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### Adam Ornelas

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**Oral History Project of Colton, CA - 11/4/13**

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera, I'm the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Emeritus. Emeritus means that I've been retired for a couple of years now. Today is November the 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and it's about 9:45 p.m., and we're at the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). Our guest this afternoon [who] will tell us a little bit about Colton history is Mr. Adam Ornelas. Adam, thank you very much for being with us this afternoon. I'm delighted that you're here because you are our guinea pig. Today we're starting our oral history of South Colton – so why don't we just get started. Adam, tell us about your parents, where did they come from? Why did they come to Colton? And where did they establish [themselves]?

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, my Mother and her family were the first ones to come, her 3 brothers and herself, and my Grandmother, [my Mother's] Father had passed away. They came from a little town called Piterville, Arizona in the year 1920. The reason for my Grandmother [going] there was the fact that she had a brother there—and I think after... her husband passed away she had 3 boys from her previous marriage, so there was seven of them. So they decided to come to Colton and that's where they settled in Colton because she had the brother there.

My Father came from a little town called Teocaltiche, Jalisco. He came to Colton in 1927, and they met there. My Grandmother was a lot like a lot of women they were... they had to make money and somehow my Grandmother was a bootlegger. So my Dad went to have some beer, I guess, and that's how he met my Mom. They were married in 1930 there in Colton at the San Salvador Church.

When my Dad got to Colton, he opened up his barber shop with another gentleman named Jesus Llamas. And at that point in time, the barber laws were not in effect until, I think, 1928: that's when the barber laws came into effect in the state... you were required to have a license. So my Father barbered there up to the time that my Mom and him were married. And it's kind-of interesting, they didn't live in Colton right-off-

the-bat, they moved to La Habra. And the reason they moved to La Habra: they were getting 5 cents more for a haircut than where they were in Colton.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** How much were they getting in Colton?

**Adam Ornelas:** I have no idea...

(Laughter)

**Adam Ornelas:** ...must have been 15 cents, but anyway, maybe in La Habra they were getting 20.

So they lived there for 2 years; and then they came back and they bought the home where I was born; and they lived there until my Father passed away; and then my Mother moved away. And then, of course, the house is still standing there.

There were 7 of us: there were 4 girls and 3 boys; I was born between the 4 girls. Ida is my oldest sister, Delia is the 2nd one, Ava was the 3rd, Alice the 2nd—uh the 4th one—I'm sorry, and-uh my brother Herman, and my brother Lionel, and Lionel died 2 years ago this month.

I'd say, once they got back, they bought the house and my Dad bought the shop right next to the house; so he actually had the barbershop right next to the house. So we continued living there all the time, like-say, growing up and going to school. And my Dad was quite involved in the community. He belonged to the *Progresistas*, and like-I-say, all those years.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Adam, what is the *Progresistas*?

**Adam Ornelas:** It was like a social club. At that point in time, there was not too many places for the Mexican people to get together and socialize. And I think for the most part, they started these different... there was the *Progresistas* and all those kind of programs or clubs. And in time, it became an insurance: it was a death benefit that they started. So that was basically for the most part I think what started these social clubs. And they would have meetings, and they would have dances and that kind of

stuff; and that was a way for those people to get together cause there wasn't too many places the Mexican community would go to, in those days anyway.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Why was that, Adam?

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, the discrimination—I think they weren't allowed to enter establishments that was basically for the white people. So they formed their own little groups and—and in time this group... because all of a sudden you had all different communities started having these organizations, and my Father became quite involved with it.

Over the course of time, as you know Tom, they used to have the fiestas in September for the celebration of Independence, and all that... and they did that. And I think that's what started the camaraderie that they had. And I think that's one of the things that I remember more than anything else about my Father—was that you have to understand the financial part of their lives were centered in the little larger communities, like Colton and San Bernardino. And so, the people that worked in the industries like the cement plant, in Colton there, the railroad... it's interesting how everything makes a cycle. Back in those days the banks closed half a day. And I remember so well, the women would come on Saturday morning to go to the bank and cash their checks, and they would drop off the men in my Dad's shop, and that's where they all met. It was so interesting—I was just a little boy, the place was full of people, and that's where they got to meet each other. They didn't see each other during the week because they were busy with their families and what-not; and they would come there and spend all day drinking and having a good time. And then the women would get done with their shopping and come over and pick them up and go home. I actually saw my Dad give a guy two shaves one time: he got shaved in the morning and then shaved him before he left...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Did you make any money while they were there?

**Adam Ornelas:** Well yeah, because I'd shine shoes.

(Laughter)

**Adam Ornelas:** And I got to know these people and the camaraderie was great, it was fantastic. They had a native bond amongst them, you-know, they had all come about the same time. I think my Father had come in the early twenties or mid-twenties to find work to better themselves—from Mexico, for the most part; and they found jobs and started families, you-know, and they all grew, you-know. They started buying automobiles and what-not, you-know. And it's interesting over the course of time as I got older, of course, and then I went to work as a barber myself, those businesses in Colton were smart enough to understand that the only way they were going to survive, especially if they had their/the Mexican trade, it's interesting, they offered them credit. And once they offered them credit, it was a great way for them to make money, but also for the people to continue having the kind of life they were looking for, you-know. They were making that kind of money back then...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So you had credit for just about everything that was offered?

**Adam Ornelas:** Absolutely, yes, uh-huh.

And so, the stores we had there, you-know, well, there's all these companies that provided goods for the family.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Now these stores were in North Colton, tell me about—what was the border between North Colton and South Colton?

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, the railroad; basically it was the railroad was the one that divided the two: north and south. So for the most part, most of the Mexican people lived in the south end of town; of course, we basically were not really welcome in that north part of town.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Was there a curfew that you couldn't be past the railroad tracks?

**Adam Ornelas:** I vaguely remember, yes, there was, you-know. And we pretty much stayed away from there. I think we stayed within our own little confinement of our community, you-know.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What about being able to attend the movie shows or things like?

**Adam Ornelas:** We did. Like-I-say, I don't remember any discrimination. They, of course, were interested in making money too. I think in time, and it's interesting too, the old Hub City in time, and I'm gonna say... I don't remember the year but they started showing Mexican movies.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** The Hub City was a movie theatre?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yep. And I remember the gentleman that... I was already working in Colton at the time in 1959, I remember him: Meyers was his name; and he came and he made a remark to the owner of the shop that he had never made so much money because he was showing Mexican movies. So he was doing quite well... [because it was] the only movie theatre in San Bernardino that showed... remember the Azteca?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah.

**Adam Ornelas:** That [was the only theatre that] showed Mexican movies. So when this man decided to show Mexican movies... he did quite well... his name was Meyers, I remember that, you-know.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Now getting back to South Colton, your Dad at the barbershop, did he also have another type of business?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes he did. Between the shop and the house there was another building there; and he bought it for taxes, and it became a restaurant, it was called Las

Palmas. And over the course of time, as I was growing up, my Dad rented it to different people, and they ran the restaurant all that time.

And when I was in high school, the last tenant had come in and left, and then my Mother decided: well, let's give it a shot. So for two years we ran the-uh... between my Mother and my sisters we all worked at the restaurant, up to the time that we finally closed it, and tore the building down. But it was a good experience; I don't think I'd want to be in the restaurant business, but like they say, my Mother said: that's enough! So my Dad tore the building down, so there's actually a parking area—a parking lot to this day between... a big driveway between the house and my Dad's shop.

And in about 1961 or 62, somewhere in there, my Dad tore his shop down, and built a brand new shop out of concrete block. So he had a nice building there—and it's still there to this day. And in fact, our house is the only one left on that whole block. We were actually the only house that was on that particular block. The other businesses that were there, the people lived in the business or lived in the back of the businesses. But our house was actually the only house on that block. And, like-I-said, it's still standing there to this day; everything has been torn down except for our home and my Dad's shop. And that belonged to my youngest brother, and it belongs to his widow, now.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You-know, while you were born and raised on 7th Street, I heard that 7th Street was referred to as the Broadway of South Colton. Why was it called the Broadway of South Colton?

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, for the most part, all of the businesses, for the most part, were on 7th Street. Across the street was the cocktail lounges, and that of course was the big entertainment part of the South Park Colton.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And who owned the Sombrero Inn?

**Adam Ornelas:** A fellow by the name of Milton Noriega owned it. But it was run by a gentleman by the name of George Lum, and he had it for a long, long time; up to the time that finally left it.

We had the Bolero, the Pico, next to my Dad we had the restaurant; then next to that was another restaurant called the Mexicali Rose. There was another beer and wine that belonged to Johnny Anton, we called it Chispas. Next to us was the two-story building that belonged to the Caldera family, they had a tortilla factory in there. They had a hall up in the 2nd floor that was used by the American Legion, but then it got disposed.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What was the name of the American Legion Post?

**Adam Ornelas:** Fidel Hernandez.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Who was Fidel Hernandez, do you know?

**Adam Ornelas:** I think he was killed in the 2nd World War. I think, I'm not one hundred percent sure. And then, on the corner was the Tucker Building, which was ran by Tucker, and across the street was the Martinez Bakery, down the street was Zarape, and then Tomitoca (cash and carry)... it was there before I was... And then, there was the church, and across the street from the church, remember when we used to hang with Judas?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** No, Judas... what was the activity from the church?

**Adam Ornelas:** That was during Easter, Easter Sunday. Father Valencia would have this mannequin made out of paper maché, and then had it shipped, I guess, from Mexico full of fireworks. And after the mass, Sunday mass, they would run a rope across the street to the building across the street, and they would hang him; and course, they'd play the music and then light 'em up...



**Dr. Tom Rivera:** To the tower, they'd hang it between the buildings to the tower of the church?

**Adam Ornelas:** Right. And that's interesting... that building my Mother told me one time that my Grandmother had a pool hall in there. But anyway, they would light 'em up, you-know, and after they blew him up in the middle of the street we all went home and had our Easter dinner.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I remember those times because Father Valencia would go around with a little whip and...

**Adam Ornelas:** ...make sure the kids wouldn't get close to the fireworks because that would blow them up pretty good...

But anyway, and then we have the next... coming across the street there was Morales Market, then coming down was a little store...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Before we leave the Morales Market, if the camera can span the Colton book on my left. We have this book that was authored by Mr. Sheffield; and then, Adam mentioned the Morales Market, it's where the book is open, there's a picture of Morales Market in that little book. So if the camera can span that; this was also part of the 7th Street – Broadway of Colton.

**Adam Ornelas:** Like-I-say, then we came down... and then with the person was Iris and the name of the building was Iris, you-know, and it was the Bermudez family [who] owned that.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What happened to Pumfy?

**Adam Ornelas:** He's still around...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Pumfy was the son of the person that owned...

**Adam Ornelas:** ...Iris, uh-huh. They sold all kinds of little trinkets and what-not, you-know.

And then you're coming south, and then the Sombrero, of course, was there. And then, if you went to the Bolero—and there was a pool hall there that belonged to Llamas... And another barber shop, that gentleman was the one that actually came to work with my Father when they first opened up the barbershop in 1927.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What about the tortilla factory that was next to the Martinez market?

**Adam Ornelas:** Okay, that was Lola's. There was a little bitty building there--great tortillas there, they were there for a long, long time. And then, at the end of the street was the Navarro market.

And then, right after the war; oh-and, there was a little gas station also on the corner; and after the war, after the Korean War—no I'm sorry it was the 2nd World War, Nacho Cabrera came and opened up his barber shop.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** That was on the corner of 7th and 'O'?

**Adam Ornelas:** Well no, no he was actually on 'N' street then when he first came there; he had the barber shop on the corner; and that building was owned by the gentleman that owned the two story building next to us, Mr. Juan Caldera. And anyway, Nacho eventually built the shop down the street there.

So we had 3 barbershops, you had 4 bars, you had—what—5 markets; so you had all the businesses were concentrated in a 3 block section.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So that's where the happenings were...?

**Adam Ornelas:** That's where everything was happening. And then, of course, you had the church. So, you-know, if you want to confess your sins...

(Laughter)

**Adam Ornelas:** But anyway, it was so... the traffic... you-know, growing up I remember Sundays was such a big day, you-know, people going to the stores, and you-know, going to church and all this. It was interesting how they... it was the center of our little community; it was the center—there's no question.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Did we have a hardware store in South Colton?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes, we did, on 7th Street there was the Muratalla Hardware Store there, yes... that was out towards Wilson School there, yes... And then, Chayito's the gas station...

(Not audible – both talking the same time)

**Adam Ornelas:** ...The best snow cones... We'd go home for lunch and my Dad would give us a nickel and we'd stop and get a snow cone for five cents—I'll never forget that. What a great, great gentleman that was...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And then, across La Cadena or 8th Street we had the 76 gas station, and that was owned by Tom Velasquez?

**Adam Ornelas:** Tom Velasquez, uh-huh. And then, if you came back north again—that's where my Uncle Charlie had his towing business in that building that was there, [it] was a garage there; and he had a man who worked for him in his garage and [he also] had the towing business. My Uncle lived to be 102; and he worked up into his high 90s before he finally closed the business down. But, like-I-say, that was another one [who] did quite well.

That building actually belonged to his brother, my Uncle Louie, and he rented from his brother, but he lived in the back there. But he started the towing business; and in time they started the wrecking yard. So they had a wrecking yard down there too, you-know... So for the most part, everything was along 7th Street.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And then we missed that grocery store: 7th...

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah, it was on the west-end of West 'N' Street... no, I'm sorry it was 'O' Street, 'O' Street and 6th, next to the railroad tracks. And he was a very popular gentlemen, very nice, I remember him and his wife, yes.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Did you ever hear about, there was a theater, you-know, there was uh... couldn't cross the railroad tracks to go to North Colton to go to the theatre... Did you ever hear about a theatre called Tivoli? It was on the corner of 7th Street and 'O' Street across from the 7th Street Market.

**Adam Ornelas:** You-know, Tom, there's... actually between 'M' – I'm sorry, between 'N' and 'O' there's a building there, there's some concrete still left there. And my Mother told me one time that was a movie theatre; it's on the north side, I'm sorry, it's on the east side of the street, and it's still there. You-know the concrete foundation is still there. My Mother mentioned it to me one time it was a theatre way back in the 20s. But I don't know what year it burned or what happened, but she told me that, I remember my Mom telling me that.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So that was a theatre?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes that was a theatre.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You mentioned the 20s, and you mentioned Juan Caldera [who] owned the building where the veterans organization was. I also heard that Juan Caldera had a store and he was a butcher.

**Adam Ornelas:** I'm sorry, let me go back...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Okay.

**Adam Ornelas:** It wasn't Juan, it was Cristobal. Juan was his brother; Juan was the one who built the swimming pool down there.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Juan, he built the swimming pool, I hear, in the 20s. And that was because we could not utilize or use any of the services north of the railroad tracks. So he built the swimming pool for the community. He also built a baseball diamond for the community. And what else did he have there? I hear that he had a bull ring there in that area.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes, uh-huh, yeah... But I'm sorry, Cristobal was actually... they were brothers; but they are the ones that had this two story building that was a tortilla factory. They lived upstairs, and Juan was the other brother and he was the one [who] built the swimming pool; and there's pictures of that and I'm sure you have those. But he built that diamond and everything there on Congress.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Right, right, right, Congress and 5th Street... Congress and 5th Street.

Yeah, quite a guy, quite a guy...

**Adam Ornelas:** I got to meet him when I was quite young, but I remember him very well, the gentleman. And like-I-say, Cristobal lived next door to us and they had a large family. It was I think seven girls and one boy, and his Mom and Dad lived in the building; and like-I-say, they lived upstairs and they had the tortilla factory downstairs, you-know. They had kind of like a little... they sold sundries, ice cream that kind of stuff, you-know, milk and all that kind of stuff; but the main thing was the tortilla factory.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And also, we talked about 7th Street—what about 8th Street because 8th Street was also the freeway or the highway from Riverside to San Bernardino. We had lots of businesses in that area also; some of your uncles... Cervantes Market on the corner of 'M' and 8th.

**Adam Ornelas:** There was another market across street—the building is still there, I don't remember the people that lived there or the name of it... that whole building was a market too, remember that?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Sí (Yes)

**Adam Ornelas:** There was a market across the street from the Cervantes Market, there was a gas station next to that also, remember that?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes.

**Adam Ornelas:** Where that tortilla factory is at now?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes. And then Henry Portillo...

**Adam Ornelas:** Henry had the gas station.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I worked for Henry for 4 years, '58 to '62, and that paid for my college education.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah—and there was a little... on the corner there was a little business there and I don't remember what it was. Then, of course, across the street there was a little building—that's where the beer and wine...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Al's?

**Adam Ornelas:** No, well no, I'm sorry that's right. Across the street there was another liquor store there. Yeah that's right. And the vacant lot next to what would-be south of the of the liquor store—of Al's liquor store was an old school that burnt down.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I think that was the Garfield School that burned down.

**Adam Ornelas:** It could've been. My Mother went to that school, my Mother told me. But it burnt down way back too, didn't it?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, right, right.

**Adam Ornelas:** And like-I-said that was on 'N' Street, between 7th and 8th. And then, like-I-say, if you went a little bit further south there was that building on the corner and that was that beer and wine... and my Uncle Charlie had his business... Also, on the corner across the street from my Uncle was another building. Remember that? That belonged to Llamas I think that was a restaurant at one time. Remember right there is where 8th Street makes a bend?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...

**Adam Ornelas:** Remember that?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Vaguely, but yeah, I do remember a building there... it was a trailer park.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Getting back to the old school that burned on 8th and 'N' Street – after that school burned, remember they used to use it for the Fiestas Patrias Celebration?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes, the only thing left was the handball courts...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** ...the handball courts... they had a lot of activities on the handball courts...

**Adam Ornelas:** That's right. They would build the stage there, and then they'd have little booths, you-know, and they would sell food and the rest of the stuff – and they would do that. And another thing I remember when we were around was when the American Legion was still active, every Christmas they would go around - I think the guy that didn't get drunk that night was the Santa Claus.

(Laughter)

But anyway, they'd dress a guy up as Santa Claus, you-know, and they'd go around town and they'd ride together downtown and then they'd get together in that big vacant field and hand out candy... remember that?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, yes, yes, yes... I remember that...

**Adam Ornelas:** Stocking candy for all the kids, you-know; about 500 kids would show up and they'd be handing out these candies...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You-know so, along with the Fiesta Patrias that was utilized on that vacant lot—that's where the Mercuries started playing in 1939: the baseball team. The Mercuries started their baseball team – but that's another story.

Tell us about your school experiences; I know that you and I went to Garfield elementary school. Anyway tell us about some of those experiences.

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, we started at Garfield – we went all the way... cause on the same grounds was Garfield and Wilson, which was the junior high; and when you went across the lot there you were in junior high. In 1953 was the last year that the junior high existed – I graduated in that class: I was in the last graduating class in 1953. They centralized the junior high... You went to that one didn't you?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I went to that one, yes.

**Adam Ornelas:** And we had two junior highs: Roosevelt and Wilson. And I think for the most part that was kind of the beginning of the desegregation, I guess.



**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, Roosevelt was the north-end Middle School, Junior High School, and Wilson was the south-end Junior High School.

**Adam Ornelas:** Right, uh-huh. And, like-I-said, 1953, I was in that last graduating class, and then, the following Fall is when everybody went to the one they centralized. And for the most part, they started tearing down the Garfield and made the Junior High - then Wilson into an Elementary School, which is still is to this day. But, like-I- say, then I went onto high school and I got out of high school in 1957. I was very fortunate, I got a scholarship from Fidel Hernandez Veteran's post, and that's how I went to barber school. And that was in... like, I finished in 1950 the last part of '58; and then in 1959 is when I actually started working.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Before we leave Garfield Elementary School, I remember you as a 5th grader. Mr. Hosea was your teacher, and you guys had a tremendous square dancing group... Tell us a little bit about that.

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, he was quite a square dancer himself, and so he got us interested... we were kids, you-know, so anyway, we had two squares and we had to dance with our partner... and we were kind of-a... (He chuckles)  
We became the novelty act, okay, if you want to put it that way. So he would take us to all these venues where they have square dancing, and during an intermission—we danced. And we went all over, we danced—you name it—we danced. Of course, it was great for us because we got to eat afterwards, they gave us cookies, cakes and all that good stuff. And we did that for that whole year, and we traveled, he took us everywhere; wherever they wanted...you-know. And like-I-say, you can imagine what it must have been like for those people looking at these kids, you-know, what were these Mexicans doing square dancing.

(Laughter)

**Adam Ornelas:** But we did. We had two squares and I have a picture... I still have a picture of us when we were square dancing; and I'd say that was that was a lot of fun in those times.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Do you still keep in touch with many of the kids that you went to school with?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes I do, yes I do. I'm very fortunate that we've had such a good comradery all those years... In fact, I just saw Gloria not too long ago at Wilson; even my wife says, she's your partner. We see each other and we acknowledge each other very well.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Any other experiences that you remember? One of the highlights while you were going to Garfield and Wilson Elementary School?

**Adam Ornelas:** No, not really. (inaudible) ...across the bridge...  
(He chuckles)

And going to catechism classes. The nuns would take us across the bridge to catechism classes.

No, nothing really special. We had some good teachers.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** What's your most memorable teachers?

**Adam Ornelas:** Stocks, the principal.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Of Wilson Junior High School?

**Adam Ornelas:** You remember, Stocks?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I do remember, William Stocks.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah. Why did he make an impression on you?

**Adam Ornelas:** He did something that, I guess, today... back then... Anyway, at that point in time, do you remember the Perris Hill Ballpark?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes.

**Adam Ornelas:** They used to have... I forgot the team that used to come... what team was it that used to come there and have their Spring training? Anyway, the Cleveland Indians, of all teams, the Cleveland Indians were coming to play this particular team... I don't know who that team was; and he was a baseball fan. And so, he got... I forgot how many, it was 5 or 6 of us, he got us all together and he said: "Guys!" he says, "the Cleveland Indians are coming to town and I want to go see them in the middle of the week." And he says, "get a note from your parents we're going to take a field trip."

(Laughter)

So he snuck us out of class and we went to see a baseball game in the middle of the week. And I'll never forget that...

(Laughter)

That was a field trip! Believe it or not, I got to see Bob Lemon...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Did you see Bobby Ávila – the 2nd baseman?

**Adam Ornelas:** I think they might have been there, they were all walking out after the game... Who was the other team? I can't think of the other team, now. But anyway we were all walking... the game ended—but we were all walking to our car; the ball players were walking amongst almost all of us. I did get an autograph... But I'll never forget... about 15 cents, or I think it was a quarter to go to the game... he said get a

quarter from your parents, we're going on a field trip. Yeah, we went alright, to watch a game—a baseball game...

(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, I remember Mr. Stocks. Your class that graduated that June: Cisco Valencia, Ray Castillo, Ray lived on 5th Street, and a couple of other people that graduation night. Stocks had a '49 Ford, 2-door, powder-blue was the color of the car – and the guys flattened all his tires on graduation night. Remember that?

(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And the next day, I guess they were caught or someone squealed on them, but the next day, all of them were pumping the tires back on Mr. Stocks [car]... I remember that, and I mentioned that to Cisco just the other day.

**Adam Ornelas:** And he remembers?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** He remembers—he remembers... That was one of the adventures that they had.

**Adam Ornelas:** I remember him. But I remember the gentleman (Mr. Stocks) very well, like-I-say, he was a real nice fellow. He was the principal, like-I-say, at the junior high. Once we graduated and went off to high school we never saw him again.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Now, when did you start your business?

**Adam Ornelas:** I actually started my own business in 1967.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You said you went to barber school after high school?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes I did. Well I actually worked in construction for about a year. I applied for it but they didn't have an opening in the barber school in San Bernardino. I had to wait until they had an opening; and I did some construction work for a short time

– worked out of the laborers union. And then, like-I-say, when they finally called me... I started school—it was a little over six months; and I worked part-time in Riverside. Then, I got a full-time job there at Anderson Hotel, and that was quite an experience working downtown.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Downtown Colton?

**Adam Ornelas:** Downtown Colton...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** The Anderson Hotel was THE place to...

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah, like-I-say, I worked there a little over 8 years. And-uh, they started the redevelopment there; and if you remember, there was the 2 back buildings... that was across the street from each other. And there was the Anderson Hotel; and then, right across the street was another business—it was the dime store there, it was a hotel also on the 2nd floor. That's where Brill had his shoe store; that's where the old drug store was at. Remember the old drug store was there, you-know?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Um-hm

**Adam Ornelas:** In 1963, I think it was when they started the redevelopment—they tore down the buildings across the street. That's where Stater Brothers is at now. And then the building I worked in was next, and that was torn down in 1964. And then, we moved up the street there, and I worked there for about a year—a year and a half. And that's when I left and then I started my own business.

But that was kind-of the beginning of the end there for the downtown area of Colton—when they started tearing all those buildings down. And that was kind of tragic... it was too bad they didn't... they were nice buildings but, maybe they just felt something different... and they never materialized.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So you started your own business back in...?

**Adam Ornelas:** 1967

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** '67, and you're still working?

**Adam Ornelas:** Still at it, yeah.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Um-hm. And your shop today is?

**Adam Ornelas:** It's right there on Highgrove. I've moved 3 times; and now, I own my own business. But like-I-said, I started there in 1967; and here it is 46 years later and I'm still there. It's been good, and my community has been very good to me... I've lived there since 1961. We built our home there, my wife and I. We've raised two kids: Michael and Felicia.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** When did you get married? How did you meet your wife?

**Adam Ornelas:** I met her at a dance at the American Legion, of all places.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Of Colton—the Colton American Legion?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah, the 155. I met her at the dance; and we dated for 5 years, until I got out of school and took my exam. In those days, you took an exam, and then you served an 18 month apprenticeship; then you went back and got your master barber's license. Then, right after that I waited about a year—2 years actually, and then we were married. I built our home there in Highgrove.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Children?

**Adam Ornelas:** 2 kids, Felicia and Michael, like-I-said.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** How about grandkids?

**Adam Ornelas:** 7 grandkids and 5 great-grandchildren, now.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Ooohh, Adam, you're gonna be busy for the holiday...

(Laughter)

**Adam Ornelas:** But it's been good, I have no complaints.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You mentioned work, you mentioned employment for people... back then, when we were having lots of activity on 7th Street, where did most of the folks that lived in South Colton work?

We had, of course, 1890 brought the railroads to Colton. So I guess we had a lot of railroad workers?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes, uh-huh. The cement plants; Colton had Crestmore; and the PFE yards...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** The PFE yards were the Pacific Fruit Express?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes, uh-huh... repaired the boxcars, you-know. I think they were the biggest ones, I think at that time. Like-I-say, when I think the people were coming, like my Father, and all, and finding work here and there, and I'm sure they picked oranges. A lot of citrus...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So citrus was a big thing also?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah, citrus was starting to get real big there like in our community. A lot of oranges were being planted at that time.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Because I do you remember picking oranges when I was an 8th grader.

And then, you mentioned 7th Street where the church is located; and around the corner lived Evaristo (El Gordo), and he was one of the contractors that would hire many of the folks in South Colton to pick oranges. He'd pick them up at, what, 5 o'clock in the morning?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And they would take him to Redlands, Rialto, Colton, Riverside... and people would earn their living by picking oranges.

**Adam Ornelas:** Interesting... my Father-in-law came to Highgrove in 1908; [he] was 4 years old; and [he grew] up there with his brother and 2 sisters [who] were born there in Highgrove.

Anyway, he picked oranges for 3 cents a box.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** 3 pennies a box?

**Adam Ornelas:** 3 pennies. He told me, you picked a hundred boxes, you made 3 dollars in one day. And he said, but that's the way it was; there wasn't any work for them.

He was a very interesting gentleman, his Father made sure that they got an education. So he bought him a Model-T car, him and his brother, and they graduated from Poly High School in 1924.

It was very difficult: Riverside was probably, I wanna say, worse than Colton...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** It was! As far as discrimination and segregation.

**Adam Ornelas:** Oh-yeh, oh-yeh. Like-I-say, it's in fact, maybe I shouldn't even bring this up because, like-I-say, it was an article in this morning's paper about the Japanese



family—the first Japanese family that moved next door—who moved to Riverside, and the discrimination that... There was a law that immigrants couldn't buy property, so the gentleman, the Japanese gentleman, he had children here and they bought the property. And it's interesting, the article... the lady that lived next door to them didn't want them there. And in time, they became good friends, you-know. But they died, now, their grandchildren own the house and their going to make a museum out of it. So it shows you how things were, like-I-say, we couldn't live up in the north-end of town. The war changed all of that... I think the fact that these... not so much the 2nd World War, in my opinion. Anyway, I think it was the Korean War—the GI Bill became readily available to these guys; and, you-know, they started working, going to school, college, and getting better jobs. And I think that was the beginning of the movement to the north-end of town, in my opinion. Anyway, I might be wrong but I think that started the whole thing. These guys realized they [were] entitled to something better than...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I paid my dues... I paid my dues.

**Adam Ornelas:** I paid my dues. And they weren't going to live in those old houses their parents lived in. So I think that was the beginning... that's in my opinion, like-I-say, I think that was good.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** In that movement, was there also a movement a-foot to run for offices?

**Adam Ornelas:** Oh-absolutely, oh-sure, oh-sure. They were more politically involved. But, like-I-say, that started the whole thing... and now, you've seen tremendous... it's like, you didn't date a white girl, you didn't date a white girl in high school. It just didn't happen.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** That was taboo, huh?

**Adam Ornelas:** That just didn't happen. Just like, you-know, I'm sure that the Black boys wanted to date some of the Mexican girls but, it didn't happen. It was just something that...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So you would stay on your side of the fence and we'll stay on our side of the fence...

**Adam Ornelas:** And look at it now.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And that's the way it was.

**Adam Ornelas:** That's interesting because I've got 4 sisters and I've got 3 white brother-in-laws; my daughter married a white boy. So things have changed...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** ...quite a bit, quite a bit, yeah.

**Adam Ornelas:** Nothing wrong with it...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah. But again, we're talking about change.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes!

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** We're talking about different times.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yes!

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** And different moods of the country; different politics; and again, the 60's where we have the Civil Rights Movement, and that affected all of us. But you said the Korean War was the impetus for integrating the community?

**Adam Ornelas:** I think so. In my opinion, I think that's what it was, you-know. Like-I-say, even after World War II it was still not good—I don't think it was that good. I was just a little boy when the war ended, of course.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yeah. You were what, 6 or 7?

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah, but I don't remember too much about it. But I do remember, I mentioned... how sure how things have changed. And I mentioned it to you when you were there the other day, how things were. And it's hard to believe that this transpired because I mentioned it many times to even my customers, and they look at me like: that's not possible. But it was!

If you had long hair, let's say, you-know, maybe like mine, and the police would see you—they'd bring them into the shop and stand right in front of the chair with their hand on their gun and tell my Dad: "Give him a haircut." And if you shaved your head-off, they'd arrest you—you'd think you were a criminal of some sort. It's hard to believe, it's hard to believe. I was a little boy, but I remember—can't tell you how many times a police officer would grab a guy, bring him in the shop, sit him down, and stand there with a hand on his gun; give him a haircut. But that's the way it was. It's hard to believe that people did things like that. And, I don't know whether it was their fear or what... just because you wore your hair a little bit long, it doesn't make any sense. But I remember, and I think back: what could my Dad do? He did what the police officer told him to do.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Of course.

**Adam Ornelas:** That guy never said a peep... Can you imagine doing that now?  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** I don't think that would fly nowadays...

**Adam Ornelas:** But that happened and... a lot of people don't understand; things have changed so much that, you-know, to think back that, you-know, they treated you like that. Like you were less than...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You didn't have any rights; you did not have any rights

**Adam Ornelas:** You didn't. And that was so wrong.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** You mentioned inter-marriages, and you mentioned people coming together and making some changes in our society. You-know, in the old days, living in Colton, how's it living in Colton? Because I remember it being a safe place; I remember going to school—running to school; I remember playing late at night; I remember playing in the park with no problems. I saw it as, well, everybody seemed to take care of you. It was such a small community that everybody knew each other and everybody was related to one another. And I would imagine like all the other communities in our country – things are different now.

**Adam Ornelas:** Um-hum, oh-yeah. It was a lot of respect. The people had a common bond... especially you and I growing up, we knew each other, you-know, we played ball, or whatever it was—run in the streets and what-not. There was a few of those bars next to our house, you-know, where there was always some kind of a disturbance there, you-know. But, like-I-said, I remember like saying going back to what I said about my Father with all these people there at the shop—the place would be packed with people who hadn't seen each other in several weeks or a month, or whatever. It was, you-know... and they'd sit there you could hear them laughing and reminiscing and what-not. And there was a camaraderie; I think that bond that these people had; and I think that's what they... and the big thing we learned: Respect. You and I, and all of us kids, we respected one another. And I think that's what made it such a unique little community.

And [it's] interesting, you-know, here we had South Colton—we had the little Mexican kids in South Colton, and the white kids in the north-end.

And I remember when we went to high school it was... a new experience for us because we were around these people. And it's interesting, we made friends that are friends to this day—very good friends. There was a few little incidents, but I think we were kind-of curious with each other; you-know, what made you tick, what made me tick, you-know. And probably, my best friend is a white gentleman; and we became so close—to this day. Like-I-say, we went to our class reunions and, you-know, it was neat! And it's funny because this gentleman sitting here taking these movies – I did not know a Black gentleman until I was a junior in high school; a junior in high school. Isn't that something? It's incredible that we lived in that community and we had no people of color, right?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Right, right.

**Adam Ornelas:** Isn't that interesting? So when they got there, I made a point of getting to know them. And there were 2 brothers and a sister: there were 3 of them. And after awhile, they didn't act any different than you or I. They were colored, but, what? We're human beings for God's-sake—that's all. Isn't that interesting? But, like-I-say, you haven't crossed that threshold of that person because he's a different color. But after awhile, we're all alike... What's so different about us?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, you-know, possibly one of the advantages or disadvantages of growing in a segregated community was that you would develop that spirit of comradery, strong bonding, and a strong [feeling] of protecting your family and your community. And, perhaps that was good, or was it bad? I don't know, but maybe that worked in our favor because of the segregation that was there. And then, also, possibly because we were not receiving the same facilities as the north part of Colton was receiving, in terms of street repairs, street lights, and that sort of thing... It was kid stuff, I don't know... but that's what I feel.

**Adam Ornelas:** You-know, that's interesting Tom, [because] I talk about this to my customers all the time, we talk about this... It was, you-know, things have changed;

but there's always gonna be that separation. There's something about people that... I don't know it's, you-know, we have all these mixtures of people which is—I think it's fantastic—I think that's great; I have nothing against that. But, for some reason there's always that—there's certain people that just don't get it; and you'll always have that. You and I are getting old, and we've seen it. But that's always going to be there; it's never going to end. What's so hard with getting along with people? What's so hard? I don't have to love you but, I can get along with you, right? I get along with this gentleman and I get along with him, you-know. What's so wrong? What's so hard? It's not hard. I could have this gentleman meet my family, you-know... But it never ends, does it? It never, never ends. But we've made progress...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** A lot.

**Adam Ornelas:** ...you-know, and I'm not that way, you're not that way; we get along with everybody, right? I have to, to run my business, you-know. But it's interesting that—what we've been through, you and I, in our short lifetime. And we didn't see what our parents saw.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** True, true.

**Adam Ornelas:** We didn't see... We didn't see what this gentleman's parents saw, [or what] his Grandparents saw (referring to James, the cameraman); but it's better, it's gonna get better. But there's always that little line; and I think about it. And I've talked about it with all these people that I meet in my business—in all the years I've been in this business. And it's so sad, so sad that there's always that segment of society that doesn't want to change. But we've changed that – you and I worked to change this to make, not only for ourselves, but for our communities.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, you-know, that's why I am so intrigued about your Father. Your Father being a community activist and using his business to bring in people to discuss issues to organize... and organize and develop programs that would address the

issues that were at hand at that time. For example, you mentioned the *Progresistas*, which was a program to help people get together, [also] providing assistance, not really medical assistance, but assistance for scholarships and assistance for people [who] couldn't bury their families. And then, you mentioned *Los Trabajadores Unidos*, who your Dad was also very active in that area. And many of the employees of the cement plant--that was one of the biggest employers in the area; they formed a strike against the cement plant because they were not getting as much salary paid as the white persons were. So they went on strike for a couple of months, and they won that strike. So again, this is like you said, Adam, *pero* your Mom and Dad were just tough, and our Grandparents were just tough to go to those experiences—that were just kind-of uncivilized experiences.

**Adam Ornelas:** I'm gonna tell you a story; and this was told to me by a gentleman who worked at the cement plant. And the story is such that it tells you how they felt about these people, how they treated them...

I was about maybe 18 years old, and he was a friend of my Father's, and he'd come to the shop that particular morning, and I was in there for some reason or another, and he had retired from the cement plant: and he [said], I'm gonna tell you a story that happened to me many years ago. There again, it shows you how they treated these people. He was a miner, he was a miner in the deep part of the cement plant, down in one of the shafts, I guess... They didn't have the aluminum hats at that point in time – the safety hats. They had a hat that was made out of like-a fiber board, okay. And he would tell me that sometimes they'd be in these pits, and a little rock would fall and it would go right through the helmet; and he said you'd feel a little blood... he would tell me you'd feel the blood. So, they were always aware of an avalanche. And anyway, this particular day him and another fellow were working in this pit—way down, I guess, really deep, and they were very concerned about a landslide, you-know, they knew it was very dangerous. So he says, we were working down there, he says; and I wish I remembered that man's name too. But anyway, they were working down there and they heard this rumble, and they knew—they knew. And he started running to get away from this—all this avalanche, and a rock hit him and knocked him out. And he

says he's not sure how long he was there. But he says, all of a sudden he felt something hitting his face and he put his hand to his face and it was blood. And he couldn't understand where the blood was coming from; and he looked over there and there was his friend, a rock had decapitated him and his heart was still beating, and it was throwing the blood in his face, and that's what woke him up. And he said, of course, he was dead... He was a big gentleman, he said I picked him up and I carried him all the way to the front office and I put him down, and they looked at him and told him to take the rest of the day off... take the rest of the day off. So...

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Life was not worth too much then.

**Adam Ornelas:** When he told me that story (inaudible)

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, would you believe we've come a long way. Adam, is there anything that I missed or that you kind-of thought about during our conversation that you would like to bring up?

**Adam Ornelas:** No, I think the... like-I-say, the people that my Father got to know and I got to know as a little boy as I grew up, you-know; my Father died in 1970, he was just short of sixty-eight years old.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** He was young.

**Adam Ornelas:** He was very young. Like-I-say, growing up there and meeting the people... he was so... he loved his friends, my Father loved his friends. I know that when one of them passed away... he did the eulogy for the *Progresistas*, and he became very good at it. And, I don't know why but, every time somebody died—when one of his friends died, he took me. I've been to funerals all my life, I swear to you, I've been to funerals all my life. When one of them would pass away he would haul me up there with him. And it was interesting, after the priest would do the service, he would get all his members around, all the members of the *Progresistas* around the grave site



and he would recite this... they have this... one of the most beautiful things I've ever heard in my life—it'll bring tears to your eyes. When it was a eulogy that he was reading, and whoever wrote this thing, this man wrote it from his heart. It's in Spanish, of course, and even if you didn't understand it—it'd bring tears to your eyes. My Dad was good at it, and it got to the point where he could really recite this thing. And when he passed away, I went to the mortuary to make the arrangements for my Father, the first thing the guy says to me: Who's gonna do the reading now? And I said, I don't know. He says: Your Father did it so well. I said: I don't know. But anyway, he was quite a guy, some said he was an incredible man, my Father... he was great.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Did he ever think of, you-know... because most immigrants, when they come to this country, they always have this yearning to return home. Did he ever...?

**Adam Ornelas:** Oh, no, no, no, he became a citizen in 1948. He carried that flag at his heart, he had flags all over the shop.

(Laughter)

Oh, no. And he never missed an election, he never missed an election. My Father was a true patriot, believe me. In 1948 he learned to speak English, of course. He studied the constitution and all that stuff, but in 1948 he became a citizen—it was one of the proudest days of his life.

No, he never intended on going back, believe me. He went to visit but, uh-uh-no.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** So he came here and he became a US citizen and remained a citizen.

**Adam Ornelas:** Yeah, like-I-say, but he was a flag waver, let-me-tell-ya'. I used to get a bang out of when he would call me on election night, especially, or actually day—the election day. He would call me up and he says: Did you go vote? I said: No Dad, as

soon as I get out of work I'm gonna go vote. He'd say: Okay, don't forget, you go over there and vote. But he was a flag waver...

I thought about this: during the war, remember the blackouts?

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Yes, yes...

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, he tried to join the service but he had 4 kids and he didn't speak English, so they weren't about to take him, you-know. He joined the civil defense, and he was one of those guys [who] would send you over to Grandma at blackout. And he carried that, I think, the day that he died, I think that he had his 4-F card in his wallet.

(Laughter)

But he wanted to join the service, he wanted to go join the Army—go fight, you-know. But no, you got 4 kids and you can't even speak English, no, we're not gonna take you... But he was so proud when he became a citizen and I'll never forget that. He was very, very proud of that, yeah. But he was a flag waver—this was his country.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Were there others in the community that felt like him?

**Adam Ornelas:** I'm sure... oh-yes, oh-sure, oh-sure. Whether they became citizens or not, I don't know.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Was there a feeling of being part of this country and participating in this country?

**Adam Ornelas:** Oh-yeah, like-I-say, this was his country, this land... he was born over there but this was...

But that... I'll never forget when it became the moment, he was so proud that he had got his citizenship papers... very, very proud.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, Adam, thank you so much for being with us this afternoon. As I mentioned at the opening of this conversation, you are our first guinea pig in this oral history of Colton, California.

**Adam Ornelas:** Well, I'm sure there's people that know a lot more than I do... Like-I-say, I just happened to be born in the middle of all the *barullo* – where all the activities are going on... the music... I used to sit down the block near the fence while they were having fun in the house, and I'd wait for them to open the doors so I could hear the bands playing. You-know, they had some great bands in that day, you-know.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Were they swing bands?

**Adam Ornelas:** Oh, everything, you name it. Back in those days it was mostly swing, you-know... great bands... but I had to wait for them to open the doors so I could hear the music. All of the guys would come there... But those days are gone.

**Dr. Tom Rivera:** Well, thank you so much and I appreciate you being with us.

Transcribed by Pat Ricé-Daniels, Library Services Specialist-1, Special Collections