

Alfredo Santos Part 3

Alfredo: So, my mother figured out finance and bought a lot of materials, hired a contractor and started building a house.

Chuy: What year is this?

Alfredo: This is '65.

Chuy: '65. So, you're a freshman in high school?

Alfredo: I'm an eighth grader.

Chuy: Eighth grader—okay.

Alfredo: Everyone told my mom, "You can't do that. *Tienes tres güercos (huercos)* and this and that. And she did it anyway.

And so, I started 8<sup>th</sup> Grade in Uvalde. I'll never forget the first day of school. I'd heard the phrase, but I'd never believed it—"Butterflies in your stomach". Man, *bien nervioso*.

Chuy: (Chuckles) Why? Why do you think that was?

Alfredo: Well, we were there at my grandma's house when we came back. I knew some of the guys in the *barrio* and I didn't speak Spanish. I am from California. I understood parts. Of course, when you live at my grandma's house, you better understand Spanish *o no vas a comer*. Anyway, but that first day of school—oohh. And so, I started 8<sup>th</sup> Grade there—a lot of taunting, a lot of bullying, all that.

Chuy: You were an outsider and you were *engabachado*.

Alfredo: Yeah. I'll never forget. They put me in a reading class—Mrs. Green. And the reading class—big mistake—I knew how to read. I was a good reader. I used to always read Reader's Digest. My mother, for some reason, every couple of years, she would bring in—she would order a new edition of the World Book Encyclopedia. So, we had the encyclopedia all the time. *Iba al restroom con una encyclopedia*. We had our own library.

Chuy: We didn't have s—t. You had a library!

Alfredo: The University of Toledo was our library. So, anyway, but they put me in there with the reading class. But that first year, *estaba cabrón* because the Anglos wouldn't talk to me because I was Mexican, and the Mexicans didn't speak to me because I didn't speak Spanish. And the Anglos who wouldn't speak to me were some of the same Anglos who had gone to school with me in the second grade when I was at Benson. And so, when they wouldn't talk to me or be friends, I thought, "You know, ch—ga, we were playing baseball and everything in second grade.

Chuy: What happened?

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Alfredo: Something happened. Of course, I didn't process that.

Chuy: You didn't understand the dynamics.

Alfredo: No. Anyway. And so, I got through 8<sup>th</sup> Grade and 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, I signed up for football and a lot of my buddies in the reading class became my friends because we played football. So, *entonces*, playing football, my friends were football players.

Chuy: Sure.

Alfredo: All that goes with playing football—the popularity and all that. Anyway, so then, I started learning street Spanish—slang.

Chuy: Which is what everybody spoke?

Alfredo: Yeah. So that was my world. I remember that first summer that I worked in the fields because I wanted to make money. But then, my mom got me a job at Vasquez (Vazquez) Restaurant con Concha. Concha was my manager.

Chuy: Mexican Restaurant?

Alfredo: Mexican Restaurant, yeah. Henry was the owner, but he was going to college. He was away. It was a family restaurant that had been founded in 1935—*algo así*. So, *me pusieron de lavaplatos*—thirty-five cents an hour—not even a penny a minute. *Hijo de la ch---*

(Laughter)

Chuy: You would've been better off picking cotton.

Alfredo: Thirty-five cents an hour, plus I got to eat the Number 3 Plate.

Chuy: There you go.

Alfredo: Two tacos, two enchiladas, rice, beans and a glass of tea. Every two weeks, I'd get a paycheck—sixteen dollars and fifty-two cents. And the other thing about that job was that Concha—my mom knew all these folks from way back then—but Concha was very lenient because I had a football schedule. And so, I'd come in late, you know, and on Fridays, Thursdays, I had football. I couldn't go to work. So, I worked as a dishwasher and played football \_\_\_\_ (as a) freshman. *Y luego*, we lived outside the city limits, a mile out of town. And so, then one day my mom picked me up (from school) and she says, "Let's go for a ride." And so, we went to one of the local car dealers, West Cooksey—West Cooksey Motors—and she...

Chuy: How old are you now/

Alfredo: I'm fourteen. So, we went inside and immediately, the smell of new motorcycles hits

me.