

Archive408



ORAL HISTORY

San Jose Trans Oral History Project: An Interview with Felicia Elizondo

0:00 / 48:50

Oral history with Felicia Elizondo

Recorded on October 17th, 2019 in Felicia's home in San Francisco, California.

**“It’s important to me that
San Jose knows their history.”**



Illustrated
by Benny
Arana
O'Hara.

Introduction

Archive408 is creating an oral history library featuring the life stories of transgender, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary individuals with ties to San Jose. We are committed to documenting their stories, in their own words, using the language they choose to describe themselves and their lived experiences. If you are interested in participating, please email us at submissions@archive408.com (<mailto:submissions@archive408.com>) or call us at 408.239.9531. Oral history interviews take about one hour, and can take place wherever the interviewee is most comfortable. We offer an honorarium of \$50 per interview.

CW: descriptions of CSA, descriptions of sexual assault, medical language, transphobia, homophobia, and police violence.

Transcript

Archive408: Do you want to introduce yourself?

Felicia Elizondo: Oh, of course, I always . . . do you love my introduction?

Archive408: Yes!

Felicia: My name is Felicia A. Elizondo. I'm also known as Felicia Flames. I am a transsexual woman—male to female. I am an activist, entertainer, a historian, a trailblazer, a Tenderloin queen, a pioneer, a legend, an icon, a diva, a 32-year survivor of AIDS, and a Vietnam War veteran.

Archive408: That's an introduction!

Felicia: It is. I love that because most people say "ooh I've never heard that kind of introduction!"

Archive408: It's great! It's really good.

Felicia: How I did those all together is from getting well known in the community, because I've been in the community for a long time, so ...

I was born Felipe A. Elizondo to my father Felipe and to my mother Juanita. I am Spaniard, Sioux Indian, Mexican, and another thing that I don't know. I was raised in San Angelo, Texas where we were segregated. Whites had their school; Mexicans had their school; Blacks had their school. Our community is the only one that we knew. Only when we went downtown we would see different people. I even saw Woolworths where it used to have a sign: For Whites Only fountain and a Black fountain. I always wondered why Blacks were always in the back of the bus, and I got to learn in the future.

I was a sissy. There's no doubt that I was a sissy. There's no other way that I could feel just what I was feeling. I mean, I couldn't change. And I didn't have a father. My father died when I was about three or four years old. My brother was twenty years older, and he was on his own. I have a sister that's fifteen years older, Fay. And my other sister Mary is one year older than me, then it's me, and then my baby sister Dolores. After a while, when my father died and my mother was having a hard time, she found out that welfare was better in California, and my sister was already living here. So they brought us to San Ysidro, California.

I was raised in a community that it was just secluded. How we got to know about sex—because our parents wouldn't tell us nothing about it—was the little boys started playing with each other. And that's how we got to know. But nobody told us it was right or wrong, you know what I mean? It was just a thing that was ... you know. We didn't say anything, and our parents—well, they didn't even know I don't think. Or maybe they did know and just thought it was just a kid thing or something.

[3:33] But later on I was molested by ... it wasn't molested, it was playing around with an older man, with an older friend. My best friend that I loved to death, Ruben ... I fell in love with him at seven or eight years old, and he was my best friend and we did a lot of things together. And then his brother was older, about three or four years older than me, and he started playing with me but I didn't know any better. [muffled]

So anyway, we decided to move to San Jose ... no, to San Ysidro. My sister was living in San Ysidro. I got to know ... I still was playing with boys, you know the young kids around the neighborhood. And one time we were living in the trailer home and there was this older man that was living two trailers down, and he got me into his trailer. And he started masturbating me and I didn't know what was happening to me because I never ... I was about twelve or so, something like that ... eleven, twelve years old ... and he started masturbating me and I thought I was gonna die. But then I found out that's what guys do. We started messing around, you know, and then my mother decided she wanted to go to Texas and live in our own ...

[05:06] We owned a home in Texas so ... but she didn't like it, so we came back, and then we came to, uh ... we were supposed to move to Modesto, CA but my uncle wasn't there, so we moved to Stockton. A good friend of ours who lived in San Angelo moved to Stockton, so we started living there at a, uh ... it used to be workers camp but it was not a workers camp any more. So I met this guy named Victor. He was tall, Latino ... I mean Spaniard, tall ... and very swishy. I says oh my god, I'm not the only one. So, uh, we were gonna have sex but we were two girls, so we decided to be best friends. But they used to make fun of him like they used to make fun of me because I was feminine and that's the way ... I didn't know how to act ... I had no other way to act. So he, uh, we were going to have sex together but we were both two girls so we decided not to.

[06:16] Then we moved to San Jose. I think I was around twelve or fourteen when I got to be at San Jose High on the 9th grade or 10th grade, somewhere around there. They used to always make fun of me. They used to say horrible things to me—it was just embarrassing—and I hated to go to school. On my junior year, I ran for head cheerleader and I won. I was the first male cheerleader to be—what do you call it?—put in that position. But the kids in my junior year made it so bad that my grades fell down and my senior year I could not fulfill my job. So there was another gay guy, or another guy, that was beneath me and he got the leadership. So at the time that they were doing all this, the varsity ganged up on me in the hallways. Lucky that a teacher was passing by, and he stopped it.

[07:35] At the same time, earlier, I have just the ... I didn't know about St. James Park. All I knew is that I was walking down Santa Clara Street with my coat draped like sissies used to do at the time, and this guy stopped me and he told me about ... he stopped me, he took me to wherever, we had sex, he gave me some money, and that's how I started prostitution. I needed that money because my mother was on welfare and I had to ... you know how young kids want. That was at the time of The Beatles. Everybody wanted to have the hair and do all that stuff. So one day, he uh, he picked me up, he brought me home, he says "oh by the way, you know what?" I says "what?" "Your kind hang around St. James Park." "And where is that?" "On first and second between St. John and St. James." And I started going there. I met a whole bunch of kids. Young kids that, you know, uh ... there was my best friend Bernie, Tommy, there

was a whole list of them, but I'll tell you in a second. And we started hanging around there. And we used to, uh, prostitute. You know, the older men used to come and give us money for whatever they wanted us to do. That's how we got to be in a group ... a big group together.

[09:26] And another thing, a hang around was Around the Clock on Santa Clara Street between 1st and 2nd? It was like Compton's but it wasn't Compton's. It was way before Compton's. We used to hang around there because that's the only place we could hang around with.

And another thing too: the Crystal was the gay bar on San Fernando Street. We used to hang out at 2 o'clock in the morning to see if we would get picked up or we'd run to the park. If we needed money we knew we could have money there. So, uh, we used to hang around there and that's how we made extra money for us because we were too young to work, we were too young leave home, and that's how I met Bernie, and Tommy, and Ray, and Dee and a whole bunch of kids. We got to know a lesbian. Her name was Ann. She lived on Florence Street up on the east side. We used to hang around her house too because she had three kids. We used to hang around her house; we were all teenagers and stuff like that. It was a place to go and hang out when we couldn't hang out at the park or at Around the Clock or in front of the Crystal. It was just one of those things.

I was a really good looking boy at one time and I used to get a lot of money and I got a sugar daddy called ... his name was Wally. But before that, we used to hang around the park and what happened is that I was walking—if you see 2nd Street is this way, 1st Street is this way, Julian is this way, and St. James is this way? I was walking towards 1st Street and there was this man with a big hat and he started coming toward me. And he talked to me and I know he was a priest and he grabbed my hand and put it on his ... what do you call it ... well, the penis area. And then I said, "but you're a priest!" And he says, "oh, ok." So I walked away promising that I would never go to church again. And I never have. Only once I went to church for my mother's funeral. But other than that I never went to church.

I have my beliefs here at home; I'm Catholic. But for that instance that this priest propositioned me and put my hand on his crotch was traumatic to me because I went home and cried and cried. It was ... yeah, I could deal with everybody that paid me but to a priest? I was just shocked that a priest could do that because I never heard of these priests molesting until way later on. And, uh, I just was reserved. I don't go to church at all. I hold my church here whenever I think about it or when there's a sad thing that I want to do, I lay in front of my Virgencita de Guadalupe and pray and stuff like that.

[13:22] But then I met this older guy named Wally. He was my sugar daddy. He brought me to The Tenderloin. But there was other things before The Tenderloin. The kids had nowhere else to go. We had no place to help us because of who we were. It was just word-of-mouth that everything happened, because it wasn't no organizations or anything like that to help us or to make us understand who we were. Because we didn't know! We knew that we were queer, sissies but as far as having this ... I tried to change. I tried very hard to change because I ... my sugar daddy brought me to the tenderloin. We used to play hooky from school, me and Bernie and Tommy. At the old Greyhound Bus Depot? And take the Greyhound to 7th and Market ... but we'd only go so far because we were afraid of ... we didn't know what it was, you know?

I had seen it with my sugar daddy but I was secure because I was with him. But being alone and underage was traumatic.

[14:44] **Archive408:** Do you remember the first time you came to St. James Park and how did you identify the people you wanted to hang out with? Like, could you ... were there just like groups of kids already there?

Felicia: I don't know how it came about but we got to be really good friends. We got to go to their houses, we got to know their families and stuff like that ... but, we just knew. What is a young kid doing there at the park at night time? You know?

Archive408: What words did you use to describe yourselves? Did you have ... cuz you're saying that when you came here [to the Tenderloin] that you were like afraid because you didn't have, like, you weren't sure what you were getting into maybe.

Felicia: I knew I was different and a guy told me my ... the people who hang around St. James Park was like me. I think that I was a queer. That's what everybody labeled us as in the sixties, you know, that we were queer, that we were different, that we were sick, that we were molesters and stuff like that. When we ... I never got to go to bed with my best friends, which were total strangers, but we knew that we were sissies but yet boys when it came it money. We knew who to go to bed with. I never in my relationships in the beginning, I never played the man's part with my lovers. I always was the girl. In the park I was ... you paid for it, you got it. So, uh, but I don't know ... just word of mouth. I mean, just hanging around the park you got to be really good friends with a whole bunch of people, with a whole bunch of kids.

Archive408: Did it feel dangerous to be there? Like did you feel ... was there a lot of police police activity there?

Felicia: None. Very rarely. I mean, I never felt danger there because there was a whole bunch of us at the time that we could ... you know ... and the people that picked us up weren't wanting to molest us or beat us up or kill us. They just wanted sex, to pay for it, and then go. It was just easy ... easy for them to come and have sex with us and then move on. For us, I didn't feel ... um, like something was going to happen to me. I always felt free that I could do whatever I wanted to at the park because, of course, in the middle of the park which is on first street, was the rest room. The rest room was the place where if you wanted a quickie, you would head to the back bathroom and people were there always having sex one way or the other.

Archive408: Yea, they took that out in the early 90s. There's no public restroom there anymore.

Felicia: And then there was a building right across the street on the other side of the park but I don't know if it was a rest room or not?

[18:18] **Archive408:** There used to be a senior center there.

Felicia: Yes! Right on the corner of Third and Julian ... yeah. And right beside that there used be a building ... it used to be like a [??] toilet I guess but they closed it. So they made the main one on First Street and Second.

Archive408: Did you see protests there in the park ever? I know there was one in 1969 but I don't know if there was before that?

Felicia: No.

Archive408: What about the bars that you were talking about ... The Crystal?

Felicia: Oh, The Crystal was a ... I had a picture of it too. Because I'm doing a collage, or a tour, of when I started at St. James Park, come to The Crystal, go down the street and then come to the Tenderloin and all the bars that used to be in the Tenderloin. And the only ones at that time was The Crystal. As we grew up ... as we got older there was Macs. There was Bucks, Renegades ...

Archive408: Renegades is still there, yeah!

Felicia: Mac's moved to the little street on the side of the ...

Archive408: Was that on Post St?

Felicia: Yea, Post St. Yea, and the Crystal was on San Fernando on the opposite block.

Archive408: What was The Crystal like? Who hung out there?

Felicia: Gay boys. Just gay boys, period. I don't think I ever saw lesbians there because they weren't that out. I always say: lesbians and gays stayed in the closet, made their money, got their education where we could not. [20:20] We could not do that. Because being sissies it was very difficult to get a job. Although I did get jobs. I always worked all my life, one way or the other whether it was acting straight when I walked in and then acting gay when I felt like. I think at, uh ... I had been with my lover Anthony and he wanted me to play the man's role and I broke up with him because I could not. And then John ... I broke up with him and we were living in San Mateo and I told my mom that I didn't want to be this way. So I decide that the best ... oh! Yeah. I did not want to be this way so I decided to join the military. I went in to my brother in law who was Mary's husband, my older sister. He took me to the recruiting station. I went to the army. They wouldn't take me because I was too short. But the Navy took me and I went through boot camp. Played the ... I should have won an academy award! Because I did the recruitment training and I was stationed in Coronado. I was a cook and I was a clerk. And then they were taking recruits to go to Vietnam and I decided, well, I am not going to change but I would love to make my mother happy.

So I volunteered to go to Vietnam. Maybe I would get killed, and that way my mother would have a hero for a son. But then being in Vietnam, being in Da Nang and stuff like that, and seeing all those men! My god! Rows and rows and buildings and buildings! I went a ... what do you call it? ... there used to be an organization that had off premises things for the military? And I met a French teacher, and he took me to his house and we had sex and when I came back I was AWOL so they put me in jail for a couple of days and then I says 'You know something? I've had enough.' I was unloading cargo from a ship, way down there in the freezers and then I told myself 'If the military can't make me a man, nothing will.'

I went to my priest and I told him who I was, and I went to the captain and I told him where I was ... and the CIA and the FBI interrogated me because it was during a time of war and they let me come to treasure island to discharge.

[23:42] But I've been beaten, I've been raped, I've been thrown in jail, I've been harassed a lot of times because of who I was meant to be. I had my sex change done in 1974. Oh, by the way, when I came back from Chicago with my lover and seen the Christine Jorgensen movie, I said 'that's who I am! How the hell am I gonna get there? It takes a lot of money to have a sex change. So I came back to California and I started working for different companies. I even tried to go back to the Tenderloin but it was just not what I wanted.

I started working for the telephone company: Pacific Bell. Pacific Telephone. On Market Street, right next to the Catholic Church. And I was a long distance operator. I was the first male telephone operator in the state of California.

So I got hired. I talked the way I talk now but they told me "can you talk a little bit lower so they can tell you're a guy?" Because a lot of people were saying I talk like a girl. Little did they know!

[25:09] So what happened was a lot of my friends—Blanca has been my friend for ... she's still around ... she's my best friend in San Jose. Her name is Blanca?? Oh, what's her name ... She's married and has kids and everything like that. She was my best friend because she understood. When I transitioned, I saw the ... ok ... I heard about the Gender Dysphoria Clinic that was in Palo Alto run by Dr. Donald Laub and his assistant Judy Van Maasdam and I went there and they gave me a letter to take to the telephone company. They told me that I have vacation so I took two weeks vacation. They told the people who I was and that I was gonna come as a female. I walked in to Market Street. I think I transitioned in 1973 from male to female at work at the telephone company on Market Street. I walked in and the security guard said "oh, can I see your ID?" I showed him but it was still my male ID. He said, "Oh, yeah, we've been waiting for you!" And then as I walked away he says, "Oh! You look better than some of these girls!" So that made me feel good.

[26:54] And what I contributed the Pacific Telephone for giving me such a great, great environment to be there, to transition from male to female, was all my workers that I had worked with for a couple of years, especially most of the Latinas. They gave me the respect too ... when I wanted to go to the bathroom there was always a girl to go with me and be outside, to take care to do my business and then we would go upstairs again. I opened a lot of doors for a lot of people, you know, in transitioning at the telephone company!

I been married a lot of times. When I had my surgery at San Mateo County ... no, it was xx Hospital in San Mateo but now it's San Mateo County? Yeah. I had my surgery there ... and Blue Cross of California approved for my surgery, they paid for my surgery. There were three of us that got approved: in Oakland, San Francisco, and me. And we got approved and right after they put the clause that nobody else could do it.

[28:12] Archive 408: Ohhhh. Wow, you got in there at the right time!

Felicia: Well, it was a test for us.

Archive408: Was the insurance that you had through the phone company?

Felicia: Yeah, Blue Shield of California. They played for my sex change, for my breasts, and for my nose. I've been very fortunate that I didn't have to be harassed after transition because I always looked the part because I'm tiny. But a lot of these girls nowadays don't have that luxury like I did. I mean, I been ... after the telephone company, after Pacific Telephone, I went to work for GTE California in Los Gatos. They were transferring to Santa Barbara. I was living in Los Gatos on Broadway and ... Broadway ... right near the post office. Right across the street was GTE California. So I just walked there.

Then I decided in 1992, 93 ... I decided to move to San Francisco. Oh no, before that, I was uh ... I wanted to get involved so I got involved with the ARIS Project which is an AIDS organization, and I worked to ... I started volunteering for the people that had AIDS, mostly gay men, and I was emotional

and practical support volunteer where I used to go to their houses ... clean their house, wash their clothes, take them to the hospital, take them shopping, take them everywhere ... and I got to be a very activist.

[30:07] In 1987 I became HIV positive. But before that I told my family that I was HIV positive, maybe they would give me the love and affection that I wanted or needed ... but they never did that. Even with my HIV status or my AIDS status, they never were very affectionate to me. I don't know what went wrong because my older sister convalesced me in her house after my surgery. My older sister ... my brother died ... but my older sister, uh, she just wiped me off her slate. My older sister convalesced me and then she decided to go to a religion that didn't accept us.

My baby sister who is a Jehovah Witness: we have more closeness between me and her, because I told her at the time, 'I know your religion; I respect it, but you have to know my religion. And if we can put that aside when we're together and not talk anything about religion, we can be sisters. And we were. We agreed to that. We don't talk about religion when she's around. And I've been HIV positive for 33 years and I've been an activist. I even started performing the gay bars at The Savoy and at other bars ... in Tinker's Dam ... to raise money for AIDS with Nikki Nations and Gary Givens and a whole bunch of the girls that were in that era. Then I decided the best thing for me to do was to move to San Francisco, because you hear the best place to go if you have AIDS ... go to San Francisco. I moved here in 93, I've been an activist, an entertainer, a historian ... all that, and I have come to the place where Brazil, England, Chicago, New York, Miami ... have all interviewed me for life as a transsexual woman. Lately I just came back from LA where FX is doing a special on me, on my life of being in San Jose and ... the way I'm telling you guys. And then Z Space is an organization which runs plays for the LGBT community and they just interviewed me not long ago. They're gonna do a rock play of Compton's. So, uh, yeah.

[33:28] My kids are fine. I love where I'm living. I try to be ... I was a really activist but now I'm very closed. I'm tired. I'm tired of ... I've done ... I started working for Project Open Hand when I moved to San Francisco and people heard I was doing AIDS memorial quilts for the people that have died of AIDS. I made about 80 to 100 quilts for my friends.

They said, if you see me in the B-A-R can you make a quilt for me so I won't be forgotten? It got too overwhelming ... so overwhelming ... the quilts were three feet by six inches ... three feet by six feet ... the plot of a burial. I got so overwhelmed that I started doing three inches by six inches and putting their names in the quilt. I have em here somewhere I just don't know ... I have so much history in me that I don't know where to start. I'm not that educated, and I didn't finish school, I didn't take up anything other than work. But one thing I am very fortunate that I have always worked. No matter who I was, no matter where I was, I always worked. At Chicago, you know, I was a stripper and cashier and a clerk. San Jose has ... I will never forget that redheaded guy that told me where my people were.

Archive408: That's quite a life!

Felicia: I think so! But I wanna make sure that my history's not forgotten. I made sure that anybody that wants to interview me, if they can't afford it we'll work out something to do it. Because I have to make sure that all the girls ... especially with the Jean Compton's Cafeteria Riot.

Archive408: They were all from San Jose?

[36:09]**Felicia:** Yes.

Archive408: Were they the one? I read in an interview with you that after the military you were living in a house in San Jose that got busted in on by the police and then that's what caused you to move here the first time, is that right? Were those some of the same people that you lived with in San Jose?

Felicia: So here's five queens—four or five queens—on the Greyhound Bus depot, coming to San Francisco and we landed at the El Rosa Hotel. If you see the documentary *Screaming Queens*, Amanda was the clerk, and she let us ... I was in room 15. And she let us have tricks at \$5 a shot. And that's how we would make money. If the girls could not afford a room we would always ask them to come and live and to get back on their feet. We helped each other. Compton's was the center ... like *Around the Clock* was the center of the universe for us. Compton's became the second one for us too, because it was a place to meet, it was a place to make sure that we had made it through the days. Because we were arrested ... it was against the law to be a queer, it was against the law to wear long hair, it was against the law to wear feminine clothes, it was against the law to, to ... they would arrest you for anything at Compton's. If the police didn't have a quota somewhere else they would come to Compton's at two o'clock in the morning or two thirty ... and when the bars closed ... and as soon as you walked out they would bust you. The only people that could dress as females before Compton's is the female impersonators. Professional. Like Vicki Marlene and Pat Monclair and Ronnie Lynn and all those girls ... Laverne Cummings which was an entertainer at the Finocus on North Beach. There was a lot of female impersonators at The Nickelodeon, at the Frolic Room on Mason Street ...

Archive408: I'm trying to think what else? I think we have maybe three more minutes left ... on the tape. Is there anything else you want to say that you feel like is important? I mean, you said a lot of important stuff so far.

Felicia: I just thank you guys for knowing that you gonna make it up. I hope when you finish whatever you're doing to do this to give it to the LGBT community center to make sure that ... or give a presentation there for the transgender women that think that they're all by themselves. The gay men and the lesbians think that they started the gay movement. You have to understand what I said about gay men. They stayed in the closet and got the education and everything and where we couldn't do that.

[39:36] We had to be who we were meant—whether it was meant to be killed—we didn't know where were gonna end up from day to another. Just one of those places ... I mean, you had to be who you were meant to be. If we wouldn't be who we were, we wouldn't be who we are today. The kids have to know where they came from to know where they're going. Without the history of the queens of the San Jose queens or the Tenderloin queens, we wouldn't be here. But of course there was Compton's ... was a center of the universe for us. It was word of mouth, it was in newspapers, it was on television ... it was word of mouth that people came to the tenderloin. Because girls came, they left ... it was a revolving door. If it was too dangerous, you went somewhere else. But to the girls who stayed and got in that riot ... although it was lost for 40 years ... it's only hearsay that the mafia was controlling that area. And nothing would be ... it's not in the newspapers or anything. You know? It wasn't anywhere until Susan Stryker when to the LGBT museum and got the document ... and I got the document ... you wanna see it? Oh god! I got old! [41:16]

I lost it! I don't know where it's at. I had it organized ... I thought I had it organized but I guess I didn't. But I will send you a picture ok? You know, because seniors can go somewhere and they forget where they were going.

No, but you know something, thank you so much because it's important to me that San Jose knows their history, because I am the only one that can tell it, it has to be told, because there's very few of us. If any of us ... all those queens that were in San Jose, they lived in San Jose.

[42:46] **Archive408:** Are any of them around anymore?

Felicia: You know something, I wanted to go to the LGBT community center and put a poster?

Archive408: We could do that for you!

Felicia: Oh, would you?

Archive408: Yeah, of course! If you let us know what you want to put on it, we could totally do that.

Felicia: Because it's imperative ... I've been to where they used to live but they don't live there no more. I don't know if they passed away or if they just moved on to another place, you know? On 7th and Santa Clara Street? No. On ... 7th Street in between St. James and St. John, there used to be ... Greta used to live there and we used to be a whole bunch of queens used to go to her house and stuff like that. Jackie, uh, Nikki Nations was a very famous person in San Jose because she used to do a lot of community work for the homeless ... and she was the first one that had a hippie shop in San Jose on San Fernando ... between 2nd and 3rd. It used to be an old building but they took em all down. But we used to over there and they smoked pot. I didn't smoke pot because I didn't want to change my attitude at all. Nikki Nations, she was the grand duchess or grand empress of San Francisco for the Dukal Court.

Archive408: We can probably try to hunt some folks down to interview them

Felicia: Because it's imperative that we all get together or just at least talk to you guys to make sure our history is never forgotten. Because, you know, what I went through, I mean, I wouldn't let it go to anybody else ... but this is my life! I've been there, done that ... you know?

Archive408: You know it seems like most of history stuff in San Jose is more focused on the 80s and like business people ... or the labor movement ...

Felicia: You know something, the thing is, with the lesbian and gay community they got the money and the education. Now we're in the process right now of being strong. The young kids are going to school, they're getting their surgery, they're getting up in the world ... where we were dirt and trash, like thrown away ... like, if you were gay or we were sissies, they would throw us like trash outside. My mother never did. She understood me, but I would rather stay away because of her Latino community than to embarrass her. You know? Not that she ever turned away or anything like that. Because my mother was there when I had my surgery and when I woke up she said "mija." That was the most heartbreaking, loving thing that she could have done for me because when she called me "mija" I know I had done the right thing. Because I always tell her, "Mom, I'm gonna have a sex change." "Oh, you're crazy." "Mom, I'm not crazy!"

Archive408: And she was in San Jose because you were saying that you visit her grave at the one on Capitol and Alum Rock, the cemetery there.

Felicia: And then I go to Mark's Hot Dogs? Every time I go there I have to have a hot dog. It used to be down the street. It used to be between King and, uh, Story or somewhere like that ... somewhere around there. It used to be on Santa Clara Street.

Archive408: It's like a historic landmark now.

Felicia: It is. But it was because when we were teenagers we used to always go there and get the hot dogs and it's still there the same. Because I go there every time I go see my mom I stop at Mark's Hot Dogs.

[47:10] But I don't know if I have anything about my history at San Jose High ... or it's not San Jose anymore, it's something else. But I tried to go get my records and they weren't too helpful.

Archive408: I wonder ... we know someone who teaches art there and she's really interested in the history of San Jose High

Felicia: Because I was the first male cheerleader at San Jose ... and then my grades went down and I was torn down because ... I did a routine that would ... that's why I won!

Archive408: Do you remember ... was it to a song or was it more like cheering where you make up the words yourself?

Felicia: I was going something like this and then I go like this and then I did a somersault ... something like that I think ... but they overwhelmed me when they gave me the title of head cheerleader. And then the guys made it impossible for me to ... but that's how my life's been. I cherish everything that's happened to me because I lived it. And I'm grateful that I've lived this long. 73! And 9 husbands! And I decided to just be by myself. If the only way that I can make myself happy is be by myself, I am by myself. For twenty years, my last divorce was twenty years ago. And I loved it! I haven't had sex but that's ok!

[49:01] **Archive408:** Do you have any thoughts about how San Jose has changed? Because when you were there it was a much smaller place!

Felicia: It was a nice home! It was a nice city. It was a nice town. It was small and a lot of Latinos. I used to go to the Mexican bars to dance at the Tropicana—they used to call it Casa Blanca on Santa Clara St and 24th St there used to be a Mexican bar. I used to say, ok, I'm a girl now, and I came wild. I would go to the bar and get the cutest man that I could find, lay him and then ... that made me a woman. It's funny the way it is, the way I did it. But it got me through.

□

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