



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Lucy Fischer-West
Interviewer: Meredith E. Abarca
Project: El Paso Food Voices (Private Kitchens)
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In this interview, Lucy Fischer-West, author of the memoir *Child of Many Rivers: Journeys To & From the Rio Grande*, shares how food traditions, from cooking pinto beans in a Mexican clay pot to preparing Indian food have come part of her personal culinary traditions. Lucy, the daughter of a Mexican mother and a German father, grew up in what in the 1950s was known as “El Barrio del Diablo,” a neighborhood close to the Chamizal Theater in the vicinity of Piedras Ave and Alameda. Her childhood home, where she learned to eat and cook Mexican rice, *chiles rellenos*, Lenten foods, enchiladas, tamales, as well as pork roast and cabbage rolls, was located between a canal and the Rio Grande. As she recollects her childhood food memories, we travelled with her mother, by foot, bus and trolley from El Paso to Cd. Juarez to gather food from the markets, Juarez and Cuahatemoc, from the butcher, from the cheese maker, and the bakery. She recalls how after her marriage to folklorist John O. West, southern foods, part of his cultural background became staples in her El Paso home: chicken ‘n dumplings, black-eye peas and corn bread for New Year’s Eve. Since folklorists are always interested in documenting and understanding why traditions are formed, Lucy speaks of how her husband and she documented the process of a number of Mexican traditions, like making tamales for Christmas. She also shares how the process of canning vegetables, storing legumes, have contributed to the tradition of good fortune eating black-eye peas has become in many Southern households. Traditions of chuck wagon cooking, associated with cattle drives, are also part of Lucy’s culinary experiences.

As Lucy states that all of our culinary traditions are a reflection of lived experiences that have influenced us, she speaks of how traveling has impacted her culinary repertoire, her gardening interests, and her commitment to feed not only those in need of food, but also family and friends the bless her table with their presence. Paulette Dupré, a French lady, and Lucy met when Paulette was 71, and established a life-long relationship till Paulette passed away at 96. Through multiple visits to Paulette’s summer home in Gaverlac, France, Lucy continued her knowledge about home gardening, about eating locally grown foods, the use of new herbs like tarragon, canning, cooking with “red spices,” de-salting cod. Not only did Lucy learn to cook Indian food in India, but she was gifted and blessed by meeting Mother Teresa who reminded her that feeding others alleviates many kinds of hungers: physical, spiritual, emotional.

Restaurants that have being significant in Lucy's life long experience of eating in El Paso-Juárez area range from the Shangri-la and Julio's in Juárez, to Pancho's, Leo's, Ardovino's Pizza Parlor, Ardovino's Desert Crossing, Ruli's International Kitchen, to Cattleman's in Fabens, Texas.

Length of interview: 1:20:11

Length of Transcript n/a