

I am Catherine Kauffman, chairman of the Historical Committee along with Kathryn Gasser here to interview Nellie Ulloa and her daughter Linda Torres.

Catherine: Do we have your permission to record and quote any part this interview?

Nellie: Yes

Catherine: Tell us where you grew up and what you remember as a child?

Nellie: I was born October 3, 1929. We lived on the corner of 2nd Street and Goldwater – just east of Los Olivios. Our house was in the back and there was a house in the front, which my parents rented out. Our house was made of adobe and had just 3 rooms. The front house, which also had 3 rooms, was made of wood. The City bought my mom out sometime in the mid to late 50s. There were 8 children in all – 4 boys and 4 girls. My parents used to go back and forth between California and Scottsdale so some of the kids were born in California and some were born here in Scottsdale. My oldest sister was born in 1925, the next in 1926, 1927, my brother 1928, I'm 1929. I'm the middle child. Alice was born in 1930. My brother who lives in San Francisco is 80 now was born in 1939. My mom lost 2 babies – one bitten by a scorpion and the other from pneumonia. They were buried in Guadalupe.

The whole block was Hispanic- Noriega, Ochoa, Herrera, Lopez, Torres, Valenzuela, and Dominguez families. The (Alvero and Elena) Corral's, who own Los Olivos, the Espinoza's, and Tony Gardella, all are still in Scottsdale. The Espinoza's, the Dominguez's and the Gardella's started in the McDowell Mountains working for E.O. Brown on his ranch and later bought land from him up there. The Gardella's eventually went into Scottsdale and the Dominguez's started farming. Tony Gardella says that he is the oldest Mexican cowboy here – cavellero – the only one left. Tony was raised there on the Indian Reservation and was about 5 when they moved to Scottsdale. He is 90 something now.

My father was from Cananea, Mexico and came to Scottsdale in 1919. E.O. Brown came down to Mexico recruiting workers to work in the cotton fields in Scottsdale. He took whoever wanted to come over. He paid so much to bring them over. They needed workers and that was the only way they could get workers. Many Mexican's were dying in the silver mines in Mexico and decided to give America a chance. By the time they got to Scottsdale, they already had a job waiting for them working in the cotton fields and working on ranches.

My father worked over in California in the fields and then he worked here in the fields. When my father decided to stay in one place, he went to the Jokake Inn to look for a job. He started working with Mrs. Evans (Jokake Inn) as the grounds keeper. He took care of the grounds. There were a lot of flowers and a lot of things to take care of. There was someone else to take care of the pool. It was a place where people came and stayed – movie stars and all of them. My cousin

used to work for Mrs. Evans as a waiter. He used to dress with a suit and everything. She had a lot of Mexican people working for her. Mrs. Evans was a really nice person. Later, my father went to the Biltmore as a grounds keeper where he retired. Mr. Jesus Corral (brother of Alvero Corral) worked inside for Mrs. Evans. A lot of the neighbors worked as maids at the Inn. My mom stayed home. Mrs. Evans would come over at Christmas and bring us gifts – dolls for us and cars for the boys.

Scottsdale was a farming area. Camelback Road was just a 2-lane road and so was Scottsdale. We had fields on the east of us. Between the field and our house was a ditch for irrigation. My mother used to grow a lot of flowers. Her favorite was sweet peas. We had chickens, a goose, a mule and a Billie goat. We used to have fun with the Billie goat. All of us playing - jumping each other and we used to say “Billie, come on.” One of the kids would jump and Billie would hit him right in the mouth. It was like leap frog. We would have more fun with him. Then there was the mule Jenny – we would call her and she was way out in the field. You didn’t keep them where you were. They just went back and forth. We would call Jenny and she would answer back going “hee hee hee.” Then she would come to us. We had fun in those days. We had to create our own recreation or games.

Catherine: Where did you go to school?

Nellie: I started school at the Little Red Schoolhouse (aka Scottsdale Grammar School or Coronado School for Hispanic Students) - what is now the museum. I went there for 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade. They had 2 classes in the basement and then one on the top. There were only Mexican and Yaque Indian children. The white children went to Loloma. The Yaque’s used to live in a small community outside Scottsdale and they would transport them to the Little Red Schoolhouse. From there they moved to McDowell just west of Hayden Road. Some of them went to Guadalupe. There are still some in Scottsdale. We spoke mostly Spanish at school. I learned English when I went to Loloma in 5th grade. That’s when they mixed us with the white children. I went to Scottsdale High after that. At that time when we saw the little schoolhouse, we thought it was big. We used to climb the stairs and we thought “oh my goodness, look at this.” It was for us and it was big. Now I see it and it’s so small. We said the same thing with the Old Mission. For us at that time, they built a big church and now I see it and it’s so small.

Linda: Nana spoke Spanish all of the time. She never spoke English.

Kathryn: Was it confusing to you - not speaking English - when you moved Loloma for 5th grade?

Nellie: No, because I wanted to learn - I didn’t want anything to hold me back.

Linda: I was born in 1954 and I remember being at Nana’s house when I was a little girl. There was the library and the swimming pool across the street.

Nellie: We weren't allowed to go the swimming pool. It was supposed to be a public swimming pool but not for us Mexicans. We weren't allowed until years later – probably in the 1960s. Then my sons used to go there and jump off the diving board. It wasn't until years later that you could buy homes north of Camelback Road. Mexican's had to stay south of Camelback Road.

Linda: Oh yes. I remember across from Nana's house was the library, the park, the pool – we couldn't go because we were supposed to stay in Nana's fence. We weren't allowed to go across the street. Then it was a 4 lane street and we would be at the corner there just watching people go by. People would be staring at us and I didn't know why – now - oh it's because we are Mexicans. Then my parents wouldn't speak Spanish in public. It was frowned upon. I remember this like it was yesterday. If we would go somewhere like in the store speaking Spanish, people would just look down on us. They would make faces and make you feel low. When I was in 2nd grade, my mom had an Avon lady. She would buy stuff from her but when I went to their house after school to play with the daughter – she had a nice dollhouse – a real dollhouse in the back yard – her mom said to me, "You need to go home." She was good enough to sell Avon to my mom but I couldn't play with her daughter.

Catherine: Linda, do you speak Spanish?

Linda: Very little because that is how we were raised. It was too embarrassing and my mom didn't want us to go through that and be treated that way. She was doing what she thought was best for us. Everyone has those stories where some people like you and other don't - about prejudice and I learned how to deal with it. I did try to eliminate that from happening to my son. Once I had a child and he was going to grade school, parents would call and ask if Frankie could come over and play. I would always say; "you know he's Hispanic – right?" I did not want him experiencing what I experienced – when someone says; "can you come over to my house" and then all of a sudden they would say; "oh you didn't tell me he was Mexican so you're going to have to go home." I was trying to prevent that when he was little. When he got bigger, he could deal with it. When you're young, it hurts. Frank will be 40 in September. My granddaughter will be 18 on June 16. She just graduated from Mountain Point in Ahwatukee.

Nellie: I didn't want them to get confused when they went to school. My mom used to tell me, "teach them their language" but I didn't.

Catherine: Were there other places in Scottsdale you were not allowed to go?

Nellie: Certain restaurants

Kathryn: Did they have signs or did you just know you weren't allowed?

Nellie: No, we just knew. We would go in and they would just say, "No, we are busy." Way afterwards was when they started accepting Mexican restaurants and Mexicans working in white people's restaurants. A lot of Hispanics worked at the Camelback Inn but they couldn't go there to eat. My youngest son, Bobby, started working there as a dishwasher, then a busboy, catering manager, catering director He kept working there and kept going higher and higher. He worked there for years even before he graduated from high school. He would go all over to different states. He loved that. He was even in some of the magazines for that. He got tired with all of the hours – holiday hours. Now he's been with American Airlines for 20 years.

Scottsdale started growing after the 1st World War. We had wooden sidewalks. We had a pool hall (Robert's Pool Hall) that was west of the Chinese grocery store (Jew Chew Song). We were allowed to go into the pool hall. There was a little post office that was kitty corner from the Chinese store. They tore down the post office. The Chinese store was right across from the old school house. Also across from the Chinese store, was a drug store where we could go have ice cream (Lawson's Drug Store). There was another building not too far from the little schoolhouse where they had classes and sometimes we would use that building for our fiestas because it had a kitchen. That is where one of our cousins had their wedding reception. Everyone in the community would come there and buy things we had for sale.

Catherine: Did the Mexican's have their own community here in Scottsdale – where they banked, went for groceries etc.? Was Mr. Song the only grocer in town?

Nellie: No, there were others but Mexicans would mostly go to the Chinese store. We could go to Earl's Market on Scottsdale Road across from what was Lulubelles but it was mostly for white people. The Indians would come over here on their wagons and sell cantaloupe, watermelons, squash and corn. They used to come over to the Chinese store and do their grocery shopping there too. We bought clothes and things in Phoenix. Sometimes there were people who would come - Syrian's or something – they would come in a car loaded with brand new clothes and sell it to the Mexican people on payments. You paid so much a month.

Linda: Nana also made a lot of clothes out of potato sack material. She even made me underwear out of flour sacks.

Catherine: How does your family connect with the Old Mission Church?

Nellie: I was just an infant when they started building the church. They didn't have a church in the beginning. They wanted somewhere to go and pray instead of going to different homes. It was just a bunch of dedicated Hispanic families who built the church because they grew too big to meet in homes. They sent a priest from one of the churches in Phoenix to do mass. The Ochoa's had a lot to do with building the church. Cruz Medina's dad helped build it. Mr. Herrera

was the one who built the stained windows in the Old Mission. They made the adobe at the church site, Schrader's Lake, and then another place on McDowell and Hayden where they had a water pump that was going all of the time. That's where they made a lot of the adobe. It was way out of Scottsdale so they had old trucks and horse drawn wagons to haul it back to Scottsdale. The priest didn't see the church until it was finished though he was sent to build a Mission.

Catherine: Did the "white" Catholics have there own church?

Nellie: Nobody had a church. After the church was built, people who came from out of state that were Catholic attended the church.

Catherine: Tell us about your life after high school?

Nellie: I married my ex-husband in 1946 or 1947 and we had 5 kids - 4 boys and 1 girl. He was always going from one place to another - never staying in one place. I divorced him and then I married my second husband. We were married 37 years. I didn't have any children with my second husband. He died of cancer in 2012. After Bob died, I lived by myself for 2 years. I sold my house on East Culver about 3 years ago. I had it rented for many years. Now I live with my son, Linda's oldest brother, in Phoenix.

Linda: He moved us every 2 years – all in Arizona. We lived in Scottsdale – 3 different places. Our first house was on Thomas and Scottsdale Road. The second one was north of Thomas by Dora and the Brown's because I went to Pima. The last one was 7843 East Culver Road around McDowell and Hayden. I went to Tonalea, Pima and Coronado. I graduated Coronado high school in 1972. Our first house in a neighborhood around Thomas and Scottsdale Road was behind the Steak Pit. I remember the big old pole was on top of the roof of the Steak Pit restaurant. It was facing Scottsdale on the southwest corner of Thomas Road and Scottsdale Road. The bowling alley was just north of Thomas on Scottsdale Road. My brothers used to take me there and leave me in the daycare. My mom and dad had no clue. We would walk there and they would say, "Oh, we are going bowling" and then leave me in the daycare. I could see them hopping the fence or something taking off and leaving me there. Then they would come back and take me home.

Nellie: The first house we bought in Scottsdale, Thomas and Scottsdale Road, we were the only Hispanic people living there. That's when I started talking to the kids in English so that when they went to school, they would know how to speak English instead of just Spanish.

Catherine: Did you work outside of the house?

Nellie: When I married Bob, I worked at a place called Sandstones Creations in Tempe that had paintings by (Ted) DeGrazia, (Robert) Red Bird, the Indian, and (R.C.) Gorman. Mr. and Mrs. Brown owned it - though a different one from the Scottsdale Brown family. When they died, their son Rick took over. Sandstone Creations closed in the 1980s. It was a place where we produced bells for these artists. The dinner bells were small. The wind-bells were big and small. Gorman did a lot of the wind-bells. He also used to make ashtrays and odds and ends. (DeGrazia burned a lot of his paintings out in the desert because his family could not afford the tax on it.) These artists were normal people with a lot of money but you couldn't tell by the way they were dressed. They were friendly people. DeGrazia would do an original design and bring it up to us or Rick, my boss, would go to his place in Tucson and see if it was ok. If it was ok then I copied it though I wasn't really copying it because I had to create it myself. For DeGrazia, I made little angels. Gorman was the Indian guy who every once in a while would go to the place where we were making the bells and he would paint them. Redbird would also ok the painting of the bells. They would all number and sign them.

Catherine: Were you always an artist?

Nellie: No, Rick said: "Nellie this is going to be your job." I liked it. There were about 4 or 5 of us artists. We had orders from all over the country. We sold them in all different shops around Scottsdale like Ortega for instance. I started painting the bells myself – somewhere there are some that have my initials and the year that I made them. My son, Bobby, has a dinner bell that I made from the start. The bells were made of some kind of clay mixture. I airbrushed the dinner bells very lightly. After I got them out of the mold, I had to use sandpaper on them to make them real smooth. Then I put them in the kiln. Afterwards, I painted them. I have a picture that Scottsdale Progress (circa 1980) took of me cleaning the bells. We completed probably about 50-60 bells a day

Catherine: Can you tell us about your 2 children who were buried at Camelback Cemetery?

Nellie: Bobby was the first child born in 1948. When Bobby died, we were renting a house from my sister in law, which was behind her house in Scottsdale. Bobby died of double pneumonia – he was 2 or 3 months. Greg, who is 70 now, was born in 1949. After Greg was born, Pete was born in 1950 and then Patsy was born. When Patsy died, we were living in Victory Acres in Tempe. Patsy died of crib death at 9 months. The Camelback Cemetery was the only one we knew. I think they are in Lots 1 and 10. My ex-husband did it fast because they didn't have a place to put the body. Someone gave him permission to bury them there. This was in the late 1940s and 1950s. Those are the only 2 family members I have buried at Camelback Cemetery. I never went back to the cemetery until the 1990s.

Linda: I couldn't figure out why we didn't go visit them. We never talked about it. I knew that we had a sister because my biological father always said she was so pretty and I wasn't. She had real light complexion and light hair. My biological father's mother was French. As long as I was born, my mom never went there – that I was old enough to remember. I think it was more painful for her. What I see in my mind, the way she was raised and the way my father was raised, when they passed, I don't think she had a chance to grieve. She had other children at the time but he was all about him. He'd get up early and worked. He retired from Salt River Project. She made fresh breakfast every morning. She sent him off every morning with his lunchbox, coffee the whole bit. She came home and made dinner. It was kind of like you take care of me – make my breakfast, clean the house, take care of the kids, and make my dinner when you get home. My mom had to just go back to life – taking care of the man – and that was all there was to it.

I kept telling my mom that I wanted to go and see where my brother and sister were buried. Then I got this lady going and she gave me all of this stuff. I don't even know how this all came about because it was a long time ago. Pehlman is her last name - Michaela Pehlman. It was a woman. She went by Mike for short. I don't recall how she and I connected. But we did and she was working on stuff from Scottsdale as well. That's how I found out where my brother and sister were buried. She told me which Lot they were buried in. That's when we finally took my mom, her sister, my baby brother and myself to go find them. This was way before we met Sally Thompson. I can't remember what year - just that it was in the 90s. That was the first time my mom went to visit them since the time she buried them. There were no markers on the graves until later.

Catherine: How did you connect with Sally Thompson?

Nellie: I only met Sally about a year ago. One of my friends had died. Her son was in charge of her. Then afterwards he died. My sister and I went to his funeral over in Scottsdale at OLPH. Sally and my cousin, Bobby Leyva, were talking. Bobby said to Sally, "If you want to know about Scottsdale, these 2 ladies, my mom and her sister Alice, can help you because they were born and raised her in Scottsdale." We meet every Tuesday. We all talk and Sally writes down what we say – questions – pictures. The first time I went to Sally's house, I told her that I have 2 children buried at Camelback Cemetery. Sally is finished with the book so now we just meet to talk. Sally is still looking for a publisher.

Linda: Growing up here years ago when Scottsdale was nothing and now when I go to these meetings with Sally and the group, I get to hear more stories. Whenever we go to a funeral for people from Scottsdale – or just when they get together – you hear more stories. It's fun and it's enlightening. My mom just knows so much. She just chimes in and talks about this and that.

We'll come down a road and come to a corner, she'll tell me about the store that used to be there – or just this was there and that was there.

Nellie: One time with Sally, we went to the cemetery and the police came – a Hispanic officer. He parked his car and asked what we were doing. We told him what we were doing. He said; "Well they sent me over here to see what was going on because there were people around there." The policeman started talking to Juan Alvarez from our committee who was looking at the graves of one of his parents. They were talking about something. Then Juan said; "Yeah we were at so and so's house and we were talking about the cemetery over here and that we had people coming over here. That's when the policeman said, "That's my aunt!"

Catherine: Are you involved at all with the cemetery?

Nellie: No – just when I was president for the American Legion there in Scottsdale, we would have the Boy Scouts come and clean the place. The Legion would come and place a wreath and flags on the graves. My friend, Eva and I were the only ladies that would go.

Catherine: Is there anything else you think would be interesting for this interview?

Linda: My uncle Benny built that Phoenix bird on 20th and Camelback – the Town and Country Center – he created that bird. I don't know if it's still there – over by the Biltmore. Paul Coze, a famous artist, designed it for Benny to build. Coze asked for it and Benny came up with the design. They talked about what they were going to do and Benny built it. It was out there in the front so everybody could see it.

Linda: My mom is 89 and still driving and going to church. She takes her friends who are 10-15 years younger than her to their doctor appointments.

Nellie: God willing I will be 90 in October

Catherine: Thank you both for this interview.



Linda Torres' Uncle Benny created this Phoenix bird for Paul Coze. It was displayed at the Town and Country shopping center on 20th and Camelback Road



Nellie Ulloa holding a DeGrazia dinner bell that she painted

