

# Sookie Sillas Interview

**Sookie Sillas**

My husband worked at the Empire Zinc. He did.

**Kelli Lycke**

Was he involved in a strikes? Or was that? No, no,

**Kelli Lycke**

He worked there later?

**Sookie Sillas**

Yeah. When he got out of the service. He was in Vietnam. And that was in 67-68, I think when he got out. He got his job before he went to the service at the Empire Zinc. So he wasn't there that long. He got there. And he worked there for a while. And then he got, you know, recruited to go to Vietnam. And then, when he got out of the service, he got a job at Phelps dodge. He worked at Phelps Dodge for 36 years

**Kelli Lycke**

but you know, mine.

**Sookie Sillas**

Phelps dodge, okay. Chino was already it was already Phelps Dodge. Okay. And she was over here. But then he didn't work at Freeport. So they changed some mines. You know,

**Kelli Lycke**

before I asked my questions, you said that it's important for your grandkids, you want your grandkids to know about Santa Rita? Can you tell me a bit about that?

**Sookie Sillas**

I want them to know about Santa Rita. No, because it was such a tight knit town, and everybody was willing to help each other. And it wasn't a place for you competed, you know, everybody was in the same level. Nobody really had money. So we all wore about the same clothes. You know, nothing fancy was very few people that probably had nicer tennis shoes than we did.

**Kelli Lycke**

Everybody had the same tennis shoes. You

**Sookie Sillas**

know, it was not nothing. It was just, it was just everybody was the same for now. You know, everybody has really nice clothing and stuff. Santa Rita was not like that. And we didn't judge each other because we didn't know any better. We didn't know that. So and so had nicer clothes, because we weren't not around him. Now we went to Cobre High School, it was a little bit of a shock because it was like, wow, you know, they have nice clothes and and then you wanted nicer things. And thank God by then our parents were a little bit better off and they could afford to give us more stuff than before when we were young. But I just feel that it's important that the kids know that you have to be generous with what you have. You have to learn to love and give and not expect anything in return. You know if you give don't expect something back. I just think it's it's important because all those things are to me there. A lot of them are lost. You see so many people and they don't. They don't care. They judge you by what you have and what you what you are. I want my kids to see the person from inside. Not just this the outside. I think it's important for them to learn about family. And in families, like in our family. We had family that had so much more than we did. But we were brought are not to look at that, to look at ourselves and to always love and respect each other. And we did, we grew up like that. But we knew that they had better cars, they, we knew that they could go to town, Silver City and do shopping, we couldn't do that. But, you know, like, once a month, we'd go to town, once a month, we'd go out to eat. And it was just hamburger nothing. We never went into restaurants and sat down and made like, like this kids now, you know, there's no way that they would just go to a little hamburger joint and be happy. We were, you know, we appreciate it once a month that we did. And, you know, I tell them that we don't we've never locked our doors. Yeah, never locked our doors and the kids nowadays, you know, you're you don't even trust people. Because you don't know who's gonna walk in your house now. But back then, everybody took care of each other, they saw stranger, they would make sure. You know, what are you doing? They call Are you sure you're okay. You know, it was just not that they were busy, busy bodies, but they were just concerned. And making sure you were Okay, so, you know, it was just a beautiful little town, a very happy and humble place. And we, we just, we everybody got together certain times, and even going to the little grocery store, where they have a little porch and all of us teenagers that were we thought were a lot older, we could sit out there and stay there for an hour. We never got in trouble because we knew that we couldn't mess around. But we were there with our friends. And it was just nice. And now you don't see any of that. You know, and nobody had cars, like, like, everybody has cars now. And there's just so much more that we grew up with. We didn't have and we didn't need. Because we the what we needed was love and friendship. True friendship. Yeah. And now it's a little harder. To me, it seems like it's a little harder. Now where our kids grew up having to work, having to learn and learn neighbors needed something, they'd go offer, and we see that they needed something we tell our boys, we have to go and check and see if they need something or check and because they want to give you money, you don't accept money, you just do it out of kindness. And, and they learned that and they've instilled that in some of my kids, but so when we get there very spoiled, they have everything they want. And I contribute to that too. But you know, it just for me, I like to talk to them about our growing up and how we had it rough. I mean, compared to them, they don't know walking in the snow to school, they don't know anything about that. And, you know, we we had to, we had a lot of sacrifices to make. And we were given choices. And our choices were not like, you know, you can buy a stereo. No, if we could have have a little portable radio that we could share. We were happy because there was a gift that was given to well, for myself, my brothers and myself. We only had one bedroom. I mean, my mom had theirs and then we have another one. But I have to be with my brothers in the bedroom. But we never..

**Kelli Lycke**

how many were you?

**Sookie Sillas**

There was three of us.

**Kelli Lycke**

Okay.

**Sookie Sillas**

Yeah. So it was two boys. So it wasn't like you had this fancy beautiful rooms. You didn't you just had your nice bedroom and you were thankful that you had a bedroom.

**Kelli Lycke**

And I know you've talked about this before, but would you mind just again talking about your house?

**Sookie Sillas**

My my parents bought it was a very small, very old house. And it needed a lot of work. So my my mom's brothers, they, they, they knew how to do everything. They learned the hard way, but they learned so my dad and my mom would buy so much lumber every payday. They couldn't afford a whole lot. So then my uncles once they had a good accumulation of the they built like the bedroom, my mom's bedroom they tore down the one that was there. And they built a real nice solid bedroom. Then they save money and they built another room. And at that time they didn't have bathroom. So it was just that two bedrooms, the living room in the kitchen. And in the kitchen you did your washing, which was a ringer type machine. And we had the clothesline so Oh, you know, it was, it was a humble place, but it was very nice. And it was sturdy. So when the houses got moved, my mom was worried that the Her house was gonna fall because some of the houses had had fallen when they had moved them. They brace them, and they did all kinds of things, but they still have a lot of damage done to our house didn't. Our house moved really well. They did have to take the porches that were in the front and the back. But the housing itself moved very, very nice. And they were able to rebuild the the porch, and they built the back porch. It was different from what we had, but it looked very nice in our house in Central. It's still there. And it's it's a beautiful little house. It's a beautiful house, and we still two bedrooms. It's three bedrooms and two bathrooms.

**Kelli Lycke**

Oh, it's a lot bigger. It's

**Kelli Lycke**

doubled in size.

**Sookie Sillas**

And then he had his own laundry room. So yeah, it was it was a lot bigger. I mean, the and my mom's kitchen cabinets when they moved in to Central they they built cabinets ever built by scratch, you know,

so they were I mean, those cabinets will be there for live until that house is demolished or you know, but they don't have to move like our aren't cabinets are not built that way. You know, they're, they're okay, but they're not. They're not solid wood. And my mom's cabinets were solid wood. And they were built by my mom's brothers and a carpenter who was a very good friend of ours. So my uncles would help him build, you know, houses or whatever he needed to do. So in turn, they helped build my mom's cabinets and stuff. So

**Kelli Lycke**

it was for free.

**Kelli Lycke**

It was just well, just

**Sookie Sillas**

they paid the the contractor, because he that was his job. But he didn't charge like, like, because my uncles were helping him. And so they didn't charge what would regularly cost anybody to do but yeah, but it was it was a nice house. And it's still very nice. And I wish I could show it to you, but it's not ours anymore. And we just sold it, what, two years ago, two years ago.

**Kelli Lycke**

I know we talked also a bit about this, but how would you describe your relationship to other people from Santa Rita.

**Sookie Sillas**

We just built a bond. You know, it was a bond that we had. And even to this day, like I was telling you, if somebody from Santa Rita dies, we feel like we have to go either because they were my mom's friends, my dad's or our friends from school, it was their parents. So we feel like we're obligated to go not that we have to but and once you go to something like that you always see more people from Santa Rita. So it's like a little reunion. Every time somebody dies because you meet so many meet, you just reacquaint each other with with each other like, not too long ago. Last year, we had one of our friends from Santa Rita, they moved to California. And it's been 54 years that I have not seen him.

**Kelli Lycke**

Wow.

**Sookie Sillas**

My brother had seen Jesse Turray about three, four years ago. But he got COVID. And he passed away. So they let him know. So then my brother let me know. And then I went to school with with their sister, his sister. So I contacted her and now we reacquainted each other so we write to each other or call Send cards. But we and it's funny because we were just talking the other day. I said maybe we can this summer, meet half weeks and get a hotel and just have half time she she doesn't her husband died. Her kids are grown. I have my husband but if we go to Phoenix, I can leave my husband with my kids and we can go to a nice hotel and just just visit and just have a good time just talking about our growing up because that was that was one family that was very, very well, they were they were very

close to my mom, my grandma and my grandpa. They were next-door neighbors. And then when they moved, you know, we lost track of each other. And then about 20 years ago, they had a Santa Rita reunion. And the brothers came and we I wasn't there but my brother was. So he kind of stayed together. But Jesse he had just seen about three years before and they had stayed in contact and as a matter of fact, they had been calling each other. So when he passed his daughter got his dad's phone. And he saw she saw the people he had last talk to. So she called him, let them know. And she said she wanted pictures of her for her. Dad, you know, when he was little, so my brother was able to send in baseball pictures and just,

**Kelli Lycke**

that's cool. Yeah, that's so cool.

**Sookie Sillas**

But you know, that's the way I think Santa Rita. That's why I tell you, we were very close.

**Kelli Lycke**

It's almost like family. And because you don't ask for pictures of your friend's cousin usually. Or your friend's dad, but you guys do?

**Sookie Sillas**

Yeah. I mean, it's really just something else he didn't like this Chinorama was like, my cousin. He inherited from one of my uncle's a box of them. And he says, I don't know what to do with them. I said, Oh, my God, I'd hold on to them. Jenny gave me some and I'm holding on to me. He says, No, I don't want to hold on to them. I want to give him out. And I said, What are you gonna do? He says, Well, I'm gonna look anyway, see, like, your dad. I'll bring it to you or, or one of your brothers. So I said, Well, that's good. So the other day, he went to my, my friend's house, and she was all excited. She called me she says, I've seen your your cousin, but I had never really talked to him. He comes to my door. And I told him, Oh, come on in. We know. I mean, he says, Well, I have something for you. And she's she's got like, what did you know, she said, Never in my life did I think it was a Chinorama with her family in it. And so she was all happy. And that's what he's doing. You know, he's getting the Chinoramas and then he looks. And then if he knows somebody that the picture of one of their family members, then he goes and give it to them.

**Kelli Lycke**

That makes sense. Because Francis was asking me, she's I told her you had Chinoramos and she was she asked me, we'll see if you have the one where my dad retired, see if there's any with my dad. So it's the same thing?

**Sookie Sillas**

Well, I'll be sure to ask Gilbert. And I'll give you his name. And he loves to talk. So. Oh, my God. It's okay. So anyway,

**Kelli Lycke**

is he Gilbert? What's his last name?

**Sookie Sillas**

Costales

**Kelli Lycke**

okay. Yeah.

**Sookie Sillas**

And he lives on Market Street. And like I said, you know, I'm sure he, I mean, because he has the gift. He can talk like Olga. You know, he does. And I'm sure he can give you a lot more. He was brought up by, well, my aunt lived with my grandma, my grandpa, but they all grew up together. So but like, I tell you, Santa Rita, it was like, five houses are all related. So you'd go from one house to the next. And then. And then like myself, I had two very, very close friends. And we still, we still get to visit, you know, call each other sometimes when I was in California, and she'll come by and visit me. So you know, we've always I don't know why it was just a bonding that we had. And very neat. We call them find out, you know, they're in trouble or whatever. We'll find out if they need anything. We'll try and send them whatever they we can, you know, so but that's just the way we are in Santa Rita. And I don't. People don't. I don't hear that kind of a relationship. Bayard doesn't have that kind unless. It's people from Santa Rita. Because there's a lot of people from Santa Rita and Bayard than you do. You know, you know, the neighbors, but I don't know. That's just the way we are.

**Kelli Lycke**

Yep. This is not on my list of questions. But it's something that Olga touched on a little bit is like, do you feel like that relationship is deteriorating as people age? Or do you feel like that's something that people from Santa Rita are handing down to the community?

**Sookie Sillas**

Well, it's ending because like, our kids have moved out of Santa Rita. So like, my, my kids know, a lot of people from from here, but I don't think that they would be as open as we were, or are to people here. You know, like, now that my daughter had her surgery and she was in Colorado. You can't imagine the cards and money that were sent to my daughter, from my friends from the people from Santa Rita. I mean, my friends from Santa Rita,

**Kelli Lycke**

that's really touching. Yeah. And,

**Sookie Sillas**

you know, I was like, I mean, I didn't expect that. I didn't I mean, we're close, but I didn't expect them to want to help my daughter. Knowing that she was by herself, and she didn't have anybody to help her except, you know, her brothers and sisters and us, so I got no cards, take this to Patricia. So we got it open, and we had some that are \$100, some \$50. One of them sent \$400.

**Kelli Lycke**

That's big money.

**Sookie Sillas**

Yeah. And then one of that Cendana dollars was somebody that I know, doesn't have that much money, not to be giving money away. So it's kind of I felt bad. And my daughter said, Maybe we should return it. I said, no, they send it with love and you just have to acknowledge that you got it and let them know you appreciate it. And I said, when I'm there, I'll make sure that I've always helped him anyway. But I'll make sure that I'm there for them when they need me. So I think that we have, but you know, we can we can help you something's true. Wow, she lost her husband, too. And, of course, we had to help her there too. So, you know, just just something that we have learned. But I don't know if our kids would learn. I mean, like my daughter was so appreciative. She said, I never, I mean, I know them because of you. But I never thought that they would extend their, their love and and their donations to me, you know, it really, you know, I don't have to accept them. Because, you know, I don't, I said, No, you accept gifts. And you just just make sure that you acknowledge that you got it and you appreciate their help. So like I said, I don't think I don't think he meant as much as I wish I could say my kids are going to do it. I don't know if they would. I know. You know, for my closest friends, I know that they would let some of these people were just friends, acquaintances, friends, from Santa Rita. So I mean, that's why I tell you, we're there to help each other. And that's something that I don't think you'll see anywhere else.

**Kelli Lycke**

It's certainly beautiful. It's something that I have noticed this morning. And I know that Francis is not from Santa Rita. She's too young. Right, right. But she kind of embodies some of that, that I see. Because when I first came down here, first of all, when I met her, I was standing in front of the union hall. And I was like, I have my big old video camera, and I'm a white girl with Arizona plates likeshe was she pulled up. She said, Excuse me, can I help you? I'm like, Oh, I'm just a student. And I'm learning how to do that. I'm working on a project. And you know, she said, Well, next time you're in town, call me, you know, and I did. And I had plans to stay here in Silver City at a hostel. And she said, Oh, no, no, no, no, that's not how we are, you're going to stay in my house with me. And I've never really met her.

**Sookie Sillas**

That was nice.

**Kelli Lycke**

It was so nice. And like when I came here, this trip, you know, there's, there's just Walmart here, right? There's not Best Buy. There's nothing and my camera charger was broken. I guess it broke on the way here. And I'm like, No, I came here just to do interviews. What am I going to do? There's no way I can get anything. She was calling Western to see if they had camera chargers, I could borrow she called the Silver City press to see if their media person. They gave her the number of a photographer to see if a videographer to see if he had a charger. I mean, she bent over backwards. And I've never seen anybody like that. But it seems like that's kind of the mentality.

**Sookie Sillas**

Right? Yeah, I mean, like I say, you know, you just help each other out.

**Kelli Lycke**

And it's beautiful.

**Sookie Sillas**

Just something that that we've developed and and I do I always tell my kids to always be nice and never expect to get in return. Because that's not right. And my kids are pretty good. They really are. I have Patricia the oldest she's very talkative, very friendly. My son is very friendly, very talkative, but then I have two my daughter and my youngest son, who are very much like their dad. They're not. They're not they're not saying they're not friendly. But they wait for somebody. They have to get warmed up.

**Kelli Lycke**

Yeah.

**Sookie Sillas**

In order to to let go you know, and Patricia and Michael they don't I mean, they'll just pick up the conversation and

**Kelli Lycke**

warm

**Sookie Sillas**

and they Yeah, And it just, it's interesting, even within your own family to see how different people can be. And then I tell him, oh my God, you're just like your dad, you know? They're going Mom! Everywhere you go, you know people and I go like, I've lived here all my life. So what do you want me to do? And I have a friend, the one that I chose moving, she's moving to Arizona. And she, when I first met her, I never went anywhere without my husband. I mean, just the way we were brought up. And one day, the kids were in T-ball. And she said, Would you like to go shopping in Las Cruces? And I said, Oh, my God, no. I mean, I can't go anywhere without my husband. She's like, Oh, my God, I've got work to do on you. And then I've got like, she mean, so anyway, she was she was, what do we got to be very close friends? And she said, Oh, my God, I can not believe. And you make breakfast for your husband and you make lunch for your husband? And you set the table for him? Hell, heck, no. You know, I, I just put ready, you get your plate. And I wash dishes, but you pick up and put it in the sink, you know, and I'll do the rest. And she says in your house. He gets up to she says for you put up. And, you know, I'm not I wasn't brought up that way. So well. I was brought up that way. So yeah, but I have I have changed I have learned to, to go on trips by myself when my friends, which we never did, but you know, just things like that. Because we Hispanics are very, we're very close to each other. And we were told that once you got married, you had to take care of your husband.

**Kelli Lycke**

My fiance is Hispanic, by the way

**Sookie Sillas**

Oh, so you have to take care of him? Or is he?

**Kelli Lycke**

Well, um, I don't say I have to take care of him. But I have learned like the expression of love a lot of times is for example, to peel a banana.

**Sookie Sillas**

Right.

**Kelli Lycke**

And in my life growing up, I would have said, heck no, peel your own banana. But it's just learning a new expression of love.

**Sookie Sillas**

Yeah. Well, and that's, I mean, that's the way we were, you know, I mean, now like I say, Well, of course, now we're home alone. But the kids would make fun of me because God mom, you do everything for dad. And now, my two sons that would never cook, never do anything for themselves. I did it all. And now I go to their houses and they're cooking. They're doing laundry. And I'm going like well thank heavens. He says well, Lonnie works and I have to offer. I said what about me did you guys help me? Well mom, you did it all.

**Kelli Lycke**

What did you do for a living?

**Sookie Sillas**

I worked at a jewelry store. I worked there for 21 years. And I first started as a part time, because my kids were still growing up. They were in high school, but to me, it's growing up.

**Kelli Lycke**

Yeah, for sure.

**Sookie Sillas**

And, and then I started to work because my daughter was a senior, and she needed a lot of things and we couldn't get them. We could but we would have charged and I didn't like that. So I thought I'll get a part time job when she graduates then, you know, quit working. But then Yvonne was cheerleader and she always needed different things because she was a cheerleader. So all the girls that wear the same so that meant I had to work so I started to work and like I said, I worked part time until my youngest son was a junior in high school. Then he started to work from nine to three o'clock and before it was from 10 to two o'clock, just so that I'd be there and then I'd covered lunches for everybody else and then I come home but I'd have that little extra money to help and then my sons were very involved in sports so as

**Kelli Lycke**

soon as three o'clock hit you're transporting kids to their programs and then coming home to cook dinner.

**Sookie Sillas**

Right

**Kelli Lycke**

okay.

**Sookie Sillas**

And we do not eat dinner until all of us were together. That's beautiful. Sometimes we were eating dinner at eight o'clock. And that was because cheerleading or game or and I would tell them you can snack. You can have a snack, but we none of us are going to eat until we're all together and we all share what we went through during the day. And it was mainly we we usually didn't share The kids, you know, we have practice and so, so missed. And, you know, there was always drama wasn't one thing was somebody else, you know, but, but it was, that's the way we grew up. And it's sad to say, they don't do that anymore. My daughter does my daughter, they do. But now they're all you know, in college, but they used to do it. And you know, they would try and say seven o'clock is our limit, we have to eat by seven o'clock. Sometimes they all each together. But if somebody can make it at seven, then you know, because of practice or whatever, then they'd go ahead and eat and then they'd get home and eat late. No, we did, we would. That's pretty beautiful.

**Kelli Lycke**

That's kind of beautiful advice I think for Well,

**Sookie Sillas**

I always think that's a time to share your day. And it's not actually for us parents do share, but we need to know where kids are doing right and how they feel. And there's just so much that

**Kelli Lycke**

so I just want to know, are there any mementos or objects or photos that you want to share and talk about

**Sookie Sillas**

a little bit, but I have those right there. Like I said, I have the Chinoramas and, and I made a, we had a family reunion and I put a lot of the pictures from the family from from Santa Rita that. Like I took pictures of each family and put them in her family reunion. But it was mainly we had a picture of the Kneeling Nun and our church in Santa Rita. And we have our school from Sentry to the we went to the Catholic school. But mainly, I mean I hold on to those because like I said one was my mom's and then one was a very dear friend of mines.

**Kelli Lycke**

So this brown one that was your mom's?

**Sookie Sillas**

Yeah, that was my mom's

**Kelli Lycke**

it's beautifully framed to it looks like she spent a lot of money to get it framed. So It was important to her too.

**Sookie Sillas**

we had it framed for her because we knew that she treasured the picture. And she just had it in a very plain picture so. We we it now. the Brown was the people that that did it said that there would be a better color. And I kind of didn't really like the brown because it was so dark. But my mom loved it. So I mean it's. Is the glare real bad?

**Kelli Lycke**

well I can fix the glare, okay. You know technology these days.

**Sookie Sillas**

Oh, yeah.

**Kelli Lycke**

Okay, anything else you want to add about Senator reader?

**Sookie Sillas**

No, just I can't. Now I can't even think. I forgot you were recording.

**Kelli Lycke**

Well, that's the point. I hope it makes you comfortable.

**Sookie Sillas**

I guess so because I did stop talking