

Quotes

Quotes excerpted from oral history interviews collected by West Side Community Organization in collaboration with students from Saint Kate's. Part of the photo exhibit, Stories from the Flats.

Amparo Gaston

- "It used to flood every spring, and people were put out of their homes. People would get sick because of the water contamination. And at the time, you know, most of those people had no place else to go. We were almost forced to move, like all the other people of the flats, unfortunately. I'm sure we would have stayed there forever otherwise, because the people that lived down there were happy down there."
- [...] When you don't have money, you make do with what you have. [...] I remember that we made boats out of doors, got all wet and got spankings for floating on the water with those boats. [...] it was sad too, because, of course, then we couldn't go to school. A lot of people had a real hard time during those floods. [...] A lot of families were just out of luck because if you didn't speak English, how were you going to read all the notices that came down?" – Amparo Gaston

Anthony Vasquez

- "To this day, I sometimes dream of the West Side. We would come up here on the hills and then go back and ride in the dark down those crazy looking streets, dirt streets. It was just safe, you know?" – Anthony Vasquez

Don Luna

- "What made this community special was that growing up, we really were truly diverse. We were represented by Lebanese, Syrian, African American, Native American, Hispanic, Jewish cultures and then just a pocket of Anglos. There was a commonality and a common bond: we had come there to the community in different vessels, but we were all in the same boat: we were all dirt poor! So you didn't have to lock your doors 'cause there was nothing to steal– that's how I rationalized it. But I also think it was more of a 'we looked out for each other.'"

Eloise Isabel "Chavela" Lozano

- "When the flats disappeared and we moved back to the West Side, we didn't know a lot of the people. Because the families were dispersed, we didn't really

keep in touch as we grew up. So we had to make friends all over again, and get to know who all lived around us. But it still felt like home. It felt like our neighborhood, like our community, like we belonged here.”

- “Whenever I have gone back to the old West Side Flats, I reminisce, ‘Oh, this is the street that I used to live on!’ I have a lot of dreams of when I was little, and in my dreams, I found myself often walking those same streets. So when I go down there, you know, it doesn’t look nothing like it used to, but just the fact that the street names are there still brings me back to when I was little. Now it’s industrial, so it’s more like businesses, companies that have factories. It’s not really a community.”

Frances Mudek

- “I remember when I was a child and we were living at home, we’d open up the basement door to see how far the water had come up. And every time we opened it, we could see it rising and rising and rising. When it came to the top of the step, that’s when my father decided, ‘Ok, we need to move the family to higher ground.’ The unfortunate thing about that was not the whole family could move and stay together, and families were the support, the families were the main thing that kept you hoping and improving yourself.”

George Avaloz

- Every other year they had the flood down here and the city or the state never did anything about it. And then they made my family move because they were going to build the industrial center down there, and *then* they put the flood control in. There should be some kind of acknowledgement of what they did, instead of just wiping it under the rug. Because as time passes, everybody forgets. It was really an injustice, what they did to the Mexicans down on the old West Side. To make them move like that, and not compensate them, and give them the bare minimum. What they did to destroy a community like that is wrong. It’s really wrong.”

Gracie Margaret Arias

- “When it flooded, we needed boats to get out of our houses. It was quite traumatizing, I still remember it. A flood wall would have protected us.”

Inocencia Raquel “Rachel” Rangel

- [The relocation compensation] “wasn’t even worth it. They just wanted you out. They wanted that land because they wanted to do business. Once we all moved out, they fixed it up. It was always happening to the people of color at that time.”

Irene Martinez

- “They were going to take over the whole land down there so then they just kept telling people at certain times you gotta move–you gotta move–you gotta go. And they didn't even give us–give the people that lived there– the value of our homes.” – Irene Martínez

Irene Sticha

- “The water was coming into our living room, kitchen. We packed up what we could take and moved in with friends. It was sad. Why didn’t they put it up [the flood wall] before, to help us stay in our homes? They didn’t think of us. I don’t know why. They told us we had to go. Everything we had was ruined.”

Bob Luna

- “What I liked most about growing up on the Flats was that there were people from every nationality, and every color, and we all coexisted awfully well together. We all grew up on the West Side and were proud of it. When I was about 12, the National Guard came in and made everybody move off the West Side so they could build businesses down there. A lot of people didn’t want to leave, and barricaded themselves in their houses. We were renters, so when they said ‘move,’ we moved. The flood wall should have been put up earlier. But I don’t imagine we paid too much taxes down there, and so we weren’t that important to them.”

Isabel (“Cookie”) Eduarda Anderson Nava

- “Lafayette School had already been closed down, so we got bussed up to Douglas School. That was not a good experience for me. There were people up there that didn't want us there, so they would stand outside when the buses would come and they'd yell stuff. Being that young, you're wondering why they're calling you names, but you're not understanding that it's because you're Mexican. To us, we were no different than the other kids, but they kept us separated. As a kid, it's hard when you come from the West Side and everything's okay, and then you go up the hill and it's not the same.”

Jesse Vasquez

- “Oh! We have had a lot of good times down on the Flats, we were just little kids. Our ma and dad never had to know where we were, we would just get up in the morning and get dressed and we would be off. And as long as we were at home by the time the sun went down, we were good. Everybody had their little salt shaker in our pocket because that's what we would do all day in the summer: raid gardens, apple trees, we'd get the tomatoes, cucumbers, you know, with our little salt because that's what we eat. That's the way it was back in back in those days.”

Linda Castillo

- “Port Authorities came in 1959 and they told us they were going to buy up the land because the land was no good, and they were going to move us up the hill, and they were going to pay us for the houses, which they didn't. My mom and dad went back to our house and they already had the bulldozer in the middle of the house. We lost a lot of furniture and stuff, but they never paid anybody. Nothing, nothing. It was like a community was just knocked down because they wanted to knock it down... we didn't know at that time that they were going to bring a freeway through there. There's no houses there no more, just a bunch of factories. There will never, never, never be another West Side like that.”

Rachel Verduzco

- I enjoyed it down there on the Flats, because we knew each other. I would walk my sister home, you didn't have to be afraid. I knew my way. I was never afraid. We used to sleep with our doors unlocked. I always liked the West Side, that's where I grew up since I was born. And I'm still here.

Refugio Simon Méndez

- **“They wanted the land.** My folks never explained why we were moving again. I think I remember the city was using the floods as a reason to move everybody” – Refugio Simón Hernández

Sandra Alayon

- “My experience with the West Side is... it's really just hard. We need something. The West Side isn't the West Side anymore. Everybody knew everybody, it was a community. You can never go back. You just gotta go forward and hope for the best.”

Wes Borgen

- “We all knew what was coming: they were going to start tearing everything down. And so you basically knew your number was coming up. You had to leave because we didn't own the house, but the person that owned the house, the city bought it from him. It was going to be all commercial down here after they tore everything down, and no one could ever live there again.” – Wes Borgen

Richard Garcia:

- “You took care of people. Everyone knew each other, you took care of each other. Jewish kids played with Mexican kids, Italian kids, Black kids, all kinds of nationalities, all kinds of people.”

Ray Garcia:

- “The ghetto or the Flats was the only place we could live with people of our race. There were places we could rent, it was affordable. It flooded three different times: the first year it didn't flood too much, next year was a little bit worse, and by the end it just took everything. I don't know why they built a barrier for the airport but they didn't extend it down.”

Ruben Garcia:

- “We had to because the city or state after the flood wanted that place, they wanted the west side, we didn't have a choice, they made everyone sell out. That's when my dad had to buy the house on Curtis. Since the state wanted that house we had to move again so they could put a freeway through there.”