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## Interview no. 869

Mary A. Lacy

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World War II: Border Homefront  
Oral History Project

Mary A. Lacy  
By Michelle L. Gomilla

October 18, 1994

This is an interview with Mary Lacy. The interview, by Michelle Gomilla, is part of the World War II Oral History Project. We are located at Mrs. Lacy's office at 9400 Montana Street, El Paso, Texas. Today's date is October 18, 1994.

G: Mrs. Lacy, before we begin discussing your recollections about World War II, I'd like to begin the interview by asking you a bit of biographical information. Perhaps you can begin by telling us when and where you were born, please.

L: I was born in San Elizario, Texas, October 10, 1936. The best recollection that I have about my birthplace is that I was born at home in a little house that belonged to my grandmother and my grandfather. And from what I remember I was my daddy's girl- that's what my mom tells me- and that the house is still there. I've been back to visit as an adult. And it had dirt floors and ceilings with rafters and very simple furniture.

But Dr. Love, who was a physician that I remember Mother telling me about, was the one that delivered me, but it was at home. And the nurse was named Aurora. And I've never met them, but I've heard many, many tales about how he delivered all of Mother's children.

And it was interesting being in the valley and the cotton patches. And as a little girl that's about all I remember...is going across the ditch to my grandma's. And [she lived in] a big adobe house. And [I remember] how they had little rooms that were strictly reserved for company or when somebody died or when somebody got married. My grandmother was a very stately looking woman with braids and her hair always combed back. And my grandfather was- we called him "Güero," "Green Eyes," because he was very fair. I always thought he was a tyrant, but [he was] probably not because he looked at us like he was kind of mean, but that's how we perceived him and I'm sure he wasn't. I know that my aunts and uncles...there's about thirteen of them in the family and a couple of them had died. And she raised them all in that one home. And my dad was one of those. My dad was about the fourth one, I believe, the fourth or fifth in the structure of the family. And my dad was fairly dark. My mother isn't as dark. And so all of us in the family, we're just a little bit of shade of anywhere from the green-eyed, blue-eyed, to the dark eyes, and light-skinned to dark-skinned. So when we all get together we're kind of an interesting group of Sánchez kids.

Anyhow, I remember back in those days that one of the things that has carried on in my lifetime is that my mother was so into cleanliness. My mother kept an immaculate house in her younger days and we always had the neatest of clothes.

Mother sewed. And she always insisted that we have Sunday shoes, Sunday socks, Sunday dress, a Sunday hat. We had school shoes, school dress, and we always had tennis shoes, so we were always very neatly and appropriately dressed. And as I grew older...from the days of being down in San Eli[zario] that we called it...we were always the Sánchez kids who always looked real perked and real pretty. And that's something that all of us remember to this very day, that she always insisted that we were clean and pretty even though, probably, in a lot of sense we were really poor, but we really didn't know that we were poor because we always had enough to eat.

And we always did things together. We never had a car. We always walked. We rode the street car or the bus when the buses came into being. I remember when we were down in San Eli with my aunts and uncles we walked to church. It was about a two-mile walk every Sunday with our Sunday shoes and our Sunday hat. And you never missed church. And you always had Sunday dinner, whether it be a roast or a chicken or whatever, but it was always Sunday dinner. So those were fun days.

I remember when my mom and my dad- my dad apparently worked for the El Paso Boundary or the [International] Boundary [and Water] Commission...yeah, El Paso Boundary Commission. And we moved. And, I guess, that was the onset after the Depression. I know that everybody had real hard times because I remember my mom talking about it. I really

don't remember those times because we were always sheltered from that.

But we moved on Myrtle Street. That's the house I remember. It was an apartment. It was 1114 Myrtle Street. And we had to walk down some stairs. And there was some other families [who] lived behind us. And interestingly, we had to share a common bathroom, which I hated- I remember not liking that at all- and one big bathtub. We always had to make arrangements for us to go in there and take a bath. And in that same little neighborhood was a lady named doña Maria, who used to sit and make fresh tortillas. I learned how to make tortillas, corn tortillas, and pat them out.

But Mother- I guess the war was getting close and times were hard because my dad was a, I think, he was a mechanic for the Boundary Commission. [He] did not make a lot of money. And by that time Mother had four of us. There were four of us. So she put us all in Catholic school. So I went to Catholic school my first few years except for first grade. First grade I went to- to jump back a little bit- I went to live with my grandmother, who was my mom's adopted mother because my mom was adopted. And her name was Kika, Francisca, and so we called her Kika. And I went to the first grade in that one-room house in Clint where that little structure still is there. And I remember that first grade is the only one I went there.

My grandmother at that time had a little store right next

to what we call Chano's Bar, which is [owned by] Ray Montes, who was our sheriff here in El Paso. And I remember him as a little girl because they had mean dogs and they used to chase me. And I even talked to him about it. It was kind of fun. But my grandmother had a little mercantile store there and it was kind of fun. And I remember that real well.

But, anyway, from that year on to the time my dad died after the war started we went to St. Mary's Catholic School, which was right down the street on Myrtle about before you get to the Immaculate Conception Church on Campbell. I don't remember what street that was. But, anyway, we wore uniforms that I hated...navy blue, white, and white sweaters. And we all had to wear brown shoes and white socks. I mean, you wore that forever and ever and ever, so I'm not very sensitive to the issue of uniforms in these days because I had to wear them when I was there.

But I think something that really impressed me at that time was that we knew that things were different and we knew that there weren't a lot of dads around. I remember that. And the sisters were very firm and very stern with us. And they were very strict disciplinarians. I think something that I feel like we have gotten away from [is] that in school, I think, that discipline is very much needed. I remember sitting. And you had to sit up straight and you didn't slouch over. And you had your Big Chief book, those Big Red Chief pamphlets, and, I mean, you didn't waste them. You didn't

scribble on them. I mean, you wrote on them because paper was a commodity that you had to [use wisely]. It was sacred. You didn't throw it away. And pencils [were also a commodity]. I remember the sisters going around and walking and watching. If you didn't do your work, they'd tap you with a ruler. Whoppo, you know! And you didn't blink an eye. You did that and....

But in addition to all that I remember my brother Ray, who is next to me...a couple of years younger than I am. Ray was always kind of rambunctious and, you know, he'd have a tendency to get a little out of hand sometimes, but they kept him right in line without any problem with those little rulers that they carried around.

I remember being very vocal even in the younger grades. I used to love to dance, so I remember dancing. We used to have little plays in the classroom and so you had to choose a dance. I used to make up [dances]. I remember making up my own and.... So I was creative even when I was little. I used to like to perform and do that kind of thing. So those days I remember very well.

I remember the street on Myrtle and all the families that lived there were there until way after the war. I remember that any news that came to the community was through the newspaper boys on the corners. They used to holler, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" And we'd all rush out. We'd all dig for our pennies. I think the *Extras* were like five cents.

And we'd get our *Extra*. We'd all sit and Mother would read the *Extras* and tell us what was going on.

And then for whatever small amount, five cents or whatever, ten cents, that [it cost], we used to go to the movies. We'd always go on the weekends to watch the news reel to see what was happening at the war, what was happening with our troops. And our favorite theater, of course, was the Plaza Theater. That was beautiful. Even until I was in college that was the best place to go for the date. You know, you sit in the balcony. (laughter) And I remember the State and the ~~L and A~~. *Elmanay*

And in those days people didn't have a lot of money and, yet, you took time to really look feminine and dress up. I remember, after, my mom always had a charge account at the Popular. She's had a charge account at the Popular probably from the day the Popular opened, I think, and knows everybody downtown at the Popular and at Given Brothers, I think. I don't know if Given Brothers is any longer in business, but they used to have the first class shoes. Givens and the Three B Store, those were compatible stores. And that's where mother did all our shopping for shoes. So, really, we didn't grow up thinking that we were poor. In essence, we probably [were] financially [poor]. We were, but we really never really thought we were.

Our little apartment had a big kitchen. And then around the edge of the kitchen there were beds and- it was kind of a



sofa bed like that you would open up and you would sleep on there. And then they had a bedroom and living room combo. So, really, it was like two huge rooms and all of us were in those rooms.

What I really do remember is coming home one Sunday. We had all gone to church and Mother was cooking. And, in fact, she was making corn beef with gravy that you put on toast. She'd always make that or jello and she'd have potatoes and beans. That was a staple. We had potatoes and beans and rice for everything. And she made tortillas. I mean, that was- you never starved eating all of those things. Now, today, it's a delicacy. You go buy those things, you know. Mother used to make them fresh. And I remember coming home and we were all sitting listening to the radio. And we were listening to one of the famous programs. And I don't remember whether it was- it wasn't Amos and Andy, but it was one of those- and they interrupted the program and said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. And we all got real upset because we couldn't hear the rest of our program because the program didn't come back on because all these were the news about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. And then pretty soon we heard, you know. We saw the *Extras* that the United States had gone to war.

Well, it didn't make a great impact on us at that time because my dad was not drafted into the war until towards the end of the war [according to] my understanding. And so he was

always working. But he did work on the force of the, [International Boundary and Water Commission], you know, with the Commissioner...whatever they were doing, the mechanical work. He was involved in a lot of the war effort and so was everyone else.

I remember my mom shopping at this grocery store named Henry's, Henry Alba's Grocery Store, because we used to have to run down to [the store]. It was about three blocks. We thought it was like forever to run down three blocks. And he gave Mother a credit and so it was like charging our groceries. So she paid it once a month. And we'd go down there and get what was needed. He just wrote up a bill and we'd bring it back. And I remember during the war we had little ration books. And sometimes we'd run out of sugar or we'd run out of flour or Mother would give us a little coupon. We'd have to [make do]. And that's all you could get for that until the next time the books came out. And you'd have to get that particular thing.

Mother was very frugal during those times because times were hard. I do remember that going down to San Eli and riding the bus and going to the cotton fields, which is Alameda Street now. And, you know, that was nothing there. And it just seems like it was forever and ever and ever to get to San Eli. But my grandfather at that time had a garden and he had corn and stuff. We'd bring some of that back, so we always had stuff like that to eat in addition to what Mother

fixed and whatever, you know. But she was very independent because she wasn't really from this part of the country. Mother was born in New Mexico and had her own story to tell about her personal life- and which I never did find out until I was an adult because she would never talk about it.

But when my dad died, my dad- well, let me back track. I remember my dad coming home and telling my mother one day that he was being drafted. And it was towards the end of the war. And because they were- [this is] my understanding during that time- they were not taking gentlemen that had children, a lot of children. They were letting them stay back and doing all the home stuff that needed to be done for the war effort, but towards the end of the war they were drafting everybody and anybody. I understand they needed the men, so I remember my dad getting drafted. And he went. It was like in, oh, maybe October, somewhere around there. And we saw get him in uniform and we saw him leave. And then he came back around Thanksgiving, right around Thanksgiving, I think. It was not Christmas. It was around Thanksgiving.

And I remember going to school and saying, "Humph! You know, I don't think my dad's going to come back. He's going to war." And the sisters got really upset with me because I said that. And they told me- they used to call me Alicia. See, my name is Maria Alicia and, somehow, during my years Alicia dropped and I just kept Mary, but anyway.... And they walked me home. And the sister walked me home and wanted

to know if it was true that my father was going to war and he wasn't coming back. Of course, Mother was just in awe [and asked me], "How could you dare say such a thing?" you know. And it's always kind of haunted me because my dad left right after that and Mother- we couldn't go to the train station- and Mother wouldn't take us because we were in school. And he said goodbye to all of us. And that was the last time I ever saw him. And they went and had some pictures taken. And I don't know what else they did, but anyway, they had some pictures taken. And those are some of the last pictures that Mother has of her and him together. And he left.

And during that first- and I don't remember exactly where he went, Fort Hood, maybe. And from there he was shipped to Germany. And from what I understand, his position- because we had some very dear friends, the Stewarts, that lived next door to us on Myrtle Street. Sarah Sue and I have maintained a friendship. She is a nurse in Kansas City, Kansas. And Sarah and her sister Gail and I have been by to see them occasionally since I have been married. And Mr. Stewart, after he lost his wife.... He is on a ship cruising the world- that's what he does- on a merchant ship of some sort. Anyhow, he and my dad were together.

And I remember that, you know, we used to watch for all the mail. The mail would come in bulk. And everyday, I remember, Mother would write letters...every single day. And she'd make us run out and put them ready for the mail man.

And I don't even know what it cost to mail- and probably very little for what it is today- but I remember she diligently [wrote to my dad]. But the sadness of all that, [is that] half of those [letters she wrote to him] he never got. And so when he died all those letters came back in a bulk. I remember them delivering all these letters. And, I guess, she still has them. I don't know. She's got some I know, not all of them.

But towards the end of the war I remember them talking about the bombing of Japan, victory in Japan, and victory in Europe. But what really has always been ingrained in my life is that I remember when she got the telegram. Because my mom was next door visiting the lady that lived around from us. And they had a daughter about Mother's age. Mother, I think, was twenty-seven at the time that my dad died. I don't know if she told you that, but, I think, she was twenty-seven. And the young fellow that came came on a little motor scooter. They had a little putt-putt motor scooter, I remember, and he had a Western Union little outfit with a little hat. And he came and knocked on my door and wanted to see if Mrs. Sánchez was there. I said, "Oh, no. She's not here. I'll run and get her." So I ran around the little complex and got Mother. And she came. She came to the door. And the little fellow [said], "Here's a telegram for you. Would you sign?" So she wrote her name. She opened the telegram. And, I don't remember, the little door just had a screen and there was a

dresser sitting right next to it. And she opened that telegram and she gave out this curdling scream that, I could tell you, it was awful because I still remember it to this day. And my little brother, my brother Ray, started crying. He didn't know what he was crying about, but anyway- and I didn't either, to be very honest, because I didn't know what was in the telegram. And she ran over to the- and the family's name was Domínguez. Her name was Nora and Delia, and- oh, what was the other lady's name? But, anyway, they became very good friends of Mother and helped Mother through all this tragedy. And from then on I didn't see Mother. I didn't see Mother for about, I'd say...if we saw her two weeks. My mind just went blank because I don't remember seeing her. All I remember is people coming over, just tons of people, tons of people, all the family.

And then later a priest from the Immaculate Conception Church came over and took me and Ray and- Wesa was itty bitty. My sister Eloise was tiny. She was little. And [the priest] talked to us and told us that there had been...you know, that my father was not coming back. And I remember saying, "I told the sister that." Isn't that awful? I remember saying that distinctly, "I told the sister that." And he said, "Well, now Alicia. That's not what you remember." But you know, anyhow, I remember, that was a scene that, you know, just kind of keeps embedded in your mind.

From there, the thing that I have admired, probably, the

most about my mom is that she took everything [in stride]. She didn't fall apart. You know, she might have fallen apart, I'm sure, as [the death of my father was such] a tragedy. Here you are with five children and no husband...twenty-seven years old. And then she finds out she's pregnant with Gracie, which is our youngest sister, and you're husband's gone and, you know, you've got all this to do by yourself with really no finances. You know, I never dreamed that I could ever do what she's done in my lifetime if that ever happened to me. But she pulled herself together. And I can't ever tell you how I visualized her. I've often in my mind have compared her to the scene that I remember...Jackie Kennedy and little John John, so stately and so regal.

And my mother wore black for one solid year. She wore a black dress. I still remember her coat. She wore a pill box hat and a veil, black hose, a black purse, and black gloves. She wore those for a year in public. But everybody did. It wasn't just my mom. You know, they used to call it luto, in mourning. That's what they called it. But what she also did was make us wear that ugly navy blue, whatever we had to wear, all the time. I mean, we couldn't get out of not wearing that uniform. That's why I hate wearing black and navy, you know. It was just.... We all did. We all wore that dark color. We wore it for one solid year without fail.

But during that time we had a very dear friend, Mr. Phillips, from the Boundary Commission that helped Mother with

all the paper work, the insurance, the- everything. And Mother, I guess, has always had a tremendous sense of accounting skills. And, you know, she sells herself short a lot in thinking that she wasn't educated. She just wasn't educated because of the times, but she probably would have been a wonderful educator of- she would have been great in some kind of profession because she's very smart. She reads a lot, too. And, anyway, he helped her find the little house that we lived in. And it was a cute little house. And we kept it up. We all had jobs to do. And Mother moved to that little house. And we had great neighbors. I went to Crockett. All of us went to Crockett. Then I went to Austin and then graduated from there.

But during that [period], all this time, between the time that my dad died and the time that we moved, there was always a void like, "So he died. Where is he?" Because no one, really, in those days would sit down and talk to you about someone dying. That was not a kosher thing to do. And my grandmother was very much into her faith and she always- this was my dad's mom- she was always very like, "How could they do that to me?" [She had] that kind of attitude.

And it wasn't until, I guess, I must have been in the fifth or sixth grade at Crockett when my mom had an option to bring my dad back. I think all the war dead that were buried [could be brought back]. He was buried in a Belgium cemetery. And she chose to have his body brought back and buried here.



Well, it was déjà vu all over again, so we had to go through that same scene all over again. I remember. And then, of course, by that time I was older, my brothers were older, and my sister Eloise was older and we could understand then what was happening. But the saddest of that is that my grandmother never, and one of my aunts- I don't think in their lifetime- have really accepted the fact that that was my dad in that grave because they would not open the caskets. You know, they had been buried for so long and they just would not do that.

And I remember that it was Harding and Orr, Mr. Orr, the elderly Mr. Orr- I've seen him, you know, in my adulthood [and I] have talked to him- that he was the one that did the arranging for the funeral. And I remember going through all of that and my grandmother falling apart and wanting to open the casket. And they wouldn't do that. And I also remember them very distinctly folding that flag. And I always had a feeling. And then later on in my adulthood I found out that they felt like the flag should have belonged to my grandmother instead of my mom, but my mom got the flag. My brother has the flag now, the big flag, the original flag that was on his grave. And in addition to that, I believe, they sent the flag that was on his casket when he was in Germany. So that came back.

So, you know, that happened and we finally put all of that to rest. I think about the times in El Paso that I had an opportunity to witness just because, number one, I was very

spunky. I started playing tennis. And I played tennis across the street. And we started with a little paddle. All of us in my family became very accomplished tennis players. And I was, too. I played varsity for all my years in high school. I played for TW and- Texas Western at the time- and I coached tennis. And I had some wonderful mentors that assisted me in developing my attitude about being a competitor. But I always was involved in multiple things. And I always said that I was going to be better than good. I didn't want to just be good. I wanted to be better than that. And I remember that we used to take summer trips to [visit] my grandmother down the valley. And my aunts and uncles also have children, of course, that are the same ages [as us]. We were all little. And we used to sit around the big mulberry tree that had those black berries. And my mother would get furious when we'd come home with our clothes all stained with berries. But, anyway, I remember sitting around and telling them all, "I'm going to college and I'm going to do all these things. And I'm not going to be poor like you all are down here. And I'm going to do all these things." And they used to laugh and tease us. And I still remember saying, "And I'm not going to always speak Spanish." You know, it was.... And I don't even know why we used to, but I remember Ray and I used to say that. And every time we would go back down there they used to really pick on us because we were always...they said we were always trying to be better than they were. But that's how we saw

ourselves at that point.

Mother never worked. I- don't ask me to this day in my life- I don't even know how she ever budgeted, but the maximum money, I think, that she ever made, ever, when we were all home might have been eight hundred dollars, ever. Ever! And that went to pay groceries, utility bills, clothes, everything. Eight hundred dollars. She used to have a ledger. And I don't know what she's done with it, but I would love to have her ledger. She had an account at J.C. Penney's, one at the Popular, and at Given Brothers. And we never, and I mean never, in all my years that I was at home did I ever start school without new clothes- shoes, socks, underwear, slips, dresses. You name it. We had, all of us, all six of us, had new clothes. And we always had to sew our names on our clothes because my sisters and I used to fight over our clothes and.... But we always had new clothes, always.

And then Mother started sewing. Mother was an accomplished seamstress. She could whip up an outfit and copy a pattern. We'd go to the fifth floor of the Popular and say, "Mother, this is the dress I want." And all Mother had to do is look at it and we'd go to the store and buy a pattern and material and she'd duplicate the dress. She used to make our coats. We never bought a coat. I never bought a coat until I was married. And then I really cried when I found out what I had to pay for a coat. But Mother was, oh, she was an accomplished seamstress. She made all our beautiful clothes.

And I have to tell you this little story. In the [19]50s, you know, after the war times were hard, you know, and there was still a lot of dissention with the military people being in town. And Mother always harbored some very unusual feelings about German descent people simply because my dad, number one, was killed in Germany. And it was very hard for me to understand all those feelings because I had a very dear friend in high school named Anna Marie Coors. Her father was a scientist in Germany and they were stationed here. But, I guess, as an adult I can understand all those feelings and, especially, when there was probably no outlet for her to ever really sit down and visit with someone about her, [and talk about] how she felt as a person and, you know, and to assist her in the multiple things that were confronting her. You know, here she had six kids and all this stuff to do and....

But I remember when Anna Marie and another one of my dear friends, Shirley Staten Gore- we went to school together- and Judy Breck, Dr. Breck's daughter, that we're still good friends. And there's several of us here in town. I was a senior in high school and I was in Austin in Action. And I was going to represent our school, Austin, in the Jefferson Mardi Gras or something, and they all said one day, "Well, we're going down to the Popular to Miss Day and get a dress made." And I don't know if you know the history of Miss Day. She was a seamstress for the Popular for years. And she was a very tall, stately-looking lady with her hair pulled back.

And she made all the gowns for the Sun Carnival. So I said, "Sure." She said, "Make sure you bring your picture, Mary." So I did. I drew my picture of my princess dress that I wanted for Austin in Action. And I took it. And the lady said, "Are you going to have your dress made, too?" I said, "Of course I'm going to have my dress made." She said, "Let me see your pattern." So I showed her my dress. It was baby blue and it looked like a little Bo Peep peplum and it was off the shoulder and, oh, so pretty. It was lace and everything. And she said....

**End of Tape One**

**Side A**

**Beginning of Tape One**

**Side B**

L: Okay. So I told the lady taking our order- and she measured me and everything- "Yes, my mother has a charge account." So I placed the order for my dress. I didn't even know how much the dress was going to cost. So I kept playing tennis. And everyday I ran home to see if anybody had called, if I had any mail. Nothing, nothing. And lo and behold, one day, one day, I got home and my mother said, "I want to talk to you." I knew. I knew then that they had called her. She said, "I understand you have a dress that you need to be fitted for at

the Popular." [I said], "Yes, mother." You know, I was crying and so she didn't say a whole lot to me. She took me and we walked. And we went to the Popular. And, you know, in those days, some of those days we rode the street car before the buses. We went on the street car. We went downtown. So she saw my dress. And it was \$125, then, then. That was what you would relate it [to] today, I don't know, but it was \$125.

The interesting thing that my mother did was that she knew how much I wanted that dress. And she knew how important that dress was to me and my life and the things that I was doing. And she didn't deny me the dress, but I was working at the Dairy Cup right around the corner from my house making hamburgers working part-time. I paid for every bit of that dress making hamburgers. (laughter) And I'll tell you what, you talk about a lesson learned, but I loved that dress. Not only did I wear it, my sister wore it and, you know, in fact, we have that dress. I don't know if we still saved [it] or not, but it was a gorgeous dress.

And I often think about that lesson...that the insight that Mother had even though she no more could afford that. And for everything else that we did there was always a will. There was a way. She either bought- we had a, I know, an outstanding bank, Southwest Bank, with Mr. Brown, who was the banker that knew Mother really well. And anything we needed or money, Mother always, always, [was] able to buy it because she has an immaculate credit rating, I mean, to this day.

She'll not eat before she pays her bills. And that's [the way] she was, so consequently, you know, she was able to do what she could for us during that time. But....

And I think it was all- you know, all these things were- was her genetic makeup. I never really knew what her parents were like. I knew her mother died at birth and she was adopted by my grandmother. And my grandmother, who was her adopted parent, was also a very dignified lady, very smart, and so was her father. During the pre-war and during that time he owned a taxi cab service between here and Juárez and he was an entrepreneur. He really hustled and did things. And they were childless, so they couldn't have any children so that's how they adopted Mother.

But, you know, I think there's lessons to be learned from the war. I witnessed a lot of prejudice, tremendous prejudice. I remember, you know, I never saw blacks in my days when I was little not until integration came. But I remember how at that time the Anglo population [was]. You were either on this side of the street or you were on this side of the street. I was a product of, on the early onset, of some of that discrimination. You know, you hear Nolan Richards and some other people talk about it. Well, I was a tennis player traveling with our team and I think the only reason I got to do some things [was] because I was accomplished. And yet, you know, there was places you couldn't go because I was on the team or, you know.... There

was a lot of that that people just don't have any idea. And to this day, I think, you still feel and sense some of that, but it was even more visible at that time.

And yet it was interesting how we grew up always speaking English, always. None of us have an accent. And Mother.... All of us speak both languages, but Mother was emphatic of us learning English when we were little. And that was a tribute to her because we did well in school because of that, you know. And I remember a lot of the kids after the war, especially the Hispanic- we called them the Mexican kids then, Hispanic kids now. And there weren't very many. I grew up in a neighborhood where there was one or two families. That was it. I grew up in a very predominant Anglo neighborhood. And all my friends were predominantly Anglo.

It wasn't until the mid-[19]50s that the neighborhoods began to change and people started moving in after the war settled and, you know, people started getting their lives back together. The neighborhoods changed and the climate of the schools changed, but the doors weren't open to a lot of Hispanics. And, I think, that the reason that, probably, that I can sit back and look is that the reason we were successful- and I'm not just talking about myself, I'm talking about my brother, Ray, and all the rest of us- is because Mother was always home. She always gave us a direction. And she was always made sure that we understood what was important to her and how we should behave. We never were disciplined in



school, never. I mean, Mother was a tyrant with the belt if you did anything, you know. And we participated. We were all in sports. Academically, we all did extremely well, [and in] extracurricular activities [we also excelled]. And Mr. Applebee, who was the principal at Austin High School and he is a fond friend of our family...and Mr. A always says, "How's your mother? How's Wesa?" And Mr. Moy grew up with us and he.... Mr. Francis was the coach when I was at Austin. And so, those folks knew us personally as individuals and as people and they knew my mom, so they, you know.... We had that advantage of being catered to, really, and looked after in a different way, but not, you know, right directly. But if there was a need we were always helped out.

Mother never accepted charity, not one day, to this day. And going back and reflecting, right after the war, Mother- and, I guess, the good Lord must have been looking over all of us because she never had insurance. We never got commissary privileges not until all of us were almost out of school. And a friend of my mom's, Josephine's husband- who she's talked to you about- told my mom that she needed to go back and bring some paperwork. And I don't remember exactly what the status of this was. [He told her] that she ought to be getting medical and commissary privileges because all these years she never had them. When we were in school we never went to Beaumont [Army Medical Hospital]. We never did any of that. And they were shocked when she went and found out that she

didn't have those privileges. And they gave them to her instantly. And that's been a blessing in disguise because it gives her an assurance that in her later years that, you know, she's got that to look forward to.

And fortunately none of us were very hospitalized, sick, whatever. Dr. Bill Gaddis, who was- he's a pillar in this community [and] is a physician- was our doctor for all the years that we all grew up. And [he] catered to my family, Dr. Bill. And, consequently, I think a lot of the reason is because of Dr. Bill my daughter is also a doctor. He operated on her as a baby and she interviewed him. And, I think, back in her mind she always, I think, in a sense knew she wanted to be a doctor like Dr. Bill because he was so good looking and....

But, you know, all those things play a role in how we grew up as a family. You know, [my mom was a] single parent...single parent, but not the single parent you see today. I mean, I don't think a single parent could go through what my mom went and survive and do what she has done with us.

And Mother never remarried. Mother did have a boyfriend at one time- she probably would never tell you this- after the war. And this was in later years, but my brother was very adamant of having a man around the house. So Mother, you know, I guess, she sensed that hostility so she just kind of removed herself from that pattern and she never really dated. Mother never really dated and was always home. She was always

involved in PTA and booster clubs at Austin and everybody knew that our house- we used to call it the Alamo (chuckles) because of the little white house. But it was an open door. The doors were always open. The football players, the tennis players, everybody that needed a phone, [knew that they could ask], "Mrs. Sánchez, can we use the phone?" And they would wait right outside for their parents to come. So, you know, it was a very close knit family even though the school was not as big, of course, but it was that type of environment that I grew up in. And I relate a lot of that from the strength that I saw Mother demonstrate from the day she got that telegram to the things that her values....

And she's always been very, very, very devout to her church. And that's something that she always, always, told us. It was, you know, [mandatory to attend church]. Come hell or high water, I don't care if you got home at two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning, you got up the next morning and you'd better be in church. I mean, that was it. And there was no saying, "Mother, I'm not going to church." And there was.... You didn't say that. You just went. And that's an interesting attitude because, I think, regardless of what people say today about their faith, I think, your strength, your inner strength about life and your values and the things that, I think, that we all grew up with, I think, that all of us have gotten that strength from that because I don't think any six of us have strayed away from the

church in any one form or another. I know my children- I don't go to the Catholic Church today, but I have always gone to church. My husband and I go to the Christian Church. But my kids have all grown up in the church and we've been very active. And it's just the sense of community and that you have that things, they're going to work out well. And, I think, it comes from that.

We saw a lot of death during the war. I remember seeing a lot of that. My uncles were bombed. One of my uncles was torpedoed in a ship in Japan and he came home all wacky and, bless his heart, to this day he's never been right. So, you know, we've seen tragedy, we've seen adversity, we've been poor, but in all of this, I think, the only sadness that I have that I see today is that my mother did not choose to have a relationship with someone that she could have fulfilled her life with today because I can't see myself [alone]. My husband and I have been married thirty-five years. And I can't see Steve and I, me being by myself, and having children and not being able to share it without somebody. And, yet, I think, we've all paid her a great respect in that we all have done well in our chosen areas of work and had our children and grandchildren. And they have done well. So, I think, she's done good for herself as far as things that have happened to us in all these years from day one to [the] day [of] war. (chuckles)

G: I'd like to back up a bit, Mrs. Lacy, and ask you about your

memories of being a child in school. As a school child were you asked to contribute to the war effort? Can you recall anything?

L: Uh-huh. When we were at St. Mary's we used to [contribute to the war effort]. The Sisters would ask us to bring tops of... either canned or tops. And I think- I don't know what they did with them- I think they recycled those tops or they did something with that. And we used to [collect rubber]. Anything that was rubber that we had we had to take it in. We used to carry those. We used to bring in our Coke bottles, all our little Coke bottles, we used to take those in. And I remember the newspapers. We took newspapers a lot because they used to use them for packing. And I remember we used to crumble them and take them in a sack and take the newspapers. And then milk cartons. We had these little tiny things that were about like this [shows dimensions with hands] and they had these little bottles. And we carried those. And I remember that at different times we took those. And what they used to do is somehow seal them and put...I don't know if it was juice or what they would put in them. But they used to say that that was to take back. They would send them off to the soldier. So I remember doing that.

And being in the second and third grade...third grade... I don't think you really realized the impact of the war. We remember writing letters. I used to write [letters]. The whole class, we used to write letters. And it would be just

a letter. It wouldn't be addressed to "Dear Daddy," or "Dear"- it was a letter- "I hope that," you know, "everything's okay. We see the war." And, you know, we used to write our little letters and the sisters would take them up and we'd send them all off.

And I remember that a lot of times we'd write on paper that was already written on, but the back side was not. I remember that. And they used to make us save our Big Chief note pads. That cardboard part of the Big Chief, we used to collect tons of those. I don't know what they did with those. But I remember those distinctly...the Big Chief pads. You know, they still do them, but they're not like they used to be with the great big letters and that paper.

I remember in school, also, [the sisters] talking about [the killing in the war]. The sisters would talk a lot about how awful it was to kill people. And, I think, that's where maybe my comment meant about, you know, "My dad's gone. He's not going to come back"- and not really understanding that, you know. It's because we would talk about [the war and our teachers would ask], "Do you know what war is?" or "Do you know what the Japanese did?" And we used to look in the geography book and they used to put Japan and it was way out. And, you know, we would never conceive how far away it was. And we used to relate that to a family. We had a Chinese family that lived right around there. And we used to think that they were part of that. And, you know, how you have

these ideas on how these people [should be treated. We wanted to ask], "How could you be here and do that to someone else?" But other than that I don't remember a whole lot.

And I remember ink pens. We put ink in a little well and we used to write with those little, tiny ink pens. Penmanship- I still have my penmanship book. I saved it. And don't ask me [where it is, but] I've got it. I didn't throw it away. And you'd write your letter with the date. And you'd dip it in there and you'd do this [demonstrates writing] and you'd dip it in there and you'd do that. That I remember.

G: It makes you appreciate Bic ballpoint pens.

L: Yes, it does. We did that. And that's how we used to write our letters. And with the little penmanship pens, those little ink pens. And you'd write your letter in there.

And I remember, too, my mom- (chuckles) you know, they didn't wear hose. Mother used to paint her legs. She used to paint a seam. And I remember laughing because my neighbors [also painted their legs]. And everybody did it. I remember all the people around there. They used to get up on tables and say, "Okay, make sure the line's straight." And they'd draw these little lines on the back of their legs. And then some of them would put makeup on or some kind of makeup on because there was no hose. You didn't have hosiery unless you were very wealthy I'm sure. But the regular person, you wore your shoes without hose or you wore socks, socks and high heels, and then you painted this line that was for hose. I

remember that. Mother did that a lot. She'd die if she knew if I remember her doing that. (laughter) But....

And then very little makeup. Mother never wore a lot of makeup. You know, they always wore the little eyes. And during the war she didn't wear makeup. There was no makeup, no red. It was all black.

G: How about the hairstyles?

L: Oh, yes! It was this bun right here [demonstrates placement of hair] to the center like this. And Mother wore it back, yes. And then she wore the semi-page where everything was to the side and real straight like this [demonstrates hairstyle] like some of the hairstyles that you're wearing today, but most of all it was those buns. And, we, oh- that's why my hair is not long! I used to have long hair. Mother French braided our hair every, single day. I wore French braids. And the French braids started right here [demonstrates length of braid]. And, I mean, they went all the way back and then they turned under and they put big bows. I have pictures of me with my hair all braided. All of us, all the girls, wore French braids. And that way we never had our hair flying all over and.... But, oh, Mother was.... Oh! She used to really braid some tight French braids because our scalps felt like they were just, "Agh!" But that's how we wore our hair...in French braids most of the time with little bows on them all the time. Always had little bows on them.

G: Do you remember the blackouts?



L: Uh-huh. Sirens. And everybody had to turn out their lights and you had to [use candles]. Mother always had candles. We always had a candle, but you always turned out your lights and they'd tell you when you could turn them on. Yeah, we used to practice that. We used to practice that in school. And we used to practice walking down the hall at St. Mary's. And then they'd make you get down on the floor on the edge of the wall like this [demonstrates crouching] in case of a bomb. Yeah, we used to remember that.

G: And what did you think? Were you frightened or...

L: You know, the sirens always scared me. Sirens to this day have always had...they always give me a chill, a funny feeling, like something terribly wrong has happened. Like when I hear the fire trucks or I hear [any siren]. I always relate that to tragedy. It's not a pleasant thing. And I was scared of the dark for a long time. And, I mean, you had total blackouts. You couldn't turn anything on. When they said, "Blackout," it was blackout. Everything was black. And, you.... Of course, at that time there wasn't street lights, either. You didn't have street lights.

G: So it must have been very dark.

L: It was black, yeah. And you didn't have all the lights like you have [now]. You had those little.... You know, the plaza used to really be neat, it really did. It used to be really a neat plaza, the plaza downtown. And they had the little, kind of really pretty, ornate lights and.... But when there

was a blackout, there was a blackout.

G: Were there any curfews?

L: Probably not for me, but, I think, I remember that, yeah, people had to be in early. You couldn't be out in the middle of the night or you couldn't, I think it- if I remember Mother talking about it one time- [the curfew was] ten or eleven o'clock, somewhere around there, but people could not be out. When it got dark people always tried to come in at that time.

And I don't remember burglaries. I don't remember hearing a lot about people stealing cars, but there wasn't cars. There was no rubber, you know. If you had a car it sat because, for one thing, you couldn't afford gasoline. I remember that. People didn't have gasoline money. And people walked. And people walked in groups...in a lot of groups. And, you know, I remember going on picnics with the neighbors. Everybody would get together and we'd all walk to the park. We'd all walk someplace and take a picnic lunch, whatever it might be. We'd all, you know, we'd play ball, we'd do whatever. And, interesting enough, in those days girls didn't wear shorts. We didn't wear shorts. You didn't wear pants.

G: What did you wear?

L: Mother always had dresses...dresses...for us. And we wore funny undies. Mother made these really funny things that we wore underneath our dresses because when we used to get on the monkey bars, I mean, we all used to love to hang like this. (demonstrates) And you didn't see our undies. You wore these

funny things underneath, but you didn't wear shorts in those days. I don't remember anybody [wearing shorts]. And much less to come to school. Forget it. And you didn't wear blue jeans. There was no such thing as blue jeans. No blue jeans. No blue jeans. I did not wear blue jeans in high school because you couldn't wear them. So we've come a long way from that day.

G: Did you notice any of your leisure activities changing after the start of the war?

L: Oh, yeah. There's a lot of things we could not do. You know, where we used to spend a lot of time going, like, to the movies or we'd do a lot of [visiting]. We'd get on the bus and go to Grandma's or do stuff like that. Once the war started, you know, it was an all-[out] war effort for the war and you sacrificed. There was a lot of sacrificing being done in that time and you didn't....

You learned to play your own games. I remember my sister and I spending hours making our little furniture for our doll house. Mother bought us a little doll house. And we'd make our furniture. And we'd make it out of cardboard or paper or sticks or [use whatever material was available], but we'd find a way to put it all together and we'd make it. And paper dolls were big so we entertained ourselves with paper dolls. We'd paint lots of paper dolls. Mother would get us each like a book apiece. And it'd all be different so we wouldn't fight over the paper dolls. And we would always have a little pair

of scissors and we'd cut them all out and then, you know, they had little things that you put on the back and you'd put it on the doll that came. You dressed them, and you put them in your little thing. And [we] entertained ourselves for hours doing that.

And Mother, for the boys, they had a truck. And I'm trying to think. It was like a Tonka truck, the old Tonka trucks. And Mother had it for years. And I don't know whether my brother Ray still has the truck. She saved that truck. But all the boys, well, the two boys, played with that truck endlessly because it had a little thing- it was a dump truck- and you'd put gravel and dirt and they'd [play with that]. But that's how we entertained ourselves.

We could never leave the yard. We could not go across the street. We would always have to stay in that [area. It was] like a compound, you know. But it wasn't a problem because everybody else did, too. Everybody else was in the same shoe. And we didn't play a lot of dress up like, you know, like little girls not until I was a little bit [older] and we were away from there and after the relaxation of the war and, I think.... We did that. But we didn't play a lot of dress up because there wasn't a lot of things to dress up with.

G: You mentioned that you attended the movie theaters in downtown El Paso. Do you remember some of the movies or the movies stars? Did you have any favorites?

L: I remember Claudette Colbert. I loved Clark Gable. I remember Betty Grable, Shirley Temple. I used to remember that when we went to the movies you dressed up. You did not go to the movies [in] sloppy clothes. You didn't, I mean, especially if you went to the Plaza. Now the Plaza was the place to go. And if Mother took us, all six of us- all five of us because Gracie wasn't born yet at that time- but we would all be dressed up. And afterwards we'd ride the street car and we'd all dress up and go to the movies on [the days when there were] matinees. And we'd wear gloves, carry our purses, and sometimes we would even have hats. And we wore hats to the movies. I remember the State and the L and A. And those were the three major theaters that were right there in walking distance. And, oh, I remember seeing a lot of the Roy Rogers movies. We saw a lot of westerns and Roy Rogers. And I remember the one that Shirley Temple played in with the horse, "Black Beauty"- was it "Black Beauty? Yeah, I think it was "Black Beauty" with Shirley Temple and the horse. And, of course, we saw "Gone With the Wind." I remember "Gone With the Wind" then. I saw it when I was about...I was in grade school when we first saw "Gone With the Wind."

G: It's a classic. It's one of my favorite movies.

L: Oh, it's one of my favorites. It's hard for me to imagine that that movie.... But, you know, going to the movies and having a place to go like that was always very special. And people always went. And you saw [the news

reels]. Of course, a lot of people went to the movies every weekend to see the news reels. The news reels were an update like you see on the news every night, but it was an update on the war. And that's where people found out a lot of the information of what was going on wherever it was going. I know Mother.... And, I mean, we went to the movies on weekends. Every weekend we were at the movies, especially when my dad was gone- before she knew that my dad was killed- to go see what was happening in the war effort.

G: Were there advertisements asking the audience to support the war...

L: Oh, yeah.

G: ...and buy bonds and...

L: Yes. We used to buy bonds and like, for instance, there was things like you went off to [work]. A lot of people went to the factories to work to produce. I know some of my aunts worked in factories that were making war effort products of whatever there might have been. Some of them worked at Fort Bliss. A lot of them worked at Fort Bliss. And it wasn't really civil service at that time, but whatever they called it...if it was civil service I didn't know that, but I knew that they worked there. And they worked long hours, long hours, during that time. And I don't know what else they did, whether they made tools or components, but they were always doing something for the war effort.

And, yeah, I remember seeing that Uncle Sam, those Uncle Sam things that you buy your war bonds for that. And I remember Uncle Sam was Uncle Sam. You know, it had meaning... Uncle Sam. And the songs had meaning. And I'm trying to think of some of the songs that we used to sing all the time. Some of the ones that we used to sing in the war [such as] "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy"...oh, my goodness. I remember some of them. But we used to all sing them and we always said [the] Pledge of Allegiance. There was never a thing about you don't say the pledge.

And you always said a prayer, always said a prayer in school. Of course, I was in Catholic school so you didn't have a choice, but I don't remember it not ever being a problem with people saying a prayer. People were always praying tougher. You'd see people in little [groups], you know, down in the park. People would be huddled together and you'd see, sometimes, people holding hands and saying a little prayer or whatever. And that was an open thing. Nobody questioned it. It was just that people were bonded together at that time. And you did it because it was preservation of our liberty and that's what we used to be told, you know, "This is your country and these people are working for you and you need to respect."

And I remember the ticker paper parades. And I don't remember one in El Paso, but I remember a parade, a huge parade. It was all the army trucks after the war. This is

when they had the big- I think it was the Sun Carnival parade then- but it was a big parade after that. And I remember my mother having a hard time with that. Mother had a hard time for a long time and she doesn't like war movies. She won't go to a war movie [and see] anything that has to do with war. I tried to have her go [see] "Schindler's List". You couldn't even get her, you couldn't pay her a million dollars to go see it. And you can understand that. But, you know, she still, to this day, has those reservations about some things like that.

But the parade, I remember the parade. And I remember when they honored the generals here. And after all of that, I think, things began to quiet down. I know many times in high school, right after as a senior- I don't know if you probably remember this- but the West Point cadets used to come to El Paso and they'd spend a week or ten weeks here in training. And then they'd ask all the area high school girls to escort the cadets. And we always used to have a lot of fun. And Mother always would make us our white dresses and the cadets would come pick you up.

G: You didn't go to the Popular and charge a dress this time...

L: No. Mother made mine.

G: ...did you?

L: Mother made my sister Tina's, too, because they had to be white. And Mother made us gorgeous dresses...peau de soie, you know. Mother was [an accomplished seamstress]. She could



just sew and line. She lines everything, so all our dresses were always lined and pretty and, yeah. And...

End of Tape One

Side B

Beginning of Tape Two

Side A

L: And as I was saying about our formals, Mother [sewed them]. Really, we had probably the prettiest dresses. We didn't appreciate her talents of sewing until we left home probably and had to buy our own garments. I remember I used to say, "Mother, I want to go to the store and have a store-bought dress. I don't want you to make me a dress." And, yet, my dresses were always so much prettier than what I would buy at the store. And they were always up to date and the colors and....

So, really, we did real well with that, but to the day I married, Mother always had a sense of feeling about the military. When I met my husband, Steve, [he] was in the Army. I was a tennis player and I was practicing on the tennis court when I met him with my partners, the Sherwood twins. We were playing. And him and a buddy came and they were playing on the courts. And he was [a] half-way tennis player. He wasn't super good, but, anyway, we got to hitting and got to visiting

with him. No[thing serious], you know, I was dating some college boy at TW at the time. It was really not an interested thing. It was just, you know, like an acquaintance on the court.

And so Steve says to the twins and I, "I'll get you all a Coke." And (chuckles) I said, "Sure, but I need to go to ask Mother and tell her." You know, we always had respect to tell her where we were going and who we were going with. She always gave us that sense of which is great, really. Now I appreciate it even more. And Steve was just really buffaloed that here I am, a college person, having to go ask my mom or talk to my mom about that. But we did. And we just walked around the corner and that was it.

And we walked back and sat on our front porch at the Alamo and talked. And Mother said, "Now, he's a soldier and you don't have anything to do with soldiers." I mean, that was her thing. And I never really understood why she was so adamant about that. I think it was because the relationship of the Army and feeling that she was deprived and all of that, probably, is how she felt.

And, interestingly enough, by that time Steve got out of the Army and he started going to TW. And he was a good buddy with Jessie Whittington and some of those guys because they were all football players. Steve used to play ball and stuff. And I started dating him and when we wanted to get married my mother still had this thing in the back of her mind, you know,

[and told me], "You're not going to do anything with this guy because he's a soldier or has been a soldier. You need to go over here and keep on dating Glen Barnum"- who I was dating at the time- "because he's a boy from the area." And it took Mother a long time to adapt to the fact that I was going to do that. And, I think, probably that was my first defiant break with my mom. That was a separation right there.

And when I did get married it took her a long time, but now, of course, things are great. You know, Steve's a wonderful person and has been and he's very kind and good to her, too, and his mom. And so it's been a very wholesome relationship all these years. But, I think, even to this day she has that turning in her memories. And, I think, it's just time. It's just her personal feelings about that.

I remember when they did the A-Bomb in Japan. I remember that really well. I remember D-Day. And, you know, and you go to the movies and you used to cringe to see all those dead bodies because they would show the news reels and they would show what was happening in D-Day Normandy. And I remember those distinct days and I remember when they had victory in Europe. Because, see, my dad was in the army no more than six months. Total, lifetime, in the service was six months. And I don't even know if there was that act that maybe short of that time, but from the time when he was drafted to the time that he was killed, it was like November to March. That's all the service he ever put in the army.

G: It's ironic, isn't it?

L: It's very ironic. And then my brother, my brother Ray, being the oldest son of a deceased veteran, they would never take him, so.... He wanted to serve in the Korean War. And, of course, that brought chills to my mom. And, of course, my younger brother, Joe, was too young for that, but Ray tried to enlist and they wouldn't take him. And he finally got settled down and, I think, he went to school for a year- and he's an electrician- and he was going to get married. And then they drafted him. So it was really, you know.... I guess attitudes began to change and policies. So they did draft him.

I think, probably, one of the things that was a turnaround for our whole family is that we were probably one of the first families in the El Paso County to receive the War Orphan's Bill. In fact, I think I was the first one to go. I had to go train at Texas Tech. And they paid our tuition. What they did is we got the same privileges- we got \$110 a month- as [those receiving] that GI Bill. It was called a War Orphan's Bill, but it was like the GI Bill. Like when the service men got out they could go to school. And you had to maintain a grade point average and you had to.... And they paid you once a month as long as you were carrying a minimum. I think it was twelve hours of school. And they didn't pay you in the summer unless you were in summer school for a full load, so.... And that didn't happen to me until I was a

sophomore in college, so my last three years I was able to utilize that, which was a blessing because that paid my tuition and books and things that I needed until I got out.

And I graduated when I was twenty-one. I started teaching when I was twenty-one. [At] twenty-two [I] had my first baby and I've been teaching and taught until I retired.

G: How proud your mother must be.

L: Well she did it. She did a lot. And, I remember, when I got married the first thing she said to me- because we ran off and got married. It wasn't a wedding like you always dreamed even though here in El Paso during those days when you were going to get married you had a tea. And there was a little tea house on Montana Street. Everybody had their teas there- and I'm trying to think what the name of the tea house was- and you made arrangements. Then you sent out invitations and everybody came to your tea. And I had a tea. And my announcement was in the paper because that was the thing to do and the whole shebang.

But my sister, my younger sister, got married before I did and she had a wedding. And Mother couldn't afford to pay for two weddings, so she told me that I had to wait. So I got mad. So Steve and I went off (laughs) and got married.

G: You rebelled.

L: I rebelled. (chuckles) And that's.... Yeah, my mother was not very happy with me at that time, but, you know, things have worked out really well since.

G: Did she have any type of support system outside of her family during the war? Because you had mentioned she didn't socialize, or...

L: She didn't have time. She had friends. She had family. Mother didn't work. The church, the Catholic Church, really preyed on people's feelings and attitudes- and I've always thought about this- but they weren't your support system. Not like a lot of your non-Catholic denominations that are- the congregation is [supportive], therefore, yeah, they come and support you and do that thing. The Catholic Church wasn't that way. And I never remembered it that way. I remember going to catechism and doing all of that. And Mother kept us in Catholic school simply because- even after my dad died- it was a support to her because it disciplined us and she knew she probably couldn't do it all and handle all her emotions and stuff. So we were in Catholic school.

Mother had, you know, the family. She had my dad's brothers and sisters. You know, there was like nine of them [who] were living. And then her very dear friend, Josephine. They grew up together and did all kinds of things together as young girls and that kind of thing. So she had that as support and then, of course, the neighbors. And she had a cousin, a cousin by her adopted mother's family, that was very supportive. A family by the name of Salvador Chávez that used to live right down on Myrtle Street- and I don't remember where- but, anyway, they were very close and supportive, so we

used to do things for their family. And she's kept in touch with all of them all these years. So she had that. But not as far as a support group like your church or having a support group from the army or anything like that, no. And I don't ever remember an officer of the army ever coming to visit Mother. I never remember that. She got a telegram just like me handing you a piece of paper and saying, "Here, your mom's gone." That's it. I don't remember ever that happening.

So.... But I think Mother always felt, I think, she felt cheated. I really do and I don't even know if she ever said that. I always felt like she felt cheated in that she was born without a mom. I mean, her mom died. And then after my grandmother adopted her- and Kika was really good to her- and then Kika dies. And her father, who she adored...and he must have been a wonderful person. Of course, I didn't know him. He died. So she was left orphaned for two times. So as far as immediate family, she had no brothers and sisters, no mom and dad, and no adopted parents to fall back on. So, you know, you think about that. That's really tough for a person. And her will is phenomenal.

I've questioned the church a lot and maybe that's why I left the church. Because I remember Mother one time even commenting [on] the strictness of the church and birth control. You know, in those days they excommunicated you from the church. You went to a priest and you went to confession. [If] you told him that you were using birth control, well,

they'd say, "Well, Mary, we're going to excommunicate you if you don't do what I tell you to do"...and blah, blah, blah. And that's the way it was. And you didn't question the church. And I think Mother grew up in that atmosphere, so the church for her was a very strong, powerful thing. And yet they didn't give her the support that should have been given. And even to this day, I sometimes think about... reflecting back in those days when times were hard and the church was a support system for most people. And every endeavor from their depression- because she grew up in the depression days when people didn't have any money. They lost their businesses. There was no food. Mother couldn't go to school.

And I have a great story to tell about that. My husband was principal at Ascarate Elementary School. And there was a teacher there named Flossie Martin. Flossie was a fourth grade teacher. Flossie, one day, just- oh, she just loved Steve. And Jerry Lou, her daughter, and I went to school together at Crockett Elementary School. And [I] never realized that Flossie was, or Jerry or whatever.... Anyway, so we knew each other that way.

So one Sunday Steve says, "Mary, I'm going to invite Flossie for dinner." I said, "Great! Now, I'll get Mother to come." So I brought Mother and Flossie. I was getting dinner ready and they were sitting talking in the living room. And Mother said, "You know, when I was in the sixth grade at



Socorro Elementary, I had a teacher named Flossie Campbell. And that's always been such an unusual name. Flossie Campbell." And Flossie turned around and looked at Mother and she said, "And you were Ofelia." And she was my mom's teacher.

G: After all these years?

L: Yes. And they sat there and they talked and they talked. And I had to drive my mother and Flossie to Mother's house, the Alamo. And Mother has pictures of all those families and those kids in that grade. And they sat there and talked about all of them. Some of them are people you probably know. The Heinemans, Ken Heineman, his wife, Anna Laurie, was in that class and there was some other prominent people in town here that were in Mother's class. Flossie was their teacher. And no connection. I mean, my husband- it was a faculty member and his faculty and.... And so we've been good friends. They've been good friends ever since and talk about all the people they knew.

And then I find out that my grandmother, Kika, was Dr. Hank's, the superintendent of the Ysleta Independent School District for fifty years before he died, [housekeeper]. She was his housekeeper during the war days and the depression days before he married.

G: What a story!

L: Isn't that amazing? And I didn't even know all that until later in the years that I found out that Kika was his

housekeeper down in Ysleta, right down by Ysleta town. And there was a little apartment. Dr. Hanks lived in that little apartment. He was the superintendent of the Ysleta Independent School District until he retired, what, a few years ago.

G: Huh, that's really something.

L: And one day, I- Dr. Hanks liked my husband for some reason. But, anyway, he's the one that got him in all this trouble of school. (chuckles) But, anyway, we used to go to dinners and stuff and I used to sit next to Dr. Hanks. And one time I told him, I said, "Dr. Hanks, do you remember my grandmother, Kika? Francisca?" [He said], "Oh, yes! That was your grandmother?" I said, "Yes." And after that we were buddies. Dr. Hanks, I mean, he loved strawberries and bananas. I knew all about Dr. Hanks. You know, small world. Small world. And him and his wife were always very kind to us.

But, anyway, we stayed on that path of education all these years not really even knowing where life was going to take you, you know. And I often think and I really, I think, you know, there was a luck of fate right there because I don't know what would have happened had my father lived. You know, I don't know whether my mother would have had ten more children, whether I would have been going to Bowie High School instead of Austin High School, or that we would have been able to do as much and have as much freedom to explore ourselves as people and our talents or- I don't know what would have

happened. I often, many times, think about that, but I've always been very grateful that my mom had that insight that she wanted things better for us. And that was her goal, that she always wanted the best for us.

And, really, we all have done well. You know, I got my degree. My brother Ray had very opportunity. He went to college one or two years and he's an electrician, licensed electrician, here in the community [and he] does well. My brother Joe is a teacher. Got his degree. My sister Tina's a teacher. My sister Eloise is a teacher in Amarillo. She's a special ed [teacher]. And then the youngest is Gracie and she never did want to go to school. She went through high school- we all graduated from high school- but never did go to college. And she is in the garment business. So out of all of us, you know, we all have done well for us as far as what we chose to do in life. And it's been very interesting.

G: Okay. Well, I'd like to thank you for your time, Mrs. Lacy.

L: Thank you.

G: On behalf of the Institute, I'd like to thank you very, very much. And if we can be of assistance to help you in writing your family memoirs, just call.

L: (Chuckles) Yeah, that will be fun. You know, it's interesting. You forget about all the fun things you did. You really do. You know, I didn't even tell you about how much fun it was to go to UTEP. It wasn't even UTEP. It was TW, Texas Western College, about three thousand students

there. All the teachers knew you personally. I was in the Drum Corps. TW had a Drum Corp. I beat the drums for one football season. (chuckles) Let's see. You know I told you I was always involved in something. I worked on the flow sheet. I did the editing and the club section and I played tennis. And, you know, UTEP was fun.

I had a chance to witness a lot of things in my lifetime, not only as an educator, but as a teen growing up in the community. And, you know, Charlie Brown was the first black basketball player at UTEP and he's the one that carried me out of the Student Union Building when my water bag broke when I was pregnant. And he became a good friend. We've seen Charlie occasionally here, you know, when we've had reunions. I, you know, met some wonderful people at UTEP.

And school was fun. You know, it was fun and you knew everybody. And yet there was a lot of sadness, too, because, you know, even UTEP for a community, I mean, Texas Western at the time, being a community, there was, you know, there was still a lot of prejudice. Hispanic girls could not be in a sorority. You weren't allowed to be in a sorority. There was some things that you weren't allowed to be initiated to or [join] because of that. And, you know, I used to wonder, I used to think, "Why am I so different than those others?" And yet those were my friends. And how funny attitudes change when you become a Tri Delta Chi Omega and you couldn't be [a part of that] and yet you grew up with them. You did all

kinds of things with them and yet you couldn't [join].

I remember my first [boyfriend]. One of my first loves was a boy named Barry Morgan who was Jewish. And he went to medical school in New York after he left here. And a lot of my friends were Jewish or [of other ethnicities]. I used to buddy around with the Haddads all the time. And yet you couldn't be part of a lot of things that- because you were Hispanic or you were [another ethnicity]. They still equated you as not as equal as they are. And, in teaching, I saw that after I started teaching. I saw a lot of that.

And I always- I had a teacher that, to this day, I give a lot of credit to. Back in the [19]70s I was honored as teacher of the year for the Ysleta district, so I had to write my résumé about my life and my goals in education, what I saw, and who I credit things to. And I remember Ruth Cady. She's Dr. Ruth Cady. She's a professor at Houston, Sam Houston University, right now. And she was my tennis coach. And she had polio. And I was spunky as the devil. And, I mean, I was spunky. And she- I was playing in a tournament one time. And I knew I was going to win. And I got mad because I threw the ball and I hit the ball wrong. And I threw my racket. And my racket sailed. In Austin High School we had a lower and upper field. There was no- it's not like it is today. But, anyway, my racket sailed clear across the moon. And I turned around and said to the little kid, "Go get my racket." Mrs. Cady was watching me and she (chuckles) let me play the tournament. I

won. She called me over and she sat me down and she said, "You're suspended for three weeks." She said, "I'm going to give you a bucket of balls and there's going to be a hundred balls in this bucket. You will never throw your racket again. You will never order anybody to do anything for you. And before you go home, everyday you're going to hit a hundred balls to the backhand, the forehand drive, the serve, cross court, and you pick up your own balls. And don't you dare leave until you do it"- I looked at her- "And you don't play in another tournament until I tell you." And I was a ranked Southwest ranked player.

Well, I cried and I went home and Mother [told me], "So, do it." And, I mean, for a long time I had blisters and calluses on my hands. But, boy! I would hit those balls and I'd grit my teeth, but I guarantee you I did it. And there was never a question [in my mind of whether or not] I'm not going to do it. And it was lesson learned. And she said "You'll never do that again. You will do it."

And I used to tell my kids in school that. And I said, "How many of you would quit?" Half of their hands would go up. And I said, "That's one of the things I learned. You're not a quitter. If you're good, you will take your licks with a good confidence." And I said, "And boy, she stuck by that."

And once my three weeks were up my attitude changed and, I mean, you know, I was back to being me and I was still

playing and nobody laughed at me. Nobody ridiculed me [and said], "Ha ha! Lacy's over there! Sánchez is over there hitting the ball!" You know, it wasn't that kind of.... It was a disciplined type of action. And I credit that because I remember going back and thinking, "If she hadn't of done that I'd probably would still have been very smart alecky thinking I knew it all." And I did not know it all, you know. And through my years of teaching it's always been a replay of that and thinking how I see kids today. And I did a lot of things for young people. And I was never a kind of person that was demanding of payment to do this. You know, education has taken a lot of turns since I started teaching. And a lot of it, today, "You pay me. I'm a specialist. You pay me and I'll do it." Not when I started teaching. I did it at whatever pay I got. My first paycheck was \$192 for the degree as a teacher. And, you know, I would never trade teaching. I think some of us are meant to be teachers and some of use are not meant to be teachers. My sister Tina is also an excellent educator. And I want to think I have made an impact on education and the things that I have done in my life as an educator. And, yet, in turn, education has been very kind to me in my adult years. And now that I'm retired, I'm still, I'm able through my position now with the Y[WCA], to do similar things, you know. [I'm] still working with young people and still share some of the knowledge and the expertise that I gained through all those years.

But everything I do still is a reflection of the many things that happened to me when I was little and my life up to that point. Because it really is. We didn't drink. We didn't smoke. I mean, everybody, you know...you do the things you do when you're in college. You know, you do those kinds of things when you're away from Mom, but that was never a thing in our home ever. I never remember alcohol at my house. And I think that's important because I don't think any of us in our family are drinkers are anything like that. You know, a social drink here and there, but never to that degree. And no smokers. Maybe our husbands did for awhile, but not us as individuals. None of us smoked. So it's been interesting. (chuckles)

G: Okay. You're ready to end the interview?

L: Whenever you're ready. If there's anything else you want me to tell, ask me.

G: Would you care to add anything else?

L: Well, I don't know. What else would you think that I need to add that.... You know, there's a lot. I'll think about a lot of things after you leave, I'm sure, that I think were neat. But I remember at my grandma's house. You covered mirrors when it rained and when it was lightening because they might strike.

I remember wakes. You know, all the dead were brought to the home. They weren't taken to a funeral parlor. And that's when my grandmother had a room that was very, just, I mean,



immaculate. It had a woven rug and a couch and nobody went into that room [except] either when you got married and you got blessed, you know, in the traditional way or somebody died and there was a wake. And people stayed up all night with the dead body with candles. I remember that.

G: What was the room called?

L: *La sala.*

G: *La sala?*

L: *La sala.* And I remember the- I tell you, I would love to have my grandmother's house. If I could ever get that whole piece of land, I'd get it and redo it because it's a historical [landmark]. It's marked historic. It's on Sánchez Road down in San Eli. And it was just a big, huge house. She had, you know, one of those big stoves, a big dining room. And, well, there's a sadness. She had a great, big dresser...armoire type dresser...that was gorgeous. And my wacky uncle chopped it up for wood and burned it because they were having hard times and they needed the wood so they chopped it up.

G: Is anyone living in the home now?

L: My uncle. My uncle that was in the war that had some hard times. He lives in the house because my grandmother's gone, my grandfather's gone, and then the family's gone, you know. The children have moved and they live other places so the house was just left to him. And all that piece of land, all that belonged to the Sánchez family right there. So it's all been divided, you know, with the uncles and whatever, but that

house, it would have been a neat house to do. I would have loved to have redone that house and fix that property and it would really have been a showplace. It would have been pretty. There's been memories there. There's a lot of good memories there.

And, you know, and I remember (chuckles) my aunts when they were young my grandfather would not let them [date]. You couldn't go out on a date. And if you did he stood out there [and] he watched you. (chuckles) So they always- there was a ditch called the *acequia* and they used to go behind the *acequia* (laughs) and smooch!

But, anyway, those were fun things. I don't know whether I'd want to do them all over again but, at that time, you thought it was wonderful to go through those experiences. You'd come back to the city and you'd tell everybody in the city about the frogs and the, you know, and the cows and riding the tractor to the hay and all that. Because they did have animals on their [property], horses, and stuff like that. But it was the country then. It's not the country any more. So...

G: Okay, Mrs. Lacy.

L: Alright.

G: How about we stop for the day?

L: Wow, that's great!

G: Okay, thank you very much. This is the end of the interview.

**End of Interview**