

<b>Date</b>	July 13, 2021
<b>Time</b>	5:00pm
<b>Interviewer</b>	Edward Y. Millar
<b>Interviewee</b>	Jipp Ortiz and Rick Ortiz
<b>Location</b>	Ed's Garage
<b>Audio log Prepared by:</b>	Edward Y. Millar
<b>Collection Number</b>	AFC 2020/013 <i>The Ransomville Speedway: Dirt Track Workers in Western New York</i>

**Archie Green Fellowship Ransomville Speedway Interviews,  
American Folklife Center, Library of Congress**

---

**Day 1 Field Notes**

**Pre-Interview**

I first reached out to a friend and former neighbor Justin Clark back in May, after bumping into him in Lewiston (not literally, he saw us walking and pulled over to chat), after not seeing him for a bit. I mentioned about the project I was doing and that I had been meaning to reach out to him as I remembered that he works at Ed's Garage in Ransomville, which has a really important connection to the Ransomville Speedway. Ed's Garage is owned by Jipp Ortiz, who is the son of Ed Ortiz, one of the main founders of the Ransomville Slowpokes, who would go on to found the speedway in 1955 behind his father's garage (then Pedro Motors, now Ed's Garage).

I texted Justin a few days after bumping into him, and he helped setup a meeting with Jipp and myself end of may to try and get together, where I introduced myself to Jipp and spoke a bit about the project we were working on for the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Ed's Garage in Ransomville is still one of the main auto shops in the Ransomville / Wilson area (and one of the oldest family run ones, it opened in 1946), and are constantly busy as well.

After meeting and talking with Jipp a bit initially about the project, agreed to check in later on and see what week looks good for him, and Jipp mentioned he'd check in with his Uncle Rick too as he'd be a great person to talk to as he was around then. Rick Ortiz is Ed's younger brother, and was around 10 or 11 when the Slowpokes started to race, and remembers working at the track / a lot of those early memories.

After not hearing back after two weeks, I sent my friend a text to see how things at the shop were looking, and as I assumed, they were absolutely slammed, so I told him not to worry and would check back later in June / early July.

Justin shot me a text checking my schedule and Jipp's and found out first week of July that our schedules would line up alright – after business hours but before their weekly bible study – and we'd be able to first get together on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July for the interview, so I thanked Justin and started to prep the materials on my end.

Day of, Justin shot me a text to make sure I was still ok to come out after work, and I confirmed I was. I wrapped up my work at the museum around 4:30 – a few minutes after the end of the Botkin Lecture we gave which ended about ten minutes earlier, I got my gear together and hopped into my car and drove up to Ransomville. When I got to Ed's Garage I looked for Justin and Jipp, and everyone was still finishing up a lot of body work and other mechanical car stuff so I asked if it'd be alright if I walked around for a bit outside and went to go do that.

After walking around for a bit around the garage and out back (as that's where the original track was), I checked back in if they were ready and Jipp had us go setup and walk over to the office area, where he then introduced me to his uncle Rick who had just shown up too. Jipp pulled out the box of all their old records before the interview, and was walking me through the historic photos and the logbooks, meeting minutes, bylaws, etc. all from the slowpokes – and all dating back to the 1950s: everything was in really pristine condition and organized, which I told Jipp I usually come across the opposite in my line of work. I told Jipp I could help out just by digitizing those historic objects, as what they currently have is only the physical copies, and there was just incredible note taking and notes that were kept. And the photographs of the races on the original track were really something else too (and there aren't any of those photos out there currently!)

After looking through the stuff so more, Jipp mentioned that we just had to finish by 6 / around 6 as they have the bible study after, and I took a look at the time and realized that it was already 5:15. So I mentioned that maybe we'd need to separate the interview into two parts (to do some this day and then some in a following week at same time), and they said not a problem.

Before starting the interview, I told jipp and rick that for this interview we'd focus more on the ransomville speedway history side of things, and for the next one we'd focus on Ed's Garage.

## **Interview**

During the interview, Jipp and Rick spoke back to their early memories of the Ransomville Speedway (especially the original track), the Ransomville Slowpokes, and Jipp's dad/Rick's brother, Ed Ortiz. Rick and Jipp took turns kind of walking through their knowledge and connection to the speedway, bouncing off one another in terms of trying to remember dates, years, and all of that: sometimes referencing some of the old newspaper clippings and other historic materials that they brought with them. One of the really interesting things to learn about, was how when the track was started by the Slowpokes, it was really more of a club of guys that really loved racing and basically organized together so they had a place to race aside from just drag racing and racing on the roads- for example, racing from ransomville to Niagara Falls.

I was a bit familiar with the history of the track from other research and conversations with some of the older drivers and racers (although most of them went back to the 70s, and not the 50s/60s). But what I didn't know about, was how 1962 would be the last year that Ed Ortiz would really race at the speedway (until a later return about 3-4 decades later), and kind of the beginning of the end of the original period. A local businessman named Harry Schultz, had been buying up stock from stockholders of the track in the few preceding years, before eventually acquiring majority ownership of the track in 1962 (it moved to Braley Road in 1958 from its more humble origins/original track location behind Ed's Garage).

When Harry acquired majority ownership in the track he basically told the Slowpokes, as Jipp and Rick summarized, that he was taking over – and was going to be running the track according to his way from then on: moving from being really a club and grassroots type of thing, to being run as a business, for profit. That he was looking to make X amount of money per weekend, and wanted to own the track and manage it not necessarily because of the racing side, but in looking to make a profit.

This upset a number of drivers of that original club (none of whom were really businessmen): some of the original slowpokes stayed, and others left. Ed Ortiz was part of this second crowd, and never raced at the track that he had helped found – the Ransomville Speedway – again, until nearly 3-4 decades later when he came out of retirement to race (to win a 200<sup>th</sup> title). While Ed Ortiz wasn't racing at Ransomville because of this, he had moved on to race and win championships throughout the Northeast, and Jipp spoke about how every weekend they'd put almost 1000 miles on their car during this period.

Harry would own the track from 1962 till about 1972, when Stan Friesen, himself a racer back then in the 1960 period, (and Kurt Uhl) bought the Speedway, which they would actually own until 2015. Jipp spoke about a memory of how Stan when he took ownership gave his dad the championship jacket or award from 1962, because when his dad left the track and vowed to not race there after that takeover by Harry Schultz, he had been leading in points. But by the late 1970s and early 1980s, had been racing less and less: with Jipp and Rick saying his peak period was really in the 50s and 60s, and into the 70s in terms of racing. Jipp spoke about his relationship with the Ransomville Speedway in this period too (and kind of lack thereof as his dad was racing elsewhere), and of working at the track and growing up and being friends with Joel Friesen. The Friesen family would actually own and manage a large number of dirt tracks in the area, and the family continues to be involved with racing.

Rick shared his relationship with the Ransomville Speedway in those early years too, of working at the concession stand at the old track, which basically was him and a grill. He mentioned that he was too young to really drive and compete then though he did compete once, so his driving career came a bit later.

## Post Interview

As I saw we were approaching 6pm, and I wanted to make sure we didn't go over, I started to wrap up the interview by thanking them around 5:55ish on my phone, and mentioned that we'd continue the conversation – talking about the history of Ed's Garage – the next time around. After the interview, and I asked Jipp about his name too actually and how that nickname became his name and the story behind it, which Rick jokingly nodded that he remembered it too. But Jipp told the story, that basically his dad took off work so he could be with his mom while she was in labor, but she ended up being in labor with Jipp for 16 hours, so his dad (ed ortiz) said something like "this kid's jipping me out of a lot of money". And ever since then, for his whole life, Jipp's been Jipp (or jipper, itself a nickname of a nickname!).

After the interview and before I left, Jipp handed me over the box of materials so I could bring them back to the museum and help digitize all of the files with them, and we talked a bit about the exhibit at the Castellani too and that we'd be interested in helping show some of the historical objects and stuff too (not permanently).

And with that box of historical documents relating to the founding of the Ransomville Speedway and the Ransomville Slowpokes, we bid our goodbyes, and I started on my way home.

---

<b>Date</b>	July 27, 2021
<b>Time</b>	5:00pm
<b>Interviewer</b>	Edward Y. Millar
<b>Interviewee</b>	Jipp Ortiz and Rick Ortiz
<b>Location</b>	Ed's Garage
<b>Audio log Prepared by:</b>	Edward Y. Millar
<b>Collection Number</b>	AFC 2020/013 <i>The Ransomville Speedway: Dirt Track Workers in Western New York</i>

## Day 2 Field Notes

### Pre-Interview

I got to Ed's Garage in Ransomville around 5:00pm, and went in through the main doors, and checking in on Jipp and Justin before heading to the office and getting my equipment setup. Last Tuesday (July 20<sup>th</sup>), Niagara County suffered a really severe, sudden storm that saw hail (in ransomville in july), and widespread flash flooding in specific parts, with about 3 – 6" of rain falling in an hour (heavy rain is considered .3" an hour). But as with all weather events here it was extremely intense, shortlived, and highly localized: for example, Lewiston Village & nearby town area under the escarpment avoided any major flooding. But just up the escarpment, about five minutes away, Niagara University & the Route 31

corridor in Niagara Falls was totally underwater, with many businesses suffering severe damage depending where they were. Going down 104, Cambria (next town over from Lewiston), eastern & Lockport, were probably hit the worst: some farms lost over 100 acres of crops right few weeks before harvesting season. Videos were everywhere of people kayaking down the streets or in their backyards, and the cleanup in the hard hit areas (including Niagara University) was still on going.

Justin showed me some photos on his cellphone as he was working that night, that there wasn't flooding problems in Ransomville but it got hit really badly from the wind and hail – downed branches and debris everywhere. After talking with Justin a little Jipp said I could go setup in the office so I went to head over there, and shortly after Rick came as well. Rick brought along a family album with some really old pictures and went through it with Jipp before starting which was a great opportunity for Jipp to see some of those old photos of family members here & in puerto rico.

After looking through the album for a bit we decided to jump in and get started on the second part of the interview, focusing on the history of Ed's Garage primarily – and its connection to the Ransomville Speedway, with a lot of discussion focused on Jipp's father/Rick's brother Ed Ortiz, who passed away in March 2020.

## **Interview**

Ed's Garage was originally Pedro Motors – a garage and dealership built by Ed Ortiz's father Pedro, who was a Pastor from Puerto Rico (this unique/historic/ongoing connection of the garage to Christian ministry will be revisited at end of interview). The garage was built in 1946 in a field area known locally as the 'strawberry patch' after Pedro found success selling used cars primarily out of his garage behind the family house, which was two doors down – and is still in the family. Pedro Motors at the time was a garage and dealership that sold Kaiser Frazer cars, with a showroom on the one side and a mechanic shop on the other side.

As mentioned in the first part of the interview, the original Ransomville Speedway 'track' was established behind Pedro Motors: and in the early years of the Ransomville Slowpokes, the garage was like an informal meeting spot for the club. Their more formal meetings took place at the nearby Porter Hotel. Ed's Garage continues to be this kind of informal gathering spot for much of the community, and has always been like that over the years.

In 1958 Pedro Ortiz passed away, and Ed Ortiz took over the garage and eventually renamed it to Ed's Garage. As Jipp puts it though, where his grandfather (and Rick's father) was a great businessman but not a mechanic, Jipp's father (Rick's brother) Ed Ortiz was a legendary mechanic, but not a businessman. When Ed Ortiz took over Pedro Motors, it went from being a garage and dealership to focusing on fixing up cars: in contrast to where instead of just buying parts that would replace something that broke on someone's car 1:1, it was basically always things being built or fixed from scratch when Ed ran the garage. That was his specialty and what he was really known for in the community as a mechanic: basically being able to repair anything but not by replacing it with a part but just working around it and

making something work. Jipp and Rick mentioned this reflected kind of the lack of business focus of his dad Ed in that instead of spending extra money or something to invest in a new equipment or tool that would make what they did easier, they just had to work around it: and Rick and Jipp shared a laugh over the state of some of the tools/equipment they had to make do with.

Jipp explained and Rick shared too that Ed loved helping other people, perhaps to a fault, and never charged people anything close to what work was worth: Rick Shared a story about how one time he had to build almost an entire new exhaust system for a customer working the entire day on it, and Ed only charged a fraction of what the actual cost was.

Jipp and Rick shared a lot about the hard times and difficult times that the family went through, including a snowmobiling selling business Ed and Rick started in 1967 that went on for just under a decade. Rick and Jipp also talked about the challenge of Ed racing in the years that he was also running Ed's garage: Rick shared a story about how he'd basically drive to and from the race, and Ed would be sleeping in the car, that it was one of the few times that he ever saw Ed sleep. Much of this goes back to Ed's passion for helping others too, in that he could get a call in the middle of the night or from someone that they needed something fixed, and doesn't matter when but he'd go over to the garage and work until it was done.

This challenge of racing and working at the same time, was something that Jipp and Rick shared too with their own experiences and the difficulties it placed on their families too: that it was hard to balance everything because you were either working at the garage or working on the car for racing.

Jipp took over Ed's Garage after returning from living out west for about 8 years, as his dad (Ed/Rick's brother) said he was going to turn over the business to him, and after Jipp and Ed agreed that he'd be allowed to run the business his way (and Ed would in turn be working under him). Jipp shared the first few months he was basically just cleaning stuff up, and that because of the hard times his dad went through, similar to a lot of families, it was kind of a mentality of never throwing things away (or replacing them with better equipment).

Jipp traces his connection and passion and skill in fabricating and fixing cars from his father and basically just growing up at the garage and the track: that he never went to an official trade school, but just learned how to do everything fixing and repairing cars from his dad or other guys in the shop.

In the closing part of the interview, we focused on the unique connection of Ed's Garage (and earlier Pedro Motors) to Christian ministry and church service: Pedro, Ed and Rick's father, was a pastor from Puerto Rico, and when Pedro Motors opened Pedro would go on to hold some bible studies and church services in the garage. Pedro also helped fund and build multiple churches back in Puerto Rico as well. When Ed Ortiz took over the garage after his father's death in 1958, he continued to hold bible study meetings in Ed's Garage: which is still continued to this day. So for roughly 75 years, Ed's Garage (and Pedro Motors before it) has been not only a garage but also a gathering place for discussing and studying Christianity. For the Ortiz family aside from having such a deep familial relationship to racing,

cars, and mechanic stuff – a deep personal connection to the Christian faith has always been a big part of the family identity.

In closing Jipp and Rick both talked about how as they've gotten older, they've thought more about legacy and how they'll be remembered: Jipp in particular talked about how it was always weird going around and seeing his dad in like the Dirt racing hall of fame, and all these other places and acknowledged on the racing side, but for him, he remembered him more for the other stuff. That it was his dad (and Rick concurred that it was his brother and it was more than racing).

### **Post Interview**

After the interview, I saw that we ran a bit over time and knew they were about to head into bible study, so we quickly wrapped up and gave our goodbyes, after updating them on my progress in helping digitize their historic records.