

Gregory Sanchez, by Julie M. Luker

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Narrator

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Transcription

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Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

GS: Gregory Sanchez

CS: This is an interview conducted as part of a larger—oh, hang on. This is an interview conducted as part of a larger faculty and student research project initiated by Dr. Julie Luker of Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today is August 9, 2023. I'm here with Gregory Sanchez. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint. Paul.

Today I'll be talking to Gregory about what life was like growing up in the Twin Cities. During this interview, I'm going to ask you to reflect on your childhood life experiences as they relate to a variety of social topics from that time period. For the purposes of their interview, we have defined childhood as birth through 17 years of age. To begin, please state and spell your full name.

GS: Gregory Mann—that's M-A-N-N—Sanchez.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

GS: Hispanic, white.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

GS: April 7, 1949.

CS: Finally, please share where you grew up, such as the name of a neighborhood or a nearby street intersection. Include any major moves you made during this time period.

GS: Okay. The bluff area. The major intersection was Third and Maria.

CS: Okay, thank you.

GS: This was my preteen years. Then, moved further east a year before I went into high school.

CS: Okay, thank you. I would like to learn more about your family life. Let's begin with the memories you have for immediate and extended family. Please share some memories that you have about these relationships.

GS: Familywise, I had three brothers. We were all pretty close. The four of us weren't five years apart. Parents, both working parents, working-class parents. The neighborhood was a blue-collar neighborhood. Just played with the neighbors. I played football and hockey at Bluff Playground, and then baseball at the little league park out by Harding High School.

As far as the house we lived in, it butted up with—there was an old barn in the backyard, and once that was torn down, we'd climb up on top of the grocery store, which was the Piggly Wiggly at the time, and later Red Owl. It overlooked Third Street, so we'd go up there and watch the traffic and all that.

Next door, coincidentally, was—Chief Justice Warren Burger's parents lived next door to us. Then, across the street, my cousins on my mother's side, and her brother, and sister-in-law, that's where they lived. Then, they moved further east. Then, we moved into their house. Then, had a lot of kid friends in the neighborhood.

There was a grade school, Van Buren, up the block. It had a real steep hill, so we'd go sledding down there in the winter, or in the fall, take cardboard boxes and slide them down the hill with the burnt-out grass.

CS: Which family members did you engage with the most growing up?

GS: Probably my brother, Gary, who's the closest to my age. He's 16 months younger than I. He passed away a couple years ago, but all four of us were really close. I ended up—I kind of stuck up for the baby. The other two would team up on him, so it was the older and the younger were kind of a pair as far as protection. The middle two were close. They did a lot of, as adults, hunting together.

CS: Okay. Did you have any family pets? If so, please describe them.

GS: Yeah. We had a dog, a boxer named Bonnie, who was the—that was the nicest dog. You could literally have a half a dozen kids hangin' on a rope, and that dog'd pull ya around the

neighborhood. We had him for quite a while—or her, for quite a while. We had to have her put down after we moved further east. That's the only pet I remember as a child.

CS: How were household chores divided between members of your family?

GS: After I think it started getting automated, and we moved further east, one of the neighbors asked my dad, why doesn't he get a dishwasher? He says, "I don't need one. I got four standin' right here." They asked him the same thing about a snowblower. He says, "I don't need one. I got four snowblowers right here." We had our work to do, nothin' heavy, wash and dry the dishes, mow the lawn, shovel snow.

CS: Thank you. Next, please describe the ways in which your family's economic status influenced your childhood.

GS: It gave us a work ethic because my dad worked two jobs, almost full-time, and my mom, she worked and had a part-time waitress job. Because of those extra jobs, they sent us to a Catholic school, all four of us. Then, they sent us to Hill High School once we moved out further east, again, due to the extra jobs they had. We could afford those schools otherwise.

CS: In what way has your family's financial circumstances shaped your spending habits today?

GS: Let me think. Well, we knew we didn't get anything for free, so we had to work for anything we wanted, whether it—as a youth, I had a paper route. I was a caddy. Then, in high school, I was a dishwasher at the post office cafeteria, downtown Saint Paul. Anything I wanted extra, I had to pay for it. I guess that's what I was taught. You had to pay your way to go.

CS: Great. Now, I would like to know about your experiences with religion, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, *et cetera*. Describe what you can recall about your family's religious practices when you were growing up.

GS: Well, we went to Catholic grade school. We were all altar boys, and so we were raised Catholic. I don't practice Catholicism anymore. I believe it's a religion based on fear and guilt. I'm more of a deist now, but as far as right and wrong, good and evil, it's a good basis to grow up.

CS: Did you guys go to church every Sunday?

GS: *[Laughter]* At grade school, we went every day. They walked us from the school over to the church and went to mass every day. Like I said, we were altar boys, so we went to church a lot extra doin' other masses, funerals, weddings.

CS: What, if any, impact do you feel that religion has had on your life?

GS: Well, like I said, knowin' good from evil. As a deist now, I don't believe in the Bible. I believe there's an almighty. There's something higher, and I'll find out after I'm gone.

CS: Now, I'd like to learn more about the neighborhood in which you grew up. If you moved during childhood, you may wish to reflect on more than one neighborhood. This is fine to do, but please indicate as you do it. Please describe what comes to mind when thinking about the neighborhood in which you grew up.

GS: Okay. As I said, sports was a big deal when I was growin' up. Winter carnival, I remember that. They had a mini parade where they'd take the hockey teams, put 'em in trailers, and go down Maria to Third Street and wave at everybody in the middle of the winter.

Oh, neighborhood, if you go—I don't know if you're familiar with it, but where Mounds Park is, the Indian Mounds, just up from where Bluff Playground used to be, we'd go up there and play in that area and scale the cliffs along the banks of the Mississippi and the railroad tracks down below. I didn't know how dangerous it was at the time, and I probably didn't care, but I remember Mounds Park a lot.

CS: To what degree were you satisfied with the quality of your living conditions?

GS: I didn't know any difference, so I was happy.

CS: How well did the residents in your neighborhood know each other, and what were some of those relationships like?

GS: In the early years, really didn't—I knew a few of the neighbors, not a lot, not like the one out further east, just the kids and maybe a couple sets of parents.

CS: As far as transportation options, how did you typically get around town?

GS: Bus, walked to school 'cause it was less than a mile away. My grandfather took me down to the Saints—the old Saints' ballpark at Lexington and University. We would watch the Saints play baseball, or the old—not Minnesota Vikings, the old Saints hockey team. We'd take a bus downtown and go to the hockey games.

CS: Next, I would like to learn about the values shared by your family and your neighbors. Values are principles or standards that help guide behavior. What memories come to mind that demonstrate what these values were for your family and your neighbors?

GS: I think my dad instilled in us to look out for my brothers. Protect your brothers. That's probably the most valuable lesson I took away. Yeah, that's probably it.

CS: In what way were your values similar to or different from others who lived in your neighborhood?

GS: I suppose similar. We were kids. It wasn't like there was bullies around back then. I don't remember altercations when we were kids. A little bit older, I remember a couple, but as young kids, I don't remember any.

CS: Can you share a memory where, growing up, you behaved in a way that reflected one of your values?

GS: I remember gettin' in a fight with somebody that was pickin' on a younger cousin. That's probably eighth grade. Yeah, seventh or eighth grade. We got in a physical altercation that lasted a couple—it probably only lasted 30 seconds, and that was it. It was done.

CS: Now, I'm going to ask you all about leisure time. Describe some of the ways in which you, your family, and your neighbors engaged in leisure time when you were growing up.

GS: Sports, that's pretty much it. Playin' at Mounds Park, scalin' the cliffs. I remember my grandfather, he lived in the area, too. That's why I keep mentioning him, my mother's father. He was a drinker. He'd take me down to the one bar on the corner at Third and Maria, and I learned to play cribbage watchin' him. He taught me cribbage, basically.

CS: Can you recall if your family ever took vacations, and if so, to where?

GS: Yeah, we did a lot of camping, different parks in Minnesota. I can remember going up to Itasca and crossing the lower brook where Itasca turns into the Mississippi. I slipped on the moss on those rocks, crushed the cojones. We did a lot of camping with my cousins, uncles, and cousins. Four or five, six families would go camping, set up in the same area. I think the furthest we went on vacation was the Dells, drove to the Dells one time, mostly just Minnesota.

CS: What bands or music genres were your favorite?

GS: We'd have to go to high school years because I didn't—it'd be rock and roll, and it's still—I don't know if you can see this. Anyhow, it's the Rolling Stones logo.

CS: Oh, I see it. Yep.

GS: I'm a big Rolling Stones fan. I'm a rock and roller. I've been to a lot of, lot of concerts, probably hundreds.

CS: What types of toys did you play with growing up?

GS: Toys. The bicycle is the only thing I can think of. Rode the bicycles everywhere. I remember we I had a little bike, and it was cool to put eight hanger bars on it, and a banana seat, and that's what I did. I did it myself.

CS: Describe some of the activities engaged in when you were with your friends.

GS: Just sports. I guess dressing up for Halloween, goin' through the neighborhood, gettin' treats. I guess that's about it.

CS: Okay. Next, let's discuss your experience with schooling. Please describe what it was like going to school as a child.

GS: Strict. Sacred Heart was a—well, the nuns were strict. I remember, it was in fifth grade when you got penmanship. I remember we'd go from printing to writing cursive. I remember the nun rapping my knuckles with the ruler because my cursive wasn't good enough. Well, you keep rapping my knuckles, no wonder. Yeah, it was pretty strict.

CS: In your opinion, how diverse was the student body of the schools you attended?

GS: The Sacred Heart was pretty, basically it was a German school, so they catered to—they let you get in if you had German heritage. I've got a little bit. Saint John's up the road is different. The parishes were set up that way back then, I believe. They let you in the schools if you met their criteria, whatever they decide it was.

As far as high school, it was mostly white. There was a few black. As a matter of fact, as a freshman, it was homecoming. We took the bus to a homecoming game, and we beat this team for the first time in the school's history. Hill beat Creek, and some of the kids went nuts and tore the signs off the bus panels inside. Somebody went and reported it to the principal.

Well, they called me into the office, and they said, "We gotta report the Mexican was tearing down the bus stuff down." I said, "It wasn't me." He looks at me, and he says, "You're right. It wasn't you," because I am so white compared to some of my cousins. He kicked me out of the office. "Get out of here."

CS: The school lunch hour has changed over the years. Can you recall how your school handled the lunch hour when you were a student?

GS: Grade school, we got a cafeteria, metal trays. High school, it was kind of optional. We would brown bag it mostly.

CS: Which teacher stands out to you most in your memory and why?

GS: Now that nun, I'll never forget her. I told you the reason already. High school, one of the brothers, he—I yawned in his class, and he bent me over, and he kicked me in the ass. I'll never forget him, either, bastard. Then, the principal, or vice principal, the one that called me in his office, some of the coaches. I think I have a lot of respect for the coaches more than any.

I remember a guy. I was the catcher, and this coach, he wasn't associated. It was in the city league or whatever. He stole my catcher's mitt. I'll never forget that 'cause I had a nice catcher's mitt. You know what he used? It was stamps back then. You collected 'em in books, and then you redeem 'em, green value, or something. I can't remember.

CS: Okay. For our final topic, I'm going to ask you to reflect on local and global issues, such as war, poverty, discrimination, social unrest, *et cetera*. In your opinion, what were some of the biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

GS: Nothing other than they scared us with the nuke scare. We were those kids that went under their desks, like that would do a lot of good. I did, however—there was a kid in our school who, I think, had polio, so he was a bit of an invalid. This was grade school. If we had fire drills, me and another guy, every time, we'd carry him in a fireman's carry out of the school to get him out of there quick. This guy—do you know the band Free and Easy?

CS: No, I'm not familiar with 'em.

GS: Well, anyhow, they're a '70s band. Anyhow, they used to play at [Pudges?] in the park, and they'd do all over here on the east side, on North Saint Paul, wherever. Anyhow, that's his band. He was a musician. He still remembers me carrying him out of the school, so that's the social issues.

Today, it's the bigotry. I said this years ago, that the only thing that's gonna stop this is if we're all biracial. I don't think that is ever gonna happen, but I think that's the only thing close that would get rid of this hatred. Global issue, still worried about a war, but one thing that hit me—I

don't know why personally, but I was a freshman in high school, and I remember it today when Kennedy got assassinated. They stopped school, put it on the news. They sent us home.

I remember that. Beyond that, I was in the Navy, and I was in Memphis, April 4, 1968. Went from boot camp to Memphis for training, and I was out at the airport gettin' tickets to come home on leave. A trooper comes up to me. "He's got blood all over him. You boys in the service?" "Yes, sir." "Well, get your ass back to base. Martin Luther King's just been killed." It was there in Memphis, and the riots started. Between Kennedy and Martin Luther King, that's the biggest social issues I encountered.

CS: How safe or unsafe did you feel in light of these issues?

GS: Very safe. When I was in the Navy, working over Vietnam on the ship, I didn't feel so safe, but yeah. I felt very safe.

CS: This is the end of our interview. Your responses are invaluable, and we really appreciate that you took the time to do this today. Thank you so much for participating.