

ROSA MIRANDA RAMIREZ
Interview 145a
May 4, 1994
Marie Davis, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Marie Davis, Rosa Miranda Ramirez reminisces about living in White City, Fastrill, and Diboll, Texas. She recalls life at Fastrill with everyone working together and raising food and sugar cane to make it through the Depression. Mrs. Ramirez also talks about race relations, being a Hispanic in Fastrill and Diboll, and her feelings on the company's efforts to bring in more Hispanics to Diboll.

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): Today I am talking with Rosa Miranda Ramirez. She lives at 407 Devereaux. Today's date is May 4, 1994. My name is Marie Davis. When were you born?

Rosa Miranda Ramirez (hereafter RR): 1913.

MD: Where were you born?

RR: In White City. That is in San Augustine County.

MD: Now that was a Southern Pine Lumber Company camp, wasn't it?

RR: Yes. Yes it was.

MD: When you moved from there, where did you go?

RR: We moved to Fastrill.

MD: Do you remember how you traveled to Fastrill?

RR: They had these big old open-mouthed rail cars. And we would load everything in there. I don't recall bringing any animals from White City. But when we moved from Fastrill, they let us bring my cows and hogs – not only me, but everybody. Even though it was a Depression time, I don't believe we ever suffered hunger because we raised enough food to supply even the neighbors. He (husband) even made syrup – sugar cane.

MD: Did he grow the sugar cane?

RR: Yes. And they had a mill. We just had everything. That is why I call it the good old days. Even though we were poor, we were not hungry. Then the neighbors were always ready to help you. No matter they had the last cup of sugar or coffee, they would half with you. If you were sick, they would come over and see if you needed anything. We,

now today, don't have time for neighbors. I often think – I don't know if my neighbor is sick or not. That is why I think we are living real fast now. We should get together now, get more close, find out what the neighbor needs, but we don't.

MD: We don't take time, do we?

RR: No. I wonder why is that?

MD: Do you feel like we are more selfish now or that we feel like we don't need those people?

RR: I would think we don't need them. We are self-satisfied with ourselves. We are in a hurry, too – those people that are young and working. I myself am not able to do anything, so I don't count myself too much.

When we were at Fastrill when the child got sick, and the neighbor got sick, I used to make soup and carry it to them and all these little things. If we got back in those days everything would be better. But the town now is so big, I never dreamed it would get this big—a little city now. When we first came, there was no mail delivered to your home, there were no cement roads. I look back and I say, “My goodness this place has grown.” I can't believe it, but it has. As far as knowing the neighbors, like in those days when I knew everybody. Today, the only people I get in touch with mostly is the people at church. I don't know a lot of people in that church – just the ones in my Sunday school class. I believe we need to stop, slow down a little bit, and look around and see where the needs are. You might just give them a call. That helps.

MD: You speak such good English, Rosa. When you were young in your home, did your parents or grandparents speak Spanish?

RR: My parents did – they spoke mostly Spanish. I picked up the English going to school. I didn't have too much chance to stay in school. In those days they needed you at home and they pulled you out. I think I practically taught myself reading papers and books. We did not watch T.V. in those days. We did not have T.V. kids learn now days watching T.V. These little children of my daughter, they know both languages. The oldest one is just 4, she won't be 5 until October, and they talk Spanish and English. Those days when we first came, Dr. Dale was our doctor and he often called me to interpret for him. Dr. Eddins did too, so I think I did a little good somewhere.

MD: When you were in Fastrill, were there very many – do you like to be called Spanish-Americans?

RR: Yes.

MD: Were there very many beside your family?

RR: At Fastrill? Yes. There were more than in Diboll. When we first moved to Diboll there was just 3 or 4 families.

MD: Did they move from Fastrill with you?

RR: Yes.

MD: Can you remember some of their names?

RR: The Guerrero's were one bunch – Mr. and Mrs. Sam Guerrero and family. And then the Sanchez, the Malanders, and the Miranda's (us). Now I get amazed looking when we picked up the kids at school. You would see the whites, the colored, and the Spanish and they were outnumbered then. But now they are not.

MD: Did you live close together? Those four families?

RR: Yes. There used to be a division, I am talking about Fastrill now. The colored lived across the road, the Spanish on one side and the Whites lived in another section. I think all of the people spoke English at Fastrill.

MD: Did all the Spanish people in Fastrill move to Diboll?

RR: Yes, they did. Most of them are dead except Mr. Malanders. Jessie Malanders – that is my brother-law. Mr. Sanchez is dead but his wife is still living and the children of course. They are all grown up. I still call them the good old days. I didn't know any better that we were poor.

MD: Describe your house at Fastrill.

RR: At Fastrill they were big long rooms. In the middle there was a porch. You had to walk from this room to that – an open space. You had about 2 bedrooms. It was small. Then you had your kitchen. It was a pretty good-sized kitchen. That was one good thing about it. We had a big table. We used to bring a killed hog in there and throw it on the table. We had wooden tables in those days and wooden benches. It was very roomy; at least that is what we thought.

When we came here, they had what they called Red Town houses. We barely could get a bed in there. You never could turn around. They have done a way with all of those. In 1941 when we moved they had those little, long shacks. It was very uncomfortable, because they were not big enough. Later they sold them and that is when we began to get big houses. I remember going to Mr. Anthony. It was on Saturday morning. I told him we needed to rent the house. It was right on the corner there. He said, "Well I think you ought to buy it." And I said, "Buy it, me buy a house? No way. I don't have money to buy a house." He said, "Oh yes you can, I will fix it so you can buy it." So he explained that I could pay whatever I wanted down, or I could just take it up like rent. Well, I had been saving. I always tried to save just a little bit. My first husband used to tease me. "Why do you want to save a dollar or two or three dollars in the ban?" I had \$600.75 when Mr. Anthony was talking about me buying. I told him I had been saving because I

had heard rumors that they were going to move our little houses up in the quarters. I did not want to go down there because of the school – it was dangerous. He said, “You don’t have to give nothing down.” I told him that I wanted to because I was saving for a purpose. I got my house for \$3,500. I only paid \$40.00 a month.

MD: Is that the same one you are living in now?

RR: Yes. One time money got a little tight because I had 2 kids in college. I had a girl and a boy. I got a little behind. I talked to Mr. Anthony about it and asked him if he could skip a month for me until I could catch up. He said, “Oh yeah, take as much time as you want.” They were just so nice to work with us. You didn’t have to pay a big down payment, just take it up as rent. I am very fortunate that I did that because Mr. Temple, the older man, I don’t remember what his name was except it was Temple.

MD: Henry.

RR: Yes, it must have been Henry. Used to if people had a big family, he did not charge them lights and he did not charge them water. So they were good, they helped a lot. We had to pay just a small amount of rent. I was always looking forward to getting better, and I talked to Mr. Anthony. I told him I needed a house and wanted to rent it and he said, “No you can buy it.” My husband said, “No you don’t need to buy it because as long as you live in the family and I died, Mr. Temple would let you live in it without charging.” And I said but what if sometimes somebody takes over, and that is exactly what happened. I am proud of my house. I don’t have to worry about living with the kids or renting. It is mine, and I think I work hard for it too.

MD: When you moved to Diboll, what church did you go to first?

RR: We didn’t go to church. There was the Baptist Church, colored Baptist Church. My first husband believed in Catholic, but he did not go to church – no kind of church. The children did not go to church. We did not get a church started until we moved to Diboll. I know you remember Mrs. Farrington and Mrs. Ballenger. They got this scout house building for a church. So that is where we started. When the ones running it got too old or were sick then they were having a revival across the track at First Baptist Church. The pastor and evangelist came and invited us to the revival. My kids were all dirty playing in the backyard. We had a little creek where they could get in and play. Every evening I let them play in it and then go take a bath. They came and invited us and we said, “Yes, we will go because we do not have a church right now.”

They told us what time it started. I remember one of my sons, Joe, said, “No, Mama, we can’t go to that church.” “Why not?” He said, “That is for rich people.” I said, “rich people or not. You are going to take a bath and we are going. As long as you are clean, we don’t have to be rich.” We started and I never have been happier. Practically all of my grown up kids are in church. Joe, my son, works in the First Baptist Church in Houston. My daughter plays a piano in a Baptist Church. Louis, my son-in-law, teaches Sunday school for children. So they are all in place and I think I chose the right thing. Mrs. Farrington used to call us her “children.” She said, “Wherever my children go, I am

going.” (Mrs. Farrington established a Methodist Church to serve people in Red Town. The company built a church for them) I didn’t tell my children to go tonight. I said the Lord will speak to them. They went one by one. They all became Baptist and we have all been happy since. My church is in walking distance, but I got frightened that I might step on a rock and fall. But Mrs. Ollie Johnson always picks me up. I still think Diboll is a good place to live. I wouldn’t live any place else.

MD: When you and your husband found out you were going to move to Diboll, how did you feel about moving? Did you want to move to Diboll?

RR: No, we did not want to move because we thought Fastrill was the only place that existed. It was a small place but we were happy. We just didn’t know there was any place else until we got out of there. We got out of there and we decided that there was more than Fastrill. We still go and have homecoming every second Sunday in June.

MD: Do you go?

RR: Last year I went. I hope I am able to go this year.

MD: It is not very long, is it?

RR: No. Next month. There a good many people that still gets together.

MD: Was it easy to make friends in Diboll?

RR: Yes, it was because this little church that Mrs. Farrington had. She began to come and visit us and all the people in the church. She took part in our lives and other people began to join – our group from Fastrill. I think all the people are dead that ran the little church.

MD: I think they are, too. Mrs. Tatum worked up there.

RR: Mrs. Tatum died not long ago. Mrs. Ballenger, Mrs. Farrington, Brother Anderson. I can’t remember way back, but there were several pastors there. And then we changed to the Baptist because all the people were dying. A lot of the white people went and joined with us. We made friends pretty quick. I don’t know every body in my church. They will ask me if I know “so and so” across the track. I tell them I don’t know anybody across the tracks. It has to be this side of the highway.

MD: Did you have some children after you moved to Diboll? Did Dr. Dale deliver them?

RR: Oh yes. Dr. Dale was the doctor and Mrs. (Lucille) Warner was the nurse. I had about 5 after I moved.

MD: Did they come to your house to deliver the baby?

RR: I almost had to go to the hospital. They had changed the rules and they would not deliver any more babies at home. John was the least one. Dr. Dale and Mrs. Warner always came. Maybe they would bring somebody else to help. Mrs. Frank Ruby told me she used to help a lot. She was one of my neighbors at Fastrill. We lived across from each other.

MD: When the Spanish-speaking people started moving to Diboll from the Valley, were you in favor of them coming?

RR: It did not matter to me. I felt we would have more neighbors of Spanish speaking people. Bro. Bass got me to go and speak to them, talk about this town and how nice it was to raise a family – good work and good schools. I spoke to them. Some of them did not speak any English. I spoke to them both ways. Yes, I was happy.

MD: Mother told me that you would bring some of the new people to the store and interpret for them so they could buy their shades and things like that.

RR: Yes, that was when I was still able to go around.

MD: Do you think that everybody should learn to speak English if they are going to live here?

RR: I certainly do. I really do. It is very important to have 2 languages. I know people now who do not speak English and they have been here 10 years or maybe a little more. They have given lessons here in the past, but they just don't get interested or something. I wanted to learn. I didn't go to a school where they give English-speaking lessons. I tried to read the paper and I read a lot of that. I taught myself. Like I said we did not have television then. On television even the little children learn a lot of things. No I think the more the better. You know we would get along as neighbors and friends.

MD: Keep your heritage, but new ways, too.

RR: Yes, absolutely.

MD: Rosa, when you were living in Fastrill and you went through the Depression, what did you do?

RR: Well, actually, it didn't affect me because I did not know any better. But I did work hard a long time ago in those days. They used to sell feed for the cows in printed sacks. I used to get those sacks and make dresses for the little girls. With the white ones, I made shirts for the little boys. We made pillowcases out of them. We made curtains out of them and they were beautiful. We didn't know that anybody would make fun of you because everybody did it. We never went hungry. A lot of people did because they would not plant. They would not do this or that. I was happy. I didn't know any better.

MD: Did your husband still work part time or full time?

RR: Do you remember Mr. Getzman?

MD: I have heard of him.

RR: Well, he was the boss of the camp. He let my husband have some land and he would furnish the seed and for him to plant whatever he wanted in that field. My husband planted about three acres. He planted seed for food that I would put up. He planted sugar cane for syrup. But I worked hard canning all of this stuff to have for the winter. Then he gave him some more land. They worked by halves, you know. Mr. Getzman would furnish the seed, fertilizer and whatever and my husband did the work.

They used to go to work early in the morning. They would leave about 5:30 in the morning and come in about 4:30. They had daylight and then of course on weekends, they worked.

MD: Did he work on the log train?

RR: He worked on the railroad. He used to put out ties and rails. That was the kind of work he did. I remember there was 8 men to a rail. They used to fold a toesack for padding on their shoulders. If they did not, it would skin their shoulders. They made it somehow just like I did. I have often wondered. I did all the cooking, canning and raising children.

Someone asked me one time, how come I did not know how to drive. I said, “Me drive, taking care of 6 or 7 children always?” I did not have time. Then when we moved here the boys were getting big and they were getting ready to leave and go to the towns. I never had them to stay there. After that, my mind is not just working good to do things like that.

MD: Who was the doctor in Fastrill?

RR: Dr. Turner and then there was another one – a tall skinny doctor. When the camp closed, he came somewhere close and retired.

MD: Was it Evans?

RR: Yes. Dr. Evans. He used to come to the houses to deliver the babies, too. And Dr. Turner did too. I almost forgot his name. I could picture, but I could not get the name out.

MD: And you had eleven children – you were the mother of eleven children.

RR: Yes. I tell you, I had a hand full.

MD: Yes, you did. Your first husband’s name was Joe Miranda.

RR: Yes. Joe.

MD: And your second husband was?

RR: Gilbert Ramirez.

MD: I want to ask you this one other thing. What did you do for recreation?

RR: Go fishing and have picnics to the river.

MD: The river was not very far from Fastrill.?

RR: No, we could walk. We would take all those children and put them in a place called Rocky Hole. It was not too deep and you could see. Later, when they left Rocky Hole, they would go further and it would be deep. But we did not think anybody would drown. We did not know how to swim. We just take them and they all splashed water and run around in there. The men would fish. Like on Saturday night, they would set out hooks and in the morning on Sunday, they had already caught a lot of fish. By the time we got over there, they were frying fish and we would take the food we had at home. We had a good time. Oh, I loved that; I wish I could do it now.

MD: You didn't have to spend the night?

RR: No.

END OF INTERVIEW

(Transcribers note)

Rosa's children with first husband Joe Miranda.

Mareno
Alfred
Isadore
Joe
Rose Marie
Matilda
Carmen
Frances
Marie
John
Frank