

Martinez Oral History Project

Interview Date: September 5, 2020
Interview Location: Homeless Encampment at Amphitheater in Martinez, CA
Interviewer: Deborah Zamaria
Interviewee: Ronald Lee Pedro (Ronnie)

Ronnie was born on November 14, 1966 at Merritt Hospital in Oakland, California. This hospital no longer exists but there is a Lake Merritt Health Care Center located nearby.

Ronnie had a very difficult childhood. His mother, Marion Fish, was shot and killed in his home by a Mexican mafia gang member who his father was in debt to. His father, Richard Pedro died from an overdose of heroin one year later.

Ronnie was only one year old when his mother was killed and his older brother, Richard (Rickie) Pedro was three years old, having been born on September 9, 1964.

At this point, both boys went into the care of their grandparents, Elmer and Helen Bacigalupi. Elmer owned a bike shop on College Avenue in Oakland and sold large amounts of pot and coke out of it. Grandmother Helen worked for Pacific Bell Telephone Company. These were Ronnie's father's parents and they were physically abusive to Ronnie and his brother. Ronnie states that they only took care of the boys because of the money they received from the State.

Ronnie remembers living in Oakland for three years, then the family moved to Walnut Creek. Here Ronnie and his brother attended Bancroft Elementary School and then when the family moved to Concord, the boys attended Woodside School, another elementary school covering grades First through Sixth. Ronnie cut school frequently and was out of school more than in school and was kept back a year as a result.

It wasn't until he began attending Oak Grove Middle School for 7th and 8th grade that Ronnie has some good memories. He was a Quarterback on the school football team for a while but continued to struggle academically.

He attended Ygnacio Valley High School for one year and never graduated. Unfortunately, Ronnie had been shooting dope since he was 15 years old. He was sentenced to a drug program at the Salvation Army for a while, but was unable to maintain his sobriety.

His brother Rickie owned a bike shop in Concord and Ronnie worked with him for one year, but he began using drugs again and his brother had to let him go. Although Rickie had a problem with drugs for a while, he's been clean and sober for 25 years and owns a successful jewelry store called Diamond City in Vacaville.

Ronnie moved out of his grandparents' house when he was 17 and has been on the streets ever since. He's had a number of jobs including Forni's Paving, J and L Paving, Wendy's and Burger King, and he currently works on call for Rick Johnson, who owns a landscaping and maintenance company.

However, a contribution that Ronnie made for 12 years was managing a Board and Care facility in Martinez. The first one was located on 521 D Street in Martinez and there was also a home at 211 C Street in Martinez. Both of these facilities he managed and operated with his wife, Lisa Pedro, although he states that Lisa was the "boss." Ronnie would prepare breakfast and lunch for the residents and Lisa would prepare the dinners.

This was a successful business that assisted at least 22 people at one time. Residents would come and go from the C Street home to the D Street home. Unfortunately, it burned down in 2007. There was a trailer in the back of one of the homes and the resident was careless with the gas line and litter. Although the residences were insured, the owner refused to give Ronnie and Lisa their share of the insurance money. This owner still lives in Martinez today.

In the mid 1990s, Ronnie met Lisa. She had been living upstairs from a friend of Ronnie's in Martinez. In 1996, Lisa proposed and they married on November 16, 1996 in Tahoe at the "Love Chapel." They currently reside together at the Martinez encampment.

In 1998, Ronnie had a brief relationship with Jill Marangola. She became pregnant with Ronnie's and her child, and because she already had three children, she named the baby Jacob and put him up for adoption. Jill currently resides in Antioch, California.

Ronnie is a great asset to the Martinez Homeless encampment. He's always willing to lend a helping hand to others and he works hard helping to keep the camp clean. In spite of all of the challenges he has faced in his life, he also has a great sense of humor and is well liked by the other residents in the camp.

His goal at this point in his life is to make others happy and this interviewer feels that he has already accomplished that goal. He has also mentioned that he really wants to get clean from his Meth addiction and we will work with him to hopefully achieve this.