

Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Carmen Amper

Carmen Amper was interviewed by Emory Holmes II for the Northeast Valley Oral History project on June 20, 2002. In the interview Amper discusses her life and experiences living in the Pacoima area. In this clip, she highlights the clear segregation of neighborhoods. She recalls what happened and how she and others in her community felt when a neighbor decided to bridge that division.

Transcript:

EH: How big was the community—the Latino community?

CA: It wasn't—it wasn't really that big. It was just like—well, we had all the streets that we have now. But it was just like from...was it Norris...Glenoaks. This side of Glenoaks it was just like little farms in there. And then it was Norris where the park is right now. But there was an empty field. The school was right there, but there was an empty field right there. And then it was... Let's see, the other street... Was it Bradley? Well all those streets around there, after that to San Fernando Road.

And then on the other side of San Fernando Road was houses, but not that many. But we weren't allowed to go into the other side, because there was a white community. And this side of Pacoima was a Mexican, an all-races community.

EH: Okay. So it was like racism – you were not allowed to go?

CA: Uh-huh.

EH: What would happen if someone would accidentally go across into the white area?

CA: Nothing would happen. But you weren't allowed to live there. We could go...you know, 'cause our library was on that side, so we had to go there. So, but we weren't allowed, nobody was allowed to live there.

And then finally this lady –Mexican lady– her last name was Lugo–she said, "I'm going to move in that community, whether they want me or not." And she went and she bought a house. And everybody– nobody wanted her there, nobody, nothing, and she told them, "You know what?" she says, "I'm gonna move here whether you want me or not, because I'm just as much American than you are."

EH: Yes. Do you remember that? When that happened. Did you know her?

CA: Yeah I knew her very well. As a matter of fact, we used to go to her house all the time.

EH: To her new house?

CA: Uh-huh, we used to go to her house.

EH: Wasn't that scary going there?

CA: No, because she lived there, so we'd just go in her yard and we'd just stay there. But then afterwards, after she did this, her neighbors liked her a lot. So then they decided, well maybe it

isn't not so bad to have.... Then another Mexican family—well, they bor— born here, or wherever they came from, they were English-speaking. They moved on that area.

EH: Okay okay

CA: And then all of a sudden the prejudice just started—

EH: Coming down.

CA: Coming down.

EH: What year— do you remember— ?

CA: The years?

EH: Maybe, what year?

CA: I don't remember the years. I wish I could remember all that.

EH: Was it in the thirties or in the forties?

CA: No, it was in the late thirties, I think it was.

EH: Okay.

CA: 'Cause she lived there for a long time. And then—yeah, because my brothers—one of my brothers was born in the thirties and she used to go and take care of people that had babies.

EH: Okay.

CA: This lady Lugo. And she took care of my mother and she was already living on that side.