**Transcription of Walking interview with Beni Ros**

Date and time: 02 Jun, 2023. 11 hrs. Walk starts at 11:13

Duration: 48:13

Distance covered: 2.82 kms

Starting point: Beni’s house

Route: From Beni’s house to different schools where his daughters were studying, in Tochtli street and all the way to near Ladrillo street and Tita’s house.

Notes from interview:

I arrive at Beni's house and explain the logic of the interview and the walk. We agree that it will take place, he suggests a route, and I tell him it's fine. He wants us to pass by some of the schools where his daughters have studied. The walk starts at 11:13 a.m. I put the microphone on him and we record the informed consent. It's sunny, but we go out prepared for it. During the walk, he talks to me about his daughter's school, and we go to three schools his daughters attended. The walk covers a lot of his memories of the neighbourhood and about his daughters as well. He tells me how he became involved in the struggle for water, in which he also mentions his daughters and their participation. We walk down Tochtli Street for quite a while, first one way to one of the schools and then back. At the end he tells me that he wants his pseudonym to be Beni Ros, a combination of his mother's and father's names. At the end of the walk, he tells me that we are near Tita's house, and we stop by to say hello. We spend some time with her talking and eating. During the meal, Beni comments that the neighbourhood used to be called Avándaro, because of the way it was built and that it reminded people of the old tent houses in that area, and that this is a detail that not many people know.

Participants: Interviewer [A] ; Beni [B]

TRANSCRIPTION

A: So let's start the walk, it's 11.13. And we're here in Cueva. Aha. Well, I'll follow you wherever you want to take me, somewhere you think is important, and at the pace you tell me.

B: Well, let's go now, I don't know if we should start here at the primary school, or at the kindergarten. Here there is a kindergarten a few streets away, where my daughters began to make their way through school, studying kindergarten. And then they studied in this primary school here. [making reference to a nearby building, in Tochtli street]

A: This is the primary school.

B: This is the primary school, yes, and the kindergarten is further down the street. In a street that used to have a different street name, later they changed it, now it's called Mixtli. Shall we go there?

A: Yes, we're going there, yes.

B: Let's go. Eh... Let's see, as a foretaste... [we stop in front of a school] This was the primary school, now the main gate is over Cueva. But originally it was here on this street of Tochtli. There you can see the limits. That's where the gate is, all of that was, well, it wasn't fenced off.

So, it was around the year seventy-nine, more or less, that my daughter came here to study primary school. Aha. Ah, but by that time, when she got out of kindergarten, well, the truth is that it was saturated and then... I'm talking about my eldest daughter, who is now fifty years old,

A: Uh-huh.

B: Well, she couldn't get a classroom here, so they put up some temporary classrooms. From here you can see the wall of the school, and over here they put some temporary classrooms [referring to spaces in the school that we can see] where those water tanks are, and it turns out that she couldn't find room here either. And for this, later they put some classrooms where the Mercado de los Reyes is, which is further ahead, it's a bit farther away, but we'll see that later. Ok.

A: And at that time you lived here in Cueva?

B: Yes, I was already living here. I was already living here in Cueva almost on the corner of Tochtli. That's where I live, because when I arrived here in the '71 invasion, I had to take a little piece of land, or a plot of land, whatever you call it, over there by Flores Park, which is further up. But in a readjustment, when the leaders were doing the readjustment, that's when they sent us here to this area. And this is where my daughters started kindergarten and primary school.

A: You told me that one of your daughters was also very involved in the defence of water, right?

B: Ah, yes, well, yes. If there's anything to say about that, we also talked about water, the lack of water. Now where we are going on this street, this is Tochtli Street. Here at first, it had another name, and then they changed it.

A: I've heard it being called something else, yes.

B: And here in this area around here was when, because of the lack of water at that time, little by little the water trucks started coming in. We put our drums in certain places. The good thing about this neighbourhood of Santo Domingo is that it was activated very quickly, by the will of each and every one of us. That way we could see that the cars would come in, that the services would come in, and we as settlers, all the neighbours participated, and we began to even out the streets. And little by little the water trucks began to come in, because at first there were people who had their donkeys and they would go a certain distance away, just outside the neighbourhood, with four bottles of alcohol, two on each side, which they would put on their donkey. And they sold the water. At that time, they would give us a trip for ten pesos, and we would make the water work.

Unfortunately, now that I'm talking about that, there are very few people left, and I can say that I'm an old person now, and the people I knew back then, I haven't really seen them anymore.

A: You haven't seen them any more?

B: No, I haven't seen many people any more. Well, I was in my early twenties at that time.

A: And you knew a lot of people then? All your neighbours?

B: Yes, I knew a lot of neighbours, because now where we go to kindergarten, when they started opening it and our children went to kindergarten, that's where we met. I mean I knew a lot of people, because this kindergarten, of course, is government-run, but also because of certain things we were limited, what do I mean when I say we were limited?

Well, it was built, but there was still work to be done. So we got involved, of course we were asked for support by the director, who I can hardly remember her name now, but she asked for our support in getting us to participate as neighbours. And she wrote to us to go and ask for some support from some shops, at that time I remember very well, the Aurrera that is there in Plaza Universidad. And there we went as a committee of parents to ask them to support us with a blender, an iron, anything. So that we could raffle it off and get a few pennies from there, so that we could have the material, so that we could make the floor. Things like cement, sand, gravel. So here we are, this is the kindergarten [we arrived at the building].

A: This is the kindergarten

B: Yes, I was involved in setting up the place here. At first there was a football pitch, a fronton and all that. But when they started building the kindergarten, all that changed, and that's logical. They put in a secondary school and so on. The truth is that this school, or this neighbourhood, has a lot of history. What I'm talking about is part of what I had to live through, to participate and all that, that's why I'm talking about it.

A: And they are good memories?

B: Ah, of course, they are memories that you can't change for anything. Well, we grew up here, my daughters have made their lives here, and what I'm talking about here is about my daughter, the one who is already 50 years old. But the one after her also studied here. All three were here in kindergarten and all three also went to primary school.

A: Oh, the one over there.

B: Yes, that one. And all three of them also studied at the tele-secondary school. And the neighbourhood has changed a lot.

A: You say there are a lot of people you don't see anymore, but do you think there are many people in the neighbourhood like that?

B: No. Not the people I knew back then, we're talking about more than 50 years ago.

A: So there are a lot of new people now?

B: Yes, a lot of new people. Or if not new, then there are the children, the grandchildren. There are other neighbours who for some reason sold up and left. But that's how this neighbourhood came about.

[we passed a market].

A: And do you remember this market here?

B: This market that is here, that we are passing, was there in Grieta Street. And it was logically built with wood, with sheets, I mean black sheets, just as they could. But over the years they took it away from there and built the market here, and it's on the corner of Tochtli and Mixtli, but it's known as the market of the name that this street used to have, before it was changed, or the Tochtli market.

A: Do you sometimes come here to shop?

B: Sometimes my family comes here. They come here or there's another little market, where right now, let's see if we're going to pass by there by the secondary school because that's where my family also goes. And if not to the Mercado de la bola market, which is on the border between Santo Domingo and Ajusco.

[We walk down Mixtli Street and turn at Tochtli.]

A: And how did your daughter get involved with the water?

B: Yes, that's a very good question, how did we start to get involved. The situation is that here, logically, we suffered from the water, we suffered from the electricity,

we went hungry, cold. This neighbourhood as it looks today is very different. And many people here now don't really know what it was like. Like those of us who actually arrived, now, as they say, and it is a word that may sound very cruel but it is the truth. We invaded here, we were squatters, but that's why those of us who are left here value it. And we value it for the suffering we went through. And not just because of the water or the electricity, but we also suffered pressure, and many people don't know this, that the authorities also pressured us that we had a certain amount of time to pay for the land, and if we didn't pay in a certain amount of time, well, let's see how we would do it. They told us "let's see how you do it, but you have that much time". And they gave us up to three months to pay for the land. A meeting was held on Cactus Street, almost on the corner of what is now Manantial Street, where several authorities from the Ministry of Finance and the now Mayor's Office arrived. At that time I remember that a delegate was there and he gave instructions, and that's why they put pressure on us.

But at that meeting, I was young, and I thought the pressure they put on us was very bad. So I went into the middle of the neighbours, and I took the microphone. And I said that we didn't want to be given anything for free, but we didn't want that kind of pressure either. I said that we were willing to pay. To pay for the land, to pay the cost of the land, whatever it takes, but according to our means. And that's what I said, more or less. After I stopped talking, the neighbours congratulated me. There were several who grabbed me by the shoulder, who invited me to their house to go with them. And so on. Because nobody had the courage to protest, it was just me. And that's how it was. We calmed down and it died down.

But back to the water issue. Here, after we suffered from the water at first. Afterwards, the excavations were made, the water lines. But it wasn't just the government that did it, we participated as neighbours. Because the truth is that this neighbourhood has distinguished itself and has distinguished itself for its participation. And it's not because I'm trying to make less of anyone, but maybe before, because of the need, it was more about women's participation, and to this day. But now it has kind of gone down, because it no longer exists, because the very people who saw how we suffered, they were very combative, very determined fighters. So we opened the water lines, and if we had to open 8 metres, the neighbour in front of where the line was going to pass would open 4 metres and the other neighbour would open 4 metres. So there was good communication, there was no selfishness, it was all about working for the benefit of the neighbourhood. And once the water network and all that came in, we were very happy.

A: And now we're back at the school [I make the comment as we pass in front of the primary school].

B: Yes, this is it. So, with the water we were very happy with the achievements we were making. And many didn't have to worry about paying for the land because they also felt the pressure and many people also sold. Are we going to the secondary school?

A: Yes, let's go, shall we continue along this one, along Tochtli?

B: Yes, we're going towards Tochtli to the secondary school. Then after we got the water and all that, but then came the sad disappointment. Because they were already cutting off the water without us as neighbours really knowing why they were cutting off the water for two or three hours. First it started like that, and then it was half a day, and then it was a day, and so on. So much so that later, when the elections were coming up, they always came to do things in Santo Domingo, because the territory is small, but it has a lot of inhabitants. And then those who were running for deputies, senators and all that, from some parties, promised water tanks, and many people from here said "no, I want a water tank". And we knew that we needed water, but we didn't protest, but instead of protesting to get the water we needed, we accepted what they gave us in the campaign. And that was not for everyone. As always to those who were closest to them, and they gave the water tanks, food, dishes, etc. And we, in ignorance, did not fight for water. And that's how it was until we made a decision, because after that it was already weeks, and some neighbours even months, that the water didn't reach them, and we decided to fight for the water. And we decided to go to the mayor's office, and it turned out that in the mayor's office the mayor did not receive us. There was a mayor who never received us, there was a mayor who received us once and then he would send, of course, his subordinates, his henchmen. And it was like giving him a hard time, but we never gave up, we kept on fighting. So from there we went to the water systems, now with the new government, with Claudia in charge, we wrote two letters to put pressure on them. And yes, they accepted that the water shortage was becoming a more serious problem.

A: So it's something that part of your family has had to do, isn't it? Your daughter and you too.

B: Yes, because later on one of my daughters was the one who started to organise, and we got together.

A: [looking at a house we were passing by] Look at this little tin house.

B: Aha, this is a piece of land that seems to belong to the government. And it would be good to put a clinic or something here, but it's been there for years, eh? [we arrived at the school] Well, this is the secondary school, and this is the market, right next to the school.

A: So you were saying that your daughter was....

B: Oh yes, then one of my daughters was there and she was already organising, as a woman too, because we were short of water. So two of my daughters went to Huayamilpas where the water trucks came from to deliver water, because we never got it, even though they kept phoning us. They gave us the folio number and the water truck never arrived. And they took the decision among the neighbours and that's it. And one of them, well the truth is, it's a question of when she saw the water truck, she climbed up and said "you know what, I need the water, I haven't had water for so many weeks". And she got in and didn't get out.

A: She got on the water truck and took it away.

B: Yes, and that's how the fight started. The neighbours realised, the neighbours began to unite, and this began to generate, it became generalised, and later a committee was formed, a group of neighbours, and we fought for a well. But it wasn't easy, it wasn't easy at all.

A: Here we turned around in Cuicatl.

B: Here we turned around in Cuicatl, this is the main entrance to the school, and this is where my three daughters went to secondary school.

A: So we went to what was their kindergarten, primary and secondary school.

B: Yes, secondary, that's right.

A: How many daughters do you have?

B: Three daughters

B: And now you feel that with the water issue you are in some way continuing something that your daughter started or continuing the struggle of what your daughter started?

B: Of course, yes, you can see the reflection, but many neighbours don't know about it. They don't know how this struggle came about, and sometimes the people from the mayor's office even told my daughter that it was fine, that the proposals were fine. But that's as far as it went. And then my daughter, because of her work, because of her family, distanced herself a bit and that's when I was left in charge, and we continued the struggle.

We even managed to get a well drilled, because after more than forty years there hadn't been a well drilled here in Pedregales de Santo Domingo. And a well was drilled, and one thing that must be clear is that this struggle was made on the basis of sacrifice. Why do I say on the basis of sacrifice? Because all the people who participated, the people who were at the front, as a commission and all this, who needed us at different times, the mayor's office, the water systems and all that, even those of the central government, all these expenses, we paid for ourselves. We pay our fares, if we walk in the sun in the cold, when we have a coffee, a soft drink, a water, whatever, those expenses come out of us.

[We stop to see that some people are protesting on the other side of the street from where we are. We realise that it's a protest against a political candidate.]

A: Who knows what's going on? Some people came to shout at that candidate, that politician.

B: Ah, he must be there

A: They came to shout at him [laughs].

B: Well, he hasn't done anything.

So all those details, those expenses, all the time we put it all on ourselves. We never asked for a coffee, a cent from the people, from the community, for our expenses. We had to have our mobile phone recharged to be always active, to receive messages, to send messages, or to talk to them on the phone at any given moment. And I repeat that it wasn't easy, because then the authorities gave us delays. And we were always putting pressure on them. And that took us part of the time when there was Toledo, when there was Valentín, Negrete, and now the new government, you could say, with Claudia, and now, Giovanni, we have hardly seen him, but he has sent his people to keep us informed, just up to there.

But that's how the water well was achieved. And now, in spite of the hot weather and everything, there was a lack of water, but very little.

The truth is that we lacked very little. It wasn't like in previous years when water trucks came in every day, for many good years. But now we can, more or less, not feel totally happy, but we don't have the pressure that maybe if there is a lack of water, it will be one day, but then it will come. Or two days, but it arrives. This well has already been of great benefit to many people, because here in Santo Domingo there are various groups, but there are people who see it as convenient for them, who are looking for a benefit. And I think that within our committee, all of us who participated, we should all feel satisfied. Those of us who were there from the beginning, those who joined later and all of that, I repeat, we should feel satisfied, proud, because we achieved what we wanted to achieve from the beginning.

A: And lately there has been no need to meet?

B: No, we haven't been meeting for months now, because we no longer suffer from the water.

There are things to continue fighting for, this is not over. Unfortunately, let's see if other people come, because several of us from the committee are now of age. So we're already on our way out, and we'll see if there are people who will continue. It is important that this is not lost, that this kind of struggle is not lost. Because it is for the benefit of the community, and that is what we did, it is for the community, not for the benefit of three or four or five people. And people who think that way are wrong, because that's where the well is. And even people who were against us now benefit from that well, because those people also used to ask for water trucks and now they don't ask for trucks or anything. But anyway, that's up to them.

A: Where are we going now?

B: We're going here to see the school where they also put up some temporary classrooms.

I'm talking about this is where my daughter went and she studied the first year. In the second year she went to the other primary school. But it was here in this school that she studied her first year of primary school, and it brings back good memories.

A: Does walking through these streets bring back good memories?

B: Yes, now it's even. Before it used to be dirt. It's different now, and with all that, we'll keep going, let's see how long, as long as God gives us life.

A: What would you like for the future of the community? What do you imagine for the future of the neighbourhood?

B: Well, according to the situation we are living in, I think it is going to be a very difficult future. Because, to tell the truth, our government, and I'm talking about the mayor, right now we have a lack of organisation. There is no organisation, and I understand that we all have the right to earn a living, and the most when it is honestly, but what is not acceptable is to block the public road up to half the roadway.

A. Does this alley connect to Los Reyes [as we walk down an alley between streets]?

B: Yes, here we are going to go out to the Los Reyes market.

A: So you were telling me that they take over the street?

B: Yes, but all that is because there is no organisation. I really don't know what our local authorities in the mayor's office are doing, they can't work in that sense. Well, it is very difficult for them to even organise the streets. And the streets should be one-way streets, they shouldn't be two-way streets anymore because of how saturated we are.

[we arrived at the school] Here we arrived. In this place all this was land and this is where they put some provisional classrooms. When my daughter studied here in the first year of primary school she was here. And what many people don't know is that we, the parents, protested and that's why this school was built. When they put the temporary classrooms here, they didn't send teachers, and we had to see that too. I remember that it was section 6, and we went to Tlalpan to demand that they send us teachers. And then the parents would go to the house to look for me and say: "Mr. Beni, they don't want to send teachers, let's go to the directorate to see if they are going to open or not. We don't want to do things that shouldn't be done, but within us there are parents with the capacity, or mothers with the capacity, who can educate our children". That's more or less the words. And that's how they sent teachers and the school was opened. Because we were willing, if they didn't send teachers, and they did. That's why I repeat, there are people who don't know the history. There are people who think it was very simple, I say that with a lot of respect. But those of us who suffered, those of us who lived know. Look, more or less a small stream used to run through this part of here.

A: Oh, really?

B: Yes, a little stream used to run through here, and the water looked very clear.

A: Where that street is now.

B: Yes, this way, this is where the stream used to come down, more or less around here by the school, a little stream used to come down. Where did that water go? Who knows...

A: Do you want us to follow the route or do you want to go back?

B: No, we can stop here. There is the market of Los Reyes, that didn't exist too, this is where we end up then.

A: Do you want us to go back?

B: No, look over there where Doña Tita lives [points to the street in front of us]. If you want us to visit her, if we've finished.

A: Well, let's go and say hello

B: Sure, are we done?

A: Well, to conclude, I don't know if you'd like to say a few final words, something you'd like to end with.

B: Well, more than anything, I'd like to thank you for this interview, because I don't know if it's of any use,

A: Of course it does.

B: But it also helped me a lot, because I remembered what happened many years ago.

A: Of course, we went to four schools,

B: We talked about many topics and I remembered thanks to that.

A: And what did you think about doing it while we were walking? What did you think about doing the walk?

B: Ah no, I repeat, they are memories, with the difference that now it's something else, but before it was dirt road [laughs]. That's why I repeat that there are people who don't know, now that they have all the comforts, they have water, they have school, they have secondary school, and they don't know what we suffered, they don't know what we suffered. I repeat, we suffered cold, we suffered hunger and all that. My mother was the one who would go to faena (community work), to another secondary school, to a primary school. She would go with her little buckets to make fillings, anything. That's how we used to work before, we did the faena (community work) and the neighbours participated, there was an interest in the neighbourhood progressing. Because one of the neighbourhoods, Santo Domingo, was built faster than the Ajusco neighbourhood.

A: You mentioned your daughters several times, do you have grandchildren?

B: Yes, I have four grandchildren. And it is a source of satisfaction and pride. They have been good kids, my three granddaughters and my grandson. And I have a great-granddaughter who's a little girl, she's barely two years eight months old. She is very young.

A: In the struggle for water, do you in any way think of your grandchildren and your great-granddaughter?

B: I have informed my grandchildren about all this. I don't know what will happen in the future, and that's why it's a pleasure for me, A, to be able to help you in this sense. Because I know that in the future my grandchildren may need someone to support them, and that makes me do it with a lot of interest, a lot of desire for this to be of some use to you.

A: Thank you very much, if you want we can finish then, we are about to arrive at Doña Tita's house.

B: Done.

A: Thank you very much.