

Robert Benton pt1

OK were were good.

Spanish

Mac trucks Volvo trucks Isuzu trucks

Ok ok and you did that

Dump trucks

You did that for a very long time

Yea for a while and I sold cars and pickups

Ugh, can you can you just tell us your name full name for the camera

My full name

Yea

my full name is Robert Lee Benton junior

alright and you give us permission to video record you and use it for the project barrio stories

Yes I do

alright thank you very much um OK umm you had some question alright let me get some basic questions um can you just tell us real quick what your connection to Barrio Anita is

I grew up there

Yeah how how long do like from birth

Yea pretty much

Until yeah until how old

Ugh I was born in 1938 I lived ugh across the street from Davis school and Adobe apartments on the south side which no longer exists and ugh went to Davis school after my grandparents died we moved over to their house which was on the West side of Davis school and my mother still lives there

And ugh when when did you move away from there

Ugh when I got married

OK how how old are you

I'm 78

No when you got married how old were you

Uh 26, I was born in uh 38 so I was married at 67 so whats that uh 29

I don't know

Your not a major

I'm re ally bad at math

You're not a mathematics major

Uh yeah that's almost like uh 38 48 58 that's almost 30 years 29 years

Yeah

Right right uh great uh

28 maybe

What do you. You know so it's been some time since you were living there ugh you know and I imagine things gave changed a lot in that neighborhood or do you think they've changed a lot or not so much

Well. Somewhat, depends on what what the cut off years are

Anyway what are you you know so it's been some time since you were living there and I imagine things have changed a lot in that neighborhood or do you think they've changed the latter not so much

What do you remember most about as as a child a living in barrio Anita

Growing up there had a lot of cousins down the street Uh the remember the talked family the mother of Tellez 2 talked brothers married 2 Felix sisters and they both lived in uh Barron Anita so it developed a lot of little talked kids

Uh and that's uh Felix those are your uncle's or

Yea uncle's and cousins

Yeah okay have you like uh estimated number of your family members that lived there

There were uh I think like uh both families had about 8 kids somewhere around there so there were 16 that would have been my mother's siblings I grew up there played played at the park right next door um attended Davis school

RRobert2audio transcript

Did you learn English at school then

I went to the 1c that was a program got the umm kiss that didn't know how to speak English and it was a familiarization top the English language and then you went to the 1st grade after that

And was that at Davis

Yes

Okay

If you look if you register in the 1c program you're in this is in the 40s 50s

And uh I mean these are just questions like I'm just going to ask them uh they may seem sound obvious when I ask what how's it that you you were Born in Tucson right

Yes

That you were Bjorn in here but didn't learn English until you Inouye you got into school

That's correct I heard my mother and father spoke English

So how did you not learn English

Well we always hung around my grandparents next door and they didn't speak English

Ok

I don't think I don't remember

So you you had your house and then your grandparents lived next door to you

Well close

Okay

Close that right across the street from Davis school as I said we lived from the south side and then my grandparents lived on the West side of the school.

Oh ok

So is just like you know walking from here top the building there it was really close by

Ands then you had cousins who you lived nearby as well

Res

We were close very close neighborhood barrio because it's a small barrio and uh and there was lots of relatives and a lot of friends so Uh

He just named some of the different families that were either friends or family of yours that lived around there

Well uh the tellez family of course and then the was uh acedo family on of the one of the Felix sisters maid an acedo and uh they umm I just can't think the carbajals the carbajals Rico's my my tio politico my mother's his wife was my my mother's second cousin or something and they were very but they were comrades like sisters so it was a very very tight right not we didn't look our doors we slept outside in the summer uhh walked uh all the to my uh you know whee Anita street marker is okay great maybe just one or two blocks north of that is where the tellez lived the the uh man the names of the rodriguez um Ramos um let me think of the names of the other ones who turned it to be educated so it was a pleasant it was a pleasant time for us for me

What uh why what is it about that that time or you know that felt good or a when you think back at it very pleasant you know what Made it that way what do you think

There weren't bad people laugh you know

Really

You know uh there was no crime

Really

Other than fighting in the bars maybe you know or after a wedding there was a wedding fight to 2 factions would go at each other yea something like that we uh we learned uh music a little bit from my dad and learned how to sing from like my dad and compares that would get in the afternoons Saturday or Sunday afternoons

Can you describe that like if you kinda saw your memory what you would see sights or s smells or sounds like

Well we would uh a lot of times we would meet at the umm Rico's house which is right across the street from the railroad on the calls excise me on the Alston street was originally called the calle Carmen and uh everybody stood singing and playing when the train went by as I could never understand how they could sleep at night right next right next to the railroad tracks the umm there was always the smell of fresh tortillas when they could afford a little queso always had little little botanita

Where they maid or were they harina.

Harina my tia berta would make the what we call a Sonaran tortillas I remember her putting flower on her arms and making these big tortillas my mother would make more Las gorditas

What do you prefer Las gorditas or

Oh Both

Both

But uh there was nothing like those big ones get then right of the stove put A little well we didn't have butter we had margin better was a big freak during the war

Ok yea

This isn't uh or right after so uh the uhh men would uh have a little beers and pass the bottle and have just s great time

And what kind of songs were they playing

Oh they el I uh I recorded a CD from my brother in there I sing songs from the 30s 40s maybe early 50s the uh also guerrero type stuff when he was here my dad knew him uh and there was uh a lot of music in the era of mine. one of my tias my tia Jesus acedo she was a Felix and she she had well the house is still there and she had uh great vines that grew into uh a cover and had a lot a lot of grapes and uh underneath there they used to have back there they used to have dances they tell me I barely remember dancing out there in the dirt

When you were talking about you know your dad and friends or family getting together to play music this is where on a weekend or in the day

Weekend weekend

Or at night

Saturdays sometimes Sunday afternoons

What else do you remember about those gatherings

It was uh the gathering were just a wonderful time for me at that time when I got a little older I kinda though eh this is a bit old it's not for me its for old guys but actually I just hung into that to that music or that's what uh I learned I went to John springs junior high when we were kids it was integrated And there was some white families that lived in these small apartments I never understand that as a kid how come they didn't go to the same school as I did right across the street

Is that because they were segregated

They were segregated

I think they integrated the schools in the 1952 or so and uh they renamed it john spring who was the first teacher in the state. I didn't understand the history I didn't understand why they should I thought they should've kept the name but uh played alot of basketball sports ried park you know make up make up stuff

Yea

They had a swimming pool there elevated changed the water on Thursday I think three was no filter it got a little well it wasn't too clear there on

Wednesday and was the pool segregated during the time when you were a kid.

You know I don't remember I think it was integrated the pool uh there were little tiny waiting pools around and then there was baseball team that played there the uh tired park tigers a city league type of deal it was a big rivalry there with the Mexican baseball teams

So would teams come up from Mexico to play them

No there was well sometimes from nogales but the umm the barrio seemed like every you knew 80 percent of the people there and on a friendly basis you knew who everyone one was what they did and whatever

Yea I mean that uh seemed to be uh the biggest difference back in the day. And it just seems to be one of the big difference we see now cuz I feel like you know your next door neighbor the person across the street you know

I know very few people there

Why do you think that changed

Well the younger kids moved out and I guess maybe I don't know maybe 20 years ago or more people would buy the old houses and renovate them move in.

Robert: Gringos would come in there and made it a little better, but it was a— Well, another thing I could remember is that there was an acequia— a canal that ran right through, and I think I remember that it actually ran underneath a couple houses. So, I think I remember looking through the wood floor and the water being there, and it went all the way I guess to ... farms or Ajo and we'd play in the water. It was right there between Davis School and Oury Park.

Yeah, Lee Otero sent me a little book that some of the kids at Davis, this was maybe like about fifteen years ago, they collected some raw history around that irrigation canal and there's a bunch of little stories in that book that they collected. One was about this baby Alfredo, does that ring a bell? I don't think it really happened, but he fell into the canal and he like floated down and all these different people tried to get him, and then some like really tall guy, who was like a giant that everyone was afraid of like grabbed him and saved him

Robert: I haven't heard it, but I would tend to believe something like that happened. Maybe they embellished it a little bit, but I could imagine if the canal was up and in a pretty good mood- then it would float a baby away.

Do you have any memory- oh, you mentioned Oury Park and when I was doing my initial research for this project, we went to Oury Park and the recreation center there and talked to some of the parks and rec staff that, they weren't there back in the day, but they told me about there was a guy that used to work there maybe in the sixties, that was, I think his nickname was Chino, but he was he just helped a lot of young men out, like as far as like working with young men, making sure they make good decisions, you know- a father figure I guess. And I just wonder if you know, if you have any memories of that center, that rec center.

Robert: Yeah, but by then I had moved out. But, later, I guess, some of the kids would get into drugs, you know after I grew up there.

There wasn't like a drug problem when you were there?

Robert: No. Well, there was a nickname of a guy who—I think he lived in Hollywood, but he attended school there in that area, and his nickname was El Marijuano. *laughs* And, a lot of, in those days I'm just talking about the forties, fifties, sixties, early sixties maybe, it was still pretty closely knit, and after that, you know, progress or whatever, the younger people move out to a better, nicer places and then older people would die off, so it changed a little bit. There were a whole bunch of Chinese little corner stores, the Anita Street Market was one of the latest, more modern ones. There originally was a little Chinese grocery store there and my mother used to work part time at there was one on the Northeast corner of Davis School there, called Wing Li and I went to school with one of the sons, his name was Johnny Lin. Another block there was a Chino Loco, two or three blocks more on the East side was one a Chinese grocery store and then that one pretty nice one, where the Anita Street Market is, and then they had one right on Speedway that was really really new, unfortunately that's when they made the underpass and widened Speedway and they had to tear it down. But it was a fairly new store. So that on the outskirts, well I guess its still Barrio Anita on main, and sixth there was a Chinese grocery store across where Holy Family Church is, the building is still there across the street was another Chinese grocery store, south side of the market.

Oh my!

Robert: So they were all- *laughs*

And they're not there anymore?

Robert: No, not anymore. They just supported themselves, you know? They had a you know, we didn't have any refrigeration, so everybody went to... they'd sell you soupa so that you could make, I didn't know then I was having consommé *laughs*

Wow, so you guys didn't have refrigerators?

Robert: No

So you would just get what you needed for like the day

Robert: yeah, we had ice boxes. When I visited my grandmother, this was in the forties during the war, the ice man would come by delivering ice and they'd tell me... He had a German last name and German ancestry and when he came to deliver the ice I'd hide, cause it was during the war.

Oh, and your Aunt would make you like afraid?

Robert: yeah!

Were there a lot of Mexican Americans, like that served in the war?

Robert: Oh yeah. Well, yes. One of my cousins his name was Henry Tellez or Enrique from the Barrio there grew up, he was in the army air force in the Philippines, he survived the Bataan March, if you've ever heard of that, that was when the Japanese overran the Philippines and overran our troops and the air force there when MacArthur had to leave, General MacArthur, and he survived the Bataan March. My uncle served in, there's almost, a lot of people served in the military. Then and after the military, after the World War II, seems like everybody went into the military for a little while. They went in for- they got out of high school or dropped out of high school and went into the Navy, Marines, Army, not too many in the air force, and they go in anywhere from two to four years usually. Usually three or four years, then come back. When I was drafted, I was pretty old, I was twenty three years old, these guys would lie about their age and join the military at sixteen or seventeen. So, all my friends had already been in the military now.

You were drafted, was that during the Vietnam War?

Robert: No, I was drafted when the Berlin wall was going on, 1961, in that area. So they were drafting everybody, cause it was the Cold War, the peak of the cold war. And I was, when I was in, I was sure somebody was going to push a button. And boom! You know, everybody's just... In those days I was already out of school, and I went part time to University of Arizona working for the time. They used to teach the kids to hide under the desk, you know, for- we didn't have any shelters really. During the war, World War II, my dad was too young for World War I and too old for World War II. But he was in the air raids in the-during the war (What's that?); at certain times of day they did a practice that we were being bombed or whatever. The sirens would go off over town and my dad I remember put on a hat, went outside and stopped traffic. And that was during the war years.

Do you have any, like a story you could share, maybe an incident that happened that you still remember, either, you know, either good or bad, you know that like, you know if there's a story that comes in mind.

Robert: Well, one of the most famous stories was the, when a, I think it was an oil or a gasoline tank had crashed into the railroad tracks at Main and Davis Street, and the flames and everything, all the gasoline held downstream to Davis school and all the kids were jumping the fences trying to get out of the school. I don't think it really burnt the school, I was a little kid and I don't remember the incident. But one of my cousins was there at the, when it happened, and he-he just, unfortunately he just passed away a few months ago. But, he knew a lot. He was a little bit older, he was in the eighties, eighty-eight or so. So, he was a little older than me, but he knew a lot the old stuff, and he-unfortunately, he's not around. I do have a couple of names that I'd like you to talk to that I think would be very honored to sit around and talk about their memories.

Yeah. Around when do you, around when was the tanker accident?

Robert: I think it was in the forties.

Oh, okay.

Robert: I think it was in the forties. It was after the war, I think. Did you have some questions?

I think I would like to know, like what is something typical, like tradicional, that you would do there with your family, or like in the neighborhood.

Robert: Birthday parties, you know? In those days the piñata was made out of a clay pot.

Oh wow.

Robert: You know, they decorated the pot and put the candies and everything on it. It was very dangerous thing

laughs I could imagine!

Robert: Actually, we wouldn't use a baseball bat, but we would have a pickaxe handle, one of those heavy things like that. It would start out with the little kids hitting it with a broom. Then when it got down to serious things the older ones would try to break the piñata with a heavy, like an axe handle, you know the wooden spike part. And it was kind of dangerous cause when they hit it

Yeah, I mean the shards

Robert: Yeah, the shards and the kids would go up there and chase- WAIT, WAIT, WAIT! They'd chase it and the little piñata would still be coming down and hit the kids on the head and pick up the candies. So, that was quite a deal at the birthday parties that I remember.

Would they make the piñata or would they just-

Robert: You know, they take a clay pot that they used for all kinds, to- they used it hold water, they used it for plants. They were- oh! My grandmother's house! There was two rooms and a dirt kitchen. And I don't know if all eight kids were growing- grew up there, but there was no plumbing in the house. And there was this, like a little storage shed close to the house. And right outside the house was this water spigot. My grandmother, I remember her- arreglando la- the floor and then sweeping the dirt floor

kitchen at night. A lot of women, men and women would play cards, I remember that. They, I think they played a game called Panguingue and Malia. We were hoity toity at my grandmother's house, they had a phone, a telephone. They did not have any indoor plumbing, but on the-way in the back where normally there would be an outhouse, there was a water closet. You know, the name, that's where the name comes- the international sign for toilets used to be WC- water closet. So, we had an outhouse, a plumbing outhouse in the back with a—have you ever seen those, where they have the tank on top with the chain? Very very efficient, you know, cause if you wanted to go out in the night and stuff you'd have to go out there and maybe- if you had a flashlight or something. But, that was, I thought, really neat.

CLIP SELECTION: 13:34-15:43