

**Joe Cantu Jr. and Sylvia Cantu Garcia**

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The history of a place is only as valuable as those who lived there and made it unique from everywhere else. However, with the passing of time many of the stories and oral histories of the past generation are being lost, not through un-avoidable means but ignorance and pure lack of motivation to go out there and capture these histories from the people who know them. Consequence of this would include a group of people who have no history. In accordance between Dr. Russell Skowronek, Dr. Sonia Hernandez and Thomas Knight all professors of the History department of the University of Texas Pan American a research project was developed for such a purpose as to investigate, collect and record the oral histories of the people of the Rio Grand Valley to ensure these oral histories remain even after all of us be gone. This paper be a synopsis of the interview session that took place between the interviewers Sandra Carrizales and Ana Martinez and the interviewed Joe Cantu Jr. and Sylvia Cantu Garcia and what they could tell us of their family history and the oral history passed down to them of the Valley.

On April 29, 2010 starting from 2:40 p.m. to 3:50 p.m. did our scheduled interview take place between the interviewers Sandra Carrizales and Ana Martinez and the interviewed Joe Cantu Jr. and Sylvia Cantu Garcia at 421 E. Kuhn Street in Edinburg TX. They were selected because as was pointed out by our professor, Dr. Russell Skowronek, and affirmed in our interview with Joe and Sylvia, the Cantu family through its maternal side and by the name of Cardenas and Mora has had a long standing relationship with the Rio Grand Valley for approximately as long as there has been a

Valley. Their mother was the eldest of Salvador Cardenas and Adela Mora de la Nina proprietors of El Cibolo Ranch<sup>1</sup> which consisted of seven hundred and twenty five acres of land. Upon their death resulted in the dispersal of the property between their six children including the interviewees mother Adela Cardenas who got one hundred and twenty five acres of land out of the once called El San Salvador de Tule land grant. After the death of the interviewee's parents, Adela Cardenas and Jose Luis Cantu, each sibling, all seven of them, got seventeen acres themselves as all the land had been equally divided for each of them. Originally as Joe remarked the land in the time of their great grandmothers and their parent's time was used for "Farming and ranching" however, "Neither one of us... None of us are farmer or ranchers."<sup>2</sup> What they did was come to an accord with the United States Department of Agriculture and with the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife to be used as a watering spot for all the animals there. Much is known of what the land was used for before because it was all written down into a collection for the family. The collection was then entombed into various books detailing various family histories and branches all traceable back to union of Salvador Cardenas and Adela Mora de la Nina. To the point that it was even found out that Joe Cantu Jr. had married and remains married to his third cousin on the Cavazos side. When asked how it was that Joe came to posses these books Sylvia was able to answers us by telling us that they have family reunions and by through these get together that he was able to put all these books together. Which goes to prove that if at least one person puts together a bit of family history together and writes it down in the long run as can be seen with the Cantu's it goes a long way.

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<sup>1</sup> El Cibolo Ranch being founded in 1845. El Cibolo Cemetary. May 5, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Transcription Pg.2

Having stated of where they came from it is only fitting that what and how our interviewees grew up also be recorded for the sole purpose to contrast even the small changes that have occurred from when they grew up to the way that we grew up. First of all as they stated on more than one occasion people have changed because of technology and there are benefits as well as disadvantages that come from technological advancement. Take for example of the physic of a person as both our interviewees were able tell us when they were growing up they were never bored because they were outside and as such always came up with one way or another to keep themselves entertained without television. Furthermore they came to point out that when growing up the only type of color television had was when they placed a glass slide in from of the television consisting of three rows of colors which gave the illusion of color television. The issue of trust was also another that came up. In comparison to the times of now back when they were growing up they said people knew each other better than nowadays. This was so for as was pointed out earlier the family grew out but remained close enough that they still knew each other, what branch they came from. The property itself in which we conducted the interview has been in their family since the time of their parents and as Sylvia pointed out when lunch came a bell would be rung out and friends and family would rush over to eat. They went to school with the same people that they grew up and the issue crime was not as common as it is today. Which forces people to have doors locked and bars on window to stay safe and even them we are not completely safe for still danger lurks as was the case when the house in which the interview took case was burglarizes and their mother's jewelry stolen along with many a memory that went with them. As they grew up and time changed they themselves changes and ventured forwards from the way life had

been into a new phase.

Farming and ranching as had been their parents profession, but they themselves ventured into more a technical one as the demand for farmers and ranchers diminished and the pay as well as demand grew in specialized areas. Joe worked as a mathematics teacher in Edinburgh and later as an administrated for the City of Edinburgh. Sylvia preferred more the medical field herself as she spent twenty five years working for a doctors office in Edinburgh before taking a short break Returning only when she got a job with the University of Texas Pan American working as a secretary for Dr. McBride chair of the education department then transferring into the Act Program in which helps unemployed degreed students find employment. They loved their jobs and can tell for their children as was the case with Joe also went into the same profession.

Stories that they shared with us that even today can be seen happening would include family quality time through various ways one of which included the playing loteria at grandmother's house after Sunday mass with the whole family in El Cibolo Ranch. When all else failed the mother of invention was necessity as was the case when the children wanted to go swimming and a dicing board was made for them at the edge of the laguna in the ranch. Another such story that was interesting and or surprising to hear was how when hurricane Bula hit the Rio Grand Valley Sylvia had to be picked up due to the excess rain approximately acoput 20-22 inches of rain fell daily during the days leading and during the hurricane <sup>3</sup> and taken to Grham Hospital now torn down to help out with the TB patients that were coming in from the Harlingen TB Hospital that had been flooded. This is surprising to hear because many a Valley resident that grew up

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<sup>3</sup> Hurricane Beulah - September 8-24, 1967. May 5, 2010

here, myself included had no idea that there had been a TB Hospital here in the family to begin with. Which illustrates that projects like these are not only necessary but educational for it lets us learn a little bit more of the place we call home.

When asked if further research into their family history would be welcomed both interviewees were opened to idea. Which leads both interviewers of this research to recommend that future researchers approach these interviewees in years to come so further information is available to those people that are interested in the founding families that gave way to the way that the Rio Grand Valley is like. Further research can also be recommended to take place even in just their genealogy alone for it is rare to find a family that can depict their ancestry back to the time of the funding of the Valley.

One person can make a difference. Just one sitting down can give way to numerous information that is detail and culture rich that is no where else is written down but in the memories of those who had live it or had been told it by those who had witnessed it. The Rio Grand Valley in the southern most tip of Texas is like a great big jigsaw puzzle consisting only of a few formal pieces. However, with each new oral history taken from those that know of the Valley and were here when little else was when their information be added to the oral history projects at large and with each addition the big picture of this giant jigsaw puzzle will be seen to show what truly makes up the valley. The Cantu family can be said to be one jigsaw puzzle piece whose history now has been added and hopefully with the addition of others interviews will allow the Valley be seen in a completely different perspective.

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