because my dad worked all day, so we would come home and she would have lunch or supper ready for us and stuff. And she had, I think she had an older son, like in this real older son, and I remember that he was we were talking in every one time he was talking in Spanish. And. Back then, I guess my Spanish wasn't that good, and he was trying to pretend me. I told him, on my socks, "calcetines", I say, sock-a-tienness. And he would try to correct me, and I could never say "calcetines". I would say, sock-a-tienness. I remember that. And that's when we lived here in San Marco Street, that's before the Holiday Inn was built. The neighborhood on San Market Street went all the way down to the river, the river's edge, which is Town Lake, but I remember living there also, but as far as other people, it was just basically that he and my brothers, you know,

Sergio Barrera 05:43

so in terms of, and this is something that we discussed off cameras, but just so that, so it's on the record, your mother passed away at a young age, so you were predominantly raised by your father. Correct, correct, yeah.

Frank de Leon 05:59

I remember when she the day she died, I remember my sister Lucy. Had a sister Lucy, also my three brothers. My sister Lucy, she's from a previous marriage of my mother, but they didn't live with us. Still live with my mother. But when my mother died, I remember my sister Lucy was trying to breathe air into her. I think I went off the subject there for a minute. What was the question again?

Sergio Barrera 06:28

Yeah, to describe your family,

Frank de Leon 06:31

yeah, I did have a sister, two sisters and but I don't remember that much about him, my sister, Lucy, my sister Bertha, also, and this is from my mother had a previous marriage, and I had a brother, Rudy, and a Brother Jesse. And my dad married my mother. I guess she was a widower my mother when he married her, and but they were, they were only in my life. Early on, after my mother died, we didn't have contact with them to till years later, yeah, but we kind of reunite in the last since then, yeah, they have all have passed away. My sister, Lucy and Bertha, and my brother, Jesse and Rudy. My brother, Rudy, he was in Vietnam. He died from Agent Orange cancer. Yeah, but, but we didn't have that much contact with my my step brother, step sister. It was basically just me, Gerardo and Marcos.

Sergio Barrera 07:40

So Gerardo, Marcos and yourself, who is the eldest, who is the middle child, who is there,

Frank de Leon 07:44

I'm the oldest and then Marcos. And then Gerardo, yeah, there. And we didn't know him as "Geraldo". We always knew him as "Jerry". Everything was "Jerry", all the paperwork. And then when he grew up, he found out his name is not "Jerry". It's his official birth name, "Geraldo". So he had to go back and redo all kind of paperwork for that. Nobody could say "Geraldo". They say "Gerardo". So "Jerry", there you go.

Sergio Barrera 08:16

And this is something you spoke a little bit about. What languages would you say you spoke at home?

Frank de Leon 08:24

Well, I think we spoke Spanish, but I don't remember. I remember speaking English all my life. I don't even even in, even after in high school, we spoke English mostly, I think basically I don't Marcos, I guess because he went to college, he he was immersed in Spanish. But I and Gerardo were not, were really not emerge in Spanish speaking after I graduate from high school. I don't think I spoke Spanish till I came back. I left in 65 came back in 63 and everything was in English.

Sergio Barrera 09:12

Yeah. And what about your neighborhood? Do you were? Was it a bilingual neighborhood? Would you say,

Frank de Leon 09:18

Yeah, Willow Street. I think it's Willow or Wallace. I think it's Willow. It was okay. Remember, I just remember the backyard. It was a big, large backyard. That's all I remember. In an alley. We go to the backyard, to the alley, and then we hit first street to get to school. Oh, excuse me, Ceasar Chavez street now. But I don't what was the question again?

Sergio Barrera 09:44

yeah, if the neighborhood that you lived in, or the street that you...

Frank de Leon 09:49

Okay, let's say Willow but Rainey Street and Eighth Street, I remember that pretty clear. We lived after Willow Street. We moved to onto eight Street, and we were next to the French Legion on, I don't know if you're familiar with that. That's the embassy for the country of France. When Texas was a republic, they were the only state that had a embassy in there, in the in the state, of course, Texas became a state that's but we live right down the block from that and Eighth Street, right there in a street, oh, but four or five houses down, up from interstate 35 which was a highway 81 back then, and then we moved to, then we moved to Rainey street, I think, yeah, after, after I got out of palm school. So after we moved to Rainey Street, that was junior in high school, and I remember that more than H Street or Willow Street, and we lived right there in the corner of daily. I mean, that's daily, that's at San Marcos, but corner of rainy and Holly, 1, house down from Holly. And we lived there. 66 rainy and 68 rainy, and we moved there. The streets were not paved, so there was real when the cars went by, it got dusty, and then when it rained, the streets got real muddy. But I remember a rainy street more than, say, the other streets, but it was a real nice neighborhood. We had, as far as I think most people were in my block were Hispanic. There was some, some Anglos for that by Driscoll and Red River. There were a lot of Anglos, but they you didn't see them, but you knew they lived there, you know. And then there was a maintenance plant there the city of Austin, with a street maintenance, and they had an alley. Our Alley was paved back then. All the alleys were dirt, but we had the only paved alley in our neighborhood, in that whole area, because the trucks came in after working, they will come to the in from the alley, and the Alley was paved, like really nice. I remember that. That's how we used to get to town. We go the back alley, had Driscoll down the first Red River in the first street, and go into town or to school. And on in that alley, there was also a large vacant lot, and we spent a lot of time there, the hell out of pecan trees. And it was very it was really nice. And we spent a lot of time there, hiking, playing around, stuff like that. During the fall, we would go pick up pecans and get bags and pecans and go sell them at I forgot exactly where that place was, mill or something or other, but, but the neighborhood was mostly Hispanic. I remember most of my neighbors, and then we also spent a lot of time. That needs to be a salvation of a youth center on Holly and interstate 35 Holly and San Marco Street, and it was a year Salvation Army Youth Center. It was a large gym, like place had a large park, and we'll play baseball, football. And then on week, on Friday nights, they would have movies, arts and crafts. I remember they used to have a pool table. I learned how to play pool and on the stage. They had a boxing ring, and we would box. And they also had a basketball court. Spent a lot of times playing basketball. Makes a hat on arts and crafts in a little day room. And they also had a Cub Scout Den there. And like say, every

Friday night, they will show movies. During to winter the movies were inside, and during the summer they would show them outside, and that was on Holly Street. Yeah, I remember that spent a lot of time there, a lot of time, yeah, so

Sergio Barrera 14:51

I want you to guide me to your father's role and what he thought about y'all education. What was, what do you think was his? I guess his. How does he feel about the role of education for you all, and your siblings, your two brothers, and how do you know about about that feeling?

Frank de Leon 15:14

Well, I think he never what's the word, he never pushed us, but he we knew that we were supposed to go to school. So I remember, I remember going to school, coming back from school. That's when I went to palm and then, then we went to junior high and high school. And he when we knew we were supposed to go, and he worked all day, so when he left to work like six o'clock, seven o'clock in the morning, we knew we had to go to school. So we, we, we prepared. We got cleaned up. We already go to school, but he didn't, never said, you're going to get this. You don't go to school. We just knew we had to attend school. But we still, I know for myself, I played hooky sometimes. He found out. So he was, he was very it says junior high when it was we'll go up Red River. And sometimes I didn't get past first street. There was the area was kind of not wilderness, but there was some empty houses and places you could hang around all day without being caught. But, but we, we all finished school. We all graduated. It's not because my father forced us, but we just knew we had to do it. When my father found out that I played hooky and LA times it was I remember, you know about Waller Creek. This is the Waller creek right here in Austin. It goes all the way from East Austin. It comes out in town lake. We spent a lot of time there, particularly in the summer, in the spring, but when my father found out he got a letter or anyway, he found out we had to have a meeting with the principal, and I spent the rest of the semester in Junior high every day at Detention Hall for about the whole but four months every day after school, had to go to Detention Hall. I learned that's a good thing, because I got caught up in my studies.

Sergio Barrera 17:47

So earlier in the in the interview, we're talking about how you would walk to school, and I want you to describe what that process was like. Did you go alone? Were other people with you? What was that journey from home to school, like,

Frank de Leon 18:02

Okay, I can't palm school. It was pretty it was pretty simple. I can't remember that much, but going to junior high, I remember we used to most of the time we would walk. And university, Junior High was, I think, on Red River, 19th and Red River, not too far from Memorial Stadium. I don't know, still there or not, but we would, I would walk. We would walk from the house, on on, on Rainey street, cross, uh, first street, Ceasar Chavez, and get on Red River and just walk 19 blocks, and most we would it was winter time. I don't think we had bus service back then. It was just a matter of fact, we didn't have school busses. There was the city busses, and they would cost, I think, five cents, four cents, something like that. But there was no busses that I can recall that would go to the University of junior high, so we would walk. And it was, I still remember all the places. One of the first places you start was there on Sixth Street before it is before six Street. It was sort of like a neighborhood shopping area, you had all

kind of stores there before, grocery stores, shoe stores, movie theaters, shoe repair stores, furniture stores, movie but we went past that and on the way up there, there was a bakery, and they call them, segundas, one us along second hand stores. They would remember that. And then I remember the Spanish village. There was a was Mexican restaurant there, and keep going. There was 7/11 keep going. And then I. I think Brecken bridge hospital was on the way up there too. And we get to there was a couple of beer joints. And I remember there was my brother. Was a sign said "no minors allowed". And we would say, what is that? Awkward? And they let minors. They got gold. They look for gold. We know we were minors. You know, that's a laugh about that. But, yeah, but I remember there was a tire shop, tire repair shop on the way up there, and then junior high and but

Sergio Barrera 20:39

so in terms of palm school, you say you don't, kind of,

Frank de Leon 20:43

I remember, yeah, don't, I don't remember walking there. I mean being there, but not, you know, I'm assuming we just got, you know, willow Street and couple blocks, First Street and then the school. I remember the entrance the I think on the way, there used to be a no Good Year Repair, repair shop, service store. I remember a drug store right there in the corner on the left hand side by, before you get to the interstate 35 they used to be a drug store there. And there was some large mansion type houses. I think there's a couple of them still left, but I said we didn't have 35 so we're just a regular highway. There was no overpass there at the time. And I remember entering high school, the school, I remember the tree he walked in, one two rooms, one left, one on the left, on the right, and then further up you would enter this on the left side, there was the office, and then upstairs, towards you go upstairs, there was a library, and It faced the first street, I believe, my first room, my first class, first grade, was the first room on the left, I remember, and I remember being there, and then I think they had a downstairs, and from the downstairs exit to the back, they led to the palm Park. This be a park there. I think it was part of the school. So they had swings, merry go rounds in swimming pool. And then the Superior Dairies was there too. But right next to Superior Dairies was the cafeteria, and also it was a a stage in the lunch room. At the lunch room, I remember going and getting food there with the show all their card, and I think was \$35 a month, Amanda, \$0.35 to eat it for a month or a week. I remember they used to give me \$1.05 and we would pay. There was a lady there taking our money. Give us our card. Yeah,

Sergio Barrera 23:13

in terms of the classroom experience, how do you remember palm school and being in the classroom?

Frank de Leon 23:22

Well, my first grade, I remember being there. And I remember was we had, it was Columbus Day, and the teacher gave us all pictures of Columbus, so we had to color it. And then she took the best ones and displayed them. I remember. And mine was one of them. I remember that. And I remember, in October, she, she did a play, well, actually, not a play, but a story telling. We got around the table, and she would, she would tell this gruesome story about parts body, parts, eyes, fingers, and she would pass them or something around. And we thought it was, and it was kind of, and it was scared. The girls would scream, and she would sit on, this is a hard this is an eye finger, you know, would pass it around. I remember that?

Sergio Barrera 24:20

Do you remember the teacher's name? No, the

Frank de Leon 24:24

only teacher I remember was my, I think my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Schultz or Mrs. S, and that was upstairs. I remember, I remember Mr. Boyd, one of my the last principal. I knew he was a real nice guy, too. I remember, I remember going to the office getting paddled a couple of times. You miss misbehave in class back then you misbehave. I don't know what I did, but me and my friends, we went up to those. School principal's office, and he had a paddle. It was a baseball bat cut in half. You know, that took off the round part, and it was a flat and man, it was big.

Sergio Barrera 25:18

And paddles, was this a common occurrence at Palm school or

Frank de Leon 25:21

what the Paddle? Yeah, if you were bad, I guess, yeah, yeah,

Sergio Barrera 25:27

yeah. Did it happen to you more than once?

Frank de Leon 25:30

I think once or twice, but that's something you don't forget. I think Mr. Boyd, when he came in, he didn't do that. It was the front with the other principal. I don't remember him. I just remember getting paddled by him, but it was maybe once or twice. But I must have done really bad. I don't I have no idea what it was.

Sergio Barrera 25:49

Do you know when Mr. Boyd came into the school?

Frank de Leon 25:53

No, I know it prior, before, maybe the, maybe the fifth or six, before the before the fourth and sixth grade, I would say maybe the fifth and sixth maybe the last two years I was there. But he was a real nice man

Sergio Barrera 26:18

in terms of, if you could describe, if you remember what a classroom in, you know, inside palm school looked like, how would you describe it?

Frank de Leon 26:29

A lot of windows. Yeah, a lot of windows. Yeah, like, I remember the first grade. I think fifth grade and six, I remember, I remember, I remember one class which it faced the it faced the highway. And sometimes we could look out the window, you could see I 35 under construction. I remember that. And I remember the I remember math. I realized I used to love to do. The teacher would call us up and do

math problems, division and multiplications. And I was really good at that. I enjoyed that. I read going. I remember the the heaters. They were the steam heaters, not like, not AC, like you got today, so in the winter time, as part of it was, it wasn't cold, but it wasn't really warm. It was comfortable. You had the steam heaters, or, I don't know if you were a song, but they're big old iron thing. You turn the speed steam on, and the iron heater would warm up and warm up the room. But I remember doing a lot of projects on the black the green board. There were black boards. They call them black, but they were green. I have never understood that. And in the sixth grade, yeah, it was the fifth by fifth grade class, the message we played with right across each other. So I remember us going across the street, and I remember we had a recess in the hall playing jacks. I mean, we could. We had a recess every day. Now come think of it never then. I remember Ms. Shaussey's class. I remember one of my schoolmates. I forgot his name, but he he was in an accident. He got all burned. Yeah, he burned his face, and he came back and he looked bad. You know, he saw covered up. But I remember that Ms. Shaussey's class,

Sergio Barrera 28:41

so you're saying that in one of the classrooms you could directly see the construction. That was of I 35 Did you? Did you ever feel like the construction was interrupting your education?

Frank de Leon 28:52

No, it just something to look at. I don't feel it interfered at all. Yeah.

Sergio Barrera 29:01

Do were there any and this is based on on people who have gone to schools in Texas, there's songs or maybe anthems or poems that they would teach the students. Do you remember of anything like that that was taught to you?

Frank de Leon 29:18

No, no, I'm trying. Never thought about other than the pledge allegiance.

Sergio Barrera 29:25

Did you do the pledge allegiance to to the US and Texas? Or was it only to the US?

Frank de Leon 29:29

The US. Yeah, at least the United States of America to Republic. We stand one nation of God in something like that. Yeah, I remember that all the way to junior high. I believe

Sergio Barrera 29:43

we used to do the US and then the Texas one.

Frank de Leon 29:46

I never know when I don't know the Texas one. I don't know it.

Sergio Barrera 29:51

I don't remember it, but I know we did it in elementary now, you were telling me that one of the things that you remember is, you know. Know, Christopher Columbus, yeah, and doing these things. Were there ever any teachings? Or, you know, did you ever learn about the Mexican American experience, or Mexican American Chicano history in the US while being at Palm school?

Frank de Leon 30:19

No. I mean, well, I uh, well, no, no, no, I don't, I don't recall anything. Just, I remember just in the fifth elementary it was mostly just basic stuff, math, arithmetic, reading, writing, stuff like that, American, American history. I remember American history in the fourth grade talking about George Washington, yeah, but just basic American history Texas. I don't think the Texas. It wasn't until maybe junior high, high school. I can't remember.

Sergio Barrera 31:02

I know you were you? You said that math, that you were good at math. Would you say that math was your favorite subject?

Frank de Leon 31:07

No, it was just something I did. I mean, it was I learned basic math. Excuse me, let me get some water, All right, yeah. I now math. I mean, I learned the basic math, arithmetic, multiplications, division, adding, basic stuff. In high school, they wanted me to take algebra. It was something, I guess, that was required. I took it. I didn't to this day, I didn't understand algebra, and I didn't understand why I needed algebra, and I needed that to for credit for to get to graduate. I remember that, but I took it, but I couldn't. I still can't figure it out today, but have never used, never, never had the opportunity to use algebra. And later in my life, I became a purchaser. I was dealing in 1000s of dollars when I was a purchas- that's another story. But algebra never came up there either when I made when I was purchasing for Texas State University. So what I was algebra was math, was basic math I had no problem, just algebra. I think my brother Marcos aced it. I think, I don't know, but I didn't.

Sergio Barrera 32:47

Were there any subjects or activities regarding learning that you think these were my favorite memories of palm school, something that sticks out, maybe a story.

Frank de Leon 33:00

It wasn't a story, but I think my favorite is history. That's my favorite. I love history. I continue study by history even after, after I got out of high school, history was my favorite subject. I attended Texas State University for about three years. I'm an official college dropout of the family but I took a lot of history courses at the university level. I love the history. I still, I still study history today, you know. But as far as you know, just that was my favorite subject, history, everything else I had to do, because I had to do, I even took typing. I feel that I can. I think I failed typing, but I've, but I can type pretty good. Somehow it's whatever I learned. It the basic stuff, it stuck with me. So I've been, you know, using a computer and things like that. I learned something, though it sticks with you.

Sergio Barrera 34:08

So in terms of you spoken a little bit about teachers, like your sixth grade teacher that you had, you spoken about Mr. Boyd, what do you think was the staff, the teachers expectations of you all as students while at Palm school?

Frank de Leon 34:25

I don't know if they, I guess they had some kind of expectations, but I it was never, you know, told that. I was told about they were just preparing me to to go to the next to the next class, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth and the six. And that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to go the next one. I want to see in the first I guess the first one, classes, grades, 1,2,3, were downstairs. Four, five and six were upstairs. And I wanted to go upstairs. So when I got to fourth grade, Hey, man, I made it.

Sergio Barrera 35:12

I know you said you were a little bit disconnected with Spanish, but was Spanish spoken in school? Or were you allowed to speak Spanish?

Frank de Leon 35:19

Well, I remember and we weren't we were not allowed to speak Spanish in the halls. I remember walking the halls. If you was heard spoke in Spanish, speaking Spanish, they would correct you. So maybe that was a good thing, that I was able to learn English helped me later on in life. You know, being proficient in English, I think, helped me. But you know, being in school speaking Spanish to a teacher would, I don't know if they could speak Spanish at all. So it never occurred to me that I can't remember exactly if we spoke Spanish in school, but I don't, you know within ourselves. I think we probably did, but I don't remember for some reason. I just remember speaking English all the time.

Sergio Barrera 36:18

I know you've also described, and and it's known, right that the palm school was next or, or there was a palm park in the pool, right there. Do you have any memories of that palm Park? I know you described that there was like a merry go round and some swings. Oh, yeah. Even

Frank de Leon 36:34

after I got a palm school, we kept going back. It was it was like a neighborhood park. There was a swimming pool. We used to go swimming every summer. Even after we got out of palm school, we continued going to the movie, the movies there in for recreation, baseball, you know, playing the swings and just hanging around. That was a good place to hang around with, with friends. It was a playground for for many, many, many years, all summer long, we spent there after school with old school. We spent all our time at the park with friends, myself, my brothers and other friends.

Sergio Barrera 37:24

Yeah, it's been also documented through oral histories and archival work that the that that specific pool, I'm sorry, was segregated. Did you ever experience or witness any sort of you know you, if you were Mexican you couldn't come on this day, or did you have free range?

Oh,

Frank de Leon 37:44

man, no, that was if it was we didn't notice. There was the only thing back then we wouldn't see "blacks" in the neighborhood? I don't remember seeing any "blacks" in the pool or in the park. It was just either Mexicanos or Anglos, yeah, and we all got along that I recall.

Sergio Barrera 38:14

I know you were, you were talking as well about the safety patrol, and Anita mentioned yesterday that that was kind of like a club or a something extracurricular that you could do. Could you describe, and you said you were picked to be safety patrol? Could you describe what that was like? What you remember about being Safety Patrol?

Frank de Leon 38:35

Well, it wasn't. It was harder than I thought it was, yeah, so you had to kind of look at the traffic and kind of figure out when a car would come by. So you don't, you don't want to. You would you want to block the kids? Then you look around, make sure there was no cars coming. Then you would let them go to across the street. There was, like two or three crossings. One was on First Street. I want to say first we I know Cesar Chavez and some of the new guys might like that, but we always knew it as First Street, la calle primera. So it was on First Street, cross into across the third Highway 81/ i35 and then crossing over to towards Rainey Street, and the other one was on the north, going north, crossing to Second Street.

Sergio Barrera 39:37

Did they give you any type of vest or, like?

Frank de Leon 39:39

yeah, they gave you, they gave you a hat, like a military hat, but it was white and some kind of a collar. It was go across here. It was white, had a little badge you put around here. But they didn't give us a flag. I don't recall a flag. I.

Sergio Barrera 40:00

No stop sign either?

Frank de Leon 40:03

I don't remember. Yeah, I think that came later. Yeah,

Sergio Barrera 40:06

was that sort of something you volunteered for? You got voted for?

Frank de Leon 40:11

I don't know how that got it. I think that there was the big guys, you know, the sixth graders, fifth graders, and then when they have didn't have maybe somebody was absent. They would go to the fifth or sixth graders. And I guess you know we're looking for it. Raise your hand. A bunch of guys would raise their hand. Okay, you it was random pick. One time I got picked.

Sergio Barrera 40:39

So would you, would you get pulled out of the classroom to go do that, or how would that?

Frank de Leon 40:43

Yeah, yeah, yeah, the teacher had to let you go far as I know. Yeah, it was close to, you know, three in the class. Yeah, maybe 10 minutes before class ended.

Sergio Barrera 40:59

Were there any just like, you know, when you think back of your time at Palm school, any memory that really brings you joy, or that brings you, you know, is like, this is a wonderful memory that I'm always going to share, cherish from Palm school.

Frank de Leon 41:16

Well, you know, it's not a, it's not a, it's not even bad. But the one memory about the the Halloween story and the Christopher Columbus, and then, I think I was in the fourth grade, and we, we were drawing or coloring, and I got an argument with a little girl named Mary Alice, for some reason, it had to do something with coloring. It was right before we had recess, we had a peer, we go outside and play, and she had just sharpen her pencil, and she got mad at me for some reason, and she stabbed me right here with it. I still got it in the blue dot. That's my first tattoo. I think it's on this side. And I remember that. I never forget it. I remember her name, Mary, Alice, but I can't remember her face, but I remember the teacher consoling me. And I think she kept a little girl, and then from at that, we went outside and played. But I remember that I'll never forget it. It's not a bad memory, just a memory, you know. But I remember that..

Sergio Barrera 42:38

We've spoken about a little bit about, you know, your experiences being paddled maybe once or twice. But do you recall any other bad experiences that you might have had at Palm school?

Frank de Leon 42:58

No, no, I don't remember. Yeah, it was other than the paddling, yeah. I mean, everything, everything was, you know, nothing dramatic, you know?

Sergio Barrera 43:08

What were the other children like? Or, how do you remember them treating you like?

Frank de Leon 43:13

Well we all got along. I remember like and recess. We, for some reason, everybody like to play jacks. Actually, that's what you could do. You sit on the floor. Already played jacks. I heard of it. You just sit on the floor and,

43:27

yeah, and we all, we all got along.

Sergio Barrera 43:32

Jacks is the one where you have, like, a little ball, and then you grab?

Frank de Leon 43:33

yeah, that's little things like a cross the metal, metal, metal, and you throw the ball out, you pick up the jack and catch the ball, eye coordination and stuff, it was fun. I couldn't do it no more though.

Sergio Barrera 43:49

Do you remember having any best friends at Palm school?

Frank de Leon 43:55

Other than my brothers? I knew guys, you know, but I don't, I don't remember going to their houses, or we just hang around. My brothers were my best friends. We, we, yeah, we hang around together. I entered junior high. We started going having other friends.

Sergio Barrera 44:17

So at Palm school, we're all three of you together at one point?

Frank de Leon 44:19

No, we were, we were a couple of classes behind. Yeah, we knew, I think Marcos and Geraldo, they were, they got to junior high, and I was there one year, and had to leave. I went to high school. Same thing. They were like two I think Marco was two years behind in my Geraldo was like three years behind me. So we never really in high school. We never, yeah, yeah. We didn't. When you see each other in class, in school, very much

Sergio Barrera 44:49

and at Palm school, either,

Frank de Leon 44:52

yeah, I don't, yeah, I don't remember. You know, you know us been together. I knew they were there, but we never ran into each other.

Sergio Barrera 45:07

Were there any celebrations that palm school would would highlight or do? Maybe Mother's Day, Anita mentioned yesterday that they had Fiesta days. Do you remember any celebration like that at Palm school?

Frank de Leon 45:23

No. Yeah, I was someone new when I was when I was planning to come home, you know, selected to be here. I was going trying to think of all kind of stuff, just blank, blank, blank,

Sergio Barrera 45:36

in terms of opportunities for families to be involved. Was your was your father ever going to school, or did he ever attend any parent teacher conference or anything like that?

Frank de Leon 45:47

Not that I'm aware of. I think maybe the first day of school and went less, enlisted when it took us to enroll with

Sergio Barrera 45:59

so if you would think of what role education has played in your life. How would you describe that?

Frank de Leon 46:07

Well, I think I was given the basics. I think it's up to me to go from there I was, I was taught to read and write, you know, math, you know, maybe socializing with other people, but you know, you know, it prepared me, but I don't think, I think I got my best. Well, you never stop learning. You know, I was, I was an average kid. I made Fs, I made Bs, I made, I think, couple of A's, but I was a BC, average guy, so I just, you know, went to school, learn, graduate. Well, actually, I'm a mid term graduate. I didn't, I didn't grad... I was supposed to graduate in 64 but like, said, I failed Algebra, and I think typing, so I was a guy, like a credit a half, and had to make it up. So I went, instead of dropping out, I went ahead and finished. I mean, I went an extra, an extra semester of school, and I just took pretty a couple of three, four courses. I was about halfway just to get my my my credits like I needed one and a half. To my surprise, I wasn't the only one. We graduated mid turn. It was a it was a big it was me, it was high school, it was Austin High McCallum and a couple other schools we all graduate together at the ceremony at the Austin High auditorium.

Sergio Barrera 47:52

I want to transition a little bit more to thinking about the Palm school within a larger, you know, Chicano, East Austin, Austin, Texas, you know, as Maggie was, was mentioning, how do you think the Palm school fit into the larger Mexican American community?

Frank de Leon 48:12

you know, but back then, you didn't, you didn't, I didn't think we wasn't known as A community, Mexican American community. It was just a neighborhood, you know, today, things are labeled different or seen different. Maybe, I don't know, because you go back and look and you see something else back then, eight year old, you know, just doing, just living your life, doing what you're supposed to, go to school, learn, go home, good time. But you know, other than that, you know, I don't fit anything in the community. Just it was a neighborhood, you know?

Sergio Barrera 49:00

if you and maybe this is not something that that you may be aware of, but do you know if maybe your father had a choice as to whether he wanted to send you to palm school or not, or was that kind of just by design of where you lived in the neighborhood?

Frank de Leon 49:15

Yeah think it was where we lived, yeah, when we lived in, I remember when we came back from far that's when my mother died. We lived on Haskell Street, and that's on East Austin. That's by the old Fish Hatchery. My uncle, my uncle, Luther, that's my father's brother. We lived with him for a couple, and then we then we got our own place. So it was just basically that

Sergio Barrera 49:48

I'm interested also in like I like I said, I've been privileged to to interview people that have family members that went to palm school. So as being the eldest of two brothers. What does that mean to you? The fact that this was also a family like a school where your family went to, how does that shape maybe your idea of family and your brothers sharing this history in Rainey Street, East Austin and palm school?

Frank de Leon 50:15

Well you know, back then, you didn't think like that. You wasn't like that. It's maybe later, but it was, it's the thing you did back then we lived there. The school was there, you know, we went to school in our neighborhood, you know, as far as shaping me, I got it, you know, I was supposed to get an education, which I did, you know, and things the first couple, first 12 years, your life again, you know, you get educated. Get so prepared. Once you get out of high school, it's up to you for the how you going to turn out and how you going to react or take your your part in history. You know, you know, so I was, I think I was well prepared into my high school, my to my 12 years, two and a half years of schooling and my education, my life really didn't start until after I got out of high school. It was, you know, it was high school. Have a good time. Go play after school. Just do your own thing. It was very simple. Today is, I guess it's complicated back then, you know, you gotta eat breakfast, go to school, come back. Go play. Get into trouble, you know, go do some bad things here and there, but that was normal. You know, we didn't break any laws, we didn't hurt any property. You know, we just grew up. Pretty simple. It was pretty simple, really. Complicated today, I'm afraid.

Sergio Barrera 51:56

yeah, there's, there's a lot of other things that I think today, now, students have to be hyper focused, hyper aware of because there has been so much work done on it, right? And, and I always, I'm like, it's a double-edged sword, because as much as you're growing conscious, you're also worried about so many things, yeah, and you may lose focus of education.

Frank de Leon 52:16

Yeah, yeah, you're right. There's a lot of distractions. We didn't have distractions other than our home. I mean, we didn't have what we have. We didn't get a TV to it was back to me. It was a high school/junior high when we first got our first TV, black and white.

Sergio Barrera 52:38

So looking back today, how do you think that the people feel the community feels about the history of palm school?

Frank de Leon 52:49

When you say community, do you talking about the people that they live in an area? Yeah, yeah. Well, you know it to me, I'm always, I was always, am always glad. And when I live in San Marcos, I left, I left Austin 65 to get out of high school. And every time when I pass, I enjoyed looking at the school. I you know, it's there. It's still there. Lot of things are not there. The more Superior Dairies is not it's no longer there. That good year store, that drug store, you know, everything around there is gone. The whole, the

whole section between 35 and Congress. I mean, I mean first street between 35 and Congress. It's all changed. It used to be all nice neighborhood. The whole area was pretty simple. You could go anywhere in that part of town. They used to be the warehouse district. Now it's used to be kind of a different kind of warehouses, businesses and stuff. It's all changed.

Sergio Barrera 54:09

So I know, when we were in the room, we were looking at sort of images, and, you know, we were discussing certain businesses and things like that that were that were around the neighborhood. Do you remember any of those, what they look like, maybe who the owners were, or what what these businesses and surrounding were?

Frank de Leon 54:28

Well on First Street, there was a small grocery store, if you're familiar with First Street, to the Chavez for you folks who don't know what First Street is, west of west of the school, just super dairies, and then you got Red River. And then you get to water Creek on the right hand side, left hand. There was a little grocery store. And that was the neighborhood grocery store when we lived there, you got bread, soda, stuff like that. And we're just a big right now, I think on Red River and first street there's a barbecue place. Back then it was iron, some kind of iron factory. They would make Iron stuff out of iron. I remember that, and that was our in Superior Dairies. So we spent a lot of time in Superior. We would buy the ice cream, and then you, you would get, you get the there was the cap on the ice cream, these little caps, and you would save those, and he could, you would exchange him for gifts, for prizes and stuff. And then the the grocery store, I remember the owner. I can't forget, I forgot their names, but they they would back then you have put, you paid a deposit for bottles, for Coke, seven ups, and there was a deposit of two cents, and he would give you one penny for him. And that's what, that was his cost. He would give so we would go out. That's how we got our movie money. My brothers and myself, we would go in that warehouse district with anybody was produce stores, all kind of stuff, and lot of workers, and they would just back then, no cans, all bottles. And they would discard the bottles, leave them there. And we would go after school or at night, and we'll find bottles all over the place. 10,15, taken to this gentleman at the store, and he was give us a penny for him, and all we needed was 15 cents. We could go to movies. He's cost, he's called, he's cost us five cents to go the movies, and it would go the Ritz. And we see a double feature for five cents back then, I remember that we do that. That's anytime we wanted to go movies, we go look for bottles, and we found them, and that's how we would that was, that was kind of fun.

Sergio Barrera 57:19

Any any movies that you remember watching that stick out to you?

Frank de Leon 57:22

I remember seeing a lone ranger. Yeah, I saw Elvis Pressley, "Love Me Tender". And the last movie they played the rich theater. I know this because I was there, was the West Side Story. West Side Story, I guess came out in 62 something like that. 1960 we went, I went and saw that. For some reason my brothers didn't want to go see I would say that. And the next day there was having another feature. And when we showed up, it was closed, closed for remodeling, and never reopen. It reopen later on, but somebody else, but the actual the last movie played at the red theater was the West Side Story that

I recall. That's a musical, right? About musical, yeah, yeah. It was a good musical. It was seen as, yeah, it's on TV. It's you can see reruns of it. They made a new one, but it wasn't as good as the old one. Yeah, here's a political cut type movie, if I remember. But that thing, we didn't call it, it wasn't political. We didn't call it. We didn't think was political. I didn't realize political things so way, way, way back, back then, things were, weren't political. They were just, that's the way it was.

Sergio Barrera 58:46

I know when we were when we were also in the room. You were describing that the windows in the top right maybe were of the library, right? Do you remember what the inside of the library looked like?

Frank de Leon 58:59

I remember is it wasn't that big. I remember the counter was facing the windows, though, as you looked at the window, there was a counter there, and then the rest the library. But it wasn't really that big. But I remember the library just books. We used to go there and read books and stuff like that, I don't remember that much.

Sergio Barrera 59:23

Do you remember if it was something that you enjoyed going to?

Frank de Leon 59:28

No, it was away from class. Look at books. You know?

Sergio Barrera 59:41

I want to move a little bit to kind of what came after Palm Schooll. And I don't know if maybe you had gone to, I think it's u h,

Frank de Leon 59:51

university, u j, h, union Jap headquarters. Is that where you went to middle school? Yeah, university, junior high. Yeah. Yeah. To junior high there.

Sergio Barrera 1:00:01

Could you describe what that was like, going from, from Palm school to then the middle school?

Frank de Leon 1:00:07

It was fun. It was something. It felt like big guys, you know, junior high. Yes, it was, uh, seventh, eighth and ninth grade. Now they call it Middle School, yeah, but it was a, I think it's, it was, it's part of, it was part of the university system. It was, but the the, old high school, the junior high that I was supposed to go to, everybody was supposed to go Allen junior high, but it burned down, and that was right there on, I think on somewhere on Red River, maybe Red River and 12th Street, or 11th street, or something like that, or H Street. But it burned down, so we, we were looking forward to go to to Allen junior high. It was kind of like, like, palm schools, old, yeah, brick building. So we went on going to University Junior High. But I, you know, it was, I spent a lot of time in the teaching hall there. Again, we did the American pledge lead flag. It was a nice it was, I enjoy going, Yeah, that's why I decided to join the Air Force. We were talking about career day or something like that, and I told they asked, what you want to do? Well,

when you grow up, what are you ideas? I told him, I want to be a jet pilot, join the Air Force. So that back in June, that's what my mind on, that.

Sergio Barrera 1:01:45

Do you remember why maybe the Air Force stuck out to you?

Frank de Leon 1:01:48

Yeah, I guess you just see movies about, yeah, the army narrative phase me, but yeah, that would just, I just saw myself sitting in a jet plane. Well, I did join the Air Force, but I didn't become a pilot. But, yeah, but you know, I remember in junior high, we started talking about Texas history. I remember that because I remember one of my professor, instructors, teachers, told us about Pancho Villa. He gave the history of the history of Texas, and Pancho Villa, I would come across the border, and I remember that that was in junior high. That's when I first started learning about, you know, history and for the United States and other countries and stuff.

Sergio Barrera 1:02:42

So that is corner your your first introduction to anything Mexican history, really,

Frank de Leon 1:02:46

I guess so, yeah, yeah, I've heard of these guys, but never really heard nothing much, yeah.

Sergio Barrera 1:02:56

And when you said career day that possibly that may have been an avenue as to how you were interested in in the Air Force. Did they have people come in and talk about it? Or were the, were the schools playing these movies that you were..

Frank de Leon 1:03:11

No that just was, I guess they were doing some kind of survey evaluating what you want to do, maybe to to see what what courses to lead me to take. So, you know, I think back then you could, you had certain you could take electives and stuff like that. Personally, you had your basics, then electives and but I remember that was one of the questions,

Sergio Barrera 1:03:38

did the demographics from Palm school, change when you went to to a junior high did, or was it still predominantly Mexican and Anglo?

Frank de Leon 1:03:48

No, excuse me, that's when. That's when we first were introduced to black students in junior high. We didn't have any in in Palm but we did have black students. We didn't have that many, though, maybe a handful that I can recall matter of it was a handful even in high school.

Sergio Barrera 1:04:08

Yeah, so things kind of stayed the same in terms of yes

Frank de Leon 1:04:11

Anglos and Mexicanos and we are ever seen to get along. I don't remember any any fights and protests or anything like that. It was pretty normal. You were another elementary but higher class, you know, sixth grade, seventh juniors.

Sergio Barrera 1:04:35

And then after you go to junior high, what is the name of the school that then you went for high school too.

Frank de Leon 1:04:40

Stephen F Austin on 12th and Rio Grande still there now, but it's part of Austin committee.

Sergio Barrera 1:05:00

Do you remember any stories about Stephen Austin that stick out to you?

Frank de Leon 1:05:05

Well, yeah, that's when all the protests started, the blacks started protesting and stuff. That's when you see all the riots and Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia, all that stuff. But we didn't have any that, any of that here, that's something. There was nothing like that here. I remember there was a big KK Klan march on Congress, and they were protesting because I don't know, part of the natural, the national thing of protesting segregation and this and that. And there was a big old parade in Austin. It was actually not a big parade. It was the KKK marching down Congress Avenue, and they were getting a lot of boo's I remember that, and it was, that's when the black movement started, and we had black kids at our school, and with there was nothing like that, you know, I thought it was pretty good that we weren't doing that in on Austin. You know, that's when it Yeah, I remember that.

Sergio Barrera 1:06:18

So you kind of, are, you kind of heard stories based on the news, I'm assuming right of things that were happening elsewhere.

Frank de Leon 1:06:24

Yeah, you see the news. Yeah, every day. Yeah, it was common, yeah. But nothing here.

Sergio Barrera 1:06:32

And this is around the late 1960s

Frank de Leon 1:06:34

late 1960s Yeah, 60 between 63 to 65, 62, 65 that's when I got that. When I left, I graduated 65 Yeah, Vietnam and all that.

Sergio Barrera 1:06:51

And then you enlist in the Air Force right after high school.

Frank de Leon 1:06:57

Yeah. And actually, before the recruiting office was on Sixth Street, just down the street from Congress and going to high school, there were several routes you could take to take the bus, which most of the time I missed, because by time I got to my neighborhood, it was full. So the recruiter office just down on down the street from six at six street, and I would sometimes come back, go down Rio Grande and turn on six Street and head home. And there was a courthouse, and there was a recruit off there one day I stopped, checked it out, and the guy sure, well, come on in. So we saw I started the paperwork about six months before I got out of high school.

Sergio Barrera 1:07:58

Yeah, and you had said that you you had served, and then you had a break in between, right? And then you became part of the reserve. Yeah,

Frank de Leon 1:08:05

I got out 68 and went back in 70 something, 77 I think, or 75

Sergio Barrera 1:08:18

Did anybody else in your family enlist?

Frank de Leon 1:08:22

I think my brother, Geraldo, he joined the Navy, but he had a medical problem, so they let him go. Yeah, but I had, I had uncles that were my uncle Luther and my uncle John were in the army World War Two, but that was not an influence on me, on that at least, I just knew about it.

Sergio Barrera 1:08:47

Just wanted to be a pilot.

Frank de Leon 1:08:49

wanted to be a pilot.

Sergio Barrera 1:08:53

In looking back, what do you think are some of the accomplishments or highlights of your life that you're you're proud of today, today.

Frank de Leon 1:09:03

Oh, I've done a lot of things, you know? I went to college on a GI Bill. I spent when I when I dropped out, I was classified as a junior, but I had to get out because I had a family, and it was, it was kind of rough one the family, my wife and the kids, plus, I had to, I had to need extra money, so I had to get a part time job. So, but as far as things that I'm proud of, I've done a lot of things, like say I didn't go to college, but I learned a lot of things. I found out I couldn't do certain things, wow, but I. I worked in a grocery store, and I became a manager in the grocery store grocery business. I started as a clerk and went up as a store manager, assistant store manager or and I also became a produce manager chart of the produce department. And then I went to then I went work for university, Texas State University, which is Texas State and I went there, and I started in the grounds department, and I worked my way up to the produce, I mean, produce purchaser. I became, I was the first certified purchaser in my

department to get a certified purchase for the state. And I learned, that's where I learned, I use a computer, and I was I purchase. I made purchases from, I would buy from different vendors. Set up contracts. My biggest contract that I did, I negotiated, was for a half a million dollars for to pick up the trash service for the university. And I took the bid, I did the all the paperwork, and I learned a lot of things, you know, doing that. But that was, I'm real proud that that what I did, you know, I became the first purchaser, authorized purchaser for my, our, department, and I negotiated. I didn't realize that I could do things like that. It just happened. And I caught on real quick, and I was, I was very good at my job. Yeah, that's one thing.

Sergio Barrera 1:12:19

Are there things about your education or your life that that you would like to touch upon that I haven't yet asked you.

Frank de Leon 1:12:28

No, well, you know, yeah, my life, you know, I don't know. I have I lived a pretty normal life. I mean, I my wife and I, we were married, we struggled, but now I'm not, you know, we, we owned a home. We paid for it. And our kids, they're doing okay. They both. They all of them. I got two born and grow. They're doing real good. They got good jobs. My son is he works for the university now. He's, he's a director of irrigation. He runs the whole crew, all the great irrigation for the university. He controls it. And he's got people. He's got several people under him, my daughter, she's office manager for a doctor in Amarillo, and I'm pretty proud of that they're doing they're doing real good. They're not struggling. They're doing real good financially. You know, I'm doing okay, so, but it was hard, you know, it was, it wasn't easy. But you know, you know, I'm not, I don't regret it, the stuff that happened, you know, the bad stuff. Yeah, good. Life's good, still. My wife passed away, but life's still good. You know, I have no complaints. I have no complaint.

Sergio Barrera 1:14:02

So I have a final question to ask you, and it is if you could describe who Frank De Leon has become. How would you describe your life story?

Frank de Leon 1:14:17

Never really thought about that. Yeah, pretty, I guess you could, it's pretty ordinary. US story, poor boy makes, does good, but didn't know he was a poor boy, you know, I never thought it. I never thought I was poor. It was just the way it was. But we, you know, we struggled. But it wasn't, you know, oh my God, I don't have this, you know, it was. That's the way it was adjusted. I think it prepared me for, for for later on in life, you know, I've been around the world a couple of times, in the military, been all kinds, you know, over the Atlantic, over the Pacific. Served in I didn't serve. I mean, I participated. I didn't sort in combat, and during Vietnam Desert Storm, I was a participant. I feel proud that I contributes. I was part of the the force that brought evil down, you know, I think I did good, you know?

Sergio Barrera 1:15:27

Well, I just, on a personal level, want to thank you for sharing everything you are part of history, and I want you to know that you are part of not only Austin's history and Texas history, but Chicano history at a larger scale. And you doing this really means a lot for for many people, and I think remembering is

really important so so once again, thank you so much for everything. I'm good with questions, so I think we will wrap up here.

Frank de Leon 1:15:55

All right, thank you. Yeah, thank you. So you're welcome. You.