

TOM ABILA.

Transcript of OH0085. Recorded in 1978. The interviewer is Jessie Velez Lehman.

[A].

ABILA: When I first came to Boulder I was quite young, thirteen or fourteen years old. I came down with my grandfather. As a matter of fact, I didn't speak a lot of English.

LEHMANN: Oh, you didn't?

ABILA: Where I come from, I was born, in a Chicano community, which was all Spanish, the majority of it. I understood it (English), I could speak it, you know, but, let me put it this way. I think I was kind of ashamed 'cause I used to make a lot of errors in my language. I wasn't used to it. I used to stutter a lot.

LEHMANN: Can you tell me what year that was, when you came to Boulder?

ABILA: 1947. September of 1947 or rather late August 1947. I came down with my friends and came to school. First year of junior high actually.

LEHMANN: Where did you go to school?

ABILA: Casey Junior High.

LEHMANN: Tell me something about that school.

ABILA: The few years that I went to school here, school was great. I would say there was about, very few.

LEHMANN: Like in your first year of junior high, how many Mexicans do you think were in your room?

ABILA: Well, all through my junior high school there was only about I would say five families.

LEHMANN: Five families? That's not very many.

ABILA: Not very many at all. As a matter of fact, I think that was all the families that were in Boulder.

LEHMANN: Well the first day that you went to school, how did you feel? After coming from an almost completely Chicano community?

ABILA: Well, I felt lost actually. Not only coming from a Chicano family, the community itself. You know, I was brought up on a farm and I wasn't used to a lot of people, big buildings and big places you know and stuff like that. I was completely lost, really. It took a little getting used to, I was a farm boy.

LEHMANN: Were they pretty friendly to you? Did they try to help you?

ABILA: The Chicanos yes. Your Anglos were well... Some were nice, some were not so nice, and some were hateful. But, it took me a year or so to get over that. As far as that goes, as of now, I'd still say that I don't know whether it was them or it was me that took that attitude. Now, I could care less. I know how to defend myself. At that time, I knew how to defend myself but I just didn't have the means to, you know, I didn't have the know-how. I kind of felt strange for about a year or so and then I got to know the, people. But the Chicanos themselves, the Chicanos that were here were really, really good. As far as that goes.

LEHMANN: They helped you.

ABILA: Oh yes, definitely. They all helped me.

LEHMANN: How about your teachers? What were they like, most of them?

ABILA: Teachers? Oh, I had two or three of them that were real good teachers. And then again, there was two or three that I could not communicate with whatsoever. Didn't get along with them, I don't know whether it was me, myself or them or what but we just didn't hit it off.

LEHMANN: Did you have to have extra classes because of your language?

ABILA: Yes.

LEHMANN: Did you go during the day or after school?

ABILA: After school. Most of the time.

LEHMANN: Were there mostly Mexicans that were in that class?

ABILA: No, all types. Well like I say, at that time there was only two or three families that were Chicano.

LEHMANN: What was Boulder like, tell me something about Boulder.

ABILA: Boulder was a quiet little town, real quiet little town, hardly.

ABILA: Well, Pearl St. Was about the same as it is now. That's about it.

LEHMANN: You don't think it was any busier?

ABILA: I don't think so. The only thing there that was Boulder, that was Pearl St. That was it, that was the town of Boulder.

LEHMANN: That's why I wondered if it was busier, the main street.

ABILA: The main street and that was it. I don't know about it being any busier, I don't think it was. I would say compare it now to then, I don't think it was any busier. Right now Boulder is not that busy in Pearl St.

LEHMANN: True.

ABILA: Your shopping centers and stuff is taking over. But to me it was a great town. I was used to a little town.

LEHMANN: You said that when you came here, you came to live with your grandparents. Had they been here quite a while before you got here?.

ABILA: No, I think they'd only been here a year or two before that.

LEHMANN: Did you like it here better?

ABILA: At first I didn't. At first I used to hate it. For the simple reason that I hardly didn't know anybody.

LEHMANN: So it was hard to make friends?

ABILA: It was kind of hard to make friends really, at first. I had a cousin that lived here, not my personal cousin, but a cousin on my mom's side that kind of helped me get to know the people. And after a while I got to know quite a few, both Chicano and Anglo. A few colored guys.

LEHMANN: Were there quite a few then?

ABILA: No, not too many, there was a few but not very many.

LEHMANN: Did you have any clubs or anything going in school?

ABILA: There was no such thing.

LEHMANN: Nothing that you went to?

ABILA: Oh, there probably was.

LEHMANN: But nothing that you attended.

ABILA: No.

LEHMANN: Did you do any particular thing like play baseball or anything like that?

ABILA: Yes. I played baseball, I was on the wrestling team, started to play football but I couldn't do that because I was too light. I went out for track. I've always been athletic minded ever since I was young, and I've always competed on that. But as far as that goes, I think that's where I really made my goal, in athletics. And then there was one guy there and we became real good friends. He was one of the greatest track runners there was, the name of Joe Lewis. He gave me a lot of help, a lot of help. I met him, I would say two or three months after I started school.

LEHMANN: Did you get to go out of Boulder?

ABILA: At first, no. Not for the first years I didn't. That wasn't till after my schooling was over, which I never did finish high school.

LEHMANN: Did you go to Boulder High?

ABILA: No, I never did. Casey was all.

LEHMANN: Tell me something about the community where you lived.

ABILA: The community over there, you've probably heard of Goss St. Well, that's where we lived. It was mostly a minority community, it still is I guess a minority community. They have all kinds of apartments there now, but in those days it was all together: Anglos, Chicanos, quite a few mixed. Not all Chicanos, couldn't have been, 'cause there wasn't that many Chicanos.

LEHMANN: Do you think that they moved to that particular community because it was cheaper to buy there?

ABILA: Oh definitely, definitely.

LEHMANN: Or do you think they moved there to have people that they knew or people of the same ethnic background?

ABILA: No, it could work both ways.

LEHMANN: Do you think they felt more at home there than if they would have moved to another community where it would be completely Anglo? Did you ever hear your grandparents say anything about it?

ABILA: No. I would say in my thoughts I'd see it in the way that the community itself, that's what they could afford. At that time it was Goss St. Water St. Grove St. Never any new areas. I would say that that was one of the cheapest parts of town as far as buying their land or whatever.

LEHMANN: Do you remember anything they did for entertainment in that community, like all the neighbors or all the children.

ABILA: Very well. There used to be an old park down on 19th and Canyon Blvd. Right now.

LEHMANN: Is that the one that's still there?

ABILA: I don't know if that's the one or not.

LEHMANN: There's one on 20th and Canyon Blvd.

ABILA: Oh no, that's not it.

LEHMANN: That's not it,? It was 19th and what?

ABILA: Nineteenth and Canyon.

LEHMANN: Which was Water St.

ABILA: It was an old park, well not park, a lot. An empty lot not a park, I'm sorry. And we all used to gather there and play baseball, football and all that stuff. That was all our entertainment.

LEHMANN: Who coordinated it. Who would keep track of it, be the leader?

ABILA: Well I would say the leaders would be the older guys say for instance me. I was one of them, Joe Lewis, Dave Toledo and so and so. There was no place else to go unless you went up to the city park or something like that. And then it was overcrowded.

LEHMANN: Do you remember any other kind of entertainment, like birthday parties or weddings?

ABILA: We used to have a lot of them. We used to have our own parties among each other. Birthdays parties and stuff like that.

LEHMANN: Was it mostly family that came?

ABILA: Yeah, mostly family.

LEHMANN: Or did some of the neighbors come?

ABILA: Well no, I mean I wouldn't say family excuse me. It'd be the surrounding neighborhood.

LEHMANN: So they were pretty friendly with each other?

ABILA: Oh we was all pretty close. You know all the families that lived around there, they was all pretty close. There used to be some that used to live outside and it was pretty close. As far as the Chicanos themselves it was all pretty close.

LEHMANN: What about any kind of social life in the Church? Did they have any kind of social activities for young people?

ABILA: The majority of them people were pretty social in the Church.

LEHMANN: Which Church was that?

ABILA: Mostly all Sacred Heart.

LEHMANN: Do you have any idea what they did for social events?

ABILA: No, not really. The majority of it was bingos, and of course they used to have dances.

LEHMANN: Did you ever attend anything like those dances?

ABILA: Oh yes.

LEHMANN: Who coordinated those dances, was it someone from the Church, like a member? How did they get people to come and play?

ABILA: I never did go into that. I couldn't say.

LEHMANN: I mean, was it Chicanos that played?

ABILA: Oh-yes. Who coordinated it I do not know.

LEHMANN: Do you remember anywhere else that they had Chicano dances. In Boulder?

ABILA: They used to have a lot of dances at the, what was the name of that hall, where it switches up on Pearl St.

LEHMANN: Someone was trying to remember that the other day too. All they could remember was that one thing too, that it was on Pearl St. Maybe it will come to you later. Anything else they had in the Church, maybe like Boy Scouts.

ABILA: No there was no such thing that I know of.

LEHMANN: Did they have like weekday Church schools in the summertime?

ABILA: No, not that I know of. The majority of Chicanos that were here in Boulder all went to Catholic school, the majority of them. At that time the Catholic school only had the eighth grade. And the majority all went there. And after eighth grade they had to go to junior high.

LEHMANN: Unless it was the girls, they had Mt. St. Gertrude.

ABILA: Yeah, that was a high school.

LEHMANN: Were you ever in the military?

ABILA: No, I never was.

LEHMANN: Tell me something about the Boulder government. Did you ever get interested in city politics or anything like that?

ABILA: No, I never did, I never have. I never wanted to. Not in Boulder itself. I think it was fighting a losing cause.

LEHMANN: Why do you think that?

ABILA: Well for the simple reason that I found out in later years that Boulder is a real prejudice town. And it's for the younger guys, the younger generation coming up. Which has had a heck of a lot schooling and education that I've never had. They can get active and something like that. As far as me myself, no. I didn't feel that I had a chance, I knew I didn't have a chance, so I didn't want to get involved. I just wanted to live my life.

LEHMANN: Do you think it's getting easier for Chicanos to get into politics in Boulder?

ABILA: Oh yes, yes. For the simple reason that the Chicanos nowadays are a lot more educated and they've had a heck of a lot more opportunity than we had.

LEHMANN: Do you think it is important to get into politics?

ABILA: Yes it is very important, you better believe it.

LEHMANN: What do you think politics does for us?

ABILA: Politics can do a heck of a lot for you. A whole world of difference. Politics is part of your education itself. Which we never did have in our times, in my dad's times, in my times. I understood it but I never paid no attention to it. I thought life was just being a man, supporting yourself and that's it. I found out later on that it's a little bit more than that. But it takes a little bit of education with a little bit of that to get into politics. You're not going into politics with heads down. So, politics is very important nowadays, very important.

LEHMANN: I'm glad you think so, because I think so too.

ABILA: I know it is. I found it out, a little bit too late.

LEHMANN: Oh, I don't think so, I don't think it's too late.

ABILA: Well, not too late. At least I could have found it out when I was a lot younger, you know what I mean?

LEHMANN: Like you say, we do need education behind us to get into politics.

ABILA: Yes, definitely.

LEHMANN: The desire is there, you know we can vote and that's good too.

ABILA: In my younger days, a lot of kids they never thought about voting, they never thought about this they never thought about that.

LEHMANN: Why, why do think they didn't?

ABILA: I don't know whether it was from their parents, or from what but all they thought was about was being a man, working for their money.

LEHMANN: Well, that was important.

ABILA: As a matter of fact, I felt the same way. That's the way I was brought up. My folks told me you're a man, you don't have to ask anybody for nothing, you work. Which I disagree with now. You don't have to ask, but yes, you got the same right as everybody else. What is politics doing right now, if they're not asking. Before I never used to look at it this way. After you grow up a little bit you start looking at stuff like that you know. They don't want anything for themselves, but they're still asking aren't they. And that's one thing with the Chicano people, they're too proud of themselves. They're not going to ask anybody for this and that. Actually you're not asking for anything you're asking for something.

LEHMANN: Information.

ABILA: There you go.

LEHMANN: And that should be free to anybody.

ABILA: Right.

LEHMANN: Tell me something about what happened when you got out of school.

ABILA: When I got out of school, I went to work and I worked with my uncle.

LEHMANN: Was that in Boulder?

ABILA: Right here in Boulder. I started working with my uncle. As a matter of fact, I was under age.

LEHMANN: Tell me how old you were.

ABILA: I was sixteen years old. The man at first didn't want to hire me. But then he said let's see. He was a great guy. A great terrific man. I can't say a word about him, 'cause he treated me kind.

LEHMANN: Can you tell me what you were doing?

ABILA: Oh, I was doing hard work, real hard labor. Work. But that man, he was in the brick work, same as I'm in now, matter of fact, that's where I got my trade from.

LEHMANN: How long did you work there in this brick place?

ABILA: I worked for that same man, three years. I worked for him at first for about a year and then they went slow. So he said I hate to do this but I have to lay you off. I said I'll work for you maybe part-time. So he laid me off and I went back with my folks. Then I stayed a couple of years.

LEHMANN: When was that?

ABILA: That must have been 1951 or 52 something like that, I'm not sure.

ABILA: I stayed with them a couple of years and I was working on farms. And then the wages were nothing anyway.

LEHMANN: How much were they?

ABILA: I think I was working at the farm for about \$4 a day. And that was hours from something like six o'clock in the morning till about six or seven o'clock at night. Sometimes it was later. Long hours. Of course the wages I was making over here wasn't that much. I was making I think 70 cents an hour.

LEHMANN: With the brick company. That was in.

ABILA: 1950. Cause I worked with them a year and I got laid off in 1951 or early 1952, something like that. I stayed away for two years and I decided to come back. I went back to work for the same guy, as a matter of fact, he called me. He called me and I came back. He gave me a raise, I think it was 10 an hour, and that put my wages up to 80 cents an hour. I stayed with him for about three or four years, well until he sold his business and somebody else took over.

LEHMANN: Then what did you do?

ABILA: I went to work for this new owner. And then by that time I was already made foreman. I was foreman in charge of the place. Then they brought this guy from Ohio, this guy from Ohio bought the place. So, meanwhile he hired some guy, I don't know where he was from, Florida or somewhere, he come over and take over as manager. He and me didn't see eye-to-eye and we got into a fight one day. They fired me. Not exactly fire me, we got into a fight.

LEHMANN: Do you think it was personality clashes?

ABILA: Personality clashes, yes as a matter of fact I know it was.

ABILA: Well we got into it and before I got a chance to talk to him about it, the boss come over and he runs over to the boss right away and tells him. By the time I got to talk to the boss, I'm a little hard headed anyway, I told him what I thought and said either he goes or I go, it doesn't matter to me, I says, I don't care 'cause I'm not working for this guy and I'm not working with this guy. So he says well, he was nice about it, I'm not firing anybody, I'd like to see you guys get along together. So I quite 'cause I knew I couldn't get along with him.

LEHMANN: Did he get along with everybody?

ABILA: Who?

LEHMANN: Your foreman, or your manager.

ABILA: I think two weeks after I left, he got fired. They fired him.

LEHMANN: So he was pretty hard to get along with.

ABILA: Yeah. So from there I went to Denver and worked there till now.

LEHMANN: Oh, you worked in Denver?

ABILA: Oh yeah.

LEHMANN: Oh you do? Was that part of the same company?

ABILA: No it's not the same company, it's a different outfit. But I've been in Denver 17 years.

LEHMANN: Oh.

[B].

ABILA: Well not exactly 17 years. I went to work construction. I worked construction and I worked a full year building Crossroads Shopping Center. I worked the whole time through there. I had a boss from Texas. A great guy. A lot of people said that guy was the hardest man to work for. Well he treated me great, he treated me terrific.

LEHMANN: Was he Mexican?.

ABILA: No.

LEHMANN: Well, you should have been used to Americans, he was from Texas.

ABILA: Well there was quite a few Mexican's working there. They all liked him, got along with him. Matter of fact, when the job was about to fold over.

LEHMANN: How long did you work there building Crossroads?

ABILA: One year. Maybe a little bit over. But anyway when the job was about over with, and Crossroads was about ready to open up, the manager from J.C. Penney Company went up to my boss and he asked him, he says I know you're going to lay off some people, and I want you to give me the names of a couple of your good hands, we're going to need some people to work for us for two or three months. So he said (my boss) I'll tell you, I got one right here, he says I don't want to lay him off but I know I'm going to have to. Well we all knew it. He says this is one of my best hands I got and I'm going to keep him on till the very last but if you can get him on work, I'll personally verify it. So he put in a good word for me. And I worked for J.C. Penney for about four months after that. After they opened up the new place, they had the old J.C. Penney uptown, so I came down here and I helped them move all their shelving and take all the old stuff off them until we finished. Then a week ahead of time, they gave notice, they said well next week is going to be your last week. So that was it and I went in and signed

up for unemployment. I think I signed up for unemployment and the very next day they called me up from Denver.

LEHMANN: From the same place where you used to work?

ABILA: From the same place I quit. So they called me and I went back to Denver.

LEHMANN: How was it working for them over there? How was it in the beginning?

ABILA: I liked it. The only thing is I went for bigger money, more money. See 'cause at that time, well it's the same thing, it's union jobs.

LEHMANN: At the brick place?

ABILA: Oh yeah. I couldn't see it then, I see it now. Construction pays more money but you don't get any benefits. You do now, some.

LEHMANN: But they're seasonal too, sometimes.

ABILA: Yes. It's real seasonal. But now we got the benefits where I work. We got holidays, paid vacation, sick leave, insurances and all that. It's before we didn't. Your unions are getting up a little higher. And higher all the time. Well anyway, then.

LEHMANN: Where you worked at that brick place in Denver, are most of the people there Anglos or Chicanos?

ABILA: The majority of them are Chicanos.

LEHMANN: They are. How did you get along with them?.

ABILA: Well, so so. Pretty good with some, not too good with some. You've got a lot of people, not anymore but, years back quite a few aliens, wetbacks, we used to have quite a few. Which they, I don't know if they did or not, some people accused them of getting for less wages, but now I know they don't cause they've got them pretty much tied up there. You still got some, but they got the legal papers. Before, they had some that was on the run.

LEHMANN: Oh, now they won't hire any aliens?

ABILA-: Oh, they'll hire them just as long as they have their legal papers, or visa or whatever.

LEHMANN: They have to have like a resident card to be legal.

ABILA: To be legal yeah.

LEHMANN: And you think there were fights because of that?

ABILA: There was I know there was. There was a lot of these guys, aliens, depriving our own of jobs. I don't know whether it was true or not, this we never did prove. But the union finally stepped in and was looking into it. But they never did say whether they did find out anything about it or not. But I know it's been pretty legal.

LEHMANN: So you don't have that suspicion among the workers any more.

ABILA: I know what the scale calls for and that's what they get. Paid for. That's what they get paid. Of course, this is a new business, not business, company itself, not new. When I first started there was one individual that used to own the place.

LEHMANN: Now it's a corporation or something?

ABILA: Yes, it's a corporation, before it was just an individual person.

LEHMANN: Do jobs run there so that you can advance in that type of job?

ABILA: Oh yes.

LEHMANN: Do you think it's done much for you, that people advance.

ABILA: It goes according to the person himself.

LEHMANN: Do you think that Chicanos there are pretty aggressive?

ABILA: There? I'm one of them and I'm one of the highest ones in the place. There's another guy, another Chicano, that's been there quite a few years, we're the two highest. There's another one that's been there just about as long as we have and he don't advance much. So it's according to your own.

LEHMANN: Maybe he's not an aggressive person.

ABILA: Not very aggressive, not very bright.

LEHMANN: Maybe he doesn't like to be a leader.

ABILA: Well you don't have to be a leader, but he thinks that if he gets paid to do one thing that's all he supposed to do. That's it. He just don't try to advance himself.

LEHMANN: Maybe he finds it very difficult.

ABILA: I think he does, really. And there's several of them that way and there's a lot of them that come in there and they just.

LEHMANN: Work themselves out.

ABILA: Work themselves out just like this.

LEHMANN: I was interested to (know) if they had a chance to advance.

ABILA: Definitely, you got a chance to advance. I started out as a laborer, machine operator. Well as far as that goes, I can run the majority of them.

LEHMANN: You know most all the jobs.

ABILA: Matter of fact, they taught me how to weld, they taught me how to do maintenance work. That's what I think I like about the work, they teach you everything. I got a supervisor, and he is great. He is great and patient. He understands everything, he understands people. He takes a little time, if you don't know something you go ask him and he comes over and shows you.

LEHMANN: When they had those aliens there, did they have a person or supervisor who spoke English and Spanish?

ABILA: Not a supervisor.

LEHMANN: Or someone?

ABILA: Oh yeah.

LEHMANN: Was it someone to supervise over them?

ABILA: Oh yes.

LEHMANN: Was it someone that just worked there?

ABILA: He was something like a lead man.

LEHMANN: To teach them?

ABILA: To teach them and show them. To translate, things like that. One of them became a resident. He's still here, still working there. He speaks a little English now, but not too good. He's one of the greatest guys there is. He's

advanced. He's advanced himself. That's one of the things I like about that job, you do advance and there is well.

LEHMANN: Did the company have any classes for them in English?

ABILA: Oh yeah.

LEHMANN: Oh that's nice. During the day or at night?.

ABILA: They even sent you to the school if you wanted to go. They got courses where you can go to school and if you want to apply for it you could go. You could go to welding school, maintenance school, you could (go)to several other schools. And they'll pay part of it. You could go to school at night and work during the day or whatever.

LEHMANN: So you commute everyday?

ABILA: Yeah. I drive myself, I commute everyday.

LEHMANN: Do you like it pretty well?

ABILA: Yeah, I really do.

LEHMANN: Do you like to work better in Denver than you did in Boulder? Did you find them friendlier over there than you did here?

ABILA: Well, I don't know, I don't think so. I haven't worked that much in Boulder to tell you the truth. I never did finish telling you the story. Like I said I quit three times down there and the last time I quit was in 1966. The National Center for Atmospheric Research first built its building. Then I put my application 'cause I was tired of hard work, I wanted some easy work, I thought. So I went to work for NCAR. So, I put my application in and my boss over there says you want to help yourself, improve yourself, go right ahead, that's one thing I'll never deny any person or anybody, if you want to improve yourself, go right ahead. If you need a recommendation or what-ever he says, I'll give you a letter or if they call I'll give you a good word. So I quit and I went to work for them and I worked with them five years. I started out as a janitor. The first year I made lead man, two years later I made foreman. I worked with them for five years. I was never happy with them. I never did enjoy it.

LEHMANN: What were the people like to work for?

ABILA: The people over there were great.

LEHMANN: You didn't have any trouble.

ABILA: Oh no. In my life I've never had trouble with people, no people. Anglos, blacks, Chicanos, nobody. I get along with everybody. Ever since I was a kid, never had any. But I worked with them five years and then, oh, I just didn't like the kind of work, I wasn't satisfied with it, I wasn't happy with it so I figured to myself why.

LEHMANN: Force yourself.

ABILA; Work for something you don't enjoy. So one day I just got it in my head to take a day's leave of absence or sick leave and go back to Denver. I went back to my old job. I walked in and said do you need any help. He says yup, when do you want to start, you want to start right now, then go to work. Just like that you know. I said no, I want to take a couple of weeks vacation. He says well you come back and so I did. That was in 1970 and I'm back with them again. This is going to be permanent, I hope.

LEHMANN: You like it pretty much.

ABILA: Oh, I really do. It's a lot of work sometimes, lot of long hours and they pay good and I enjoy the work. The people are nice to work with.

LEHMANN: Can I ask you a personal question now?

ABILA: Sure.

LEHMANN: Have you ever been married?

ABILA: Legally, no. Although I have a son fourteen years old, but legally I haven't been married.

LEHMANN: Do you see your son?

ABILA: Yes. I see him quite often. He comes over and stays with us during the summer months, vacations.

LEHMANN: Does he live in Boulder?

ABILA: No, in Greeley.

LEHMANN: Well, that's not too far away.

ABILA: No, that's not too far away. As a matter of fact, he spent the Christmas holiday with us. He spends the summer with us.

LEHMANN: How does he like school?

ABILA: He's picking up now. A little talking to him and now he's doing pretty good.

LEHMANN: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about Boulder that I might have missed?

ABILA: About Boulder?

LEHMANN: Anything else?

ABILA: I think Boulder is a good town to live in. I've lived in it for so long. I really like Boulder, I always did, ever since I first came here. I think it's really a nice place to live in and most of your peoples depends on yourself, I guess. I get along with the majority of them. I've got some pretty good Anglo friends, I quite a few Chicano friends. Originals and newcomers. The originals, oh you can't beat them.

LEHMANN: Why do you think they're different than the newcomers?

ABILA: Well, I don't know, maybe it was just me and I was young and I more or less grew up with them. A couple of families in particular.

LEHMANN: Let me ask you something.

ABILA: Yes, in a way I do.

LEHMANN: Tell me why.

ABILA: For the simple reason that none of the Chicanos are over here.

LEHMANN: Did you feel more free to go around talking to people?

ABILA: Yes, I really did.

LEHMANN: And you knew them well?

ABILA: Well, I used to get along with them, real good. 'Cause I grew up with them, I was real young.

LEHMANN: Do your grandparents still live?

ABILA: No, they're both dead.

LEHMANN: When did they die?

ABILA: 1965 I believe, or in the 50's. (People in the background discussing the year of death of Abila's grandparents. Some say in the 50's because they came to Boulder in 1962 and Abila's grandparents were already dead.).

LEHMANN: Were they pretty old when they died?

ABILA: Not that old.

LEHMANN: Were they in their seventies?

ABILA: No, sixty something. Not in their seventies.

LEHMANN: Did they speak any English at all?

ABILA: Oh yeah. He was a school teacher.

LEHMANN: Your grandfather.

ABILA: His dad was a school teacher. She didn't.

LEHMANN: What was his name?

ABILA: Avel Diagos.

LEHMANN: Where did he teach school?

ABILA: Back in Walsenburg.

LEHMANN: Did he teach English and Spanish?

ABILA: I don't know, Spanish.

LEHMANN: Your grandma?

ABILA: She didn't speak English very much.

LEHMANN: Could she read and write?

ABILA: No I don't think so.

LEHMANN: But your grandpa did.

ABILA: She could understand but she couldn't speak it, or well, she could speak a few words.

LEHMANN: In English.

ABILA: Yes. Oh yeah he did.

LEHMANN: Oh yes he must have if he could teach. He must have known how to read and write in both languages.

ABILA: Oh yeah.

LEHMANN: Did he speak good English?

ABILA: Great, great.

LEHMANN: Where was he from?

ABILA: Walsenburg. Originally from Walsenburg, born and raised.

LEHMANN: Was he born there, in Walsenburg?

ABILA: Yes.

LEHMANN: (Speaking to someone else) and your mom too?

ANSWER: Both of them.

LEHMANN: And your grandparents?

ANSWER: I don't know where they were born or where they came from.

ABILA: I think your grandfather was from New Mexico. I think so. I'm not positive. I didn't look into her family background. I knew her grandfather. But I have a picture of him, I knew him 'cause I used to fight with him.

LEHMANN: You must have been pretty little.

ABILA: Five or six years old. I've always had a pretty good memory since I was pretty small.

LEHMANN: What do you remember most about your grandparents that left an impression on you?

ABILA: My grandfather was a pretty easy going guy. He was a real easy going guy. Gentle. I think he was one of the most gentle persons that I've know. Really easy going.

LEHMANN: Did he ever give you any.

ABILA: Oh definitely. They all do.

LEHMANN: One that you especially remember?

ABILA: Not really, you know how you are when you're a kid and it goes in one ear and out the other. I used to like him real well. My grandma was a different type. She was kind of a moody, kind of a little bit different. She was nice but she was a little bit different. Him, he was great, terrific.

LEHMANN: Did he like to take out his books and teach the children, in the neighborhood, on Goss?

ABILA: Oh yeah. I don't know about the neighborhood. Amongst us, yes.

LEHMANN: English or Spanish?

ABILA: Both. Another thing I used to like about him was he was a sports fan, especially baseball. He used to love his baseball. That's how come I got interested in sports, through him. He used to really go for it and explain it to me. The World Series and all that stuff. And that's where I start picking up sports, got enthused about sports.

LEHMANN: You had a buddy.

ABILA: Oh yeah. And I think that's what most of your kids want about a person, a person that could teach them.

LEHMANN: Did he go see you at school, like if you were on something like track or something like that?

ABILA: Oh yes, he did.

LEHMANN: What about your grandma, did she have any kind of hobbies that you can remember?

ABILA: Well, she was mostly sick all the time? I guess she'd been sick ever since she was young, young.

LEHMANN. Well, from what, like asthma or what? (Background voices say heart trouble.)

ABILA: She was always pretty sick.

LEHMANN: So she couldn't really do too much.

ABILA: That was one of the reasons that I moved with my Aunt Sarah. 'Cause she was ailing and I knew I was a nuisance, young as I was.

LEHMANN: So she was pretty much would you say bed ridden.

ABILA: Yes.

LEHMANN: Did she rest a lot?

ABILA: Yes.

LEHMANN: So she didn't get out too much outside the house?

ABILA: No, she was Always pretty sick.

LEHMANN: I just wondered 'cause so many people, you know Mexicans, like to have flower gardens.

ABILA: Oh she used to but I think he's the one who used to keep it up mostly because she wasn't up to it.

LEHMANN: Did your grandfather teach you to read and write in Spanish?

ABILA: Yes, the little that I know. Not all of it, I pickup a lot of it on my own.

LEHMANN: Well later.

ABILA: Well, when I was younger. I always did know how to read a little bit of it. I always did since I was small. That was from my other grandpa from my dad's side.

LEHMANN: Didn't you tell me you learned to read, or was it you or someone else, that learned to read because they always (had to have) other people reading their mail and they didn't want that anymore.

ABILA: That was my grandpa. He had no schooling whatsoever. That was on my dad's side. He used to read Spanish, couldn't write it. (Background voices determining whether or not he could write English or Spanish.) He could read both Spanish and English but if he had to write a letter in English he couldn't write it. There were a lot of words that he couldn't understand. He could write it in Spanish. He could read English.

LEHMANN: Who do you think taught it? By himself?

ABILA: By himself. He never did go to school. (Background voices saying that the grandfather went as far as the fourth grade.).

LEHMANN: Well that helps a little bit sometimes, you know every little bit helps. And when you're little you know, more penetrates.

LEHMANN: He was probably a self-taught man.

ABILA: In them days ...

LEHMANN: In pioneer days, a lot of people taught themselves.

ABILA: It didn't take much.

LEHMANN: Abraham Lincoln, he taught himself, and he was one of our presidents. So it's just a desire that some people have.

ABILA: Yeah, it's just the person itself. Just like me you know.."

Tape ends.