

SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT
INTERVIEW SUMMARY
DELLA ORTEGA & RAMONA FRIAS - 9/27/93
INTERVIEWER: AMY KITCHENER
2 CASSETTE TAPES

SIDE A, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 Introduction. Interview w/ Della Ortega & Ramona Frias.
Also present is their niece, Bertha Figueroa.

009 Maiden names: Della and Ramona Fonseca

013 Della was born in Lankershim, which is now North Hollywood,
in 1920. Immediately after her birth, they moved back to
San Fernando, which is where the rest of her family was
born. She was born in Lankershim because her father was
working for Fowler-Meyers.

023 Ramona was born on Hewitt Street in San Fernando in 1927.

025 They had four sisters and two brothers. Della is the fourth
child, Ramona is the fifth child.

029 Mother was Linda Figueroa Fonseca. She was born in San
Fernando in 1900. Their father, John Fonseca, was born in
Texas. Their parents married in San Fernando when their
mother was 15 years old and their father was 16. They were
divorced in 1935.

035 Father worked for Fowler-Meyers in construction, and then
in 1926-27, he worked in a market in San Fernando. He also
picked oranges and lemons--the only kind of work in San
Fernando--could make more money picking grapefruits (\$5 per
day). Della's husband also picked oranges. After the
seasonal produce was picked, they could go in and pick
whatever they wanted. They used to pick lima beans and
trade them for pinto beans. They would also pick up walnuts
and sell them. The whole family would go and pick these
things in Sepulveda--now called Granada Hills. The whole
valley was mostly farm land and there were still wooden
sidewalks. It was very peaceful and nice in the 1930s.

075 Their father was working at a little market in town. There
were hardly any stores. There was a drugstore that sold
root beer from kegs. Their father worked in the vegetable
department. On pay day, they would buy sweets and clothes.

084 The downtown area was located on San Fernando Road--Brand
and McClay. The post office was across from the tracks--
near 1st Street. They couldn't get their mail because they

weren't allowed in that section of town because they were Mexican. There were mostly white people on the other side of the tracks. At theatres, they weren't allowed to sit downstairs--they had to go upstairs.

- 103 At the time the area was about 80% Mexican, 20% caucasians. There were more Mexicans than caucasians. Their grandmother was born in L.A. near Olvera Street. She identified herself as "American with Mexican Descent." She used to cuss at the "wet backs" when they first came to San Fernando.
- 116 Their grandmother came to San Fernando in 1881^{1881?} when she was three weeks old. Her family was one of the first families in San Fernando. They were hurt that they were treated badly for being Mexican because they had lived longer in the area than the caucasians.
- 124 Their mother used to do translation for the police department.
- 132 They grew up during the Depression. They paid \$7 /month for two bedrooms. Later when the house was being sold, they couldn't afford to buy it. Their parents never owned a house, though their grandparents had owned 1/2 of San Fernando--mother's side. Their great grandmother had three sons who sold the property little by little, and drank away half of the profits.
- 145 Their mother's family's name is Garcia. Their uncle Joe--grandmother's brother--was one of the first constables in the area.
- 154 They lived in many different houses in San Fernando. There aren't many old families from San Fernando left. Della's husband's aunt, Sally Redugo, was born in San Fernando in 1900--she's still alive.
- 170 Della belongs to Saint Ferdinand, a 50 plus club--must be older than 50 to join. Della's been in San Fernando longer than anyone else in the club.
- 181 Ramona went to San Fernando Elementary on Mott Street, San Fernando Jr. and Senior High on Brand Boulevard. The only time they could talk to the boys was walking home from school. Their mother was very strict: They were supposed to go home and do the housework while their mother was working.
- 204 Schools didn't have clubs the way they do now. They had GAA for athletes--you had to be good in all sports to be in it. Della was a member of GAA. Both of them liked to play baseball, basket ball, and volley ball. They both played on an all girls baseball team sponsored by the Rotary Club.

They would play teams from San Fernando, North Hollywood, Van Nuys. The movie **A League of Her Own** brought back a lot of memories for Della. Most of their games were on weekends and they practiced after school. Other than sports, there weren't other activities.

- 239 Their mother was very strict. The only place to meet boys was at dances. Their mother would come to the dances with them and sit in the parking lot. One time Della sneaked out to go to a dance without her mother's permission.
- 272 AK relays Mexican American legend about a girl who goes to a dance without her mother's permission.
- 286 They used to Swing dance--Jitter Bug. Big Band music. Bands would come to the San Fernando dance halls. They would wear the same dress to the dances because they couldn't afford different dresses.
- 307 Oldest sister got married when Della was 14-15 years old.
- 314 Three of the sisters were close in age--3 years apart.
- 316 Their mother never let her daughters work when they were growing up, even though they needed money. Della didn't graduate because her father couldn't send her \$7.50 to buy her graduation sweater. On Sweater Day, Della wouldn't go to school. She never returned to school and she never graduated. Della wanted to buy the graduation rings and sweaters for her sons since she never was able to have such things. In 1935-36, there weren't many Mexican girls graduating. Some of them were able to get their sweaters, though their parents were lemon pickers too, because they had a lot of brothers who also contributed money to the family. In those days, the men worked and the money went to the mother. Della only had one brother. He started picking lemons and oranges when he was 15 years old--he never graduated from high school either.
- 359 After their parents divorced, their mother went to work at the cannery packing whatever produce was in season. The cannery was in San Fernando between Hollister and Pico and Brand. Mostly women worked at the cannery. This was one of the few places where women worked. Their mother and brother were the only source of economic support at the time.
- Della had wanted a permanent when she was 12 years old. It only cost 75 cents but they couldn't afford it. Her sister's boyfriend, who was also a lemon and orange picker, gave her the money for her first permanent.
- 404 Their mother remarried around 1936-37. Their step father

- worked for Hollyview (?) Sanitarium as an assistant cook. This is when their financial situation improved.
- 415 Ramona graduated from high school in 1946.
- 424 During WWII, they all were working in the War Defense plants. Della worked in Lockheed. Their oldest sister, younger sister, brother, and their mother worked for U.S. Flares. Lockheed was located in Burbank--which is where it still is. Della worked as a dispatcher at Lockheed. Ramona was in school during the war. Della was married and had a child when her husband went off to the service. During the war, she lived with her mother. *Lockheed*
- 453 It was during the war that women started working. After the war started, women went to work--before it had been disgraceful for women to work. The women worked at different defense plants: Lockheed, Webbers.
- 464 Della loved working--she was earning money and she could spend it however she wanted to. The women who worked at Lockheed worked as riveters and solderers. She worked mainly with white women. She had been shy before she started working at Lockheed. ✓
- 503 Della met her husband in 1937. Della's husband used to come to the house in order to learn how to dance from her older sister. Their parents had known each other for years because they were among the oldest families in San Fernando.
- 543 Ramona first saw her husband in 1948 when he had just got out of the army. They eloped to Yuma, Arizona, with her mother's permission. You could get quick marriages in Yuma at the time; a lot of people got married in Yuma.
- 618 Social taboo regarding unmarried pregnant women. Mother used to warn daughter that she would send her to Juvenile if she got pregnant.
- 656 They can speak Spanish, but not very well. None of their children or grandchildren speak Spanish. Their grandmother was born in L.A.--where Chinatown is now--and everyone in her family spoke English. Their mother would speak Spanish. No one could read or write it.
- 673 They were not allowed to speak Spanish in school. Della would be sent to the principal's office every time she spoke Spanish in school. Most of the people in San Fernando were U.S. born. ✓
- 690 Their great grandmother on their father's side was the first in their family to come to the U.S. from Mexico. Their

great grandmother on their mother's side--her husband was from Mexico. On their mother's side they are from California since the first 11 families that settled in L.A.-the Rosas (there's a monument across from Olvera Street with the names of the first eleven families).

726 They don't know of any relatives in Mexico--too many generations back.

742 End of SIDE A, TAPE 1

SIDE B, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 Interest in Los Pobladores (?) club--the old families of California

009 Family never went on vacations.

013 The family would go on outings, but not vacations. On Easter, they would drive up San Fernando Road towards Newhall and they would have a picnic and color eggs.

They would go to the beach and stay overnight with five or six families. They started doing this in 1935. They used to go to Oxnard because you could camp there. They would bring food and stay three nights.

This was their only vacation. They couldn't even afford to go to movies. They often didn't have a car.

040 In 1942, Della saved money from her job and bought a 1932 Ford. She would drive her brothers to work in it.

051 Their parents married in 1915 and divorced in 1935. Their mother remarried in 1938. Their father left with another woman and had nine kids. Their father was supposed to send \$7/week to support the kids. He was often unable to send the money because he was working construction and didn't make a lot. Their mother would report him if he didn't pay for a month. Money was scarce but things were cheaper too. If Della was sent to the store with 50 cents to buy meat, she would buy 40 cents worth and use 10 cents to buy candy. When Della graduated from 6th grade, her mother took her to the store to buy a dress for 75 cents. People also painted their legs to make it look as if they had nylons on.

117 WWII was very scary. Everyone would gather to see the boys off who were going into the service. People would cry even if they didn't know the people leaving. After Della's husband left, she lost weight and started smoking. She and

her 9 month old baby moved back in with her mother.

- 135 Della's husband was in the army and was stationed in the Philippines, Australia, and mostly in New Guinea. When her husband returned he got work at Lockheed for a few weeks. later, he went to work at General Motors when it was being built in 1946. He worked on the construction of the building, worked on plumbing, and eventually became a plumber.
 - 156 Ramona worked at San Fernando Sewing Factory on 1st street when she was 17 years old. They were making shirts--she was a special machine operator (buttons and button holes) and she made 75 cents an hour. If you made more than the allotted number in an hour, you would get a bonus.
 - 170 There were a lot of women working at the Sewing Factory. Della worked there before she went to Lockheed. Their other sister Lucy also worked at the factory. Della was working on the floor and making only 65 cents an hour.
 - 178 The workers went on strike demanding \$1.00/hour. The Garment Workers' union had come and encouraged the workers to strike for higher wages. The strike lasted less than a month. The union wasn't paying workers to strike so it was financially difficult for the workers. A lot of women wanted to return to work because they needed the money . They eventually accepted a 5 cent pay increase/per your.
- Ramona was making \$2.00 /hour because she was working two machines: putting buttons on shirts and making button holes. She has a crooked finger from where a needle went through it. She was out with no pay for a month due to this injury.
- 239 AK recalls photo in the collection of Ramona with a sign: We Want a Union Now.
 - 244 Most of the women working in the factory were Mexican American--some Japanese women. There were a few Japanese families in San Fernando that had been there for a long time. It was very painful when they were taken away for internment during WWII. They never returned, they never got their property back.

There were Japanese American and black kids at their school. Everyone got along very well. They were only treated badly when they went to the theatres or tried to cross the street to the post office--the division between white and Mexican sides was Truman Street.

- 274 There was bars, stores, hotels in San Fernando where

Mexicans were not allowed. The people from who they rented their home owned a hotel. When the kids were sent to pay the rent, they were looked at strangely by the people in the hotel.

Della applied for a job at Thrifty's Drugstore in 1937. They told her she didn't have the education and there were not other Mexican people working there.

- 306 In 1965 Della moved into the house she currently lives in. When they moved into the area, it was predominantly a white area--the neighbors all watched them as they were moving their furniture. Their next door neighbors didn't want to have anything to do with them. ✓

Now there are only a few white people in the area. Everyone in the area is Mexican from Mexico--now they feel as if they are prejudiced.

- 344 Della worked for the election board, helping put the elections on. She feels to old to continue. She thinks the younger generation should take over these duties.

- 354 During the 1940s, women wore zoot suits as well as men-- Ramona had one made for herself. Boys and girls all wanted to dress in this style--it didn't necessarily have anything to do with gangs. Girls would try to dress the same as the boys they were dating. The women wouldn't wear the chains. They would get the pompadour hairdos--"the higher the better."

Zoot suits couldn't be bought in stores. You had to go to Main Street in L.A. to have them made. The kids in the Valley were not rowdy the way they were in Los Angeles. There wasn't the same sort of trouble with people wearing Zoot Suits that occurred in L.A. ✓

- 407 They used to go into L.A. to buy their dresses on Broadway--near 4th and 5th. Their mother would buy a dress for two of her daughters for \$5.00. It took an hour and a half to get to Los Angeles--had to go down San Fernando Road.

Ramona had to come to L.A. to get fitted for her zoot suit. The pants were called Caprice (?). She also had a short skirt made that went with the coat, which was almost as long as the skirt. Her mother did not mind that she dressed in this style. She was less strict with her kids by this time.

- 443 Della's husband Joe enters
[Tape recorder paused]

- 449 People didn't use mortuaries when they were growing up.

Because their house had a big living room, People who didn't even know them would ask their mother if they could hold wakes in their living room. They remember having to go through the living room to go to the bathroom or the bedroom and passing by the caskets. Their mother didn't charge money for the use of the living room. Neighbors would share things (clothes, furniture) with one another.

- 487 Traditions that have been passed down. It's a "must" to have tamales for Christmas--though they don't know how to prepare them that well. On Sundays, the family comes for Mexican breakfast at Della's house. The entire family also gets together for Thanksgiving.
- 529 There is an annual fiesta in San Fernando in June. They don't go anymore because it's changed. There used to be street dances and people would dress up "Californio" style--Spanish style. The fiesta used to last for a week with different activities every night--now it is only one day long.

During the 1920s there would always be a play at the San Fernando Mission--the kids would dress as indians. This would be the one time when white people and Mexican people would get together. ✓

- 607 Della has two sons, nine grand children, and six great grand children. Ramona has two daughters and one son, and one great grandchild.
- 630 Della never belonged to a club until recently. Ramona is a member of American Legion Auxiliary, San Fernando Post 176. She joined in 1979.
- 665 Their family attended Saint Ferdinand Church--this was the only church in the old days. Their mother and grandmother were baptized at this church.

Della got married at Santa Rosa--a Mexican church in the area.

Before the Saint Ferdinand Church that stands now, there was another wooden Saint Ferdinand's Church.

- 733 Going to church was the only outing that their family would go on--they got to dress up to go.

742 End of SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIDE A, TAPE 2

000 Silence

002 Their father's mother was a fanatic and she was the one who started them going to church. They had to go to church during the week, at night, and on Sundays.

010 Other church activities: bazaars and Loteria games.

At catechism they had to donate flowers, pin them on the men, and charge them 5 cents. If they wouldn't buy them, they would be put in a make-believe jail, and pay to get out--this money would go to the church. Della would get a few carnations, pin them on people, and take the money for herself to spend. The following Saturday, she would go to confession.

035 Most important events of their lives. Della has had more fun since she's been married than when she was a teenager: she and her husband started travelling and going on vacation.

Ramona remembers going to Las Palmas park. There were dances there for teenagers every Friday. Ramona and their other sister Lucy would go every week--these were very exciting.

064 Role models/people who have influenced them. Della says there never were any role models--everyone was too poor.

078 Most important historic event during their life time: When WWII started and ended. When the war ended, they had a dance that lasted two or three days. ✓

106 Relatives in Los Angeles. Their mother's sister, Sylvia, lived in Los Angeles. Their grandmother's sister lived in L.A.--she had been born in San Fernando and she would come out and say "How can you live in this little town?" In those days, people who lived in L.A. thought they were better than other people.

123 Differences between growing up in San Fernando and growing up in Los Angeles. Their family lived in Los Angeles for a year in 1937 when their stepfather was looking for work. They lived on 1st and Hope Streets. Their mother found work in a sewing factory making diapers.

150 Changes in San Fernando. There is a courthouse now, a new police department, the mall has been fixed, etc.

168 Social changes. The old timers are more modern now--dress better, have nicer cars.

Recently went to the Pacoima Reunion and saw a lot of old acquaintances. It was nice to see how much better off all of these people are--everyone had been so poor before.

215 Future plans. Della and her husband like to travel--through the Saint Ferdinand 50 club and also on their own.

Ramona is retired. Her husband works in cement (?) and there's not a lot of building now.

274 End of Interview
Remainder of Tape is blank

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TRANSCRIBED EXCERPTS

Accession #:

INTERVIEWEES: DELLA ORTEGA AND RAMONA FRIAS
INTERVIEWER: AMY KITCHENER
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 9/27/93
LOCATION: SAN FERNANDO, CALIFORNIA
ETHNICITY: MEXICAN AMERICAN/CHICANO
OTHERS PRESENT: BERTHA FIGUEROA
TRANSCRIBER: SOJIN KIM

INTERVIEW NUMBER: SH-
NUMBER OF DAT TAPES: 1
NUMBER OF CASSETTE TAPES: 2

K: Amy Kitchener
DO: Della Ortega
RF: Ramona Frias
BF: Bertha Figueroa

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Note: Interviews were recorded on DAT (Digital Audio Tape) and transferred to standard cassette tape for transcribing and listening purposes. The three digit numbers are indexed from the cassette recording and not the original DAT recording. These numbers may be used as a guide for locating indexed information on the cassette tapes. In some cases, the numbers on the transcript may not correspond exactly to the counter readings on the cassette player.

SIDE A, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 Introduction. Interview w/ Della Ortega & Ramona Frias. Also present is their niece, Bertha Figueroa.

009 Maiden names: Della and Ramona Fonseca

013 Della was born in Lankershim, which is now North Hollywood, in 1920. Immediately after her birth, they moved back to San Fernando, which is where the rest of her family was born. She was born in Lankersheim because her father was working for Fowler-Meyers.

023 Ramona was born on Hewitt Street in San Fernando in

1927.

025 They had four sisters and two brothers. Della is the fourth child, Ramona is the fifth child.

029 Mother was Linda Figueroa Fonseca. She was born in San Fernando in 1900. Their father, John Fonseca, was born in Texas. Their parents married in San Fernando when their mother was 15 years old and their father was 16. They were divorced in 1935.

DO: 035 My father usually worked for Fowler-Meyers in that construction. And then he worked for a little store that we had in San Fernando in 1926-27, like a little market like, which was like Americantel--what do you call those stores like that? And he worked there for quite a while. And then after that he also picked oranges and lemons, which is the only kind of work we had in San Fernando, you know. And they'd only make two and three dollars a day, unless they went and picked grapefruit, then they would make five dollars, and that would be neat because that was five dollars a day, you know.

K: Why was there such a difference between grapefruits and oranges and lemons?

DO: I guess the grapefruit season didn't last so long or maybe there wasn't as many as there is lemons and oranges, which is Valencia mostly, you know, is what they picked--and navels also. But I think Valencia was mostly what kept them busy. Because that's what also my husband did, is pick oranges. That's all there was, farming. They never went out and picked potatoes like other people--we would go, after all the potatoes were picked or after all the walnuts were picked. Whatever was the season was picked, we could go in there and pick whatever we wanted that was good, bring it home. And like the lima beans, we'd go and we'd find a lot of those, we'd bring them home, and we'd trade them for pinto beans. And then the walnuts, we'd break them and if they weren't broken you'd get more money for them, and if they were broken you still sell them but you'd get less money, to some candy factory or whatever--they'd go to L.A. and take them.

K: 055 So would your parents bring the kids--

DO: Oh, all of us. Because the more we were, the more we'd pick and the more money they'd make. You know, it was just hustling. And they wouldn't shoot you like they do now. You know, in those times you could anywhere and pick whatever, and now you can't do that.

K: Where were the crops located?

DO: Right here, which they now call Granada Hills, it used to be

Sepulveda. And all of that was nothing but farming. There was a few houses here and there but mostly all farming: potatoes and tomatoes and corn. That's all it was here in the valley. In fact, there wasn't even very many families in San Fernando. Somebody stopped in your house and asked where does somebody live, you could tell them where they lived. There's no way in the world you could tell them now. It was so peaceful and so nice in that time.

K: This is kind of the 1930s we're talking about or '40s even?

DO: Even the '40s, yes. But mostly the '30s. '31, '32, '33, it still wasn't as crowded as it is now. But I'm talking like '27, '28, that I can remember still in 1927 we still had wooden sidewalks in San Fernando. It was so cute. Because we'd look in the cracks to see if there's any money in the cracks (laughs).

K: What were you remembering?

DO: No, I don't know if I should be saying these things.

K: Yes, definitely.

DO: 075 You see my father worked at a little market there in town. There were hardly any stores, you know. And the first was a drug store and they used to sell the root beer in a keg, and it was only 3 or 4 cents, and it was so good. Oh, it was good. And then my father would work. And he--just two stores from there, which is a little market, he'd work in the vegetable department because he never had any schooling. So that was the vegetable department where he worked. And on pay day we'd have a ball because he'd buy us all this kind of stuff, which we weren't used to that. We couldn't afford to have all these sweets and all this fancy clothes and stuff. And when he got paid, oh boy, we ate like kings and queens, and stuff, whatever. It was nice.

K: 084 Where was the downtown area located? What street?

DO: Right on San Fernando Road, which would be Brand and McClay. But there wasn't very much to it. There was no J.C. Penney at that time, which we had later on in years. And our post office was across the street, across from the tracks, which would be real close to 1st street--an old, old post office. And I'm gonna tell you, but we couldn't go get our mail, because they'd chase us. See, we weren't allowed in that section town because we were Mexican people.

K: Really?

DO: Yeah, I'm not kidding.

K: So what happened?

DO: Well, either our parents would go and sometimes they'd have a hard time. Because mostly white from the tracks over this side, you know, mostly white people. And there wasn't very many, but the ones that we did have were more, you know, the upper class, which didn't come here till way later but still this was there side, and we were on the other side. And that's the way we were treated. And then we couldn't even go to the show and sit upstairs--I mean downstairs--we had to sit upstairs.

K: Really. Was there a sign? Was it official or was it just known that if you sat downstairs...

DO: No, it was just known and if you go caught, they'd chase you up. See we'd have these boys, you know how they sit you and stuff--ushers--and they would just make you go upstairs no matter how hard you tried to sneak to sit upstairs, they'd find you and you'd sit upstairs.

K: 103 At that time, what kind of percentages would you say was Mexican American or caucasian?

DO: Oh, I'd say 80% and 20% caucasian. There was more Mexican people than white people in San Fernando even then. Which now, I guess, is more 90% Mexicans and 10% caucasians. But at that time there was more. And there was more Mexican people--I shouldn't say Mexican people, I should say--how would you say it? Let's see...You couldn't tell my grandmother...you couldn't use the word Mexican to my grandmother. She would say "I'm an American with a Mexican descent." That's what my grandma used to say because she was born in L.A., you know, right where Olvera Street is at, that's where she was born. And you couldn't call her a Mexican, she'd have a fit. When the wet backs first came to San Fernando, she'd sit on the porch and cuss the heck out of them. She couldn't stand them; "go back," whatever.

116 And you know, like her, she was only three months old, they moved to San Fernando. Well, she came in 1781 to San Fernando and she was only three weeks old. So naturally, they were about the first families in San Fernando. So their feelings were hurt because they were treated like that. We were Mexican people.

K: Yeah, she was a pioneer family.

DO: Yeah, and yet she was here longer than even the caucasian people and still we were treated like dirt. But you know, that's the way it was. It's sad, I think.

124 Their mother used to do translation for the police department.

132 They grew up during the Depression. They paid \$7 per month for two bedrooms. Later when the house was being

sold, they couldn't afford to buy it. Their parents never owned a house, though their grandparents had owned 1/2 of San Fernando--mother's side. Their great grandmother had three sons who sold the property little by little, and drank away 1/2 of the profits.

145 Their mother's family's name is Garcia. Their uncle Joe--grandmother's brother--was one of the first constables in the area.

154 They lived in many different houses in San Fernando. There aren't many old families from San Fernando left. Della's husband's aunt, Sally Redugo, was born in San Fernando in 1900--she's still alive.

170 Della belongs to Saint Ferdinand, a 50 plus club--must be older than 50 to join. Della's been in San Fernando longer than anyone else in the club.

181 Ramona went to San Fernando Elementary on Mott Street, San Fernando Jr. and Senior High on Brand Boulevard. The only time they could talk to the boys was walking home from school. Their mother was very strict: They were supposed to go home and do the housework while their mother was working.

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K: 239 What would you say your family's expectations were for you growing up as girls?

DO: Oh, the best. I'd tell you things, but I don't want them on the tape (laughs).

RF: My mother was kind of strict.

DO: We would sit and tell my mother "Boy Ma, if you did to us now what you did to us then, you'd be in and out of jail so many times. Oh, she hit you and she never knew when to quit, never. For any little thing. Or if you...like say if you got caught coming from school with some boy and holding hands, and somebody snitched--she didn't even see you--you got punished. See, you

didn't do those things. God forbid kiss on the corner like you see them now. No way. Couldn't even go to a football game.

K: 255 So what was an acceptable way to meet boys? Did they expect that you would get married some day?

DO: I guess so--but no--

RF: The only place they'd meet them would be at the dance.

DO: And then she'd be parked downstairs with my stepfather and my two little brothers, and if (laughs)...and then she'd see I'm dancing two or three times with the same guy, here's my stepfather at the door; we knew what it meant: We're going home.

K: So they'd come to the dance with you and just make sure everything was...

DO: And they'd be watching through the windows to see--especially, you know, because the dances were at night. And we'd cry and cry because we wanted to go, and sometimes my brother would take us. But after, you know, we got older, then we could go. But we couldn't go without her permission. I don't care where she was, you had to find her and let her know we wanted to go to the dance. And if she said yes, O.K. And if she said no, I don't care how much you begged you couldn't go.

RF: 270 How about that time you sneaked out, you and Carrie?

DO: Oh, she beat the heck out of us, man. Right under the blankets, she never forgot. We sneaked under the blankets, she was still beating us up because we took off to the dance without her permission.

272 AK relays Mexican American legend about a girl who goes to a dance without her mother's permission.

K: 286 What kind of dancing did you do?

DO: What'd they call it then, Ramona?

RF: Jitterbug.

DO: Yeah, but there was no such a word as jitterbug then.

RF: No, there was swing.

DO: I guess. It was fast dancing. You know, at my time it was a time when they would go under the legs and up over your shoulders and whatever.

RF: And the Big Apple--

K: It was like Big Band music too?

DO: Oh the best. The best. Not like these kids.

RF: Like Glen Miller and all that.

DO: You mention them, I danced to them.

K: Were there local bands here?

DO: Well we had quite a few and they'd be like 10, 12 or 16 piece bands that would come to San Fernando to our dance halls, you know. And they'd only charge 50 cents and they wouldn't charge for the women and sometimes they charged 5 cents for the ladies and 50 cents for the man.

K: And this was after you had...were grown up more and you didn't have to ask your mother's permission?

DO: Oh, I would be, say, sixteen by then. And she (RF) would be twelve, fourteen...

K: You could to dance halls--

DO: Yeah, we'd go and dance. And you'd wear the same dress, hoping they wouldn't remember, dance after dance because we couldn't afford to be buying clothes.

K: Did you exchange clothes?

DO: No, I never did, but I don't know about her and my other sister. See, there's another sister between her and me. That's her (Bertha Figueroa) mother. And I don't know if they ever did.

RF: Yeah, we exchanged clothes.

DO: But my older sister and I never did.

307 Oldest sister got married when Della was 14-15 years old.

314 Three of the sisters were close in age--3 years apart.

K: 316 So what are some of your other memories of growing up in San Fernando?

DO: Oh, I'll tell you one thing, we never worked. She never let us. As poor as we were, we never worked. You know, houses and

housework like a lot of the girls did; they go and do housework and stuff. She never would let us. I don't know why. She was too proud or something. And yet we wanted to because we figured...I'd see other girls that did housework and, you know, they'd buy clothes with that money. And I'd beg and beg--well, she (RF) never did, she was the spoiled one [laughs]. Well, she was born in a different generation when my parents could afford more. And like me, I didn't graduate. I got out of the B-12 (?) because my father couldn't send me seven dollars and fifty cents to buy my graduation sweater. See, that's how bad it was: He couldn't give me the seven dollars and fifty cents. And because my friends that I hung around with were wearing their sweaters and I couldn't wear it on sweater day, I didn't go to school, and that--I stayed home and I never went back to school. I never graduated because of the dumb sweater. Isn't that awful?

Now I think it's the worst thing. Here my boys, I could have bought them anything they wanted. They didn't want their sweaters, they didn't want their rings. I forced my young one; I went and ordered the ring and paid for it, and then I told him you go measure. Because he didn't want any of that stuff. And I wanted him to have it because I didn't have it. We couldn't afford it.

K: It really took on a lot of meaning. It took on great meaning beyond just being a sweater for you?

DO: 340 Yeah, that's right. And you know, there wasn't many Mexican people--girls--that were graduating in 1935-36. There wasn't. There was just a few. And some of them could afford it, yet their parents were lemon pickers and orange pickers like us, but they had four or five brothers. You know, and you get all that money together...See in those times, the man worked and that money went to the mother. They didn't keep it. If they got three or four dollars in their pocket, sometimes they wouldn't get it. I'm talking because I know that's what my husband used to do. Sometimes he'd only get fifty cents from his mother for working the whole week because the parents needed his money. And you know, if you have three or four men working, even if they're picking lemons and oranges, and all that money goes to the household, well there's a little left over and you can buy clothes for your children. But all I had was my brother, one, the oldest one. At that time, we just couldn't afford it.

K: 356 Did your brother work?

DO: My brother also picked lemons and oranges. And he started when he was fifteen years old. He never graduated either. He had to go to work and help my mother and my father.

359 After their parents divorced, their mother went to work

at the cannery packing whatever produce was in season. The cannery was in San Fernando between Hollister and Pico and Brand. Mostly women worked at the cannery. This was one of the few places where women worked. Their mother and brother were the only source of economic support at the time.

Della had wanted a permanent when she was 12 years old. It only cost 75 cents but they couldn't afford it. Her sister's boyfriend, who was also a lemon and orange picker, gave her the money for her first permanent.

404 Their mother remarried around 1936-37. Their step father worked for Hollyview (?) Sanitarium as an assistant cook. This is when their financial situation improved.

415 Ramona graduated from high school in 1946.

K: 423 What did your family do during WWII? What were some of the things you were--

RF: My sisters were working in the War Defense plants in Lockheed. Della was. My other sister Karen--

K: Were you?

DO: I worked in Lockheed. And my mother and my oldest sister and my younger sister and my brother--all four of them, that's why I tell you we were a gold mine then--they were working for U.S. Flares, which makes flares, you know. These flares that the airplanes take or they throw to signal. That's what they were doing and I was working at Lockheed.

K: Where was that located?

DO: Lockheed? Right where it's at now in Burbank, which is where the airport's at, there.

K: And what exactly did you do? What was your role, what was your part of the job that you had to do?

DO: At Lockheed, I was a dispatcher. You know, checking to see that we had the parts for the airplanes and stuff. All I did was walk around all day, which was a beautiful job. I loved it. But she [RF] never did--you never worked during the war. She was going to school at that time.

RF: I was going to school at that time.

DO: And then there were so many working at--and then I was

getting my allotment, but that was going to the savings for when my husband came home, you know. I was married by then and had one child. He was nine months when my husband went to the service. And when my husband came back, my son was five years old.

K: So did you live alone?

DO: No, I moved in with my mother. There's no way I was going to live...Are you kidding? Live by myself! No, I went and moved back with my mother when my husband went to the service.

K: And then you would go and work at Lockheed everyday?

DO: I went to work and my mother would take care of my little boy. She wasn't working at that time because she was taking care of him.

K: 453 Were there many women working at Lockheed?

DO: Oh yes. That's when all the women started working. See, women hardly ever worked in those years. But when the war started, that's when the woman really went to work--and nobody thought anything of it. You know, in those years it was a disgrace for a woman to work--like mostly just like I was telling you, the canneries and stuff. But I mean the younger generations--I'm not talking about my mother, I'm talking about my generation. Mostly the husbands in the service, and they all started working at different defense plants: Lockheed, Webbers, wherever.

K: 464 So, what did that feel like to be a part of that?

DO: Oh, I loved it because I was bringing my own money home and I could spend it the way I wanted to; you know, which we never did. And it was a pleasure to have money in your pocket, and to dress or buy whatever you wanted for once.

K: And what about the other women working in the plants? Do you remember any specific experiences or things that happened when you were working at Lockheed and the friends you made there?

DO: Oh no, I made a lot of friends but mostly white people because I'm telling you, I was the only Mexican in that department. I don't know why. Maybe, because I spoke better English than the rest. I don't know what it was, but mostly all of them were riveters. All the women that went in there went as riveters and soldering, which is the biggest mistake for me because then I could have found a better job later on. Because you know how all the jobs then was soldering and stuff, especially if you don't have an education. And you know, in our times who went to college? And hardly anybody graduated. You

couldn't afford it.

K: Especially for women, right?

DO: For women, yeah. So working at Lockheed and then getting a break like that, especially for me, you know, which was neat. I learned quite a bit working at Lockheed. A lot of the shyness went away?

K: You were shy?

DO: I was then. I'm not anymore [laughs]. Hell, I'm seventy-three years old, what's should I hide? Like my husband says, when I was born they threw the mold away.

503 Della met her husband in 1937. Della's husband used to come to the house in order to learn how to dance from her older sister. Their parents had known each other for years because they were among the oldest families in San Fernando.

543 Ramona first saw her husband in 1948 when he had just got out of the army. They eloped to Yuma, Arizona, with her mother's permission. You could get quick marriages in Yuma at the time; a lot of people got married in Yuma.

618 Social taboo regarding unmarried pregnant women. Mother used to warn daughter that she would send her to "Juvenile" if she got pregnant.

K: 656 Did your mother--did you speak Spanish?

DO: Yeah, but not that much. See that's why...we can speak Spanish but not good. There's a lot of words, we can't pronounce them. Well, our children, none of our children--she [BF] doesn't either--none of them speak Spanish, which is awful because now you need it. None of my grandchildren speak Spanish. Because our parents--even my grandmother like, I'm telling you, my grandmother was born in L.A., here where Chinatown is at. So they all spoke English. All of them.

K: Did your mother speak Spanish though because you were saying that like she cussed in Spanish.

DO: Yeah, yeah, she would. She'd speak Spanish. But none of them could write it or read it. But they could speak Spanish. And that's where we would pick it up.

673 See, we couldn't speak Spanish in school. You never saw

anybody in Principal's office as much as you see me. Because we'd be in what used to be called Physical Ed. or we'd be playing marbles, and I'd be speaking Spanish, and they'd hear me--some teacher would hear me--and in the Principal's office for the whole week because we were speaking Spanish. And look it now. Now they're teaching it. So how could we learn the correct Spanish in our years? We couldn't. Because most of the people here were from here, United States. There wasn't too many people from Mexico.

K: 689 Who was it in your family, the first person to come from Mexico? Was it your great grandmother?

DO: Well, our great grandmothers on my father's side, they were from Mexico. And then also my great grandmother, who was born in San Gabriel--I'm talking about my mother's side--my great grandmother, her husband was from Mexico. But see, we're from California on my mother's side since the first eleven families that settled in L.A.

K: Which one is that? Which family, which of the first eleven?

DO: The Rosas. You've seen that monument there at the park across Olvera Street. There's a little monument with the first eleven families and there's two Rosas. Well, like we come from one of them.

K: Do they say De la Rosa or is it just Rosa?

DO: No, it's what's his name? Jose Antonio. It's Basilio Rosas or something. His name is Basilio.

K: And that is through your---

DO: --On my mother's side that we come from the first eleven families. Now, you know, there's generations after that, some of the women were born to people from Mexico and stuff. It's through my mother's side that we come from the Rosas family. And so, where did Spanish come in? Right. They didn't use it that much. They used a lot of English.

726 They don't know of any relatives in Mexico--too many generations back.

742 End of SIDE A, TAPE 1

SIDE B, TAPE 1

000 Silence

002 Interest in Los Pobladores (?) club--the old families of California

- 009 Family never went on vacations.
- 013 The family would go on outings, but not vacations. On Easter, they would drive up San Fernando Road towards Newhall and they would have a picnic and color eggs.
- They would go to the beach and stay overnight with five or six families. They started doing this in 1935. They used to go to Oxnard because you could camp there. They would bring food and stay three nights.
- This was their only vacation. They couldn't even afford to go to movies. They often didn't have a car.
- 040 In 1942, Della saved money from her job and bought a 1932 Ford. She would drive her brothers to work in it.
- 051 Their parents married in 1915 and divorced in 1935. Their mother remarried in 1938. Their father left with another woman and had nine kids. Their father was supposed to send \$7/week (month?) to support the kids. He was often unable to send the money because he was working construction and didn't make a lot. Their mother would report him if he didn't pay for a month. Money was scarce but things were cheaper too. If Della was sent to the store with 50 cents to buy meat, she would buy 40 cents worth and use 10 cents to buy candy. When Della graduated from 6th grade, her mother took her to the store to buy a dress for 75 cents. People also painted their legs to make it look as if they had nylons on.
- 117 WWII was very scary. Everyone would gather to see the Boys off who were going into the service. People would cry even if they didn't know the people leaving. After Della's husband left, she lost weight and started smoking. She and her 9 month old baby moved back in with her mother.
- 135 Della's husband was in the army and was stationed in the Philippines, Australia, and mostly in New Guinea. When her husband returned he got work at Lockheed for a few weeks. later, he went to work at General Motors when it was being built in 1946. He worked on the construction of the building, worked on plumbing, and eventually became a plumber.

K: 156 Did you ever go to work, Ramona?

RF: Yes.

K: And when was that?

RF: I went to work when I was seventeen at the San Fernando Sewing Factory, where it was Jack Berrinfeld (?). It was on First Street in San Fernando.

K: And what were you sewing?

RF: We were making shirts. I was a special machine operator, making buttons and button holes.

DO: How much an hour did you get?

RF: We were getting seventy-five cents an hour. And if you made more, you were on your own afterwards. After you made so much then they'd give you like a bonus...over so much a bundle of shirts.

K: Oh, so you got your seventy-five cents an hour and then if you were very fast and you were doing ten more than the other person, you got per shirt or something.

RF: Like a bonus.

K: Were there many other women working there?

RF: Oh yes.

K: Mostly women?

RF: Mostly women. You [DO] worked there, didn't you?

DO: I worked there too before I went to Lockheed.

RF: And my other sister Lucy worked there too.

DO: We all worked at the sewing factory.

K: What year was that that you worked there?

DO: '43-'44.

RF: No--

DO: Yeah, because I went to Lockheed in '44. And I worked at the sewing shop before that. And I was only get 65 cents an hour. She was getting more because she was a machine operator. I was working on the floor, you know, taking bundles or whatever.

BF: 178 Is that where you guys were on that strike.

RF: Yeah, that's when we went on strike because we wanted more

than--we wanted a dollar an hour. And all we got was 80 cents an hour more after the strike. We went on a strike at San Fernando.

K: How many workers were there about?

RF: Oh god, it was quite a few.

DO: About a hundred maybe. Something like that. Quite a few.

K: Who organized it and what were the reasons for wanting greater wage.

RF: Well, we were in the union. The union came in and they talked to the people, and the people decided to go on a strike so we could get more money. They said we should be getting more money than that.

DO: What was the name of the organization? You remember that? I think it's still going on.

K: Is it the Garment Workers?

RF: A-W...yeah.

DO: No...but the garment outfit, I think it's still going in L.A.

RF: It's still on. The same union is still on.

K: And it's the one that all the garment workers belong to.

RF: Yeah, it's the same one. But we started it here in San Fernando. Now it's...all the garment places are union now over here.

K: So was it unusual for the workers to be striking and what was that experience like?

RF: Oh not really. We all just used to get together and walk around with signs. And we'd all take turns carrying the signs around.

K: Do you remember how long you were on strike for?

RF: It wasn't too long because the owner of the factory needed his shirts out because he had orders for his own shirts. I think not even a month---but maybe a month...not even a month.

K: So do you remember that being a hardship because you weren't earning money during that time?

RF: Oh yeah, it was because the union wasn't paying us to go on

strike. In those days they didn't pay you to go on a strike.

DO: You weren't married though.

RF: Oh no, I wasn't married yet.

K: But for other women too it may have been very important...

RF: Oh yeah, there were older women there that depended on that money for their families.

K: So when the owner came back and offered 5 cents more, how was it decided that you would stop striking and accept that?

RF: Well, a lot of the women wanted to go back to work because they were already losing money so they decided to accept the offer.

K: Did you feel victory?

RF: Well not really...well, I was making more than that, more than 75 cents an hour. I was making two dollars an hour with the machine, working on the machines. I worked both machines.

DO: Tell her what kind?

RF: Putting buttons on the shirts--it was special machines.

DO: Show her your finger, crooked finger?

RF: I even got my finger--I got the needle right through my finger. It's crooked. It went right through to the bone. And I was making button holes too. Making button holes on the shirts and putting buttons on the shirts. It was special machines.

K: What were the conditions like there? What happened when you put the needle through your finger?

RF: Well right away somebody came because the needle was still in because I stopped the power right away. And it was still in so somebody came and just worked the machine over and took the needle out. Then they took me to the hospital and I was out for about a month.

DO: But she didn't get any money?

K: There was not workman's compensation.

DO: I guess not.

RF: No, nothing. It was nothing then. So I didn't get anything for it.

K: Did it affect the movement in the finger?

RF: Not really. But it was quite a while before I went back to work.

K: Did other women have accidents there too

RF: Yeah, there were quite a few that had accidents there.

239 AK recalls photo in the collection of Ramona with a
 sign: We Want a Union Now.

K: 244 Were there mostly Mexican American women working there.

DO: That's all there was...no, Japanese, we had a few.

RF: Oh yeah, Mary...Mary was her name, that Japanese lady.

DO: We had a few Japanese families in San Fernando that had been here for quite a while too. And it hurt so much when they took them away. Because we went to school with their children. And once in a while we'd think of them because we went to school with them. I don't know whatever happened to those families. They never came back. They never got their property back because some of them were our neighbors.

RF: When Japan started the war, that's when they took them.

K: And they all went to camp. They all to go to camps for the whole war.

DO: Yeah. And whatever...they owned their property but we never saw them. They never came back to claim it. I don't know whatever happened. But we had Japanese people working in the sewing shops.

RF: That's right, we did.

DO: And we treated them real nice because they were real good people. Nobody treated them bad. Even at school we had one colored boy and one colored girl in school. And everybody treated them so nice because they were real nice kids. See, there was no...we never treated...different nationalities at school didn't mean nothing. Everybody treated real good. When we were treated [bad] is when we were out. Like to go to the show or to cross the street over here to get our mail. Then, you weren't wanted on this side of the street, on this side of Truman, you know.

K: What was the division line, Truman?

DO: Truman, yeah.

K: And which side of Truman?

DO: This Truman was white, this side of Truman was white. And from Truman down the other way was strictly Mexican people...Japanese people, yes.

K: Oh, the south side.

RF: The north side was white people.

DO: But the colored people lived in Pacoima, which in Pacoima there was hardly...not very many people. Very deserted, mostly vacant, vacant lots, very few people. And we all got along real good.

K: 274 Were there any other times when you or people you knew faced racial prejudice? Like you were saying, you know, like that thing at the post office and at the movie theatre you had to sit downstairs...

BF: Remember you said you couldn't go to that dance place or that, what was that? Fin and Feather or what was that?

DO: Oh little bars in San Fernando. Fin and Feathers it was a bar in San Fernando. And it was one of the better bars. It was a bar but one of our nicer ones. In fact we had two or three and Mexicans weren't allowed in there--not in Fin and Feathers, no way. We had...where we had dances sometimes some of the weddings, which was Porter (?) Hotel, you didn't see no Mexican people going in there. No way.

And in the Flynn's (?), which was one of the older families although they didn't come in here till later. And our families knew each other, but yet you couldn't have nothing to do with going in there. Because in the first place we couldn't afford it; you know, to go in there and have lunch or stuff. And then if you did, they would turn around and look at you like "what are you doing in here?" Because see, we rented a house from them and sometimes my mother would send us to pay the rent. And they'd look at you to see what you were doing in there; like you had no business in that hotel or...and that was in 1936-37. So even then there was a lot of that.

I remember when I graduated--not graduated, but 1937 I went to apply for a job at Thrifty's Drugstore. No way. In the first place I didn't have the education, that's what they told me. And they didn't have any Mexican people working for them in 1936-37.

K: Did they say that?

DO: 304 Oh yeah. I wish the man was alive that...I'd go spit in his face. Oh, if I only knew then what I know now. When I moved in this house, this was strictly white, still then.

K: What year was that?

DO: 308 1965 we moved in here. And my youngest boy was...he only had like two or three weeks of school to graduate, and he had already had his papers to go to the service. So we were living in a four bedroom house, and just my husband and I so we moved over here. And boy, they were all out on the sidewalks watching us taking our furniture down. I don't know if they were watching our furniture to see what kind of furniture we had. But then after all our furniture was in the house, the next door neighbor comes and wants to know how many children I had and if we had a lot of company and if we made parties. They were white people. And I said "I've got two boys but one's married and the other will be going into the service in three weeks," I said "Why?" She says "Well we just didn't want somebody moving in here with a lot of children." And I said, "Well, how many have you got?" She had five. All little ones, all little children. And I would go outside and say "good morning," she'd never answer. I think we were neighbors for five or six years. We never, never once said good morning--she never answered. I guess she didn't want to have nothing to do with me. I don't know. But that's the way it was because it was still white. Now it's not. Now there's only one couple, older people our age, that's still here. All the rest is Mexican. So, see how things have changed.

BF: (? or RF) And these are Mexicans from Mexico.

DO: Yeah, they're not from here.

BF: It's different now for us. Because now we're the ones that are prejudiced.

DO: Now they tell us off [laughs]. I wish I could tell you the words they call us. It's sad, you know, to see that you're treated that way. I don't think it's right. That's why I tell you, I wish I knew then what I know now. I've lived here my whole life, I worked for the elections, and do whatever, you know. I've been on the jury, now I'm too old for that. I just sent the other day, I said "I can't take anymore, I'm too old," and you know my medication; can't do it. But I've done all that and I'm proud of it because it's my duty to do it.

344 Della worked for the election board, helping put the elections on at the poll. She feels she's too old to continue. She thinks the younger generation should take over these duties.

K: 353 Do you remember the Zoot Suit days? Did you ever wear

Zoot Suits?

DO: [laughs] That's her [RF]. See, my parents could afford it then, she had one made.

RF: I had one made in Los Angeles.

K: And so girls wore them too?

RF: Yeah, girls wore them.

K: Like a man's suit.

RF: Yeah, like man's suit. They were gabardine material. They were just like a man's suit.

BF: You have a picture in one, remember?

DO: Yeah, well it's in there, it's in the library.

K: I remember the picture. We have that one.

RF: I don't even show it to my children [laughs].

K: Why not?

RF: I don't know.

DO: It's embarrassing, I guess.

K: So what was this whole Zoot Suit thing about?

RF: It was just mainly boys and girls that wanted to dress that way, I guess.

DO: Just like now with the baggy pants.

BF: It's a style, I guess.

DO: A style. It's here and it's gone before you know it. But it's not because you belong to a gang. It was just that you wanted to dress like the other person. If you could afford it, you'd buy it.

K: It was really--it was the high style for young people.

DO: But then you couldn't buy it at the store. You had to have it made. You had to go to Main Street in L.A. and have it made. Choose your material and have it made. But that time, she could afford it so she could have it made. See we couldn't, she did.

K: You know what's interesting to me is that there's been

movies and things like that and they show all the men wearing the Zoot Suits, as Zoot Suiters, but I don't think there's really an awareness that the women were wearing the same thing.

BF: My mom said that if you were going steady with a guy, you tried to dress like him. It was like a couple thing.

K: Did you do that?

DO: Yeah. But the woman didn't wear the chains like the man did. You know these chains that hang here and stuff, they didn't

RF: You just mainly get your hairdo--the high hairdos--

BF: Pompadours.

RF: Yeah, pompadours.

DO: Not rats (?), what do you call those rats you wore to bring your hair up.

RF: There were three--you used to buy them at the 5 and 10 cent store. They were three--

DO: They called them rats--

RF: --they had like artificial hair in them and netting. They had like netting on them and they were long. And you'd put about three of them up here and then you'd put your hair over.

K: Because you want to make your hair tall on top?

DO: The higher the better.

RF: My husband laughs and says I used to carry my knife up there.

DO: You didn't though.

RF: He does it just to make fun of me.

DO: The rowdy girls from L.A., they're the ones that did it. And then everybody got blamed for it. But here in the valley, you didn't see no rowdy things like you did in L.A.

RF: It was different in the valley from L.A.

K: Do you remember when the Zoot Suit Riots happened in L.A.?

DO: What year was that in? 1940, '41, '42?

BF: Did they have any trouble like that here; you know, beating

up people because they wore Zoot Suits.

DO: Not like they did in L.A.

K: 407 Did you ever go into L.A.? I mean, go into the city?

DO: That's where we used to go buy our dresses for 2.98.

K: Where was that?

RF: That was Broadway and--

DO: Wherever the stores--all around, say starting from Third, Fourth, Fifth and Broadway. And we'd go buy...my mother would buy me a dress and my sister a dress for five dollars, \$2.98 each. And we were dressed to kill, let me tell you. Or take her...because the clothes were different then here in the Valley. There was more to choose from. And it would take us an hour and a half, an hour and fifteen minutes to get to L.A. because you'd have to go down San Fernando Road, you know.

K: All the way, huh.

DO: All the way. And then like her [RF], she wanted her suit, my mother would have to take her to L.A. and order it and...

RF: ...and have it fitted.

DO: Actually, you just had, you had a caprice (?) and pants. Or you also had the skirt.

RF: I had a skirt too.

K: What was that for?

DO: Well, you had Capriz (Caprice?) and they're real tight in the bottom, and real narrow in the bottom, and they were sort of wide and then narrow in the bottom.

K: Capriz?

DO: Well, pants.

RF: And the skirt was real short and the coat was almost as long as the skirt.

DO: Down to your knees; the pants were long down to here. And then the skirt, well she used to dress way up here, where I never could--she used to dress way up high. You know at that time who cared?

K: What did your mother think of all this?

DO: Well, she was more modern by then.

RF: She was.

DO: My mother touched her. I don't think she ever knew what a slap was by then. Times changed. More modern. Just like our generation is now with our grandchildren and stuff. I can sit with my grandchildren and discuss whatever they want to discuss. I will. I 'll do it with them. Our's couldn't do it.

BF: It's just like when the live-in situation--it was hard at first but now everybody lives together and nobody thinks nothing of it.

DO: No big deal.

BF: You just change with the times.

443 Della's husband Joe enters.
[Tape recorder paused]

K: 449 You were talking about the wakes.

DO: Well my mother would have wakes because we had a big house, a big living room. And at that time people didn't use the mortuaries. I don't know if they couldn't afford it, they charged, or what. They would ask my mother to use her living room. People we didn't even know. And they would. And here we would have to cross to the living room to go into the bedroom to go to bed while all these people were in the living room mourning or crying and all this stuff. And they would bring their own coffee and make their own stuff and use the kitchen; we didn't even know these people, but my mother never had the nerve to tell them no.

K: Well because she had a big living room and people around knew that and said, "Oh, well we had it over at Mrs. Fonseca's house."

DO: Yeah, you know how it is: you tell another one and come knocking at your door and you don't know who they are, but my mother hated to say no. And then sometimes there'd only be one or two persons just sitting there; at one, two, three O'Clock in the morning, you know how you have to get up to go to the bathroom and we would have to go through the living room, and here's this casket there, and oh, scary--you know, to go to the bathroom.

K: Did she charge or was it just something--

DO: --no, no, nothing, she never charged, she'd just say, yes, a favor.

471 The wake for a boy was held at Della's house.

DO: 477 People did things like that and you never charged. Or your clothes, you would give them from one person to another. None of this swap meet or yards full of clothes. Everybody gave whatever. If it was a dresser you didn't need--an old dresser naturally--you would give it to your next-door neighbor if they needed it, whoever. I still do it. I haven't got the guts to sell my clothes. I take them to the Veteran's hospital, whatever, because I remember, you know, how it was.

K: 487 Are there any traditions that have been passed down in your family that you can remember? Like it could have to do with food or special events.

BF: Just Christmas all the time making tamales.

DO: That's our main thing. It's like a must to have tamales for Christmas, although we're all having a heck of a time trying to learn how to make them. They don't come out right.

K: But was it your mother that made the tamales?

DO: But then my children will...they have to come over here and have Mexican food because their wives don't fix it. So on Sundays they're here. This is why Sundays I'm stuck here because they come for breakfast. Because they're going to have the potatoes and the eggs and the beans and tortillas and whatever, all that stuff. It's because their wives don't fix it so they come over here. And I like it because at least I get to see them. I enjoy it. Sometimes he gets mad, but I say "No, that's the only time we can really spend time with the children." So that's the tradition because we used to do the same thing. We always have.

BF: My mom used to make menudo--grandma make menudo. And Sundays we'd go to her house and eat menudo. And she'd complain, and then if you didn't go, she'd complain. Either way, she would complain. She complained if she had to cook for everybody and then she'd complain if they didn't show up.

DO: Because she goes to church on Sundays, and I said, "Mona, how can you go to church if by 7:30 the first one arrives for breakfast. By ten to eleven the last one's leaving. That's what happened to me this last Sunday. I didn't even wash dishes because he was just leaving. So I can't go to church---that's an excuse, huh.

RF: Get a night mass [laughter]

DO: Yeah or Saturdays too I could go to mass but I won't drive at night. That's an excuse.

K: 523 What about for you Ramona, are there any traditions that you have passed down in your family?

RF: Not really, just we all get together at Thanksgiving.

DO: That's a must.

RF: That, we always do.

K: Before, you had mentioned the fiesta at...San Fernando Fiesta. What was that?

RF: It's an annual fiesta they have in San Fernando.

DO: It's in June.

RF: It's been going on for years and years. It's in June.

DO: And years ago they used to choose a queen. They still do, don't they?

RF: They still do.

DO: We don't go because they're not the same anymore.

RF: They're not. They used to have street dances before.

DO: And then, all the people were dressed too. With the California style with the long dress and the combs and the--what do you call these veils they put on their hair?

BF: Like Spanish style, huh?

DO: Spanish style. The people would dress like that.

K: If you went, would you dress like that to go to the dance? Or is was the people in a parade--

DO: --No it was just walking around town, this would be the whole week, and people would walk around the whole town: the man with their black hats and their red scarfs. It was a tradition and everybody dressed up. Well, not everybody, but a lot of the people did. And you'd walk around town dressed up for the whole week, Spanish style.

548 But now, they still have the fiesta but it's now big

deal.

RF: It's not the same.

DO: They just have it like the one day, and the parade, that's it.

BF: They used to have real nice parades, remember?

DO: Yeah, it was really...

BF: And then a great big carnival would come to San Fernando park and everybody went to the park.

RF: They don't have parades anymore.

BF: They don't have no more parades, they don't have the big carnival no more.

RF: Just at the park that they have at ...

BF: It's not the carnival that we used to have. Those were huge carnivals.

RF: They were big.

BF: They were nice.

DO: And years before that, like say in 1928-29, the fiestas, it was a must; you had a play. Something like the Ramona play, the indians. They'd choose a girl and she would be the indian girl and then they'd choose a boy. And we'd have a play at the mission, San Fernando Mission. The kids all dressed like indians. That's when I went to school, we were little, and the kids would dress indians, and they'd put us back in the background. Our costumes would be made out of gunny sacks and they'd sit us in the back [..?] And I think the play would only be the one night. And then the next night would be something else.

K: Was that an annual play?

DO: Every June.

K: The children in the play was part of the fiesta.

DO: Part of the fiesta. And that was...oh, something really great. And that is when the Mexicans and white people got together, then. Because I guess they needed us, I don't know what it was. And then they'd have a street dance, no fights. It was just entirely different. And then the whole week it would be

something going on every night here.

583 Continues to describe the fiesta. The June Fiesta now is different. Della's husband attributes the lack of fights at the old fiestas to the absence of alcohol during prohibition.

607 Della has two sons, nine grand children, and six great grand children. Ramona has two daughters and one son, and one great grandchild.

630 Della never belonged to a club until recently. Ramona is a member of American Legion Auxiliary, San Fernando Post 176. She joined in 1979.

665 Their family attended Saint Ferdinand Church--this was the only church in the old days. Their mother and grandmother were baptized at this church.

Della got married at Santa Rosa--a Mexican church in the area.

Before the Saint Ferdinand Church that stands now, there was another wooden Saint Ferdinand's Church.

733 Going to church was the only outing that their family would go on--they got to dress up to go.

742 End of SIDE B, TAPE 2

SIDE A, TAPE 2

000 Silence

002 Their father's mother was a fanatic and she was the one who started them going to church. They had to go to church during the week, at night, and on Sundays.

010 Other church activities: bazaars and Loteria games.

At catechism they had to donate flowers, pin them on the men, and charge them 5 cents. If they wouldn't buy them, they would be put in a make-believe jail, and pay to get out--this money would go to the church. Della would get a few carnations, pin them on people, and take the money for herself to spend. The following Saturday, she would go to confession.

K: 035 I want to ask each of you what the most important events in your life have been.

DO: Oh god. No, I never had any fun till I got married because then we started going on vacations and travelling. We've gone all over because he's taken me, my husband's taken me. We never...I can't even tell you of anything that happened in my life as a teenager.

BF: How about your wedding, you had a beautiful wedding?

DO: Yeah, but I don't remember much of it. And then you're a nervous wreck and stuff. You know, it's no big deal [laughter] I've enjoyed being married all these years. And when it's not one thing it's another. We're always on the go. We just came back, you know that. I've had more fun now that I'm married than as a teenager, and then my kids are all gone. So we try to have fun now because you know, you can be here today and gone tomorrow, who knows. But we never had any...nothing exciting as a teenager.

RF: Not really.

BF: What about the dances at the Federation. My mother said that was a ball.

RF: Oh yeah.

DO: I never went to any of that.

RF: We went to Las Palmas park. They had a club, it was a federation club and it was sponsored by L.A. It was all over in the valley. And they used to get like calls like Las Palmas park and the San Fernando auditoriums, elementary auditorium. They used to have dances there for teenagers every Friday. So me and my sister Lucy used to go all the time to those dances. It was a big thing to us in those days. We were teenagers then. So it was real exciting.

DO: I never had anything like that.

RF: No you never had nothing like that.

DO: No clubs or stuff like that.

K: And that's when you'd wear your zoot suit and go to the dance.

RF: Yeah.

DO: All she'd do was change a different blouse and she was dressed.

K: But your mom had sort of softened up by then and you could go to the dances?

DO: Yeah. God, she was a different person, and we'd let her know it.

K: Because you had it hard, huh?

DO: You better believe it.

064 Role models/people who have influenced them. Della says there never were any role models-- everyone was too poor.

078 Most important historic event during their life time: When WWII started and ended. When the war ended, they had a dance that lasted two or three days.

106 Relatives in Los Angeles. Their mother's sister, Sylvia, lived in Los Angeles. Their grandmother's sister lived in L.A.--she had been born in San Fernando and she would come out and say "How can you live in this little town?" In those days, people who lived in L.A. thought they were better than other people.

123 Differences between growing up in San Fernando and growing up in Los Angeles. Their family lived in Los Angeles for a year in 1937 when their stepfather was looking for work. They lived on 1st and Hope Streets. Their mother found work in a sewing factory making diapers.

150 Changes in San Fernando. There is a courthouse now, a new police department, the mall has been fixed, etc.

168 Social changes. The old timers are more modern now-- dress better, have nicer cars.

Recently went to the Pacoima Reunion and saw a lot of old acquaintances. It was nice to see how much better off all of these people are--everyone had been so poor before.

215 Future plans. Della and her husband like to travel-- through the Saint Ferdinand 50 club and also on their own.

Ramona is retired. Her husband works in cement (?) and there's not a lot of building now.

274 End of Interview