

lover come to them. The beauty of magic is you can use it for anything you want. [Laughs]

In the evenings, after she got supper, my mother would pray with us and tell us stories. She knew a lot of what they call *Cuentos*, traditional Mexican folktales. In every culture, you have what they call the *Llorona*, the legend of the crying one. According to ours, it's a nun that fell in the well or in a mine shaft. At nighttime, you can hear her crying. When you hear this wailing in the wind, it's usually a *Llorona*. So I grew up with these stories and her accounts of Aztec culture. She taught us about Guatemoc and Xochimilco.⁶ She talked about the pyramids, the Aztec calendar that to date has not been replicated, and how Cortez conquered the Aztecs. And I got to feeling very proud of my roots, that I came from this tremendous culture. And that helped me. Because when I started public school, I immediately entered another world—a world where I was [labeled] “different.”

You see, I came from this mystical world where my mother cured people and we ate tortillas [and] *bapas* [potatoes], and we ate with our hands and drank *cocaleche* [coffee with a little milk]. Then I went to school, where I was immediately bombarded with the idea of “nutrition.” That is, you have to have eggs, bacon, toast, and jam. As a matter of fact, [in elementary school] we'd go around the room and the teacher would ask each of us what we had [for breakfast]. Everybody would say, “I had cereal,” or “I had Cream of Wheat,” or “I had bacon and eggs.” Well, I had some beans and a tortilla. No milk, because we couldn't afford it. We had just a bit of milk on top of coffee.

Then the school started teaching “manners”: how to eat with a knife, fork, and spoon. And I was immediately labeled a savage because I ate with my hands. Well, with a tortilla, you just scoop it up. But [they said] you're not supposed to use your hands. So, all of a sudden I started thinking, “My parents are savages because they don't eat with a knife, fork, and spoon.” As a matter of fact, we didn't have any in the house—except for the ones the tramps brought, which we stored in the mason jar in the middle of the table in case there was a piece of meat we had to cut.

But those kinds of experiences quickly told me I was different and I was bad. I mean, I was taught one thing at school, and six hours later I went back home and saw my parents eating with their hands. So a resentment began developing in me, a hostility towards my world. That's a very destructive process. The stability and the love of a family have to be there to overcome that. I thank God I had that stability in my family, plus the richness of our culture. So no matter what I was bombarded with, I could come back to my home and community where I could get my battery recharged as an individual, as a worthwhile human being.

While I was growing up, the old Mexican families congregated in an enclave by Sixth South between Fifth and Sixth West. Most of the men worked on the railroad; yet Purity Biscuit Company was there, about a block from the Guadalupe Mission. The ice company and the macaroni factory were there. They all hired Mexicans. So that was my world.