

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Lupe Rodriguez Cavazos**

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Interviewer: Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

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13 Pages



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Transcript

KELLY: Lupe we are going to start with some basic biographical information. When and where were you born?

CAVAZOS: I was born in Sugar Land, September 13, 1939, at the Sugar Land Hospital. Dr. Carlos Slaughter delivered me.

KELLY: Was he your doctor throughout your lifetime?

CAVAZOS: Actually Dr. Kuykendall was our doctor, but Dr. Slaughter was the one that delivered me.

KELLY: Did your mother tell you any interesting stories about your delivery?

CAVAZOS: No, just that it was a good delivery. My brother, Roland, said he always wanted a little blue baby, mind you. A BLUE BABY, and my mother was telling me that when I born I almost looked like I was blue. I don't know why or what, anyway he got his blue baby.

KELLY: What brought your parents to Sugar Land?

CAVAZOS: My dad came from Mexico. It was during the revolution, and it was a bad time for them. It was during the time of Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza. They lived in Saltillo, Mexico, which is past Monterrey. My dad owned a general store. It was getting really bad, and he was almost killed at one time by Pancho Villa's men in the city. They just went into the stores and took whatever they wanted, and would not pay. They just took, and it got to the point where he stood up to one of the gunmen and they did not like that. It got pretty scary because they almost shot him. Someone else came and intervened and asked the reason for the upset and, of course, there was no reason. They had other men that they were going to execute in the plaza. My mother already had three girls, at that time, Celso was just a baby, and my oldest brother.



EDITOR'S NOTE: The Mexican Revolution (Spanish: Revolución Mexicana) was a major armed struggle, c. 1910–1920, that radically transformed Mexican culture and government. It was a "genuinely national revolution". Its outbreak in 1910 resulted from the failure of the 35-year-long regime of Porfirio Díaz to find a managed solution to the presidential succession. Wealthy landowner Francisco I. Madero challenged Díaz in the 1910 presidential election, and following the rigged results, revolted under the Plan of San Luis Potosí. Armed conflict ousted Díaz from power and a new election was held in 1911, bringing Madero to the presidency. -- *Wikipedia.com*

Celso, Senior, thought it was too dangerous to continue being there. He came first and got all his paperwork and settled in the Silsbee area, actually it was in a little community out of Vidor called Terry. There were some Japanese rice farmers there, so they came and settled there. In the meantime, he was working in the rice farms and vegetable farm that they had there.

Later, he heard they were hiring here and he wanted to get in with Southern Pacific because his brother worked for them. He was in Silsbee, but there were no openings there. They knew that Southern Pacific came, and there was a line right here. He thought that if he came and he started working here, then eventually he might get on. That's what happened. They worked in the fields for a while, and that's when my brothers and sisters started in the schools there. I don't know what they called it back then... and then he did get on with the Southern Pacific. He worked many years and retired from there.

KELLY: When you say they worked in the fields, which was for the Sugarland industries agriculture...

CAVAZOS: Yes, yes, for the Sugar Land...

KELLY: Do you know where that was located?

CAVAZOS: It was on Brooks Street as you cross over Highway 6. All the fields were right in there. I don't exactly know where they lived.

KELLY: But that is where First Colony is now?

CAVAZOS: Yea, all that area where First Colony is now is where the fields were.

KELLY: When you father finished working in the fields what did he do next?

CAVAZOS: That's when there was an opening with Southern Pacific. He had already gotten to know some of the people, you know around and they knew he was trying to get on with the Southern Pacific. I don't know if his brother had anything to do with it either because he lived in the Silsbee-Beaumont area and was already working for Southern Pacific. An opening came up and he applied and got that job.



Old Sugar Land Medical Clinic, ca. 1950

--courtesy <http://wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com>

KELLY: Where was the depot in Sugar Land?

CAVAZOS: It was right by the tracks across from the Sugar Land Medical Clinic which was the only clinic we had. Right there by the refinery. I don't know if you have any pictures of that old clinic. My sisters worked there.

KELLY: I will ask you about that in a little bit. I want to talk more about the depot. What did your father do at the depot?

CAVAZOS: I really don't know what his title was. I know that he would do all the mail or get the mail ready and the mail pick up for the train. The train would also pick up the mail. He would have to put it in a big satchel and tie it up. He would just hang it up on a big pole by the track and the train wouldn't even slow down. They would just take that mail bag...and also, he would get the packages that were going in or out. The train would stop if they had packages going to the company or the industry, whatever. He would pick them up in this wagon that was like a trailer. It had those big iron tires, or whatever, like a big wagon. He would pull that, and the train would unload any packages that were coming to the area, to the refinery, or to the businesses here. If there were any packages going out, he would also get them ready to be picked up when ever the train would be coming by. I don't know if there were certain days that he would do this, if he would have to have them ready, or if it was an everyday thing. I am not really sure.

KELLY: Did you get to visit your father at work?

CAVAZOS: I did, and I just loved it.

KELLY: What did you like about it?

CAVAZOS: I just liked to see, having to pull. Sometimes I would get to sit on the wagon, and he would pull me along with everything else. I remember how nice the depot gardens were. Well, it was not a garden, but just right there where the grass is. He would keep that neat. I remember it used to have a big star. I always wanted to take pictures, but we never had a camera to take pictures of anything. It always looked so nice. It had little flowers, and he was always trying to keep it nice. I never have seen a picture of it.

KELLY: I will get one to you.

CAVAZOS: I always thought it was so pretty. Back then we didn't have much money. We didn't have a lot and there were seven of us in the family. We didn't have any cameras either. The pictures we do have are because other people took them and gave them to us.

KELLY: Did you ever get to ride a train?

CAVAZOS: OH, YES.

KELLY: Describe that to us.

CAVAZOS: I am trying to think how old I was. My sister, Toni Rodriguez, worked at the clinic for many years for Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall and she was the one who would take us sometimes. They had a little train they used to call the Dinky.

We loved to get on the Dinky because we would sometimes go to my sister's house where she got married. She lived in Stafford, so I would go visit with her and my niece, her daughter, Margie, in Stafford. I would get on the Dinky here, and they'd drop me off in Stafford, and I'd spend the weekend with my sister. Then it would also go all the way into Houston, and my sister would take us on the weekends. That was a big treat for us. She didn't do it very often.

KELLY: Do you remember how much you paid to ride the Dinky.

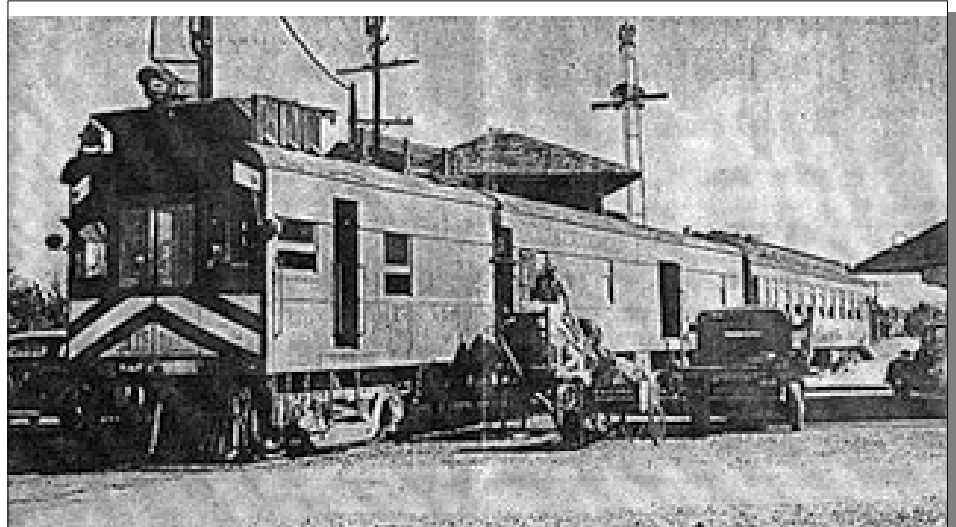
CAVAZOS: Oh my gosh, I don't remember. She used to take care of it, but it must have not been hardly anything.

KELLY: What did the Dinky look like?

CAVAZOS: It was just a small...a train with just a few cars, maybe two or three. I don't remember where it used to come from. It used to come from a lot further...

KELLY: Did it have an engine in front?

CAVAZOS: Yea, it had to have something that pulled. (chuckles) I just know it was called the Dinky, and we just loved to get on it because it would take us places. For a long time, we didn't have a car. We would walk everywhere. We had to walk to church and walk to school. Back then there was no bridge across.



Shown is a train similar to the Dinky Train that ran between Houston and Victoria. The Dinky Train was a local freight train that ran on the S&P track along Highway 90A and included one or two passenger cars. It made 4 regular stops at the Sugar Land depot and flag stops. One was at noontime for a train that made flag stops west of Rosenberg.

-- courtesy of the <http://wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com>

We had to walk from the Quarters when I was going to school, all the way around the refinery area, all the way around. It took awhile to walk all that. You had to come up through Main, up the front of the refinery, and then down Main Street, you know?

KELLY: Let me take you back to one of those walks. Try to go back to where you would be walking from home to school, what you would pass along the way that you might stop and look at? What was there?

CAVAZOS: We lived on Guyer Street which is right by the water. I had to walk up that first street. I don't remember the name, but I took a short cut. There were short cuts you could take. You could walk right by the fence where the refinery was, and you walked through that short cut instead of going down the sidewalk because it was a little bit shorter. They used to have the sugar cane there, a lot of the bulk sugar cane that they would bring in. First, they said they used to grow it here, but then later, they started bringing it in on barges, or whatever. They had it here and you could see it, the sugar cane and, of course, you would stop and look at everything.

When you're little, everything is new. Then you would walk around where the tracks were. All that was part of the refinery, and you could walk around. My favorite spot was right there at the refinery, the little fountain they had there with the little gold fish. It was always so well kept and so pretty. That was kind of a resting place for us for a minute. We always stopped there and looked at the gold fish. It was a half way point, I guess, because by that time, we had walked all the way around and stopped a few minutes to look at the fish and see the little fountain. I hope they don't tear that down. I hope they rebuild it or fixed it up. Because that was one of the focal points there for us. For the little ones anyway, but even afterwards when you grew up right there at the refinery.

We stopped there all the time and look at it. During September-October, the pecan time, you know there are a lot of pecans all the way. We would really pick up the pecans and bring them home to Mom. Maybe she could make a pecan pie or something, you know? But you know, the pecans were just all over the sidewalks and part of the streets as you walked along.

KELLY: Do you remember passing up Marshall Canning on the corner of Main on Sugar Land Street?

CAVAZOS: OH, YES, we sure did. Marshall Canning, and actually I had two cousins that came after we moved here. They came and lived with us and started working. That's where they started working, at the canning plant.

KELLY: What did they do there, do you know?

CAVAZOS: It was Juan Mesa and Richard Mesa, they still live in the Quarters. I know Richard worked where they dropped the cans in the big boilers there. He was right on the corner there where you walked. It was an open area, because it was very hot. It was open all around, and you could see the people working. He would make sure the cans were in a big thing... a lot of cans... I don't know how many it would hold, and it would go down into this huge vat that was boiling and cooking. The lid would come down, and you could see them working, and you could see how they were doing it. The other side is where they did other things over there. I don't know what exactly they did on the right-hand side. This was on the left as you crossed around the corner there on Main Street.

KELLY: I want to go back to the clinic building because you had a sister that worked there right?

CAVAZOS: Toni was my oldest sister. She started working for Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall. They wanted her to be there to interpret for them, but she got to where she was so good. Before Betty Norman they had Jean the lab technician. Jean somebody, I can't think of her last name. She needed an assistant because they had a lot of patients all the time. So then Jean trained Toni to help her in the lab and be a lab assistant for her. Toni would also help with interpreting when they needed her, but she was at the lab, she worked with Betty Norman for the rest of the years there, up until they closed.

KELLY: I understand your brothers worked there.

CAVAZOS: My other sister, Virginia, worked as the dental assistant for Dr. Wheeler. He trained her to be his assistant. She worked for the Senior Dr. Wheeler all the time he was there. Later when she stopped working there, she kept working for Battelstein's as retail for many years. Then she worked for Bealls here in Sugar Land for a long time, and then it became Palais Royal, and she was with them. My dad, bless his heart, he had so many jobs. He had a big family and the pay wasn't all that good. He worked in the depot, and then we use to clean the clinic after the doctors left. Everybody helped, the whole family. I helped, I'd come, my brothers would come, Celso and Roland. We all helped him clean. All of us pitched in, we cleaned that clinic every night.

KELLY: I bet that was interesting.

CAVAZOS: It was because we got to see a lot of things. All the doctors, all the areas of the doctors, the lab and, of course, my sister worked there. She would show us the lab and the big table where you lay down for the x-rays. She would do x-rays and she would develop them there. She would show us all the things that they would do during the day. At night we would be there cleaning the clinic, it was extra money for us.

KELLY: I was told that your mother was an excellent cook and she would bring food to the people at the clinic.

CAVAZOS: Oh, yes. Oh she did and she would make tamales for them, and they just loved it. Mother was the greatest cook in the whole world to us. She was! She made tamales, baked tacos, and all sorts of things and brought them to their parties. Oh, my goodness, they would just go crazy because it was such good food. Of course, we knew it already, but this was special for them. Oh, yes, they knew my mother very well.

KELLY: Talk to me about going to St. Theresa's Catholic Church and what that meant to you.

CAVAZOS: St. Theresa's has been our church from the very beginning. I was born here and I was baptized here. It has been through a lot of changes. When we first came here, it was kind of hard in a way because, coming from Mexico the way mother and them came, they were not used to these separations and segregation and all of this. It was different. The kids sometimes teased my brothers and sisters when they were in school because we were from Mexico. We were not from here, although our English was excellent because when they settled, my dad settled in that area there in Terry which is not even there anymore. I think it is right close to Vidor, mind you Vidor. My brothers and sisters went to school there, and they didn't have any problems. They picked up... they were young though, they were little. They picked up that English and I learned from them.

My mother would cry at night because she would say (sigh), "I don't understand what you are saying. They are going to forget the Spanish, they are not going to know the language and all of that." We did, we learned both languages. She was so afraid we were going to lose our language, the Spanish language, but we didn't. Anyway, we came and we saw the way things were here. It was hurtful because we weren't used to it. Even in church, and I hate to say that, but it was true. We could not sit in the front area of the church. We had to sit in the back, and it was on the left side. To this day we still sit on the left side, but you know where?

A lot of this changed, I think, when the Basilians (community of priests) came in. We sit in the front. That is where mother would always go sit, in the front. To this day, my husband and I, and all my family, when we go, we always sit in the front, always on the left. Because we always used to sit on the left, but it was in the back, because we were not allowed to sit in the front. Then the same at school, it was this division. I started, and I don't know if I am going out of the way here. When I started going to school, I started in the first grade and my teacher was Miss Henserton. My niece, Margie, stayed with us, so she could go to school here because she didn't want to go to Stafford. She lived in Stafford, she started going to school, we went to school together. I have a picture of me and her in front of a Christmas tree or something like that in her classroom. Then of the class, the whole class. We were separated there, we had to go, and here too.

Living in the Quarters is separate from everything else. You weren't allowed to go to certain places, you weren't allowed to do certain things. Anyway, it was different, you had to get used to it. I mean it was a big change for my brothers and sisters, more so than for me because I didn't come along until later. I didn't know anything, I just thought that's the way it was. Anyway, our English was very good.

I was in the first grade there with Miss Henserton. We did well and then I went to the second grade. We used to call it just the Quarters, but M. R. Wood, whatever... the Quarters school area. Then in the third grade, the teacher we had was Miss Parker. I think you knew Miss Parker, she was Betty Jean Prasatik's mother.

KELLY: Frankie Parker

CAVAZOS: Yea, okay. Miss Parker was my third-grade teacher over there in the Quarters. She said you should not be in this school. You should not be here. She said I am going to see if I can do something about that. Bless her heart she did. She talked to somebody, the superintendent or somebody over there, and she told them that I didn't belong there at that school. That I should be put over here. That was the year... in the fourth grade.

When I started fourth grade, I came over here. It was through her intervention that I came over here because I think the school went to the sixth grade here in the Quarters. You would go up to the sixth grade, and from the sixth grade, you would go over here to the other school.

KELLY: Do you recall what year that would have been that you transferred?

CAVAZOS: Let's see, I must have started in forty-five. I was born in thirty-nine. They didn't have kindergarten, I'd start first grade right off.

KELLY: So in the late forties?

CAVAZOS: Yes, then I started with the group. I know you know what the group is, the fourth grade with Jackie James, Susan Wood, John Ellen Wheeler, David Armstrong, and Kenneth Albers. They were in the fourth grade. When I started the fourth grade over here, that was the group, Lanie Miller, so I graduated with them. I went along with the class since then.

KELLY: You graduated in nineteen fifty-seven?

CAVAZOS: Nineteen fifty-seven, yes.

KELLY: I want to go back to Saint Theresa's a little bit. Can you describe the old church on Fifth and Main?

CAVASOS: Yes, I have some pictures, not really good pictures, I wish.

KELLY: Pull them out and show them to me.

CAVAZOS: (rustling of papers) This is a communion picture of one of the groups, and I was an angel there. I had already done my first communion. This is another little angel, Bessie, and that's myself. This is my niece Virginia Ramirez, she was an angel, too. This other little girl, I can't remember her name, but she also was an angel. We had two little angels and then two older angels that led the group. These were all Hispanics and this is Sister Elizabeth. I can't think of her name, but this is Father Dairy and he was an Oblate. That was, let's see if I had already made my First Communion. I had to have been maybe about eight years old there. Because you made the first communion early back then. You see that's part of the church on the side, on the right side as you are off Main. This is the inside of that church. That was the communion class, I think from...

KELLY: If you don't mind, at a later time, I would like to scan these.

CAVAZOS: Oh, sure.

KELLY: Okay.

CAVAZOS: This is a group. This is when I made my First Communion, and that was in forty-six. That's me and that's Margie, my niece. That is my communion class, and that's the front of the church, but that's all I have is the front of the church. I also have a photo of Father Murray. He was there when I made my First Communion, and that's Margie and myself. This is also right in front of the church with Sister Elizabeth and Sister Rose Marie, and that is myself and my niece, Margie. Oh, this is later though, this is inside of the church, too. I don't remember the occasion, I think it was a confirmation, because this is Father Broussard. He was a Basilian, and this is Father John Collins, also a Basilian, and this is Bishop Morkovsky. I think it was a confirmation for the bishop to have been there. I don't know if it might have been the old church or it's the new one...



Sister Elizabeth and Sister Rose Marie at St. Theresa Catholic Church guiding Lupe and her niece, Margie through First Communion, ca. 1949

KELLY: The first one?

CAVAZOS: The first one on Seventh Street. And these are just pictures...

KELLY: We will look at those later and...

CAVAZOS: Oh, this is when... my fifteenth...

KELLY: Quinceañera.

CAVAZOS: Quinceañera, we were the ones that started because no one ever did any of that.

KELLY: Your family started it?

CAVAZOS: Yes, the way it used to be, but now it's gotten so overwhelming. It used to be just the girl with fifteen young ladies. Now they have the partners, they have the boys, and they have big parties and dances, and everything. Back then, it was just a simple little get-together, celebrating the fifteenth birthday for the child. Kind of like thanking the Lord for this being fifteen years and going into womanhood and asking for the blessings of our Lord, the rest of our life as He has blessed us up to that point. That's what it was, and I had fifteen girls, but these are just two of the girls and that's me in the middle, but that was back in fifty-four. These are just some other pictures of Father Broussard when he took us, but we were older already. This was in San Antonio.

KELLY: Oh, what a wonderful picture.

CAVAZOS: I haven't told you about a lot of things about what mother did at the church to raise money. They worked so hard, her and Carmen Medina, which is Susie Rodriguez's mother. I know you know Susie.

KELLY: I know Susie.

CAVAZOS: That's Roland's wife, and she did this just to make money for the church. There is Saint Theresa and that is the alter from the old church. I must have been eight years old because it says forty-seven. There were four girls from the Quarters who were running to be queen of the festival they were having for Saint Theresa to raise money. The one that collected the most money would be the queen, and the second would be the princess, and then the duchess and whatever.

She was going to have a little festival. We had these in this hall in the Quarters that we made for the Hispanics. That's where they had Catechism and did little celebrations because we weren't allowed to do a lot of things over here. The company gave us a piece of land, and we made money for this hall to be built. The sisters would live in a little house and they were the ones that would teach us Catechism. Anyway, it's a long story and I know your running out of time.

KELLY: Interesting, we will get that story another time, yea. I am sorry we have to end this interview because we have other people.

CAVAZOS: Okay.

KELLY: I want to ask you if you would be willing to do another interview sometime?

CAVAZOS: Oh, yes.

KELLY: Because you have so much information left, we have barely touched the surface.

CAVAZOS: This is when I was queen but I remember my parents taking me all over these little towns around here, to collect money so I could be queen and be the one that had the most money. That's what it was but it was for the church.

KELLY: To close up, I need to actually thank you first. You were a wonderful interview, you have a lot of good information and you are very articulate. I appreciate it, and I do want to interview you again because you have so much recall of the history.

Interview ends