

## **HBS08- Villa, Emma S..mp3**

**Yolanda Leyva** [00:00:00] This is Yolanda Leyva interviewing Emma Villa at Jefferson High School in El Paso, Texas on July 28th, 2016. First, I want to thank you, Mrs. Villa, for allowing us to interview you and hear your story this morning.

**Emma Villa** [00:00:16] You're welcome.

**Y.L.** [00:00:18] Can you tell us a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

**E.V.** [00:00:24] I was born in El Paso, Texas somewhere around Lincoln School, just like around the corner from Lincoln School, really. And there was a church, El Calvario, next to my house. Yeah, I was born there. It was Durazno Street, where I was born. Later, my dad built a house on Manzana Street, where we moved. From there, I grew up. I was born in 1935.

**Y.L.** [00:01:03] Oh, okay. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

**E.V.** [00:01:05] We were four in all. I have two brothers and one sister.

**Y.L.** [00:01:14] So, two girls and two boys.

**E.V.** [00:01:17] Right, and we were all born there around Lincoln School.

**Y.L.** [00:01:19] Were you born in the hospital or at home?

**E.V.** [00:01:22] I was born at home. I was born at home. I was the youngest. One of my brothers passed away, but I still have my brother and sister.

**Y.L.** [00:01:39] What kind of work did your father do?

**E.V.** [00:01:42] My father at the beginning, he came from Mexico. And he passed us the way back. What do you call that --

**Y.L.** [00:01:55] He came without --

**E.V.** [00:01:57] Illegally. He stayed here all his life. But he managed to -- I don't know how he did it, but he got into the construction business. And actually, he started his own business, and he would build houses around, and fences around Austin School and all those places up there. He hired people for the construction business and bought a truck. That's how he started.

[00:02:34] He paid all these people working under him. He was paying pretty good money. In spite of that, he didn't have any education. And he went with this man that he knew would make the plans for the houses that they would build and the fences. In fact, I still have those plans with me.

**Y.L.** [00:02:56] Oh, you do? Those are some beautiful houses in that area. Your mother stayed at home?

**E.V.** [00:03:03] My brothers went to Bowie School and my sister graduated from Bowie High School. My brothers went to Bowie also. And my older brother went into the service. But my sister was the only one that graduated from Bowie High School because my father got sick later on. I think I was about ten years old when he got sick, and my brothers had to quit school. They were going to Jefferson to help them with the business.

[00:03:41] But then my brother went into the service. He was in the Korean War. My older brother was wounded there during the Korean War. He was wounded, but he came back. Thank God he came back! And my other brother also went into the service. But there was no war anymore.

**Y.L.** [00:04:10] Tell me a little bit about your childhood. What elementary school did you go to?

**E.V.** [00:04:15] Okay, I went to Lincoln School, and it was very nice. I liked it a lot. We had very good teachers. All of them were Anglo, and only one Mexican that I remember, Mrs. Rodriguez. It was very, very pleasant going there. The teachers were very strict, and I learned to read more or less very good.

**Y.L.** [00:04:39] Were all the children that went to Lincoln School Mexican American?

**E.V.** [00:04:43] They were all, and when we started, we didn't know English at all. We didn't speak English at all. We worked from the bottom up.

**Y.L.** [00:04:53] How did you learn to speak English?

**E.V.** [00:04:55] Well, they gave us a great deal of books like Jane, Come, Go. Like go, Jane, go stand over there with books.

**Y.L.** [00:05:11] Do you remember if you got punished for speaking Spanish? Or that didn't happen at Lincoln School?

**E.V.** [00:05:15] No, at Lincoln. Not at Lincoln. I don't remember. I do remember they were very strict. So no, tried not to. But no, I don't remember.

**Y.L.** [00:05:28] So, you had a very good experience at Lincoln School?

**E.V.** [00:05:34] Yes, a good experience. In the basement, there was a library where we would go. In the basement, all the kindergarten, first and second-graders went in the basement, and then on the upper level, all the classes.

**Y.L.** [00:05:55] What's your favorite memory from Lincoln School?

**E.V.** [00:05:57] My favorite memory was when we did very good at reading, a teacher would send us, would send my friend, and we would go to the library and fix the books that were torn. We would tape them. I enjoyed it a lot. That was free time for us, and all the other kids were studying.

**Y.L.** [00:06:24] After Lincoln School, where did you go?

**E.V.** [00:06:26] We went to Zavala. We were sent to Zavala.

**Y.L.** [00:06:30] Did you have a good experience in Zavala, too? Was it different from Lincoln?

**E.V.** [00:06:34] No. Zavala was -- I just went there one year. I know there were gangs. There were a lot of students that were in my class that were in gangs, but they were pretty good. I don't remember having any problems with the gangs. You know, they were our friends, actually, but not that we were in the gangs. They were our peers.

**Y.L.** [00:07:08] So you felt safe?

**E.V.** [00:07:11] I felt safe. No, they were okay but didn't know what they did at night. But, you know, that's all I knew.

**Y.L.** [00:07:22] And then from Zavala, you came here to Jefferson High?

**E.V.** [00:07:26] From Zavala, I only went through the ninth to the twelfth until I graduated.

**Y.L.** [00:07:34] What was it like here at Jefferson High School?

**E.V.** [00:07:39] I have very good memories of Jefferson. I took a subject that I liked. I took the required classes that I needed to graduate, but on the same side, we had electives. And one of the electives that I took was Crafts. In Crafts, we used to make leather belts or wallets. And I made this belt with my husband's name and my name. In short, Louis, Emma and Louis. And they gave us all the tools to do all these little designs, lots of flowers. It was very nice because we had something to do there. Even though I didn't do it afterward because I needed the tools, and they were expensive. So absolutely, but it was really nice in that class. Also, I had Homemaking, Mrs. Strauss was the teacher, and she was a beautiful lady. She taught us like in Homemaking, and we would actually be like a family. She would get students to be like a family, a family of four, and then there would be the mother and father and the two children. We would take part in making the recipes. They provided everything for that class. We made cakes, we made dumplings, and things like that.

**Y.L.** [00:09:33] And then you would actually eat afterward?

**E.V.** [00:09:37] Yeah, afterward. Every family had their own people and the father would do the liquids. The mother would do the solids, and when they would see the recipes. And also the other class that I enjoyed a lot was besides the press and journalism, I took journalism. I was the feature editor. Not the editor, but I was a feature editor and I had my own column. It was called Here and There, and it was silly, silly things I wrote about, about the students, about what was going on in school, about the fashion, what we were wearing. We would wear the Oxfords with penny loafers, and the rolled down --

**Y.L.** [00:10:29] The bobby socks?

**E.V.** [00:10:30] The bobby socks. The rolled down bobby socks. It was really nice. It was actually very nice being in journalism. And I did some other articles too, but that was the one that I enjoyed a lot, so I could interview the students. They were dating or things like that. I really enjoyed very much --

[00:10:56] We had pep rallies. Every Friday. And it was like an assembly and all the student body would go in there, and we would have all our student body president speak. And then at the beginning, every classroom had its own cheer, like freshmen had their own cheer. Sophomores had their -- We were in sections like all the freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors on the bottom. Anyway, freshmen had their own cheer. Everybody had their own cheer. And ours was: "We know it all. We're the class of '54!" We had tea dances after school and I don't remember if it was every Friday, or every other Friday, but we did have tea dances.

**Y.L.** [00:11:56] And what were the tea dances?

**E.V.** [00:11:57] The gym.

**Y.L.** [00:11:59] And they were just regular dances?

**E.V.** [00:12:02] Yeah, yeah. Dances, like tea dances where they would dance and stuff.

**Y.L.** [00:12:11] Well, it sounds to me like there was a lot of school spirit.

**E.V.** [00:12:15] Oh, there was, there was. I took typing, also. I took it in business courses, which was typing and shorthand, and the typing was very nice with those old typing machines. In shorthand, the teacher would take letters, and we would show that. We would give them to him and would type them.

**Y.L.** [00:12:47] Nowadays, people don't know what shorthand is anymore. People don't.

**E.V.** [00:12:53] No. I think that's about it that I remember about Jefferson. Oh, I remember going in the morning, when I was getting to school, I remember crossing the street, and then I would see them raising up the flag. And we will have to stand and wait until the flag was up there. And yeah, I remember that very well because not only that, but because my husband, which I didn't know he was going to be my husband, was the one that was playing the trumpet while the flag was going up. And yeah, very nice things.

**Y.L.** [00:13:38] Then what did you do after high school?

**E.V.** [00:13:40] After high school, I sadly, well not sadly, I should have continued my education, but we couldn't afford it. I didn't keep going to college, but I got married. I had five wonderful children, and they all graduated from high school. Four of them graduated from college.

**Y.L.** [00:14:09] You must feel proud of them.

**E.V.** [00:14:11] Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They have master's. So, I worked. After that, I got married. I had five children, like I told you. After that, when they grew up, I made an application for El Paso public schools and I worked as a teacher's aide. I started at Hawkins School, and then I went to Cooley. Sadly, they didn't continue with that. I was working where they had to learn how to read. I don't remember the name. Anyway, I worked at Cooley, starting with kids from third to fifth. It was remedial reading now that I remember, remedial reading. And they said that they took the problem off the other schools because at Hawkins School, I worked from third to fifth grade, that were really like in a second-grade level. We'd pick them up to read at their level. Most of them did, and it was very interesting. I enjoyed working very much. From there, with the program, they sent

me to Cooley, and from there, I worked another year. And with the program, they sent me to Highland High School with the special ed children. I worked there for twenty-eight years until I retired.

**Y.L.** [00:15:56] That's a long time. Twenty-eight years. And then you retired. If you were to say something to the young people of today, some advice or a message, what would you tell young people right now?

**E.V.** [00:16:09] I'll tell them to continue their education. I told my children when they were going out, and they took my advice, luckily. I'm very grateful that they took my advice. When I started working in the schools, my daughter started working in the schools. Two of them worked in elementary schools until they were ready to go to college.

**Y.L.** [00:16:52] So your work inspired your children?

**E.V.** [00:16:54] I think so. Well, two of them are principals. One of them is in a middle school, and the other in an elementary. My other one works in a community college in the offices managing in the financial aid department. And my other son works in computer programming.

**Y.L.** [00:17:32] That's wonderful! Is there anything else you would like to tell us about growing up that I haven't asked you?

**E.V.** [00:17:38] Like what?

**Y. L.** [00:17:40] So I think you had a very good childhood.

**E.V.** [00:17:44] Yes, I had a very good childhood. Growing up, it was very nice. We had a horse on the lot, and I rode that horse. My father sold the lots on the side, and he would take us to the theater. He would take us in the truck, to the drive-in theater. We would be on the outside hearing, looking at the movies and the sounds, they would go away, and they were loud, and they would go out. He had a lot on the side, and that's where he would park the truck, and we would see the movies.

**Y.L.** [00:18:34] So, that's when you lived on Manzana Street? So it was a little bit rural still?

**E.V.** [00:18:44] Yes, it was an arroyo. My people lived on the other side of the arroyo. Listen, I knew Lincoln School was here, right? And then I lived like a block from Lincoln School on Manzana Street. And then, there was this arroyo. I would say two blocks away from my house, and the people that lived on Madera Street, there was a ward they had to cross when it would rain. It was a lot of water they would have to cross on the ward to go to church, and to go to school. And all the people going up Madera, Durazno, Tularosa, all those streets, they had to cross the arroyo. All those people went to school, all their kids.

**Y.L.** [00:19:59] Did you go to church at El Calvario?

**E.V.** [00:20:01] I got married there. My mother and my father married there. My brother and sister, we all had our First Holy Communion there. And we got married there, and went to Lincoln School, too. My mother went to Lincoln School up to the -- I think she went for a short time there. I don't know. For some reason, they sent her to Guardian Angel, and she went there until the sixth grade.

**Y.L.** [00:20:50] Did she continue going to school?

**E.V.** [00:20:52] No, she stopped there at sixth grade, but she learned to read. She would read both English and Spanish.

**Y.L.** [00:21:00] Was your mother born here in El Paso?

**E.V.** [00:21:01] My mother was born in El Paso. My dad was born in Zacatecas. She was born here in El Paso in Segundo Barrio. But then, they moved to the Lincoln School area. My parents moved to Manzana Street, and that's where we grew up.

**Y.L.** [00:21:24] Did you know your grandparents?

**E.V.** [00:21:25] Yes, I knew my grandparents. Florencio Villareal and my mother's name was Aurora Villareal. My grandmother was Placida Villareal.

**Y.L.** [00:21:41] Did you see your grandparents?

**E.V.** [00:21:45] Yes, we did. My grandfather, he liked when we would sing to him. I would sit next to him.

**Y.L.** [00:22:04] Any other memories that you have that you want to tell us?

**E.V.** [00:22:08] I remember when I was going to school, going to Zavala, my friends and I, I had two very good friends that we started from kindergarten until we graduated. We turned into comadres. The three of us. I remember having to cross one time. It was only one time, the train was passing, and we were late to go to Zavala School. We went to the bottom of the train. But that was the only time. We didn't want to be late. We were very constantly late because we lived far from Zavala. And after so many times, we had the principal, he was Mr. Whitaker at that time. After that, I think he went to Jefferson. Yes, because I think he went with us. We went to Jefferson. Anyway, he would make us go to kitchen and wash dishes.

**Y.L.** [00:23:05] That was your punishment?

**E.V.** [00:23:07] For being late.

**Y.L.** [00:23:11] That sounds scary.

**E.V.** [00:23:14] We did it one time, my friends and I when the train stopped. It's one of the memories I have. I remember the man would sell ice cream. He would give us some of the ice that burned your hands. We would like to play with the ice, the dry ice. That's one of the memories that I have.

**Y.L.** [00:23:45] Well, thank you so much for coming to talk to us today and sharing your memories.

**E.V.** [00:23:50] You're welcome. Thank you very much. Thank you very much for inviting.