

University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections

MS 317. Archives for Research on Women and Gender Oral History Project

Rosita Fernandez Transcript, April 29, 1997

Ruthe Winegarten: ...recording on April twenty-ninth, at the home of Rosita Fernandez.

RW: So now I'm doing a sound check, and Rosita knows about sound checks, she's been in show business a really long time, and I'm gonna...what would you like me to call you?

Rosita Fernandez: Rosita.

RW: Rosita, could you please talk into this and I'll make sure that it's operating?

RF: My name is Rosita Fernandez Almaguer, and I'm married to Raul Almaguer, uh, for fifty-nine years, believe it or not.

RW: Wow. And this is April the twenty-ninth, nineteen ninety-seven.

RW: So, what are your thoughts today about your career? Or would you like to talk about something else? Would you like to talk about being married for fifty-nine years? Where did you all get married, here in San Antonio?

RF: Right here in San Antonio, yes.

RW: What year was that?

RF: Nineteen thirty-nine.

Raul Almaguer: Thirty-eight.

RF: Thirty-eight.

RW: In the middle of the depression?

RF: Right.

RW: So how did you meet?

RF: We, uh, my sister knew his sister and that's the way we, we got to meet each other. They were

good friends.

RW: Did you all, were you all, you were not born here in San Antonio.

RF: No, I was born, I was born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. And, uh, I, to a family of sixteen children.

RW: Sixteen. And what number are you?

RF: I'm around the middle, the middle part of the whole sixteen children. And, uh, we are, we lost our uh, well not all our family, we are still, uh, six sisters.

RW: How many boys were there? And girls?

RF: There were about, not many boys, about four or five and the rest were girls.

RW: Did your parents come here because of the Mexican Revolution around the nineteen twenties, or...

RF: Well, I think that had a little, something to do with it. My father was in the military, of course, and he was, uh, he was a capitán, Cesar Fernandez.

RW: What side was he on?

RF: What side? I really don't know for sure.

RW: Pancho Villa or Porfirio Diaz, or...

RA: He was, uh, in the military that he crossed with General Pershing when Wilson was looking forward to being in Mexico, and so he was in the military.

RW: In the U.S. military or the Mexican military?

RA: Mexican military.

RW: And Pershing used the Mexican troops and...

RA: Yes, both. Both, because Pancho Villa had come and ransacked some homes in the U.S. border and so, in retaliation, they were looking for him in Mexico as a bandit. And the people in Mexico loved him so much, they couldn't get any information as to his whereabouts. So when Rosita's father was

with the military.

RW: So the people wouldn't tell on him, huh?

RF: No, they were on his side, I think.

RW: So do you know when your parents moved to San Antonio?

RF: In nineteen thirty-three.

RA: Not too much before that. As of thirty-three you were already senior in...

RF: Yes, I was already a senior. So it must have been...

RA: In the early twenties.

RW: Right after the first world war.

RF: In the early twenties, right.

RW: And what did your father do here, did he have a business or a job?

RF: Not really. He—not a steady business. We came here, we moved to Nuevo Laredo from Monterrey, of course we had brothers from all over in Mexico, but being so long in the military, of course, he didn't have a steady...

RW: ...like a profession...

RF: ...profession, you know. But, he worked in everything that he could to be able to raise the family.

RA: He owned a carriage.

RW: A carriage shop?

RA: No, he owned a carriage, and so he would deliver, uh, the Express-Courier.

RW: So how long did you live in Nuevo Laredo?

RF: Uh, not too long. We moved to Laredo, Texas, and uh, my father was able to immigrate some of us first, and then the rest.

RW: Gradually sent for you.

RF: Gradually. But at that time, it was only about four or five dollars that we had to pay, so he was able to do it.

RW: And then gradually you all moved then, from Laredo to San Antonio. Did you have relatives here, is that why he moved you here?

RF: Yes. Uh-huh. We had my uncles, my mother's brothers and sisters.

RW: Well, did you start singing at a really young age, I mean...

RF: Yes, I was uh, about nine, ten years old when I started with my uncles. They, uh, decided that they probably would do better with a little girl singing for them. And we would go to the, to Robstown, to all these little towns and work in the, at that time they used to call them tent theaters, which it was a home, you say...

RA: The walls...

RF: the walls were brick and then the top was canvas.

RW: But was it open air?

RA: Not really.

RW: It wasn't completely closed in.

RF: No, but it had a stage, and they were really nice. Tent theaters and benches.

RW: Were you the only act or were there other acts, too?

RF: There were other, oh yes, they brought, they would bring very good actors from, you know, they, brought, in fact, movie stars. They would bring the best and I think they had very good shows. So that's how I started with my uncles.

RW: How much did you get paid? Did they pay you? Or did they pay your parents?

RF: My uncles were the ones that knew, would handle all that. So they would, uh, I don't know how much they were charging for me, but I guess it wasn't too, too much at that time, you know, they wouldn't...

RW: But do you remember getting any money yourself, or they gave it to you...

RF: No, not myself. [laughs]

RW: Did they buy your outfits for you to...you had little...

RF: Little Mexican vestiditos (sp?) the little... the little Mexican costumes.

RA: Tell her how much you got paid for radio.

RW: Yeah, radio.

RF: Well, radio, was, my goodness, I used to sing at, uh, it wasn't KCNR then...

RA: KONO.

RF: KONO, and it was, it was two dollars, a half an hour, two dollars a week.

RA: A week.

RW: A week?

RF: A week.

RW: Was it one show a week?

RF: No, it was, almost every day.

RW: Almost every day for two dollars?

RF: For two dollars. A whole half hour.

RW: And that was like in the thirties, maybe?

RF: Yes.

RW: Before you got married?

RF: Yes.

RW: And this was still when you were with your uncles or when you were solo?

RF: I was beginning to be on my own, yeah, solo.

RW: Did you sing, like, solos with them, or did you, how did you, what kind of an act was it?

RF: They would sing trio. And their voices were very pretty and they would play the guitars, the

three of them, and then they would play for me, too, and I would sing by myself.

RW: What were their names?

RF: Sotero San Miguel, Santiago and Fernando. Sotero, Fernando and Santiago San Miguel. El trio San Miguel. And they, uh, brothers of my mother.

RW: And did your mother worry about you, uh, traveling around, did she go with you, or did another sister go with you?

RF: No, they were my uncles, so I was with family.

RW: Did you all have to spend the night away from home?

RA: Yes.

RW: So where did you all stay? They didn't have motels then, did they?

RF: At that time, yes, they did, little hotels.

RA: They're called courts.

RW: Courts, right, like trailer courts.

RF: Right, uh-huh.

RW: Well, was this during the school year, did you take off from school or was it on the weekends?

RF: Weekends, mostly, um-hmm, weekends.

RW: So where did you go to elementary school here in Laredo?

RF: In Laredo. I went to school, and I, when we came here, I used to go to...

RW: Did you have a chance to finish high school?

RF: No, I'm sorry to say that, I wish I had.

RW: You probably had to work and earn some money, that's a big family like that, that must have been quite a...

RF: Yes. Right. Yes. All of our, you know, grown-up sisters and brothers, of course, would be working and helping out my father. My mother had to stay home, naturally.

RW: What was your father's, you told me what your father's name was...

RF: Wash.

RW: You all had to wash and iron.

RF: Oh, yes, Certainly. It was so funny. One time, my mother said, "Well, Rosita, we better get all the clothes together and put them in the..." there were the round tubs, the wash tubs, "wash tub." And I said, "O.K." So I did. But I, instead of putting it with water or anything, I just put the whole thing in the tub and it was nassavana?

RA: A sheet.

RF: Uh-huh, and uh, just tied it up with the whole, every little clothe of ours was there, and all of the sudden in the morning, in the morning, somebody has stolen the whole thing and then a few days later we saw all the kids with all our...and I just cried and cried, I said "I didn't have to wash today, this week."

RW: Did you put them out in the backyard or something?

RF: Yes...

RA: Back porch.

RF: Back porch. [laughs]

RW: And you saw all the neighborhood children with your clothes on?

RF: Mm-hmm.

RW: I guess you couldn't go up and say, "Now, that's my dress."

RF: No, mama wouldn't. She said "No, we can't do anything." So they were just as poor as we were, so, we didn't, we didn't say anything.

RW: What was her name? Your mama's name?

RF: Petrita. Petra and Cesar Fernandez. She was San Miguel before, of course. And she married when she was fourteen, so she...

RW: And she started having children probably right away.

RF: Oh yes, uh-huh.

RW: So she was pregnant for a lot of the years, wasn't she?

RF: Most of the time.

RW: When did she have her last child, how old was she, do you know?

RF: Well, in fact, she was having children while my other sisters, older sisters were married and they were having their children, so she was still....

RW: Some of the nieces might be older than some of the aunts.

RF: Right. You're right. Yes. But we made it, we were a big family, we were very happy and, uh, we never knew that we were that poor, because we were all together and we had a lot of fun together. And we enjoyed life. One time, my father said "I guess I better look for a home, a bigger home," because where we were staying, at the beginning it was so small that there were two rooms, here in San Antonio. Just one room here and one room next to it, and then the porch. And, uh, he said, "I better go look for another home," and finally he came home and he said, "Oh, I'm so happy. I found a beautiful home, and it has about three or four bedrooms." We said, "Fine, wonderful." So we moved and it was close to Christmas, so, um, we—my father would see that everybody had a little red light, you know, for Christmas, so he decided that he would put a little red light, and it was the...

RA: Red light district.

RF: [laughs] Red light district. And all of the sudden here comes a, here comes a soldier and another soldier and it was—all of us would go to the door, the children, you know, and, uh, and open the door to see who he was, and he said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I must have had, I must have made a mistake." We lived there for a little while, and of course, he said, "No, we better move from here." [laughs]

RW: What area was that, do you remember what street, what part of town?

RF: San Bries? No, no. Como se llama la calle?

RA: It was um, Matamoros.

RF: Matamoros, or somewhere around there.

RW: I thought you were going to tell me the house burnt down because he put the lights in and it was too hot, that's what I thought the story was going to be, but this was an unusual twist.

RF: [laughs] Yes.

RW: Did your sisters, were they jealous of you being on the stage?

RF: No, in fact one of my sisters started singing with me, Bertha. Bertha. And she said, "No, I get too nervous, you just keep it up by yourself, I can't do it."

RW: She didn't want to—were you ever nervous or stage-fright have stage fright?

RF: I don't think so—well, sure I was nervous, everybody is, but not really. When I would come on stage I was a little nervous, but after I started singing, it was alright.

RW: It sounds like it was great fun, traveling around and being a star.

RF: It was. It was.

RW: I'm sure you were very, very beautiful and cute and people loved you and everybody...

RF: Well, being a little girl probably, that's...

RA: She was an ugly duckling.

RW: She was not.

RA: Yes, she was.

RF: [laughs] My sister wouldn't, uh, take me out, my older sisters.

RA: No, her sisters would not, did not want to go out on dates if, if they had to take her along.

RF: And my mama would always make me go with them. But they didn't want to take me.

RW: Because they thought she was ugly?

RA: Yes, she was an ugly duckling. She had hair that was like a fan, just spread out...

RF: I always have had a lot of hair. And mama, whenever she didn't have time for braids, they would

always make braids, she would just part it and comb it like this and I'd look, it looked like an umbrella or something like that. [laughs] But, I think they were just saying that because, why? Because I was ugly.

RW: Maybe they didn't want any chaperones along, maybe they wanted to go by themselves.

RF: That's true. That's more like it.

RW: But you must not have thought she was ugly if you started to date her and get...

RA: I did. In the beginning, I did.

RW: You thought what?

RA: That she was homely. And, uh, both she and her sister, Bertha, were going to night school and I was also going to night school at the same time. And I then, didn't care to date with them, or go out with them, I had a lot of fun with, I even dated the teacher.

RF: He always liked, uh, older women.

RA: And so, but she dragged along and going over to the house, her sister and Rosita would both go and spend the weekend. And so I tell her about my dates with other girls and if she would iron my shirts. She said, "Are you going to wear a coat?" So if I said yes, then she'd say, "Oh, then I don't have to iron the sleeves."

RW: A woman after me own heart.

RF: Later on he, he, uh, he thought I was pretty, I guess, I don't know.

RW: What did you think later on?

RF: Well, not until a party of mine, my twenty-first birthday, and I, we went to a party and I had my school chum, was very shy. So he said—I wanted him to date Rosita and so that I could take Bertha, her older sister. And he said, "Well, how do I do that?" I said, "You come stay with me and watch what I say and watch what I do, and do the same," and so I did and I got hung.

RF: So we've been married fifty-nine years, to the same man. That's a record.

RW: So what were you studying in night school?

RA: Beginner's English and Business English.

RW: Was this at a local high school, like? Who sponsored the classes?

RA: At a high school. And, uh, all I wanted was to date the different girls.

RW: That was your motivation for going to school?

RA: So that's why I went to beginner's English and business English.

RW: Oh, to meet more young women.

RF: Tell about our marriage, I think that's cute, too.

RW: Yeah, tell me.

RA: Well, I—after a very short courtship, we decided to get married. And it was during the depression so I didn't have any money, I was making nine dollars a week.

RW: Doing what?

RA: In sales, in, uh, a clothing store. And, um, so, uh I said, "O.K., we're going on a honeymoon to Monterey, Mexico." Because Rosita had a brother...

RF: My oldest brother used to be—still be in the, uh, the...

RA: Military.

RF: Military.

RF: And of course, there was a home there, so we could stay there with him.

RA: And so, uh, we told mama that we were going to Monterrey for our honeymoon, and she said, "Oh, you're going to Monterrey, oh, that's where my son is, and I haven't seen him in such a long time. So I want to go with you."

RF: "Can I go with you all?"

RW: Your mother went on your honeymoon?

RF: Mama. That was the first—Mama was the first person to say, "Well, if you're going to see

Javier, I better go myself so that I can see him, too.” So...

RW: She probably hadn't seen him in a long time, right?

RA: So, papa says, “If you're going, I want to go, too.”

RF: And they didn't have anybody to uh, to leave the younger ones with, so all of the sudden, we were eight or nine people in the car. Little ones, and then, to top it all...

RA: Nine of us.

RW: On your honeymoon trip?

RA: On our honeymoon.

RW: What kind of car did you have that would go big enough for that, I mean...

RF: Well, they were small, and they were all on our laps.

RW: Kind of all stuffed in there together?

RF: Yes.

RA: Yes. And I, the thing was, when we got there, they made room for everybody so that we could sleep. And they had enough room for Rosita and mama and papa and the kids, all spread out. Except they didn't have room for me. So I had to sleep in the car.

RF: In the car, and I was inside.

RW: So you all didn't have a separate bedroom for your honeymoon?

RF: Not even close [laughs]. But then a lady, a comadre, of my sister-in-law and brother and she said, “Oh, no you're not supposed to do that!” And she was so angry. And she said, “I'm going to go to my other comadres,” Filipito, quien sabe como se llama, “and I'm going to leave the house for them. So don't you dare go to my house at all.” So that was the honeymoon for us.

RW: That was your honeymoon. That's a great story.

RA: And then, in the military barracks, uh, where the houses, the cottages, the bed was built into big walls, so it's cemented on.

RF: And the mattresses were about [gestures] that big.

RW: Three inches, huh? Two to three inches. So you got to sleep on one of those, too?

RF: Yes. But here we are, fifty-nine years afterward.

RW: Well, you can laugh about it now.

RF: Oh, you bet. We have been laughing about that for a long time.

RW: So, did you all have some children of your own?

RF: We had two. Deanna Rosa, we had a girl, which used to sing with me, and used to dance—she used to be a dancer with, uh, Fiesta Noche del Rio for many years. Until she married and has a beautiful family of five. For now, it's a big family. And, um, our son, is Raul Javier, and he's just married, too, again.

RW: Are any of your grandchildren interested in singing and dancing?

RF: Umm, no, I...

RW: Or are they old enough to know?

RF: Oh, sure, they're all married—not all married, but they're...

RW: Grown up.

RF: Grown up.

RA: Our granddaughter is the only one that is interested in singing and dancing. And, uh, she's in Saint Mary's University. And so she sings and dances with the groups that are in school.

RF: But just for fun.

RW: What's her name?

RF: Her name is Tadela Maria Elena (sp?) and she wants to be able to bring babies to this beautiful world, and that's what she wants. I hope and pray that she'll be able to, because that's what she really wants to do.

RW: Studying to be a midwife?

RF: Midwife, no, a doctor...

RW: An obstetrician?

RF: Yes.

RW: Well, isn't that great?

RF: Yes. I think so.

RW: You must be really proud of her.

RF: And some, some of the other children are, of course, still in college.

RA: All of them are in college right now. There are five.

RW: Saint Mary's isn't that far from here, she can drop by.

RF: No, Saint Mary's is close to us.

RW: Well, what advice would you give young women who are interested in going into show business today? I mean, you had an unusual—you had the uncles and everything. It was just a different time and place.

RF: But it's a hard way. It's a hard life.

RW: You were in the show business for how long, sixty, fifty...

RF: Sixty-two years.

RW: That's a very distinguished career.

RF: That's a very long time. And I've been retired for quite a few years already.

RW: Do you miss it?

RF: Not really. Uh, I, we try, we keep in touch with the other, amigos, the younger performers and we enjoy that. We enjoy, I enjoy seeing them now. But I'm enjoying my retirement, especially now that Raul needs me and we've been travelling.

RA: We both had a retirement. I was with Sears Roebuck for twenty years, an area manager, and I retired from them in eighty-two. And I told Rosita, "Honey, I'm going to retire from work. Do you

want to retire from the kitchen?" And she said yes.

RF: From the kitchen and singing, yeah.

RA: So she retired from the kitchen.

RW: Didn't take too much to persuade her, did it?

RA: No.

RF: Well, I'll tell you. I think I did pretty good. I didn't want to be on the road, I didn't want to be
[end of side one] [side two] I wanted to do what I could. I did movies...

RW: You did?

RF: Yes.

RW: Can you remember some of the names of the movies?

RF: Well, I worked in "The Alamo," with John Wayne.

RW: Really? Was that filmed here? Or in Hallettsville...

RA: In Bracketsville.

RF: And I did, uh, a movie for Walt Disney, which was a cute movie, in fact I was the only, there was
no other girl.

RW: You were the female lead.

RF: Female lead. Uh-huh.

RW: I was going to ask you if you had a copy of all the movies you were in.

RF: I, uh, yes, we do have "The Alamo." And we do have Walt Disney's. And, um...

RA: Seguin.

RF: Juan Seguin, we did that in Bracketsville, too. And, um, I did "Three Hundred Miles for
Stephanie," too.

RW: How did you learn how to act? Did you have an acting coach, or...

RF: No, I guess just being in show business that long, you know, it helped.

RW: You never took singing lessons, did you?

RF: I never took singing lessons. No, I never did.

RW: You just had a God-given gift.

RF: A God-given gift. That's right, thank God for the beautiful gift.

RW: When your children were small, did you travel around, or how did that work?

RF: No, no, the only place that we went to was, uh, New York, New York and, uh, he asked for a leave of absence and we took our children with us for three months to see how we would like it over there.

We didn't like it.

RW: When was that, do you remember?

RF: It's a wonderful city and everything, but we were so used to San Antonio.

RA: Thirty-nine or forty-five. After the war.

RW: After the war.

RA: Nineteen forty-five.

RW: Where did you live, in a hotel?

RA: Yes.

RW: And you had some jobs up there, too?

RF: I was already contracted for, to sing in a beautiful place. El Chico, El Chico was the name, no?

RW: Was it a nightclub?

RA: It was a dinner club.

RW: How was the pay? Was it good pay?

RF: So-so.

RA: Pretty good for the time.

RW: But it was enough to rent a hotel and...

RA: She was in several of the TV shows...

RW: The early TV shows.

RA: Like Arthur Godfrey and Gary Moore, uh, I Want to be a Millionaire...

RF: That was another one.

RA: You got paid thirty-five dollars for that one.

RF: [laughs] I still have that one...

RW: I think you gave some of the programs and things to the archives.

RF: Yes, yes.

RW: Well, I hope, I hope that someday somebody will do a documentary on your life, because you've got some clips, some of those film clips and they have your recordings—are the records at the archives, too?

RA: Most of the records are still here.

RW: Maybe we could get them to make a dub, make copies and put them in the—do you think that would be good?

RA: Sure.

RW: I think they should dub some of your—are they seventy-eights or on tapes?

RA: Seventy-eights.

RF: Some seventy-eights. But more of—more are seventy-eights than tapes.

RA: No tapes.

RW: No tapes then. So New York was too cold, or too dirty, or you just missed your home and family?

RA: The living conditions. It's uh, it's hurry up, I've got to go and sit down. And that's, uh, there was no place for the children to play, because there were a lot of night workers in the hotel, and they didn't like noise during the day.

RW: They didn't like the children being normal children.

RF: It must be hard to live over there. I guess you have to be used to living there.

RW: I mean, there's no back yard for children to play, they have to go to the park to play. It's sad in a way.

RF: No, no. We were close to the park, but still. They couldn't live amongst themselves.

RA: Amsterdam and Broadway, so we were close to the park.

RW: Amsterdam and Broadway's near Central Park, isn't it?

RA: Yes.

RW: Well, so did you regret that you didn't stay there?

RF: No, no. I'm glad that I, we came back.

RW: Did you still have a house, or...

RA: We kept our house, I kept my job.

RW: O.K.

RF: No, we did everything the right way, because we didn't know what, uh, if we'd like it. So we had our home and we had everything here.

RW: Were your kids glad to be back?

RA: Bent down and kissed the ground when we got to Texas.

RF: In fact, I had to cancel the contract.

RW: What did you have, six months or a year?

RF: No, it was three months and then we would renew it, because I didn't want to make it too long. Because of the same reason. But, uh, he was very nice about it, and said, "Oh, that's alright."

RW: He understood.

RF: Yes, he understood. And he said, "That's alright, don't worry."

RW: That's unusual these days. Well, do you ever regret that you didn't remain, say become nationally or internationally famous? You probably could...

RF: No. I think, uh, I think—I feel like I have my life complete here. I've always thought that. I've never had, in fact, I've never had any ambition to go and see what I could do. In fact, when I went to make the movie, the Walt Disney movie, that was made in Sedona, Arizona. And Mister Heebler (sp?) who was the second to Walt Disney, he went to our, uh, como se dice, our lugaro—to where we were making film.

RW: The location.

RF: The location, right. And, he, uh, went to see how we were doing and all that. And he said, “Fine, everything’s fine.” We had a little despedida, a little party for him, when he left and some of the boys asked me, why don’t you sing a song for him? There was a little song there, that I was supposed to sing in the movie, called the “Tortilla Song.” And I didn’t, I was supposed to be, uh, dubbing, and the pronunciation that the girl had was so poor, I’m sorry to say. But it was, and I said, ‘My gosh, how in the world am I going to do that?’ But I said, ‘Well, there’s nothing else to do.’ So, Mister Heebler (sp?) said by the time that I finished singing, said, “Why don’t you let Rosita sing all she wants to in the movie, because she’s supposed to be a happy lady,” and so forth and so on. So we went to Hollywood to do the sound. And, uh, fortunately, I sang a song that was his favorite, it was like “Londrina” (sp?) it’s a beautiful song. And he says, “But you have to sing that song in the movie, too. You have to put it in.” So I said, “I will, I will, I will.”

RW: So they put...

RF: Uh-huh. So Mister, uh, what was his name...

RA: McGowan.

RF: The director, Mister McGowan. He took me around, he was showing me around all the people that were standing at the corner, at the street lights and all...

RW: On the set?

RF: Yes.

RA: And reading...

RF: And reading out loud and singing out loud. I said, "Are you trying to tell me something, Mister McGowan?" He says, "I just want you to see how things are here." I said, "Don't worry, I'm going back home, and I'm going to stay home. I'm not going to come and see what I can do here. So don't worry about that."

RW: Do you think he was trying to interest you into a career there?

RF: No, in fact he was showing me how hard it would be for me. I said, "I have my family, I have my children and I want to be with them. So don't worry about it."

RW: Well, when you think of somebody like Selena, you know.

RF: Yes, single, beautiful little girl, it's a shame.

RW: And what kind of career she would have had, possibly. But just a gifted person, but she definitely was ambitious in a different way.

RF: Definitely. No, I was never that ambitious. I was lucky to be able to do all the things that I did, during my career. Still being here with my family.

RW: Did your uncles continue to be in show business after you sort of spun off on your own, or...

RF: Yes, they were working in New York.

RW: So they actually got to New York.

RF: They all stayed there.

RW: In other words, you all had gone as a group to New York.

RF: No, they were already there. And they were already asking me to go, to come, to go to New York and see what we could do.

RW: To seek your fortune in the big city. But they did stay there? And did they remain there the rest of their lives?

RF: No. Uh, finally, two of my uncles came home to San Antonio. Juan Setero (sp?) he stayed

there.

RW: So how did your parents feel about you? Did they live long enough to see some of these successes?

RF: Oh, yes. Both my parents, but my mother, she lived to be ninety-two, so she really did get to see all.

RW: When did she pass away?

RF: Oh, gosh...

RA: Fifteen years.

RF: About fifteen years ago.

RW: So, did she like to come see you perform?

RF: Oh, certainly. She was always there.

RA: She liked to have the spotlight on her. Especially on her birthday and...

RF: Because everybody would come and wish her the best...

RW: Feliz cumpleaños.

RF: Yes.

RW: So she liked to be the mama of the star.

RF: Sí, she liked that.

RA: She, uh, helped Rosita make some of her costumes.

RW: Oh, was she a good seamstress?

RF: She made most of them. Yes, she was a good...

RA: The placing of the sequins...

RF: One by one...

RW: That must be a tremendous amount of work.

RF: It is. I'll show you some of the costumes. In fact, I don't know, I'm still looking for a place for

one or two, somewhere.

RW: So, do you know Lady Bird Johnson?

RF: Yes.

RW: Did you ever go to the ranch?

RF: Oh yes, about five times.

RW: Well, tell me about what that was like.

RF: Beautiful. I, we enjoyed it. Raul, most of the time, he would go with me. So we really enjoyed that. She was very, very sweet, very nice.

RA: Very gracious.

RF: Very gracious. In fact, one of the times that, uh, you was a little too cold outside...

RA: It was drizzling, and we were having coffee outside. And I had a, uh, a cup or mug that I would drink coffee out of. She passed by and said, "Oh, that looks so good," and she grabbed my cup and took a couple sips of my coffee and handed the cup back to me. I wanted to bring that cup back.

RW: The cup that Lady Bird Johnson drank out of? Me, too. That's an interesting story.

RF: And there were several, uh, one of the people there that once...

RA: The King of Pakistan? The President of Pakistan.

RF: The President of Pakistan. And, uh, some from Presidents from Mexico.

RW: And did you meet Lyndon Johnson, too?

RF: Oh, yes.

RW: And what was he like?

RF: He was nice, he was a very nice, a very nice man.

RA: He was a rancher.

RW: He was a rancher?

RA: And, uh, he loved to, uh, get on the horse and ride off and come back around. One funny thing

that happened one time, there was uh, newspaper people, a lot of them, and cameras and—they wanted to take a picture of Humphreys on a horse.

RW: Hubert Humphrey on a horse?

RF: Yes, can you imagine?

RA: And he was scared of the horse, so, uh, they, uh tied him down. They tied him down so they could take a picture.

RF: It was all in fun, I guess. They just wanted to.

RA: But one time, uh, when the president said, “This is off the record,” it stayed off the record. I mean, no one would, uh, would write about it. And he was very strict about it.

RW: Did he ever tell you all any off the record stories?

RA: No, not really.

RF: They never really had time for all that.

RW: They didn’t talk about politics—was it just small talk or what did you all talk about?

RA: Small talk.

RW: I’m trying to imagine what it would be like to be sitting there with Lady Bird and...

RA: Now she would always...

RF: I don’t know, they were all having a wonderful time. A wonderful time. I guess they wanted to forget about politics and all.

RW: They were trying to relax. It was not a heavy, heavy...

RF: No.

RA: She served the, um, ice cream—it was in little birds, ice cream birds on top of the cake. Like...

RW: Like a little mold or something?

RA: Yes. And she would do that herself, all the time. She wouldn’t let anybody else serve, only Lady Bird.

RF: The dessert.

RW: Well, she's a gracious lady. I think she's having her eighty-fifth birthday May the first at the National Wildflower Research Center, you know, that she started.

RF: In fact, was she the one that, uh, started that thing about naming me San Antonio's First Lady of Song?

RW: She called you San Antonio's First Lady of Song. That's what it says here. She wasn't wrong, was she?

RA: No.

RW: What is her favorite song?

RF: Her favorite song is, um, Cancion Mixteca (sp?) and she used to call it Tierra del Sol (sp?).

RW: How does that go? Can you hum it for me?

RF: Que lejo [couldn't catch the words]...muy bonita, es muy bonita.

RW: Very pretty, yes.

RF: She would always request for that, and I always, whenever I—one time she brought forty ambassadors...

RA: Forty ambassadors from all over.

RF: And I was asked to sing for them.

RW: Well that's a pretty big, heavy-duty show.

RF: Yes.

RA: One-woman show.

RF: One hour, one-woman show. And, um, she would always request Cancion Misteca, but she would always say, 'Tierra del Sol.'

RW: What was the most difficult thing for you about being in show business. You told me some of the funny things and some of the happy things, but what was, what were some of the tough times like?

Can you remember some of the things that happened?

RA: Um, she, Rosita suffered from ulcers and she would get very, very sick with ulcer attacks. And she would have to go most days and sings. In fact, there were a couple of times that I took her right from stage on to the hospital, to the emergency room. And no one knew about it.

RF: It was so hard to, um, to be able to sing, you know, you wanted to do a good show, and, uh, with your stomach like that, it's very, very hard.

RW: Well, how did you do it? I mean, what did you tell, I can't even imagine. Were you in a lot of pain?

RF: Pain.

RW: And you just did it anyway?

RF: Did it anyway. But every time I would finish he would, um, it would be bad. Pretty bad for me.

RW: They didn't have any medicine at that time that they could...

RF: Maalox or something like that.

RA: They ordered Maalox and milk.

RF: But even the milk I couldn't drink. I couldn't drink it anymore.

RW: Were they able to cure it or keep it under control?

RA: A doctor who became a friend, Doctor Guy, from Fort Worth, he was a, a stomach specialist and he said, "I'm going to operate on you. And I guarantee that I will cure you." So one day, when we went to El Paso to, um, they were going to a show of a movie, Walt Disney's movie...

RW: What was it?

RF: "Sancho the Homing Steer."

RA: And some of us, some of us at the university, after the premiere, we went on to Fort Worth. And, uh, we spent the night at the doctor's home, he and his wife were there.

RF: From there, he just took me to the hospital.

RA: In the morning he said, “We’re going straight to the hospital.”

RF: And it was so, he was still a young man, a very young man, married, of course, with a family.

And the thing is that, uh, he operated me and Raul stayed for a week with me at hospital and then he had to come, of course, with his work. And, uh, I stayed for about another week, and he said, “Don’t worry, I’ll just put her on the plane and you’ll see her over there.”

RW: And did he cure you?

RF: He operated on, and I’m doing just fine. But, he said, “Call me tomorrow and I’ll see how you’re doing.” And do you know by the next day, he was dead. He died. Oh, I was, oh gosh.

RW: That is so shocking. What happened?

RF: His heart.

RW: And he was in his forties, or what?

RF: In his forties.

RW: So did he have a partner that could take over where, I mean...somebody else took care of you then.

RF: I’m sure he did. Oh, yes. Sure. I was shocked.

RW: He was worried about you, but then he...I wonder if he neglected himself, I don’t know.

RF: Well, yes.

RW: So, have the ulcers been under control since then?

RF: I can eat anything and nothing happens, it’s just fine. I’m just fine.

RW: Well, isn’t that a miracle that was—when was that, quite a few years ago?

RF: Ah, yes, at least twenty-five years or so. Thirty years or so.

RW: So, I know that you’ve been on radio and TV, what, which one do you like the better?

RF: I loved radio.

RW: You did? Why?

RF: I don't know. I guess because, uh, we would feel more at ease and, uh, we, uh, were not worried about our face, you know, about our expressions, yeah. So, uh, I liked radio.

RW: You could be more relaxed and you didn't have to worry about the makeup and the hair and the...

RF: And television is nice, of course, it's good. But then you have to worry about a lot of things.
[laughs]

RW: Yeah, I'm sure they have everybody's like standing there looking at you and...

RF: Right. And you worry about if your face is projecting right, and a lot of things.

RW: But radio was your favorite.

RF: Radio was my favorite.

RW: You were on for quite a few years.

RF: Several things, yes, several radio stations. And at that time, there wasn't any sort of competition for, um, well, if you're in this station you can't sing in other stations and so forth and so on. So I used to sing, uh, in several stations.

RW: You didn't have to be exclusive.

RF: I didn't have to be exclusive. Which was nice. And I started in WOAI way back, of course, before television, that's when it started.

RW: W-O-A

RF: W-O-A-I.

RW: Was a radio station before it was a TV station.

RF: Oh, yes, mm-hmm. They were asking, they were looking for girls that, uh, could sing and were...

RA: It was a Texas Quality Network. One of the few networks at that time. A Texas Quality Network and it was the clearest channel, station, so it was heard all over Mexico.

RW: Is that right? So you probably have a lot of fans in Mexico.

RF: I sure did.

RW: Did you get fan letters?

RF: I sure did. Yes. In fact, one of the songs I recorded was, well, it came up to the third place. It wasn't first place, but it was in third place, which was nice in Mexico City.

RW: Well that's pretty...that's a lot of competition. What was the song?

RF: "Jacaranda," it's a beautiful tree, a beautiful flower.

RW: Jacaranda. So what are you the proudest of of all the things you've done, do you think?

RF: Singing for the Pope, I guess. That's one of the things.

RW: Which pope was that?

RA: Pope John Paul.

RW: The one that's there right now...

RW: The current pope, when he came to San Antonio?

RF: Sí.

RW: That was a big honor, wasn't it?

RF: Yeah, that was a big honor.

RW: Did you get to meet him?

RF: Oh, yes.

RA: Shake his hand.

RW: You did?

RF: Yes, he came up to where we were singing.

RW: What did he say?

RF: He said, things were beautiful.

RA: It was an unusual thing because he came by in the Popemobile. And the Popemobile passed

where Rosita was singing with the mariachis, and it kept on going to the plane. And Rosita said, "Well, at least I saw him close."

RF: At least I saw him close.

RA: And he got off the Popemobile and he walked back to where Rosita was singing to shake her hand.

RF: And he tried to shake everybody's hand. I mean, the hand, um, of the mariachis.

RW: Well, that's something, that's a wonderful memory.

RF: And, of course I had opportunity to sing for other stars. The one that was always, uh, calling from wherever was Joan Crawford. And she would, she was coming, she was a very close friend to, um, Miss Silickson (sp?) and Miss Silickson always, would always ask me to come and sing for her. Here in San Antonio. And every time that she would come to Miss Silickson's, she would request that I would go.

RW: What is Miss Silickson's first name?

RF: Um, I can't remember.

RW: I wonder how they knew each other?

RF: I don't know. I never asked her. One time, she was so graceful, she, Joan Crawford, she said, "Rosita, I'm going to sit on the floor and I just want to hear your voice so I'm going to turn my back so you don't have to worry about what to do with your hands or anything, just sing the song that you like the best, and I'll listen to it." So I did.