



Bel Air  
Neighborhood  
Preliminary Plan

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# HISTORY

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## INTRODUCTION

After attending a neighborhood meeting on crime prevention, I took the opportunity to get names of neighborhood residents from the leadership and those who attended to conduct a series of interviews about the history of the Bel Air neighborhood. A list of general questions was asked of all residents who were interviewed. The interview style utilized was a free-flowing one. Questions were developed beforehand, however, they served as a guide to each interview. Further questions were asked as the interview progressed, which were in line with the directions of the interview. Some interviewees were more interested in talking about certain topics. All the interviews were interesting and helped provide a great overview to the Bel Air neighborhood then and now.

In the following chapter I have included parts of the interviews conducted over the semester. An attempt was made to put the interviews in a logical sequence and give a brief yet thorough account of the interviews and the memories of the residents. A further attempt was made to get a diverse group of residents to be interviewed--different ethnic groups, long time residents, recent residents, men and women. I interviewed those who returned my phone calls.

In general, the Bel Air neighborhood started out as an affordable place to live for young families. The homes were small but plenty of space was provided so that the residents could add on additions to their homes, which most residents have done. This is one of the unique characteristics of the Bel Air neighborhood. The interviews recount much activity in the late 50's, 60's and early 70's, with lots of kids playing in the streets, to a more quiet area, with changes being brought about by growth in the area. The concerns of the neighborhood have changed over time. Among some of the main concerns of the residents who were interviewed was crime in general and, specifically, robbery, the selling of drugs, safety, and the area going "down hill." It was also expressed that the feeling of "community" had diminished as the kids and the area grew. However, the residents all expressed a need to organize and take back their neighborhood so that it becomes a safe and nice place to live once again. There also appears to be a change in the neighborhood dynamics. It is beginning to attract young families with children, many who grew up in the area. There is rising concern with offering youth recreational activity, safety and gang prevention. Overall everyone likes their neighborhood and would like to see and work towards positive change.

## INTERVIEWS

Junita Morris

Rossie & Peggy Morris

2707 Morningside NE

*"We were the first ones to move in , but 2703 (the first house built) was for Goldson's mother it was the office and model home at the time."*

This interview was conducted at the Morris' place of business, Sundance Automotive, with Rossie and Peggy Morris who and Rossie's mother, Ms. Junita Morris, one of the first residents of Bel Air neighborhood.

*Q: When did you move to Bel Air?*

Juanita - December 24, 1948. It was a brand new house. We came from Misu TX, lived on David Rd for awhile.... we were the first ones to move in. Developers were from Wichita TX. The first house built was for Mr. Goldson's mother and sister but in the mean time the mother had died and the sister didn't want to live there by herself so that is why we got the first house.

Rossie - We were the first ones to move in but 2703 was built for Goldson's mother it was the office and model at the time. We were the first ones to move in at 2707. There were 12 other houses but not from this development.

*Q: So where did you live before?*

Rossie - We live in the South Valley

*Q: How long did it take for others to move in?*

Rossie - It was immediate, it was rapid

Juanita - There were so many contractors, one had built one block and another was building another block somewhere else. We had our own water system and had cess pools, the rest Goldson and Byers got through, the electricity and the wires.

*Q: Did your husband work in the area?*

Juanita - He was an engineer for Santa Fe Railroad. He worked at the OK River Tire Shop then he got on with the Railroad as a fireman in the switch yard then he was promoted to engineer.

We had no sidewalks, no pavement what so ever but we had our water and the cess pools these contractors came in, one built here another built over there it was 1952 before they really started working.

*Q: Did you know anyone else moving in?*

Juanita - No, we didn't know anyone but it didn't take us long to get acquainted. We were glad to meet somebody else.

*Q: What was it like back then? What did the houses and the area look like ?*

Juanita - They were just one bedroom. We were the first ones that built onto our house, we got busy and we extended the living room and made it larger, I lined it with knotted pine, then we built another little bedroom behind the garage and that's where the boys slept. So then everybody else done holler at me cause I'd be up on top of the roof.... After they had three little children, well they had to find a bigger house.

*Q: Were the front and back yards very big?*

Juanita - Well, actually, we didn't have any yards back then, we didn't get us up a back wall until several years later.

*Q: What was the landscaping like?*

Juanita - Well there was a lot of gravel, our first lawn we put in we didn't have no fences or anything. We got up one morning and some horses were chomppin around on my new lawn. Ha Ha Ha. We didn't get a new lawn for along time.

*Q: Where did you go on the weekends?*

Well what we had, they moved some old camp houses out there and that's were they had the first school in those little barracks and that's where Sam went to school and you (Rossie) went to University Heights?

Rossie - We both did

*Q: What schools did you attend Rossie?*

Rossie - When we first moved up here we went to University Heights which is now where TVI is at, the large brick building.

*Q: how did you get there?* They bussed us. The first year of school that 's where we went then the following year to go to Junior High we went to Jefferson. Our first year up here I was in the sixth grade then I went to Jefferson Jr. High, I believe that was the year they started Bel Air Elementary, in 1950.

*Q: What did you guys do for recreation?*

Rossie - We didn't have anything locally as such, the scouting program got pretty big it kept a lot of the boys busy. It was very active anything we did was away from here. When I played baseball it was in the Heights community center over by were TVI is. There was a fellow who started a bus company, that's how we'd get over in that area but at that time Carlisle was dirt the last pavement was on Roosevelt which is now Constitution and North of there was dirt, Menaul just west of Carlisle was a large distance from a large hill on the other side. Everything North of here

was just dirt, Menaul was just a little two lane paved road, the Bel Air water Co. sat here at the corner of Graceland.

*Q: So did most people use cars to get around or the buses?*

Rossie - Mostly cars. We were a one car family. The kids had to bus to school but initially there weren't that many families up here. I don't know how many houses were in the Goldson Byers project. Right after that , Goldson Byers went clear up to Washington to Sierra, Monteclaire then they skipped and built on Adams Jefferson, there must have been....(Peggy) You know something that is interesting is remember you were telling me about Papi getting down to work at the Santa Fe Railroads.

The Morris' also discussed how the roads used to wash away because they weren't paved and how there was a big water tower in the neighborhood. Rossie mentioned that when he was young, a boyscout friend and he could stand on each of their roof tops and give each other flag signals, there was little landscaping an lots of open space. They also mentioned that there was a covenant when they purchased their home. The covenant stated that that particular subdivision was restricted, "Blacks" or "Orientals" could not buy in that area.



## INTERVIEW 2

Richard and Nancy Tapia  
3018 Quincy NE 87110

*"Ohh, you could smell the fresh air, the smell of tortillas and beans cooking but now all you smell is exhaust....We were like a big family growing up."*

The Tapia family moved into the Bel Air district in 1953. They were the second home owners. Bel Air elementary was already there, their eldest daughter was 2 yrs. When the Tapia family moved in, her daughters attended Bel Air elementary. McKinley was the Jr. High or middle school and Sandia was their High School.

*Q: What was Bel Air like ?*

The homes all looked like match boxes. Everyone was really friendly, we were a small family with 2 girls, it was a completely new thing for us. I introduced myself to the neighbors right away, I'm a real out going person you know, we used to babysit for each other. My husband worked for the government as an engineer, he was a lumber inspector and he would go out of town a lot. Ohh, you could smell the fresh air, the smell of tortillas and beans cooking but now all you smell is exhaust. It was real family oriented. The neighbors on our right side had 7 kids and they went to school at the Queen of Heaven. They would leave for school in their uniforms, all the mothers would walk to the corner to see them off to school. The girls would wear dresses and bows in their hair. People would keep their houses clean, and they were so nice, when we first move in we didn't have a rake so the neighbors came over lent me a rake and helped me clean up a little. We used to walk to Regina Chaley on Menaul and Carlisle it's now the Queen of Heaven. We would walk to San Mateo to the Piggly Wiggly and Safeway on N. San Mateo. We did a lot of walking in those days. We didn't have to discipline the children, they would say thank you, or I'm sorry Mom I won't do it again, but now it's different, I see it in my grandchildren, they want to challenge you and push the limits.

*Q: Where there any major event?*

Well there was the moving of the church

*Q: What did you do for recreational activity?*

Well Francisco and Ray Augustine, well... we got 2 Cuban boys through a government program. We had them for three years, we would have like to adopted them but they left to be reunited with their family. They loved playing with all the children on the block. We were like a big family growing up. We had big Bar-B-Q's,

neighbors would bring pots over. Kids would ride their bicycles in the streets. I would take my kids to catechism at the church, I also used to be a catechism teacher. The family across the street had 8 children, then they moved to Rio Rancho, everyone was devastated. It was sad to see them leave. Oh, then Candelaria was a dirt road and people would gather to watch the different construction going up in the area.

*Q: Why did you move to Bel Air?*

We lived down in the Valley with my husbands grandparents. It was so small, we used to separate the rooms with curtains and we all shared one bathroom. My husband just felt that we needed to buy our own home. When we bought the house we thought it was so big. We added to the front, side, and the back, that was for the boys. All the kids would come over and play in the den they would pantomime to the Beatles. I went out to the alleys to collect card board boxes to make them a drum set and they would use the mop as a microphone. One time they had an assembly at Del Norte they won first place pantomiming the Beatles. I had to be really careful with the drums so they would break. I did a lot with the kids.

*Q: Were you originally from Albuquerque?*

I was from the South east valley, I went to ABQ HS in the 40's. My in laws live in the North east Heights. My youngest daughter lives in ABQ by her. We adopted a son after they took the boys away from us. We originally wanted 3 boys and 3 girls but it worked out just as well with my daughters husbands and my sons wife that makes 6. I have 7 grandchildren and 1 great grand child.

*Q: Do you belong to any organizations?*

My husband belongs to the Knights of Columbus. He's retired from the government. I'm involved with the church and now we're investing our money in buying homes.

*Q: Do any of the original owners still live there?*

One family down the street still live there on Candelaria and Quincy. Some are renting and some are home owners.

*Q: Did you know that some of the subdivisions had a covenant restricting "Colored" people from buying in Bel Air's first subdivision?*

We did know that colored people were not allowed to live up there. We lived in the Valley it was mixed we didn't know the difference, black people lived next to us they ate chili, beans and spoke Spanish. And we went to their church I loved the music especially the tambourines they used. But I never saw any colored families in this area. It was affordable housing for us, we only paid \$289 for the closing costs



and our monthly payments were \$42 dollars a month. But I do remember that when taking the bus, colored people had to sit at the back or they would stand even if there was room in the front.

*Q: Are there any changes you'd like to see in the neighborhood?*

Yes, I'd like to see it cleaned up. People also gun their motors and I can smell the fumes because I usually like to open the front door in the morning to let the fresh air in but then I can smell all those exhaust fumes. And old cars people are bringing in old cars and are just leaving there to rot, it looks so ugly.

*Q: Did you use the parks?*

Yes, we went to the parks, the Boys club, we used the tennis courts, basket ball courts. Now the Boys club is Boys and Girls club.

### INTERVIEW 3

Fred and Cecilia Bachicha  
4016 Palo Duro NE, 87110

*"I would say out of a 1/2 of the block 1/2 of those are the original owners. But the majority of the people own their homes."*

The Bachicha family purchased a house in 1956 and moved into it in 1957. They are the original owners of the house and continue to live there. They moved there as a young couple with two daughters ages 1 and 2. When they first moved, it seemed like it was in the middle of nowhere. The area continued to grow as more houses went up and Montgomery went from a dirt road to a paved road. They moved in from the Valley, Mr. Bachicha was from Barelmas and they both attended Albuquerque High School. Mr. Bachicha worked for the Post Office, then he started teaching at Loveland Elementary, he drove to work in the west mesa every day. Ms. Bachicha worked at Sunbelt Trading on Coors, she took Central to work. They wanted a bigger house, so they drove around and saw these houses, they thought they were really nice 3 bedroom homes. They had only been married three years but after seeing the model home, they put their house in the valley up for sale, it sold that same day so they had to rent for six months while their house was being built.

*Q: What businesses were in the area?*

The Montgomery Plaza went up in 68' or 70'. There was not too much going on, there was Whataburger on Washington and Menaul.

*Q: What are some problems?*

It's growing too much

*Q: Do you remember the water tower that indicated that the area was a restrictive subdivision?*

Yes, but different kinds of people moved in near us. There was and Indian, Black and some other Spanish families in the area.

*Q: Why did you choose the area?*

We thought it would be centrally located. We were right, real estate agents have knocked on our doors asking us if we want to sell our home. I guess because we are very close to Winrock, Coronado and Downtown.

*Q: Where both of you originally from the Albuquerque area?*

My parents were from Mountainaire NM, but I went to school here, I went to Albuquerque HS where I met my husband who was originally from Barelmas. We

were married in Sacred Heart Church. My kids well, I have three boys, my son Mike is the Assistant Principal at Manzano HS, My second son is a Mechanical Engineer, he moved to Boulder Colorado for 15 years, he just recently moved back, he went back to UNM but he's still looking for a job. He lives on San Mateo and Academy. My 3rd son is a technician for Presbyterian Hospital on San Mateo.

*Q: What did you do for recreation?*

Well we did things in the area, the boys were in baseball, football and 5 years after we got here they built Del Norte. My kids went to Hodges, McKinley and then to Del Norte.

*Q: Was Queen of Heaven the first Church your family attended?*

Yes, Queen of Heaven used to be on the corner of Menal and Carlisle. It used to be called Regina Chaley, it was 3 big rooms kind of house like. We had mass there for 3 years, then it moved to Claremont. First we had mass in the parish hall for five years while they built the main church.

*Q: What are some of the problems in the area now?*

The Neighborhood is very nice west of Carlisle but now you have low income housing, apartments with single mothers and now we have to lock our doors now you don't feel as safe.

*Q: How about parks in the area?*

We didn't have any at first but Grecian park went up around 1962 and then the park on Montgomery was built around 1965. Then they built a library 1-2 years after and then a senior citizens center. So that was good.

*Q: Did you belong to any of the local organizations?*

My husband belongs to the Knights of Columbus ( a Catholic association). The hall is on San Mateo by the church. It 's generally for men but some women are involved. They have potlucks every 3rd Monday of the Month, they have camp outs, they have Easter egg hunts for the children, Halloween, and X-mas carnivals and even car washes to fund raise.

*Q: Are some of your neighbors the original home owners?*

I would say out of a 1/2 of the block 1/2 of those are the original owners. But the majority of the people own their homes.

*Q: What is something you would want to change about your area?*

The area, it has grown so much and I'm sure it's going to get worse as will the traffic.

*Q: Do you still visit the Valley area for any reason?*

Well we have gone to celebrate weddings or baptisms in Old Town

INTERVIEW 4

Ms. Sedillo and her two daughters  
2703 Madison

*"...it was safe for everybody, now your afraid to leave your doors open and to go anywhere, even afraid to go to the neighbors house cause somebody will break in, there's a lot of strange people (coming to ) the area and parking across the street..."*

The Sedillo family moved into the Bel Air in April 1964 and continue to rent from the same owners. They are very concerned with crime and feel that more needs to be done in the area of policing robberies and drug selling in the neighborhood. They mentioned several occasions where they have witnessed crimes in broad daylight. They all like the area and reside there but would like to feel safe again.

*What brought you to Bel Air?*

Oh, we were looking for a bigger house, my son was born and we didn't fit in a little apartment.

*Where did you used to live ?*

We moved from the Valley, we lived in the area between 4th & 5th and Indian School Rd, in a little apartment, so we were looking for a bigger house and they were going to knock down the apartment over there so we had to move, that's why we came over here.. I loved it over here because over there we lived in an apt towards the alley, I didn't see anybody except trash men. I didn't like it at all.

*Did the both of you find work in this area? Did your husband work close by?*

He's worked all over, in different places and different areas.

*What were some of your favorite spots in this area when you first moved in?*

Tasty freeze on the corner of Jefferson where Max Drive in is. The restaurants in the area. We would sometimes go to Larry's Restaurant on 4th street when my husband got paid, they had great tacos. I used to take my kids to Uncle Cliff's, they would be there all day and still when we got home they were mad when they came home.

Was there a park around here mom

Well I would take you to the park on 2nd street

What about one around here mom?

Well I don't know, I guess it was mostly Uncle Cliff's

*So you still did a lot of your activity in that area even after you moved to Bel Air?*

Well no, once we moved here we did everything here, it was safe for everybody, now your afraid to leave your doors open and to go anywhere, even afraid to go to the neighbors house cause somebody will break in, there's a lot of strange people in the area and parking across the street here and you don't even know what they're watching.

Well they used to just come and eat lunch there, we figured they were eating their lunch from Max's but then now, they are usually not eating, they are sitting there watching

They are watching somebody but I don't know who. We saw two people, a guy running out of that house, when I was changing my water heater. I heard the alarm and I saw him running to his car but he didn't come this way because he saw me, he backed up the car all the way to Menaul fast.

*Did you call anyone?*

Yeah, but by the time they come, they are already gone. The police came way after it happened....so you know.

*Are you originally from this area, Albuquerque?*

No, were from Wagon Mound, on the other side of Las Vegas (NM).

*Do any of you know where the name Bel Air came from?*

No,...they used to have a Bel Air drug store, I would go there to make phone calls because I didn't have a phone.

*Where there other businesses like that near by?*

I didn't drive so I had to walk everywhere there weren't many places I could go.

So was there a supermarket?

No but there was...

a Piggly Wiggly ...,

yeah but it was over on San Mateo

but that was the closest one

There used to be a Smith's over there or Food Town or something.

There was a Barber shop right there in the Bel Air area.

*How about the schools, what were the schools like?*

They were pretty good, I trusted everybody and my kids would walk to school with their friends.

We were able to walk to school without getting jumped now your afraid you'll get jumped

Once in a while there would be a fight but it wasn't like now, everybody has got a knife and a gun, it's scary now.

*What about Church? Did you find a church in the area to go to?*

Yes, Queen of Heaven, I still go, I belong to the choir. When we moved here they would have the mass at the parish hall, then they built the main church afterwards.

*Did the church have any activities for the residents of Bel Air?*

No not really, for Halloween they would have a carnival

and they used to have a real fun carnival for the kids at the Bel Air School

They still have it every year. Everybody would volunteer for the booths  
yeah, the cake walks the fish pond.

I still like it now that I'm older, I still like to go to the carnival

*Where there any dirt roads in the area when you first moved in?*

I didn't see any dirt roads

Well remember it was all dirt where the Wienerschnitzel is, all that stuff, there wasn't a 7-Eleven none of that stuff was there, I remember just a bunch of dirt.

Those apartments weren't even there on Carlisle and Candelaria

Over here on All Sups it used to be called PDQ, it stood for Pretty Darn Quick

The kids used to walk over there to get what ever they wanted, a man named Mr. Flori worked there. He worked there forever.

Mom didn't we know a man that worked at the tasty freeze here yeah, Mr. Parker

You used to always take us to Max Drive in, it used to be on the corner of Madison there was a car hop in the front. We always used to go there, I guess it was in the late sixties.

*What were some of the problems back then?*

No, you trusted everybody, and there was no problem at all because, there was a lot of young kids they played together and they had fun together, there were some fights but you trusted everybody, it was nice. I don't know, now a days, forget it.

*So what are the major problems now?*

Well, people breaking into houses, even during the day time. About a month ago, I was out there feeding old bread crumbs to the birds and I say a young kid in the yard next door. He was steeling a bike and there was a girl on the other side waiting for the bike, there was a pick ready, so they handed the bike over the fence and the little kid jumped back over the fence, ran, and jumped in the truck.

Yeah, and these were young kids

This was about fifteen minutes before the owner came. That little kid was about 10 or 11 years old and the girl was a young girl too. They must have gotten out early from school.

There's more drugs around her too ha mom.



That little Bel Air park, that druggie was there last night. They hang around there waiting for customers I guess.

*Do those people live in the area?*

I have no idea.

I've never seen them

But I've seen them there so many times.

*So what would you like to see changed, more policing?*

Yes, We don't see officers very much around here, once in awhile they'll drive by.

But I have seen a few more since our last meeting, but not like every day.

*Di d both of you move into the Bel Air neighborhood?*

I did, yes, I live on Truman and my sister lives on the next block down the street, they are trying to buy the house.

INTERVIEW 5  
Noma Goss  
2838 Hermosa NE

*"One of the things that I liked about it (the Bel Air neighborhood) and like about it now is that it's very multi-cultural. It's a good feeling for me because I never have been in that type of situation before."*

Ms. Goss bought her home in 1987. After living in the far Northeast Heights for many years, the Bel Air neighbor was her choice for her ideal relocation.

*Why did you choose to move to the Bel Air Neighborhood?*

I bought here because I have a dear friend who lives 6 minutes away. I like the neighborhood too. When I first moved here there was a bad situation, people would drive by, stop, then leave. Some one pointed out that a house along the street might be a crack house. I didn't know but I called crime stoppers and within a week they had cleared out the house. We still have a few problems with the new owners of that house, there are cars, trucks parked out in the front and I think the planning and zoning office are trying to do something about it. When I first moved in here, it was quite a friendly neighborhood. One of the things that I liked about it and very much like about it now, is that it's very multi-cultural. It's a good feeling for me because I never have been in that type of situation before.

*Do you work close to here?*

My job is down town. On a good day when the traffic is right, I can make it in 7 minutes.

*Was that a factor when you purchased your home?*

Absolutely, this is probably one of the best location because it's just a straight stretch to Menaul down to Carlisle right by the interstate. It was a very big factor. I have enjoyed living in this house very much but I have been somewhat concerned with my observation that the neighborhood tends to be going down hill. You'll have some lovely homes that are a block away and then up the street there will be vacant lots or say a crack house, like the one on my block. I'm concerned about the neighborhood going down hill and that's the reason why I got involved with the neighborhood watch and the Bel Air Neighborhood Association.

*Are your weekends spent here in the area? Recreation activity?*

Everything is in beautiful walking distance. There are lots of fast foods. Most of my recreation is at my friends house. I find this a very convenient place to live because

things are so close by. When I moved in here one of the things that attracted me was my church. It's the Unitarian church just west of Carlisle.

*Are you originally from the Albuquerque area?*

No, my home is Ogden, Utah. My parents have lived there since the 1940's, my mother still lives there. They had a dancing school there. When I got married, I married overseas my husband and I decided to move to the southwest. One of the reasons we did and one of the reasons why I stay is because of the climate. I have a walking difficulty, it's hard for me to get around in bad climate weather. so I like a place where I can get around in the winter. A second reason is that my then husband moved us around the southwest area with his work, then I got a job with the state of New Mexico, so I've been with the state 22 years, I plan to retire from that job...

Crime seems to be a big problem. Ms Goss has been involved with Crime Stoppers and compliments the Neighborhood Association for it's efforts to stop crime because it's a problem in the area because close friends have had their homes broken into.

*Do you belong to other local organizations?*

Just our committees with the neighborhood association first because I was interested about my rentals. I'm not into organizations because I'm too busy with my life.

*What changes would you like to see in the neighborhood?*

I have a concern that Bel Air might become a slum. I really worry about that. I can't believe that people spend a lot of money for their house then they let it go down hill. I wish those that rent out houses would keep them up... I don't think things happen unless people make it happen and I'm just glad to be a part of the neighborhood organization to see that some of this stuff gets done. I know the other day when we had the clean up day the gals helped me get some stuff cleaned up that I couldn't do. I would like to see the neighborhood organization give people some assistance and just some gentle prodding of people to keeping up the outsides of their houses.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

How long have you lived in the Bel Air neighborhood?

Why did you choose to live in Bel Air?

What was it like when you first moved here?

Did you work close or in your neighborhood area?

What were some major events that happened throughout the years?

What are some favorite spots in the Neighborhood for recreation?

What do you like best about the Bel Air neighborhood?

Do you know where the name came from?

Are you originally from the Albuquerque area?

Has there been any major changes in the neighborhood over time?

Do you belong to a local church?

How about any local organizations?

What do you think about the schools in the area?

What were the local stores and businesses like?

What are some of the challenges your neighborhood is facing now?

If you could change something in your neighborhood, what would it be?

I would like to thank all the interviewees that took the time out to answer my questions. This is a great start for the Neighborhood Association to continue interviewing and put together a comprehensive historical account of the the Bel Air neighborhood.



*This was the first house built, 2703 Morningside, in 1910.*