

Interview with
ROBERTO PIEDRA, SR.

June 9, 2023

**ESTAMOS AQUÍ / WE ARE HERE:
LATINO VOICES IN ST. GEORGE, UTAH
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**UTAH TECH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
ST. GEORGE, UTAH**

#2023-009

Utah Tech University provides access to its collections as an unaltered, authentic historical record to aid in the research and understanding of history, while acknowledging their impact on various peoples and groups. Some collection materials are reflective of past cultures and prejudices, including images or words that are inherently offensive, insensitive and harmful. The University does not support, condone or endorse these harmful ideas, behaviors or attitudes, and they do not reflect the official opinion of the University. Rather, the University embraces a culture that prioritizes diversity and inclusion, as demonstrated in the University's Mission, Core Themes and Values.

Final editing was completed in 2023.
For permission to use any part of this transcript contact:

Special Collections and Archives
Utah Tech University Library
Holland Centennial Commons 330
Utah Tech University
St. George, UT 84770
(435) 634-2087.
specialcollections@utahtech.edu

This program has received funding from Utah
Humanities and Utah Division of State History.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or
recommendations expressed in this interview do not necessarily represent those
of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Utah Humanities, or
Utah Division of State History.



INDEX

Acapulco, Mexico	5
accept	21
Anaheim [California]	10
body surfing	6
brother	6
bullied	9, 20, 21
California	5, 8, 9, 12, 19, 20, 21
Canadians	5, 6
childhood	5, 6, 11, 12
Christmas	13
church	8, 14, 16, 17
concrete	9, 14, 15, 18, 19
construction	9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 22
cultural change	12, 19
glass business	18
grandfather	7, 8, 10, 13
house	10, 15, 16, 17, 18
Hurricane [Washington County, Utah]	10, 22
kids	5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22
Latino community	11, 12, 21
mortgage	15, 16
mother	6, 7, 8
Oscar's Cafe	17
racism	19, 20, 21
recession	4, 15
running	6, 21
school	5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21
tourism	5
traditions	7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 21
wife	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21

work

5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

ROBERTO PIEDRA, SR.

Roberto Piedra, Sr. was interviewed by Kathleen Broeder on June 9, 2023 in St. George, Washington County, Utah. He related his experiences of moving to and living in the St. George, Utah area, including during the 2008 recession. Caitlinn Grimm also contributed.

KB: Ready?

CG: Recording.

KB: I am Kathleen Broeder. I am here at the Holland Building in the Utah Tech Library on June 9th, 2023 –

CG: Twenty-three.

KB: 2023, thank you [laughter]. With Caitlinn Grimm recording and Roberto Piedra.

Roberto, would you please state and spell your full name for us?

RP: The name is Roberto Piedra. And you want me to spell it?

KB: Yes, please.

RP: R-O-B-E-R-T-O P-I-E-D-R-A.

KB: Okay, and just out of curiosity, do you have – 'cause we also did an interview with your son and he shares the same name.

RP: Yes.

KB: Do you have a distinguishing middle name? Or second last name?

RP: I actually don't.

KB: [Laughter].

RP: I actually don't so we just – since we're now in the United States, so that's how they go by Senior and Junior, so that's how –

KB: That's what you prefer?

RP: That's how we recognize ourselves.

KB: Okay. We can do that.

RP: But, it's other than a suffix or middle name, no middle names.

KB: 'Kay.

RP: Because, I don't know, we don't use middle names [chuckles].

KB: That's fair. Alright, what languages do you speak?

RP: Spanish is my main language and English.

KB: 'Kay. And where were you born?

RP: In Acapulco, Mexico.

KB: Okay, awesome. So now we're gonna move into some of those more open story questions. So, just start by telling me about your childhood and your family.

RP: My childhood was started in the very tropical area. It's a place where – it's a tourist destination, so you can imagine how busy it is and how you get to know a lot of foreigners. So Canadians, Americans, they come from all over the place. And the childhood is just you end up being what the society wants you to be. If you don't put – go through school and become a– you know, something you want to be, like through school, you have to go to work, so you have to work and be in the industry of tourism.

KB: Right.

RP: So that's how I end up – eh, my childhood was the greatest 'cause I lived on the ocean. The ocean and the school was the main thing. So after school, before school, it's spend time in the ocean. It's just like any other place when you're livin' – I lived in California, too, so I kinda like – it was almost the same. So –

KB: Okay, so do you have any specific memories about, like, what school was like?

RP: School was, I think, for me, school was the main part of my life. It's just not necessarily for education, mostly for [chuckles] socializing.

KB: Okay.

RP: So, as a kid I was very social, and I attracted a lot of other kids with me and they wouldn't do anything without me or, I don't know, I just have that attraction towards other kids. And I think school was, it was a good place to be even when in the academic way, it was really hard for me, I think, because I had problems with the teachers, in the academic way only.

KB: 'Kay.

RP: And not necessarily behavior way [chuckles].

KB: So, you attracted all the kids as like a leader, but necessarily the bad ring leader?

RP: Yes. Correct, correct.

KB: 'Kay. So what did you do at the ocean?

RP: Body surfing. Body surfing since 'cause as a kid you can't afford a surfboard or a boogie board or nothing like that, so body boarding and feeling the ocean it's like a very good experience. If no one's been on the ocean and someone that move from the city to the ocean, they usually don't wanna move back to the city. They usually wanna stay there. And there's a lot of Canadians that move in the '80s, during the '80s, that move to Acapulco. Like, a lot. So a lot of Canadians live in the area where I lived.

KB: I would not have guessed that. That's very interesting. Can you tell me a little bit about your family during your childhood?

RP: Well, my mother was a single mother –

KB: 'Kay.

RP: – with me and my brother. I have an older brother and – It was really hard for her 'cause worked like sixteen hour days and we'd be alone for long periods of time. We'll go to school by ourselves, we'll take care of ourselves most of the time, and she'll be home like probably during the whole weekend. Saturday and Sunday, she would be at home taking care of us. And I think it was really hard for her, but she would spend the time, good family time 'cause Saturday and Sunday was running day. She was a runner, so we would run about three/four miles to the beach and buy fish. So Saturday and Sunday was also fish day, too. So, fresh fish. So it would be like get up at five o'clock in the morning or somethin' like that and go to the – it wasn't the market it was actually in the beach where they pull all the nets and all that, so people will sell the fish right outta there. You just grab it and it's like hey, and I'll have this one, and just we'll walk back to home and cook. So Saturday and Sunday was a family day, running day, all together. There was some weekends that we didn't do it because she was tired or something, but she would spend good family time together. Even though she was tired all the time and she'll never show up for like school days, you know, parents' day or when everybody picks up their kids from school and like, "Okay, so mom's not here. Okay so what." We tried to get along with it. I mostly relied on my brother because he was my older brother, he's like two years older than me, and I just – I don't know how he put up with it. I think he had problems. He had personal problems, 'cause he'd get married and remarried, over and over. He's got – I think that people that do that have problems with themselves, so –. I personally don't, I've been married for twenty-nine years, and I think we have good, stable [chuckles] life.

KB: That is awesome. What did your mom do for work?

RP: She clean up of – she was a maid in a hotel, but also like they'll ask her stay for longer periods of time and she'll like more money, so –

KB: Right. It can be hard to be a single mom, so –

RP: Oh, yeah.

KB: No, that makes sense. Alright, what are some of your favorite religious or cultural traditions that you grew up with in Mexico?

RP: Religion [chuckles]. Culturally, you go along with what you were raised. So my mother was raised on all kinds of, usually Catholic, so we have all the traditions that we could have, you know all the dates that we – like the Day of the Dead, and all the other days that came in 'cause my – we lived in Acapulco, but also we would travel to another state to see my grandfather, which wasn't my grandfather [chuckles].

KB: [Chuckles].

RP: But, my mother was – her mother, my grandmother died giving birth to my mother.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: And, she didn't have nobody else, but my great-grandmother. But my great-grandmother, she was a mean lady, so my grandmother gave my mother away to somebody else.

KB: Oh.

RP: It was a really difficult way to live 'cause – but, the person that was that she gave her away, they were not married. My grandfather and my great-grandmother, they were not married.

KB: 'Kay.

RP: So it was a weird relationship, so she was given away and she was raised by my grandfather who's not blood.

KB: Right.

RP: We used to like go see him every summer. Every summer we'd go see him and spend some time in the countryside where there's like animals, and you know, besides the city you don't have all that. So, I don't know if I strayed too far away from the question.

KB: No.

RP: [Laughter] I don't know. [Inaudible]

KB: So, your favorite tradition is just going to see your grandfather over summer?

RP: Yes, and we have all the other days and traditions that we celebrated. We weren't really religious because we didn't go to church, we didn't visit church. We only went to church for a motive of a reason to like, my mother being a godmother for somebody else. So, we'll show up to church, but not really to mass every Sunday, nothing like that.

KB: 'Kay. What about any cultural traditions, were there festivals that you enjoyed or anything like that?

RP: Festivals. There were festivals like in the area just to attract tourists. It was more like, they call it like a TV and movie festivals like that.

KB: Okay.

RP: They were attracted, they were very attractive to people, to the locals, but this was mostly for other states around the place where I lived so they would bring a lot of money. So we'll go there, but not necessarily – the festivals were more like a party time and spend time in the open.

KB: Gotcha. So, can you tell me what brought you to the St. George area?

RP: I lived in California, in Southern California, for ten years. I saw my kids growing up and I didn't like the area. It pretty much is like a lot of gang members and I worked for Disneyland for a while. I worked for a subsidiary for Disneyland too, it was like the Angel Stadium, they used to be owned by Disneyland. I didn't like the area at all because my kids were growin' and I saw kinda like a future for them, but I didn't like it, the future there for them. I had a cousin that lived up in Salt Lake, he said, "Come live here. There's no gang members. ... The kids grow up in a very safe environment." I was like, "Uh, okay." So one day, I told my wife that I couldn't take it anymore 'cause I could see the future for my kids and like I'll just go leave and go see my cousin, and see what happen. But it was a November night, and I was just driving through St. George and it start snowing a [chuckles] little, bit so I didn't like – So in Southern California, I didn't like the weather and it start snowing, so I stop at the Maverick to take a break from driving and I said, "Oh, I probably can't take it." So, I called my cousin and told him "Hey, I don't think I can't go four more hours of this, and I can't imagine how hard is the snow, so." So pretty much the weather and my kids are the ones that made me stop in St. George and it's like, "eh, St. George seems like a good area." So kinda like a gypsy, and just stayed here and called in somebody. Oh, actually I went to the public library and I just looked at a job, and called a guy and it's like, "Show up and just come in." And I started working the same day that I stopped by.

KB: [Laughter].

RP: It was like in the middle of the night so I only slept like three, four hours, then went to the library and started working here in St. George, and in the afternoon started looking for a room, and that's what brought me here to St. George.

KB: So, what was the first job?

RP: Just working – since I always worked in construction, but there's a different doing concrete, they call it flat work, that's when they're doing it on the floors and all that. But here in St. George, they only have basements. Doing concrete on basements, so its walls made out of concrete, so I told him I never done anything on walls. I always work flat work and the guy says, "Don't worry about it, it's just come in, you show up." And I think he works for the – he's a teacher here in the college.

KB: Oh.

RP: He's a teacher here in the college and the – in the Utah Tech. And so, that was pretty much it, and I start working, and I said, "Well, it seemed like a good weather." The next day didn't snow [laughter].

KB: [Laughter].

RP: So, it wasn't – I told my wife, I called her and told her I found a good area and it seems like it's a good place. So I just kinda guessed, so I didn't know anything about it. Just told her, "Hey, I just found a place and we'll move."

KB: So, things were bad enough in L.A. [Los Angeles, California] that it didn't matter where you were going as long as it's not L.A. and it wasn't snowing?

RP: Yes.

KB: [Laughter].

RP: So, that was the main part and it wasn't too uncomfortable, the change for the family. Which, for the kids, it was really uncomfortable.

KB: 'Kay.

RP: So, they didn't like it.

KB: How come?

RP: I think the amount of kids, the Hispanic kids, I think that's what it was. So in Southern California there's a variety of kids, you know? But there's more Hispanic kids, but here they were like, "So, there's no Hispanic kids in the classrooms?" And they did get bullied at school, but they never told me anything. So, they put up with it. I think they did a good job. Now that they're older, I ask 'em and they're like, "There was a lot of bullying, there

was a lot.” But, they said, they wouldn’t let anybody bully us, so that’s why they called me from – They called my wife most of the time, they didn’t call me, that’s why I didn’t know. I didn’t know till they were older.

KB: That seems fair. That does seem normal. How did your wife react to coming to St. George?

RP: Well, actually, I lived in St. George for three months before I moved my family over.

KB: ’Kay.

RP: We bought a house in Hurricane. I didn’t actually like St. George. I was okay, but I wanted a rural area. More like a – have animals and like, you know, be like in the countryside where my grandfather lived or something like that. But, my wife didn’t want any of that.

KB: [Laughter].

RP: She’s used to the city, the big city, and she was afraid. And I could tell she was – she’ll do it, but she wasn’t comfortable with it. She would do it for the kids only, but I think she had to put a lot of it – a lot of the things that she liked behind so. When I showed her the house, she started cryin’ and but she kinda – I think she kinda reacted like she was happy.

KB: Were they happy tears or were they sad tears?

RP: So, that’s – I left it in a question like that, you know. I didn’t want to ask her too much. I asked her, “Do you like the house?” And she said, “Yeah, I liked it. I liked it.” It’s okay. I know she wanna say something else, but I just didn’t wanna go in depth, you know? So, I let the kids get comfortable with the area. They didn’t like it because there was nothing. There’s no skate parks, malls, or places where they could go watch a game, like you know stadiums or, you know, go to the Anaheim stadium or something like that.

KB: Right.

RP: When we did live in Anaheim.

KB: Gotcha.

RP: So really close to Disneyland. So, we’ll spend – we’ll get tickets for Disneyland every so often since I work for them. But they didn’t – the change was really radical for them. For me, it was like I’m always working sixteen hour days and it was like go home and sleep and wake up. I did that for thirteen years and I stopped doing that in around 2011.

KB: Good.

RP: And I said like, “I couldn’t take it anymore.” It was like no more double work, so –.

KB: Yeah, that's fair.

RP: [Laughter].

KB: Sixteen hour days are a lot.

RP: Yes.

KB: It would explain why your wife had to pick up the kids most of the time if somethin' happened. Absolutely.

RP: Mm-hmm. So my wife was mostly in charge of everything. I was just a father figure when they needed to be a little bit more strong hand or somethin' like that.

KB: Were you home on like weekends kinda like your mom had been? For family days?

RP: I was home every day. But like on the weekends, the days I have off, we'll spend them together, almost all day watching movies and maybe goin' out. Which, back in the day, there was not much in St. George. We go out – there's a – they didn't like hiking or anything, all the stuff that they have here, so I tried to counteract whatever they left with goin' out in nature, like nature-wise We'll visit Red Cliffs a lot and they kinda like, "We kinda like it." And they started loving more nature. I think they started liking nature more than what I expected. I didn't think they were gonna like that.

KB: After they got past the adjustment period, I'm guessing.

RP: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

KB: [Chuckles] That's fair. So, how have, maybe, some of your religious or cultural traditions changed since childhood or being here in St. George?

RP: Culturally-speaking, since there's no celebrations of no other – other people celebrating because it's a gathering of people, you know? You socialize, and since there's nothing, none of that, you forget your traditions and you pretty much leave the Day of the Dead, it's usually for people to come gather round and eat and talk about who you're remembering.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: But, usually, since you don't have no other people to talk to or celebrate it with, it kinda gets – it kinda gets lost, all the tradition and the gathering. But, since there's more people and more families moving in, 'n all that. So, I think it regains a little bit of the tradition, but very, very slow, since it's not – You can't do it here. I don't know.

KB: 'Kay. The lack of just other people within the Latino community makes it really hard to –

RP: Yes! Socially, for the Latino community, socializing is like any other community. I think even in American communities, they like talking. I figure out when I moved to the States, a lot of people like to talk and I was a really – even though a lot of kids follow me in school and all that, and I wasn't a very, a guy that likes to talk much. Because I don't know if it was tradition or it was my family side, but I saw a difference between Americans that like talk, they express themselves, they talk a lot about their feelings, and I just adjusted to that. But, I wasn't – before I wasn't just like open to talk to anybody about my feelings, about anything. It was just my family, you know. Even, you're a social person, but when you socialize, you don't talk about something deep or about your family, something private, which in the American community is more open and like, "Okay, well you tell me about all your getting remarrying or something." Or why you left your wife. I think things are not, things no.

KB: Just no. [Laughter].

RP: [Laughter]. Don't go together. Well for the [stammering] how I was raised and it didn't work out. So, I started adjusting and talking to people more, but just keeping to myself, too [chuckles].

KB: That's fair. So, that's probably – sounds like a really big cultural change for you. Just the openness.

RP: Yes. It was a very cultural change, a huge one. 'Cause when I worked in California, I worked with a Russian mason and I was not speaking to him. I was just tending for him, just doing the mud and getting all the bricks and all this construction work, and he said one thing, like, "Hey, you better stop not talking. You better start talking to me, 'cause your job is to keep me entertained."

KB: [Laughter].

RP: I go like, "Really? That's my job?" He said, "Yeah, not only this and this, you gotta keep me entertained. 'Cause I gotta keep my mind off work." I like, "Okay." "So you gotta talk to me." I think he already made the change on the cultural way, even though he was Russian.

KB: Right.

RP: And I go, "Okay." So I started working out that path with him, so.

KB: [Chuckles] Very interesting. Is there any traditions that you stopped doing that maybe you did in your childhood after you came to the St. George area?

RP: Yeah. [Chuckles] All of 'em.

KB: [Chuckles]. All of them?

RP: All of 'em, since you don't have anybody to gather with and do all this things that you liked. It's like celebrating Christmas with no one. It's like only with your family, but usually when they celebrate Christmas, it's just for with more people, you know? So there's a lot of traditions that we left behind. And not necessarily Christmas, 'cause Christmas was not – my grandfather always told us, "That's not a holiday. That's not a holiday. It didn't exist when I was a child so –" So we always took it as a non-Christian –

KB: It's not a big day.

RP: – holiday. It's not a big day. He always said that, "Like that's nothing, 'cause they only came up with it a few years ago," or something like that. "When in my lifetime," or something like that, he said. Like okay. So it was a – so here when we moved to St. George it's like, so my wife will buy gifts and all that for the kids. But other traditions, like traditional days, like for, like in Mexico where they have like a – they have two days at least to celebrate in every month. So, it was really, really different. They have two celebrations in each month, so it was different.

KB: That would be different to have two a month and then go to almost nothing.

RP: Yes, yes. It was like nothing. Because, also, all the days that you celebrated, they were related to school days. Like Independence Day, after Independence Day, they have like other days they added so they keep the celebration goin'. Things like that.

KB: I like that idea; keeping the celebration going. [Laughter].

RP: [Laughter].

KB: 'Kay. Have there been any changes with any religious traditions you wanna talk about?

RP: Well, religiously-wise, I, dealing with the Mormon [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] community [chuckles] – It's different to find out how other religions think or what they do. And me, personally, think about what they make out of what one book says. It's very interesting how one mind will read one thing and another mind will read another thing. And it'll be the same book.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: And it doesn't happen in other books. When you have like an architectural book, you read and it's like this is set, you know. There's no different mind doing, "Oh, this might be different because of this," but it's not different. But the Bible, it's like religiously-wise, it changes in every mind of the person, you know. Like, I'll say an example of when the book says that God is love and people believe in Hell, how would a loving father would let people burn in Hell for eternity? And that it don't make sense because Hell, it's made out of – I personally think it's made from people's hate.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: Because if God is love, how does that translate?

KB: Right.

RP: So, it's just my translation to it. So, 'n other people will be, "No, no, they need to be punished and they need to be burned in Hell!" And you see that and you see the contrary when you read the book, but people see other things. So, people's minds are religiously-wise – I didn't teach my kids religion. I always – no church, no nothing, we never went to church. I never took 'em to church. My wife never took 'em to church and we decided not to lead 'em through any religious belief until they can pick, until they can understand what they were reading or what they were they were told. But the days of traditions were not necessarily religious, it was just like a gathering time.

KB: Right.

RP: So, it was, for me it was kinda difficult in that case, 'cause my kids would ask me questions that sometimes related to religion and I'll just leave it off, 'cause I told 'em, "Well, later on you'll pick and you'll understand." Because they were told this in school 'cause the Mormons said this and the Catholics think that, and I never let 'em to get mixed up in that. I told 'em, "When you grow up, you gotta pick and you gotta make up out of this book, which is the word of God. It's like, you gotta make it to yourself. You gotta adjust it to what you want or what you think it says, because a lot of people –" It's really difficult. I thought it was difficult for me to not teach them about God, you know, since we were like, we were not Catholic, but my mom would always teach us. She changed religions quite often.

KB: Mm.

RP: But, she never dragged us in it. She never like pushed it. You gotta do this, you gotta do that. We'll see it, she was like Evangelical, she was Catholic, she was – she'll do different things and we'll watch only. And I decided with my kids to do almost the same thing, like, "Okay, you guys do whatever you guys want when you grow up and think about it."

KB: Okay. Awesome. We're gonna switch gears a little bit.

RP: Okay.

KB: We wanna go back and talk more about your work. I know you do concrete, what is it like working in construction here though?

RP: Here?

KB: Or, U.S., wherever.

RP: St. George is a good area to work in construction 'cause the weather, it's a great weather. I know it's a – it used to be, St. George was founded as a senior community so they moved here for the weather. For the – what are they called – the birds.

KB: The snowbirds.

RP: The snowbirds, yeah. So, I think the weather is mainly what brings people to St. George. And the construction, for me it's been – since it's my main thing to do, it was always great to do it here in St. George. I worked for a few contractors doin' not necessarily concrete work, but they'll have me do all, everything. Concrete, framing, so we'll build a full house sometimes within six months or something like that. So, it is a good area to work at in the construction way. There's always been work, except for the 2007-2008 recession when everything went down and nobody had work, so it was a very difficult time here in St. George.

KB: How did you weather that?

RP: I didn't work. So there's an experience of a mortgage-wise, I didn't have money to pay the mortgage. So the mortgage company would call me and say, "Hey, you gotta pay your mortgage." "Yeah, but there's no work, so what do you want me to do?" "So, like go find work" and blah blah blah. Like, "Well, you gotta help me out right here." It's like, "No, we're not." Okay. So, I stopped paying for a year and a half.

KB: Oh.

RP: And they never kick me out. And my wife will be scared 'cause she'll see people comin' around and tell me every time I go back home that I'll find a little bit of work here and there with people who will pay me cash –

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: – and it was very little money. And I told her, "Hey, don't worry about it. We'll get by." And the last call I have from the mortgage company, they told me, "Hey, we're gonna come by and we'll take your house and we'll repossess it." I go, "Well, you're welcome to do it." And I told my wife to help her ease her fears, I told her, "Well, they can't kick us right now, like right away, 'cause they need a notice."

KB: Right.

RP: The sheriff's gotta show up with a ninety day notice, otherwise we can't – they can't do that. It's not lawfully legal. So, I did something to the house. I didn't destroy the house, but I made it look like more not –

KB: As presentable.

RP: Yes.

KB: [Laughter].

RP: So, they called me and they said, “We’ll work something out with you.” When they saw that. Because somebody else told me that, “Hey, you gotta do something to show ’em that you wanna stay,” but they also – I think it was Obama –

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: – that passed the laws, that already passed a bunch of laws that all the mortgage companies have to help all the tenants. But my mortgage company didn’t wanna help me, so I made them help me.

KB: I see.

RP: So, I sold a bunch of – to get money, we had like a twelve foot wall maybe, on the back of the property ’cause the property is like offset from the bottom up.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: We had like a big wall made out of diamond blocks. Diamond blocks are really expensive back in the day, and I sold them really cheap. This guy from Tropic, I put an ad on Craigslist and I said two dollars apiece and I made two thousand dollars, and the house didn’t look presentable, but it’s just one of those things that – My wife was really mad about it, she didn’t like the house looking like that. It’s like, “Okay, well, they’re gonna take the house. We’ll make some money out of it, you know.”

My neighbor across the street got kicked out of his house, too, and I told him what to do and he didn’t wanna do it. I told him, “Well –” He was like, “What do I do?” I go like, “Take the cabinets out, leave them outside, and they’ll see the house has got no cabinets and they’ll work something out with you.” And he was scared and he didn’t do it. So he lost his house. Another neighbor, it was the only Hispanic neighbor I had for a long time, so he lost his house in 2007-2008. And the mortgage company now called me. Before I called them to work something out and now they called me, and they said, “Hey, we wanna work something out with you and we just gonna put a year and a half behind,” or something like that. Redo a contract or something. I was like, “Okay.” And also, had framing job doing the Foremaster church.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: The one at the very top, and the contractor didn’t pay us.

KB: Oh, no.

RP: Uh-huh. We worked there for two weeks and he said, “Well, if you guys work another one more week for me, I’ll pay you guys” and blah blah blah. So we worked three weeks for this guy without pay, and we framed the whole church and the guy disappeared.

KB: So you never got paid for that job?

RP: We never got paid for that job for three weeks. And all the other employees were just standing there one morning to show up for work and everybody’s like, “Where is this guy?” He’s like nowhere to be seen. So we never got paid on that Foremaster church. And it was really difficult times, 2008, 2007, but I think I got by pretty good. My wife got a job up in, I think in, Springdale, cleaning rooms. Since it was a tourist area, they didn’t suffer as much in the construction, we weren’t suffering as much as here.

KB: Right.

RP: That’s when I move from construction to I worked in Oscar’s Cafe for a couple of years. So while the 2008 through 2010 or somethin’ like that, I said, no, no more.

KB: ’Cause it took a while for the economy to get back.

RP: Yes, and the tourist thing it was they just kept coming, but the construction and everything else and everywhere, there was nothing. So –

KB: So, what did you do after Oscar’s?

RP: Construction. I went back to construction.

KB: Okay.

RP: Oscar’s, it was good, but it’s a restaurant. That’s when I stopped working sixteen hour days and all that, since there was no work and I was like, “ ... uh.” I had to do something else. Oscar’s Cafe, it was good but it’s not, they didn’t pay as good as construction.

KB: Right. That makes sense. So, you’re still doing construction?

RP: Actually, I drag – I moved away from construction but it stayed on the – now I work with glass. For the last seven, eight years.

KB: ’Kay.

RP: So, I had a person that I clean his yard up in Springdale [Utah] because I was working Oscar’s and this person saw me and said like, “Hey, you need work?” I go, “Uh, maybe. What do you want me to do?” “Oh, I have a house –” He’s actually an entrepreneur that lives in [Las] Vegas and he has an invention like some type of typewriter, like a – I don’t know. They have money, so they have a house up in Anasazi Plateau and Springdale, and

he said, “Well, I need my place to be cleaned up, you know, once a week,” and he had no plants.

KB: Mm.

RP: But, he only had like the brush that grew around the house. So I worked there for a couple hours, back in the day he’ll pay me twenty dollars an hour and it was – I think it was a good deal ’cause I would spend like two or three hours doin’ a little bit of work. He had cameras, back in the day, those very big cameras in his house. He would survey it from Vegas or something like that. They was pretty rich people. I worked for him in – I forgot the question. [Laughter].

KB: [Laughter]. I was –

RP: Why was I talking about this guy?

KB: I was asking what you do now, and you were telling me how you got into work with glass.

RP: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So I worked for him for a while so he didn’t wanna work – He didn’t want me to work for him no more.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: But, he didn’t wanna leave me without work. I told him it was okay ’cause I was doin’, after that I was just doin’ my own thing. I was just doing a little bit of concrete work for this person and that person and everything was going good. I had kinda like my own schedule for my work. I actually filed taxes for those 2009, 2010 something like that, filed taxes on my own business.

KB: Oh, very fun.

RP: So, I think I was doin’ good. But he insisted that I’ll go work for his friend. His friend is Mark Singleton, the owner of Desert Star Glass. And I told him, “I don’t wanna go work for this guy.” For a long time, he’ll always tell me. Okay, so one day, I say, “Okay, I’ll go work for this guy.” And I didn’t think it was gonna be a good patron, you know, good boss. Because this guy was like rich people and they were like always giving me gifts for my kids and doing all this things, giving me extra money. Just worked like two hours, and they’d pay me for four or five hours. Like okay. So I didn’t wanna leave him, but they didn’t want me to –

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: So, they pushed me to this guy and I started working for Mark. And at first it was a little bit of a shock, ’cause tryin’ to deal with people’s attitudes and all that, and I got around him and we got along pretty good, and I think that’s how I got into the glass business. I

didn't like it all, but it was like – And I tell everybody that go – I've been working for him for a long time, so he made me a supervisor and to train everybody that will come in to work for him, and I tell everybody that this is the most dangerous job you could ever have. Because the glass business, you can see cuts that you'll never see before. Yes. Yes, working with glass you gotta be really careful and it's no fun. It's not like working with concrete. I mean, like all the jobs are dangerous if you expose yourself, but I think glass is more, it's extremely. You can make it very safe, by putting all the gear and all that, but you can also make it really unsafe working with other people that they don't know anything about how to handle a piece of glass, they're kinda rough on them. So that's how I went into working with the glass.

KB: Very interesting. 'Kay, so we're gonna switch gears a little bit here again. On this one we wanna just kinda talk about what are your experiences here with the broader St. George community?

RP: What do you mean by the broader, like the –?

KB: Just St. George in general.

RP: St. George in general. I don't know if it's people from St. George or people who move to St. George, you know? Like that I work with. I have a lot of friends that I made through my work, but I think, personally, like I tell my kids, you gotta be straight forward sometimes and tell the truth, you know? And I think racism, it's a experience that kinda like you try to push it – you deal with it, but it's, I think it's very, very deep in it. When you deal with other people and you start talking to them and you see how they think and how they behave and start doin' all – Like when you work with a Hispanic, other Hispanic worker, even though when you're communicating with other people, other workers that don't speak Spanish [English], they have a tendency like, "Hey, you better speak Spanish [English] because you're in the United States." Or you have to do this, and you wonder sometimes how what's the meaning of their words. Not necessarily how they feel uncomfortable about you, but how they come about. Why they say it, you know? Sometimes when you start knowing them, they don't relate to other people that have other cultures. So a lot of people who don't relate to Hispanic community, they tend to be more aggressive towards it or something like that. It's not like being Mt. Pleasant here in Utah and being in like Southern California where kinda like a cultural change and you see Hispanics, you know? And in Spanish, we have a saying that when you're cleaning the rice, well, I don't know you don't clean the rice much here. [Laughter].

KB: I do. [Laughter].

RP: But, when you clean the rice, you see little specks like black stuff, you know. So that's kinda like we have saying that when you see the black specks, you don't like it. So, that's how I – But other than that, you just have to let the culture, the Hispanic – because the community has grown. The Hispanics have grown and more and more people are accustomed to other people, other races, to other color. I know the Samoans, they were not many back in the day, so they started comin' in and people get more accustomed to

their food or things like that. I think it's like, that's more – that's my experience with the community here in St. George. It's difficult, but people I think they get used to it, in time. I saw the changes in Southern California, 'cause it was almost the same when I moved in 1995.

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: There was not a lot of Hispanic speaking people, you know? So it was difficult, but it grew and it changed in time. And I see the same change here. I'm seeing all the changes that we've been through and even the community here in school, how more and more kids are coming to school. And I can see the change very, very rapidly happening here in St. George, especially.

KB: 'Kay. So with that change in the kind of community make up, what are your thoughts on the Latino and Hispanic community here?

RP: They're growing, but it's not – they kinda like keep to themselves still. They're not very open, like let's they would – if we call in for Hispanic people to come in and gather to talk about something in the community, I don't think they'll show up.

KB: Hmmm.

RP: I don't think so. But, since it's grown a little bit more, and the concerns, their kids and all that, I think it'll happen within the next five or six years, I think.

KB: That makes sense. And you hit a little bit on this I think, but one of our questions is just have you experienced racist or prejudice behavior here? And what was it like?

RP: I have. But, it's since I was a non-bullying guy, well, a guy that never liked being bullied, since I was bullied since I was little 'cause of my age – 'cause of my neighborhood it was like I was the youngest, and I always got bullied 'cause the youngest is like always pushed. And I was a lefty so I was bullied for everything [chuckles], so they never let me play soccer. It's like, "Oh, you gotta kick with the other one," or – so I had to adjust, I'm a righty kicking and doin' all those things, but not with my hands. – So the racism here, I never let it get to me. Even though I had it at work a lot, I always stood up for myself and they saw that it was – I wasn't an aggressive person, I didn't consider myself an aggressive person, but a person that would if you insult me and you try to do all this things, I'm like, "Hey, you better stop that." So, we had a few jobs where we went into a fist fight.

KB: Oh.

RP: We had to come up to fist fight, but after that respect was very deep.

KB: [Chuckles]. So was that fist fight with other coworkers?

RP: Yes, that disrespected and never seen, never deal with Hispanics. They'll come in from northern Utah, from the areas where's not that many Hispanics, and they didn't like it. They didn't like the – I think they didn't like the fact that we'll work with them together, I think. And I think race-wise, it's like, "What is this guy doin' here?" You know? That was pretty much their questions, but since I was like a little bit more [chuckles] aggressive person. I stopped being aggressive and more mellow 'cause in California I had a like, I went to a community college; I didn't go to community college too much, I just went for like two semesters or something like that and I took more classes like boxing classes and things like that, so I became really aggressive. When you feel power and you feel like you know a lot of things, like, "Oh, I can take these guys pretty good." So I never let myself down on that, but the racism you could tell it was very deep. I never asked my kids about what they were experiencing in school which I regret, but my wife was the one that she put up with the kids, you know? And my kids never let themselves get bullied too much about it, too.

KB: Well, they might have had a good role model on that.

RP: [Chuckles].

KB: Alright, we kinda already talked about the changes that you've seen here so I'm going to skip that question and just kinda let you end with, what do you want people to know about yourself and your community?

RP: To let them know that, in time people will accept, you know, like a broader community, they will accept what's around them. In time people will understand what you, where you're comin' from, 'cause as long as you interact with the community. I try to interact with the community by – I became a runner in 2012. I said kinda like we're always running, 'cause of the weekends we'll do three miles runs and all that. But in 2012 I said, I'll just be – I stopped working too much and my own work, just have one job and just go run, relax. And I became a runner and I started putting up more with the community, interacting with the community here in St. George, the running center, 'n all the people, all the events that happen here. So, running was a good way to interact with the St. George community and people get to know me more, like I was the only Hispanic running the St. George marathon back when I could, since I got diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, last year, May last year. I want people to know that in time people will accept you 'cause not necessarily for you personally, but as a community, 'cause we're here in St. George and they know there's more people like us that have a purpose to bring the community, to have the community together, to hold it together, and become part of the community, and that's the main goal. Not necessarily, fight the community that's already here, or have problems with it. It's more like becoming part of the community we have. Even though we have our own traditions, our own – we lose some of the traditions, but we also gain a lot, so we borrow and the Latino community also celebrate with the Fourth of July –

KB: Mm-hmm.

RP: – and all this things, and we melt together. But it's the melting, it's not there yet, but it's happening. It's happening more and more. You can see more Latino kids in other places, not necessarily like in the serving area, you know, and the restaurants and the maids, but becoming more intellectual, and you can see other, hopefully we'll see a Latino judge soon. [Laughter]. I never had problems with the law even though I had been in fist fights, but I would like to see a Latino judge sometime in the near future and interacting with the community and people knowin' that we're here to, not to take their jobs or nothing like that, but to help 'em, to grow up with the community. And the community is growin' so fast that you don't – a lot of people movin' in, a lot, and the construction goin' on. And I always saw the future of St. George as little Vegas.

KB: Mm.

RP: When you come into Vegas, when you're driving into Vegas and you see all that. When you're comin' into St. George or comin' in from the north down, it'll be almost like that. It'll be a big, big area to visit, and it's beautiful. It's got nothing. It doesn't have nothing from the ocean, because it's got, I found out it's got so much to see, so much things to do here in the community, all the parks, all the people. The people are really amazing here. For me, everything – There's been little hiccups here and there, but in talking about more broadly, it's been really a good experience for me. And my neighbors, I have the greatest neighbors ever, so I never had problems with no neighbors. I came into the community one day and had cakes, 'n they had a good receiving time when I came in the first day into Hurricane. So I really, I say, it's a good area, good neighborhood and I think we're here to stay, and it is pretty.

KB: 'Kay. Thank you so much for your time, Roberto.

RP: Oh, thank you so much for having me, and hopefully this will help someone in the future.

KB: I believe it will.

CG: Okay.

RP: Hopefully, I had a –

KB: You had a very lovely story to te–

[END OF RECORDING ONE. END OF INTERVIEW.]