

Pass It On®...

Unlikely Friends with Common Roots.

From the StoryCorps archives, a story of two friends from the same side of the tracks, with very different backgrounds.

Tucson, Arizona, has long been a place with the romance of the Wild West, even in the years right after World War II, and that's what drew all kinds of people there during the late 1940s and 1950s.

On the south side of town, hardworking folks were raising families. Most people had come seeking work in the fields or the mines. Pilots had trained at nearby airfields during the war, and the population had expanded with the wartime work. Before World War II, the blue-collar community was mostly made up of Mexican Americans — that is, until the after-war migration of families hoping to put down their roots in a place that could survive another depression, if need be.

Veterans arrived, seeking work and starting families, and with the sudden change in population, tensions were bound to arise. Jim Murphy was one of these new immigrants to Tucson. Part of an Irish American migration to Tucson from the East Coast, Murphy couldn't be more different than his Mexican American schoolmates.

Murphy remembers meeting his boyhood friend Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez for the first time on an old school bus. They were both from the working-class part of town and went to the same church. But that's where the similarities ended, or so they thought.

They laugh as they remember the town, the people, the school and the church of their early years. Murphy recalls: "We lived in a government housing project. They were army barracks made into living units around a big dirt field. [Until then,] I had never heard of Mexico or Mexican."

The introduction of new kids into Tucson was just as jarring to Vélez-Ibáñez. "Some of the Irish kids thought we were Italian. We used to beat the heck out of each other," he remembers.

But because they all went to the same church, their differences were tempered. The daily interaction moved from suspicion and schoolyard fights to

peace and friendship as the boys got older and became attracted to the opposite sex.

"We started meeting each other's sisters," Vélez-Ibáñez says. "My sister was being courted by Brendan Flannery, and I fell madly in love with Carol Anne McClain."

Hard edges were rounded off, and friendships began to deepen. The common goal of making a life in the desert and depending on God brought families together. It wasn't so much a big event as it was a lot of little things that created lifelong friends.

It's been 70 years since Vélez-Ibáñez and Murphy attended high school together, but Murphy says, "I feel that I could pick up the phone and call you and ask you for something if I needed it, and you'd be there."

"You got it," Vélez-Ibáñez answers without hesitation. "Because of our experience on the south side, there's a foundation that you and I have. Of understanding." There's a pause after this sentiment, and it's easy to grasp that the years don't matter when you care about somebody.

Growing up is best done with friends. Vélez-Ibáñez and Murphy found a way to bond during a time of great change in the country. Once you realize that the kid sitting next to you on a tattered bus seat is breathing the same hot dust, dreaming the same dreams, you find a way to help each other reach that place called friendship. And it lasts forever.

Friendship...[PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

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