

JOHNSON: Today is October 19, 2001. Interviewer is Chris Johnson; interviewee is Josie Sanchez. If you can start off by giving me a brief biography of yourself?

SANCHEZ: O.K. My name is Josie Ortega Sanchez. I was born in Needles, California in 1925, March 17. My parents moved to Tempe from Needles, California where I was born, and they moved to 802 E. 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Tempe. They lived there for many years until the University stepped in and bought the property.

JOHNSON: What are your memories of the Tempe Beach Park?

SANCHEZ: Well, my father worked with the WPA, which was a government project established to help the poor people to earn their living. That was, I believe, in the early 1930s. My dad helped build the dressing room and the snack bar (of the pool), and he also helped....Right by the Tempe Beach there was the railroad tracks. He worked part of the time on that. The earliest memories that I have was the fact that the Mexican children could not use the facilities there. It was a very segregated area. There was a park adjacent to the pool, and we could go play there, but we could not use the pool. This was a law throughout the state, I guess, and so you can't point a finger at anybody in particular. This also hindered the Mexican population from enjoying other parts of Tempe, for example, the stores. If you went into a store you were watched, and so it was an uncomfortable feeling during that time. It also affected the public schools.

There was one school that was totally segregated. It was the old 8<sup>th</sup> Street School which is nowadays (there has been so much talk about it) quite common knowledge.

JOHNSON: Can you elaborate anymore about the pool?

SANCHEZ: Yes, I was just going to bring up something that happened. Every year those groups that were graduating from the Tempe Grammar School (I had transferred to Tempe Grammar School) they had, before graduation, what they called "ditch day." This meant that for one day these students from the eighth grade got to have a free day to go and participate in different activities. Our class voted, and they decided that they were going to go swimming in the pool. Well, there was a lot of excitement. We were kids and we didn't realize that, even though we were going to Tempe Beach, we were not going to swim. In the afternoon when we were being released from the class, I remember my teacher, Mr. James Nesbitt. He was a very wonderful man, and he let go all the Anglos and kept all the Mexican kids. He was so embarrassed. I know he felt quite badly. His actions told me that. He said that we was very sorry, but he had to let us know that the Mexican children were not allowed to swim. We could sit around the pool and watch the Anglos swim, and we could take our lunch and sit on the side and just watch.

I remember distinctly a young lady (I won't mention her name because her family is still alive). She was a very

light complected, reddish hair, and Mr. Nesbitt mentioned her name and said, You may go swimming because you will fit in with the others, meaning that her complexion was light and her hair. Nobody would be able to tell the difference. Well, she did. She took a swimming suit. To this day, may she rest in peace, I hate her because I felt she should have stood up. If the rest of the kids weren't good enough to go swimming, she shouldn't have been. I would have done that, but she didn't. So that was a grudge that I lived with.

JOHNSON: Was there anything in the park that you couldn't use as well, like restrooms?

SANCHEZ: Didn't say anything about the restrooms. They just mentioned the swimming pool. So what took place instead, and I've mentioned this before, the mother of one of the Mexican kids [who] lived right close to the swimming pool found out about it, and she was very angry. And so what she did was she told her daughter that we were to go over to her house, and she prepared sandwiches and drinks and she played some of the records she had, the old Victrola-style. And then everybody danced and we played games. I think we had more fun than all those kids swimming. That is something that-not made me sad-but, I still resented that fact, you know, that we were deprived.

In later years again, I realized that it wasn't the school. It was the rules that existed. You know, you didn't speak English, you didn't mingle with the whites

in the classroom. I am going to elaborate a little because I don't think I've ever mentioned this. In Mr. Nesbitt's class, the Mexican kids sat on one side of the classroom, and the Anglos sat on the others. To me at that time, it didn't mean anything. This was how it was, and I didn't stop to think, Well, hey, they don't like us, or anything like that. I accepted it. These are some of the things we had to go through. In later years, as a matter of fact I am trying to think back when the swimming pool was open to the Mexican population, I remember there was a lady. I am going to talk about the war now, and where the changes started taking place. The veterans came back. The war was still going on, but the older ones who had been there was for a certain length of time were discharged. There was a woman by the name of Juana Peralta, and she had quite a few boys. She was the instigator and got everything started. She encouraged the Mexican veterans to fight for their rights. I was still quite young. She got a bunch of the veterans together, but I don't remember whether they went to the city fathers or whether they went to the legislators to try to pass a law. I don't recall; I was too young.

I have never heard Juana's name mentioned. She never got the credit for encouraging all the veterans. They gave the credit to the veterans, but Juana was a very dynamic Mexican lady. She was very outspoken, and she was the force behind these boys. She got them excited and encouraged, and that's where they started fighting for their rights and things started changing. And then the

younger generation of veterans came in, and they continued with the fight.

JOHNSON: How old was Juana? Was she an older lady, middle-aged?

SANCHEZ: Maybe she was in her early 50s.

JOHNSON: Do you remember where she lived?

SANCHEZ: She lived on University and Rural Road in the old barrio. I remember her. She was a very nice lady, but she spoke up for her rights.

JOHNSON: Do you know when she passed away?

SANCHEZ: It was some time ago. I don't remember the exact [time].

JOHNSON: Do you know if she had any family?

SANCHEZ: Oh gosh. She had-let's see-there was Ray, Manuel, Gerald, Armando, and Albert. She had three daughters. Alice Harkins, by the way, and Alvinelle (I don't know Alvinelle's last name), and Emeline Peralta. Those were her three daughters.

JOHNSON: You say that Alice married Dan Harkins, or Dwight?

SANCHEZ: Dwight Harkins, yes.

JOHNSON: Was there a specific day of the week where Mexican

children could go swimming in pools during this segregation [period]?

SANCHEZ: No, we were not allowed to go swimming, period. Our swimming pool was the canal. We went swimming there.

JOHNSON: Do you remember when the pool was opened up? Was it an event?

SANCHEZ: I don't recall that they had a celebration or anything like that. I mean, the city fathers were really pressured, and Juana (if I remember correctly) went and made them aware that, Hey, my sons fought in the war. They fought for their country, and they are entitled to the rights of other veterans. I'm telling you, she was very dynamic.

You have here the Rodriguez family.

JOHNSON: Yes, what are your memories of the Rodriguez family?

SANCHEZ: This Rodriguez family I remember quite well. They were the children of [unintelligible] and Isabel Rodriguez, and they lived on 7<sup>th</sup> Street between Center and College. Isabel had quite a few boys and one girl. They were some of the nicest boys in the area. They had a big house, and then they rented some little apartments. My mom and dad stayed there for maybe a couple of days and then moved to the old location, 802. They were Methodists. In those days, I guess Dan did work with

Juana, and fought for the rights, or he might have been the second batch that came in, because I remember the older veterans that fought.

JOHNSON: Do you remember a specific date when it started?

SANCHEZ: I can't remember the length of time that the older veterans fought. When I say "older," it was the first group of veterans that came back. I don't remember how long they were into this because I must have been about 14 or 15. The Rodriguez family-the girl-had a beautiful voice. Her name was Anita, and she used to sing in a lot of the functions, the fiestas patri (?), and she sang at weddings and in her church. Dan, I remember him, he's an old man now, I am sure like I am.

JOHNSON: He passed away a couple years ago.

SANCHEZ: Oh, Dan did? He was a very handsome young man, but other than working with the veterans, I don't remember him being involved in any of the other activities. I know that his younger brother, his name was Ben, he used to be involved with out organization, the youth organization. But Dan, I don't remember him being involved in much.

JOHNSON: What are your memories of Dwight Harkins' involvement in the desegregation movement at the pool?

SANCHEZ: The only thing that I remember of Dwight Harkins he owned a movie theater. It was a very small building, an he

used to charge ten cents for a movie. There was a jewelry and his mother attached to it, so between what we paid for the movie which was ten cents and then we bought popcorn when we had the nickel. That's what we paid the Davenport's. They were the jeweler and his mother. The first movie that I saw, and this is getting away from the desegregation was called "Seventh Heaven." It was a very romantic movie, and I was very impressed because I have always been very romantic in the sense that my brain is always....what is the proper terminology for that?

JOHNSON: Do you remember if Dwight had any contributions to the community in general?

SANCHEZ: I don't remember. Not like his son. His son is a very active person. Anyone knows his son, but I don't remember him. I wasn't involved. I was still too young when he ran that little theater.

JOHNSON: Is there anyone else beside Juana and Dan that you can think of that were involved in the desegregation?

SANCHEZ: Manuel Peralta was involved in that, and I don't think Geraldo was. Did I put down Geraldo too? Manuel and Ray were both very active with Juana.

JOHNSON: You don't remember any of the older veterans?

SANCHEZ: I remember one, they called him "Terminel" (?), but I don't remember his last name. He was one of the really



first ones that came back. He was an old veteran. And there was also Armando Peralta, too, Juana's boy. Those guys were very active with their mother.

JOHNSON: Was Juana always trying to change the status quo so to speak, or was it just after World War II?

SANCHEZ: It was at this time, during World War II, when her sons came back, and they wanted to go swimming and they weren't allowed.

JOHNSON: Were you aware of any political backlash against any individuals who were involved in the desegregation of the pool?

SANCHEZ: Just the ones that I mentioned. In later years, the younger veterans that came back (I'm trying to think who they were but I don't remember, I really don't remember who the other ones were).

JOHNSON: Do you remember any blackballing by any individuals?

SANCHEZ: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I don't think anybody dared blackball them because there was too much attention focused on the fact that they were depriving veterans. At that point, too, some of the veterans were able to get jobs that they couldn't have before the war because of all the ruckus that was caused.

JOHNSON: Do you know anybody else who I might want to talk to

about this?

SANCHEZ: Have you talked to Ralph Chavarria? He's very verbal when it comes to us not being allowed to go swimming. They used to swim in a water hole over by the butte. We, in my neighborhood, there was a canal that went by. That canal extended way up to the creamery. What is it called now? McClintock, up to McClintock. It was an open canal so all the kids along the way were able to swim there. So, very few of my age group found it necessary to go and fight for whatever rights. And in those days, the Mexican population wasn't as strong as they are now. So, we didn't do much arguing with anybody. We accepted the way things were.

JOHNSON: This wasn't until after World War II that events started turning?

SANCHEZ: I felt, even after I was married and had my children, very uncomfortable having my children go swimming there in that pool. I never said anything to my children because I didn't want to instill in them bad feelings toward other human beings. I didn't believe in that, but I myself felt uncomfortable. I never took advantage, even after they raised the rules. I never went swimming in that swimming pool. In the first place, my father did not believe that his daughters should go up there exposing themselves. He was from the old, old school. So, I wouldn't have thought of putting on a bathing suit, God help me. That's about all I remember. It isn't very

much. I'm sure you have heard a lot more from others.

END OF INTERVIEW