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Recommended Citation

CSUSB, "Mel Salazar (Part 1)" (2014). *South Colton Oral History Project*. 3.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history/3>

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Oral History Project of Colton, CA – 1/07/14

Dr. Rivera: Good afternoon, I'm Dr. Tom Rivera, and I'm part of the committee that is exploring the oral history of Colton from 1890 to 1960.

We're here at the Pfau Library on the 4th floor; and we have the Dean of the Library to do the welcome for us: Mr. Cesar Caballero. Cesar, thank you for being with us this afternoon.

Mr. Caballero: Thank you, thank you. I noticed you didn't say associate VP, you said Mr. Caballero, but it's okay – next time.

(Laughter)

Mr. Caballero: Welcome, welcome to the John M. Pfau Library here at Cal State University, San Bernardino; home of the headquarters for the Colton Oral History Project. We're very proud to be sponsoring this project along with, of course, the folks on the committee, and the folks from Colton.

I'm very excited to have Mel Salazar here; he's going to talk to us about his Mother, and other important leaders from the Colton Community.

Again, welcome, and I'm sure that today's proceedings are going to be very important to building the oral history collection that has been started here by Dr. Rivera and others that I'm sure will be extremely valuable in creating a valuable history for future generations.

Dr. Rivera: Well thank you, thank you, Cesar, we truly appreciate your support, especially, in the realm of putting this project into the archives where it will be available, not only to our students here at Cal State, but also the community at large, so thank you.

And our guest, as I mentioned before, our guest this afternoon is Mr. Mel Salazar.

Mel, welcome to Cal State and thank you for being with us this afternoon.

Let's kick-off the interview: You mentioned that recently your Mother was inducted into the Colton Hall of Fame, tell us about that?

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Mr. Salazar: Well, I nominated her. There were 6 and they picked 4 out of the 6, and my Mom was lucky because she was gonna get in there – with the way that I set it up there's no way they could have said no. Because there's some that if you don't make it in this year you can put in for next year. But I did this just because years ago I found two little snapshots [of my] Mom [in] uniform, and I still have that uniform.

Then, they got the ball rolling back in '98 when they had the Colton books that were written by five individuals from Colton: Bobby Vásquez was one of them; and I gave them the picture and the story and they published that. Then, years ago with a project here at Cal State [that I thought just involved] men's teams—until I saw it involved women's [teams too, a bell went off in my head]. So I got all my Mom's stuff: I brought her uniform and all the info I had on her, and they did a great job.

Mr. Caballero: Yeah, for the Latino Baseball History Project.

Mr. Salazar: Yes, the book is right there (He points to the book sitting on the conference room table.)

Mr. Caballero: Which resulted in this book (The Dean points toward the book.)

Dr. Rivera: And your Mom is in this book Mel?

Mr. Salazar: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: What page is she on?

Mr. Salazar: 33, and then she's toward the last [part, which is] her recent picture with her uniform.

Dr. Rivera: What was your Mom's name Mel?

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Mr. Salazar: Carmen Lujan. They used to call her Carmie.

Dr. Rivera: Is she a Coltonite?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah. She wasn't born in Colton but she was here since she was 3 years old. The whole family was here on Walnut Street, which was a dirt road, like a lot of streets there in Colton where, you-know, it's like you mentioned one time: the Mexicanos were invisible. They paid their property taxes; but, as kids there was dirt... In fact, the pictures [with my Mom] is the dirt road. Later on I called it tobacco road – that's the way it was, you-know, they were invisible. We didn't get the good stuff.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, but we got the rain and the mud...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Tell me, how old was your Mom when she started playing ball?

Mr. Salazar: Well, according to what I read, it was back in 1936, and she played until 1939; and then again after the war.

My Dad died of rheumatic fever, he didn't die fighting in the war. He was drafted late, like in his middle 20s, and the reason [he was drafted late] was because he already had 2 kids, he worked for Consolidated in San Diego, which was a government job – they built planes. But within a year he died.

My Mom was already playing ball before that – and then, after the war that's when she was playing with the Cherokees in San Bernardino.

Dr. Rivera: So, *mas o menos*, how old was she in '36 when she started playing?

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Mr. Salazar: She was 12-13 years old.

During the induction, I wrote down that she and that team were the first all Latina [baseball team], and that is the legacy they left...

And now, [there's] Carl Rimbaugh, and they've got the big leagues. Ken Hubbs has a softball team...

Dr. Rivera: You've done some research on your Mom's team, were they all from Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, [except] not the Cherokees... but the Señoritas – yeah...

Dr. Rivera: The name of the team was Señoritas?

Mr. Salazar: Somebody told me they were the Mercury Señoritas; and then, somebody told me they were the Mercuresses; but on [my Mom's] uniform it says Mercury Señoritas – so, I'm going by that.

In fact, they had the Mercury name before the men's team had it.

Dr. Rivera: The men's team started in 1939...

Tell me some of the names of the girls that played with your Mom?

Mr. Salazar: Lucy 'Chita' Garcia, Luz and Linda Arredondo, Mary Rivas, Mary Rosales, who is related to Robert Rosales, Estelle Pimentel, who married my Mom's brother, so she became a Lujan afterwards. Mary Soto, she married Frank Chavez, and Betty Caldera is the only one that I haven't found a picture of, she lives in Hawaii, and I heard she is the only other one who is still alive. She lives with her sister and I've talked with her nephew and other people... Anyway, I'm just hoping to get a picture.

In fact, I called Harvey Kahn, he's a writer for the Courier [Magazine], and he does a lot of sports stuff. He gave me a signed ball by Camilo Carreon, who's my wife's uncle

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and he was a major league ball player with the White Sox; I'm going to get a hold of Harvey Kahn to set up an article: Where are they? I'll give him all the info and maybe somebody will read it and say: "Oh-yeah, I know them, their grandkids, or their wife, or somebody..." [Because] I would like the families there during the induction.

Dr. Rivera: When is the induction?

Mr. Salazar: It's going to be in April. I don't have the definite date, but I'm working with the City of Colton... Right now, that's where I'm at. But I've got time to get that last picture, and I gotta set it up how I'm going to put it in the plaque because it's a beautiful place.

Dr. Rivera: What teams did they play against?

Mr. Salazar: They played against San Bernardino, Riverside, Belltown, Casa Blanca, where my Dad was from, which was a rough area back in the 40s. In fact, I went to Casa Blanca the other day to look where my Dad used to live with my Grandma. I remember, as a kid, the ballpark was across the street, maybe a block away, I couldn't find the field but there was a school there, and then way on the side I could see an old ballpark, and I'm pretty sure that was the old ballpark. I found the house but it didn't even look like it because they tore it down and...

Dr. Rivera: So they had an active schedule, *verdad*? Where they played all those teams from different areas?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, exactly. It wasn't Southern California it was just the Inland Empire. Because they were pretty young, you-know.

Dr. Rivera: How many years did your Mom play?

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Mr. Salazar: I'm thinking from 1936-39. The exact years I'm not for sure because I didn't get a lot of the information. My Mom has got dementia so there's a lot of stuff I don't know. But I know she did play, and I have her uniform as the proof.

Dr. Rivera: Back in those days, females were not allowed to play ball or leave the house. How did she manage? She must have had liberal parents?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, well, my Grandpa was very strict—so, I don't know. But like I said, I wasn't there. But there's a story in those monthly things that they send out where a lot of women were not allowed because they were girls, you-know.

Dr. Rivera: Especially in Mexican culture.

Mr. Salazar: That's right, that's right. But my Mom played for several years.

Dr. Rivera: What position did she play?

Mr. Salazar: That I didn't know until I talked to my Estella (inaudible) who, eventually, married my Mom's brother, and she just died about 3 months ago. But I asked her before that... She said 3rd base – so I gotta go by that.

Dr. Rivera: Okay.

Mr. Salazar: I heard Chita Garcia was the pitcher – a very good ball player. Luz Arredondo was huge compared to my Mom – of course, my Mom isn't tall, but Luz must have been at least 5'10 maybe.

Dr. Rivera: The Arredondo family was very tall.

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Mr. Salazar: Yeah, her brother Johnny was a big tall guy.

There were several other girls: Mary Soto, Mary Rivas, and Betty—I wanna get at least a picture even if I can't get their family there... I never could find a team picture. I found the Cherokees picture but there were only 3 girls there from Colton—I can't use that... I'll just make up my own and make sure I have their pictures...

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned that your Mom played until 1939, and then, she played afterwards?

Mr. Salazar: She was in high school till 41, she was a sophomore, I think. Then, voila! I was born the next year. So that's what ended her high school career as a sophomore. She got married, but in 1945 it was me and my brother...

Dr. Rivera: Did your Mom play ball after your [Dad died]?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, with the Cherokees.

Dr. Rivera: What years were those, Mel?

Mr. Salazar: Those were, I'm thinking, for 3 years; I think 1945, 46, 47 – around there.

Dr. Rivera: Ok. Up until the late 40s. And they were called the Cherokees?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah. But that was a group, like a travel-ball, they would get kids from difference for cities.

Dr. Rivera: Do you know what her batting average was?

Mr. Salazar: No, no.

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Dr. Rivera: We can't make one up?

Mr. Salazar: Probably, 650...

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: Like I said, I don't know... I was going to set up this induction or this nomination for my Mom, just her; but I'm thinking what about all of those other girls that people have forgotten. A lot of their kids probably didn't know they played—I found out they didn't even know they played ball.

Dr. Rivera: Well you-know, I was surprised when I saw your Mom's picture, and Rudy Serrano, Bobby Vásquez, and Rudy Oliva – monograms that we had a female baseball team. I thought, I'm going to check into this one...

When talking to your Mom, did she ever talk about wonderful memories that she had about playing baseball?

Mr. Salazar: Ah, you-know, when I found those pictures I was already an adult. She used to say that she played ball, but I thought it was at school, you-know... The high schools didn't have teams, but the boys did where they played at other schools. The GAA (Girls Athletic Association) was just intramural.

Dr. Rivera: What's GAA?

Mr. Salazar: Girls Athletic Association – they didn't play in other cities, they just played amongst themselves. But now they have soccer, softball...

Dr. Rivera: But she never mentioned any wonderful memories she had about being a ballplayer?

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Mr. Salazar: Oh-yeah, just that she enjoyed it and the women she played with. But as she got older and I got more interested, by that time her dementia started and she [couldn't] remember.

But right now as long as she still knows me, I'm happy.

Dr. Rivera: When did her dementia start?

Mr. Salazar: She's 89, she'll be 90 this year; so, I'm saying a good 5-6 years ago when she really started getting...

But a lot of that stuff was before I was born and when I was 3 years old, so I don't know a lot.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned a few minutes ago, that there were a lot of good ballplayers in Colton. We had a lot of people who came from our barrios and were able to play in sports and participate in sports. Besides your Mom and besides the girls that played on her team, who else can you remember [when you were] growing up that were good ballplayers or good representatives of Colton in the sports area?

Mr. Salazar: Well, I'd have to start with Camilo Carreon.

Dr. Rivera: Who is Camilo Carreon?

Mr. Salazar: He was my wife's uncle...

Dr. Rivera: So Camilo was born and raised in Colton; he went to Garfield, Wilson, and Colton High School?

Mr. Salazar: Right. He graduated in 1956.

Dr. Rivera: He was a 4-year letterman at Colton High School?

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Mr. Salazar: Yes. He was 4-year in all the sports. He was like: pre-Kenny Hobbs. I think Camilo was drafted, and I think the first year that he played major league ball was in 1959.

In '59 the White Sox went to the World Series but he didn't go because they had brought him up too late.

But he played several years...

Dr. Rivera: How long did he play with the White Sox?

Mr. Salazar: I think he was with the White Sox 4 years; Baltimore 1 year; and then, he went to Cleveland a few years – he played a total of 6-7 years. But he wound up retiring in Tucson.

His boy, Mark Carreon, made the majors: he played for the Mets, he played for Detroit one year, and then he went to San Francisco – he got to play with Barry Bonds. I don't know of any other Chicanos, but there was a lot of Blacks, a lot of Puerto Ricans, father and son [baseball players], and other Latinos. But Chicanos born and raised in California, or wherever, I can't name one other father and son besides the Carreones.

Dr. Rivera: We do have a street in Colton named after the Camilo Carreon – it's Correion Drive.

Besides Camilo, [who are] the other heroes we have that came from Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Well, I know the Abril twins... one of them lives up the street from me. Manuel and Ernie graduated, I think in 1950-51; but I've heard through the grapevine those guys were better than Camilo and better than Kenny Hobbs—I hate to say it, but, that's what I've heard.

They were both drafted and they played in the minors; one of them was doing a little better than the other one, I forget which one whether it was Manny or Ernie, but I'm going to pick Ernie because I don't know which one was which, but nobody could –

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that's why they called them the *cuates*, Nobody could tell [them apart] so they just [called them] *cuate*.

[One of the twins got an offer to go play for the Double-A's, or a similar league, and he inquired about his brother coming with him. He was told that his brother would probably join the team next month, but he said if his brother doesn't come with him he's not going to go.]

And that's what killed their career – that's the story I was told; I didn't hear it from them but that's what I've heard. [In certain situations, it's important to realize that you can't split twins]

Dr. Rivera: So they were inseparable?

Mr. Salazar: Exactly.

Dr. Rivera: Mel, *que mas?* Who else came from Colton? Do you remember anybody else?

Mr. Salazar: Well, if you want to go way back, this is my next project, as far as back in the '30s.

Dr. Rivera: Tell us about it.

Mr. Salazar: I've got another project... These are before even the Mercurys, who started in '39; I'm talking about guys in the late 1920s, early 30s...

Oh, I forgot to say that Odie Abril, going back to the Abril's, he signed, he didn't make it to the majors, but I think he went to the Double or Triple-As.

Dr. Rivera: Is he the son of one of the Abril's?

Mr. Salazar: Of Manuel's.

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Dr. Rivera: And he went to Colton High School?

Mr. Salazar: Exactly. He was a very good athlete, baseball mainly. He played for the Red Sox.

(Dean Caballero politely exits the interview)

Mr. Salazar: Back in the 30s there were the Colton Centrals, and later on they became a combination of San Bernardino Colton Centrals. But the main players were the Castorena brothers, who were 4 very good players.

I mentioned to you, this was like the Blacks during the 20s and 30s where they were good or better than a lot of the major league players; but, they were invisible; we were invisible.

Dr. Rivera: Who were the brothers?

Mr. Salazar: There were 4 brothers that I know of: Arturo Castorena, Sal Castorena, whose daughter, Sylvia, became a teacher; then there was Porfirio, and Apio. [I thought,] that's the same guy – well, I talked to Tommy Castorena, whose Dad was Porfirio, and he said, no, Pio was another brother. I don't know how that happened because Pio is usually short for Porfirio.

We had Milton Noriega, who played during the late 20s, early 30s; he was the owner of the Sombrero Dance Hall.

There were a couple of brothers, Joe and Ambrosio Gonzales; then there was Juan Hernandez, who is Louie Hernandez' Dad. There was Teyo Duarte, and there was another Teyo Duarte, who was his son; Teyo played later on with the Mercurys.

Andres Negreté and Ceatano Calderia, who's Shaun Calderia's Dad – I didn't even know he played. I called Chon the other day because I'm going to be needing information from all these guys – because I want to nominate them, maybe next year [for the Colton Hall of Fame].

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A lot of people didn't even know they played because they never heard of them—they're lost, you-know. And if [someone doesn't] do something, like I did with my Mom and her team, [to make some people aware]... Like I said earlier, I was just going to [nominate my Mom and her team], but I thought, no, a team is a team and you need all the good, the bad players, and the no good players to play – not just one. So I'm thinking if I can do this, they won't just be lost and forgotten, which is already happening. But if you have their pictures there in the Colton Hall of Fame...

Dr. Rivera: This is very, very timely because I had no idea that we had these ballplayers who were very active in the late 20s and all through the 30s.

Mr. Salazar: Great ballplayers!

The cement plant had a team too. In fact, one of the players...

Dr. Rivera: The Portland Cement Plant had a team?

Mr. Salazar: [Yes.] A couple of them [were] Arturo and Sal who were on that team; there was a Joe Gonzalez and John Hernandez, Louie's Dad was on that team; and the others were Anglos. One of the Anglos [is] in the Colton Hall of Fame: Gordon Maltzberger.

Dr. Rivera: Oh yes, he played ball...

Mr. Salazar: He played with the Castorenas. Those guys were good enough to play with him, and he went on to play major league ball, he was a pitcher for the White Sox. So like I say, there was probably a lot of good players from Colton [who were not] looked at it as major league players...

Dr. Rivera: They never got recognition. Like you said, they were invisible.

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Mr. Salazar: Yeah, and it's sad. But if we don't do something with their sons, they're going to be invisible, [too]...

I know Mike Murphy pretty well...

Dr. Rivera: Who is Mike Murphy?

Mr. Salazar: He's the one who runs the museum – you guys know Mike, he's a good guy. His wife and I graduated the same year, and his Mom and my Mom were in the same grade also.

Dr. Rivera: So everybody in Colton is related?

Mr. Salazar: Oh yeah, so you can't talk bad about them.

Dr. Rivera: I know.

Now, let me ask you, besides this project, I know this is kind of a project that you're getting yourself into right away and you're pulling up your sleeves and getting into it. You also mentioned that you'd like to do something about the Mercury organization.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, what I'm going to do is do this first, the older guys first. Because there's still a lot of the Mercurys alive. Some have passed, [but] most of the Mercury guys are in there 90s. The guys I want to go after they're way over 100 years old. So they'll be the next ones in my project. The ones from the original Mercurys from '39, I can't do them all because they went to the 1970s. I would just have to go after the early ones.

Dr. Rivera: The 40s and the 50s?

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Mr. Salazar: Yeah. Like Camilo and (inaudible), and those guys. But I still won't have [all the pictures of them], I'm just going to go after the ones that are in that picture that I have with Beto, Rosales, and Baker Martinez, who I think his parents owned the Martinez Market.

Dr. Rivera: And the bakery, yeah.

Mr. Salazar: Nick Martinez...

I'm going to be busy – so hopefully I can do it; and I'm going to get their sons and relatives to help me out because [I need] to get extra information. So that's what I plan to do.

Dr. Rivera: Mel, where did these old-timers like, Porfirio Castorena and those folks, where did they play? Because the Colton ballpark didn't get started until 1939.

Mr. Salazar: That's [also] something I found out because from the pictures I have I thought it was the old Veterans Park there in South Colton – but no. On the corner of Rancho and Agua Mansa there's [an area] where they stock carnival stuff.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, I know where that is.

Mr. Salazar: That's where that park was: Juan Caldera built that. Juan Caldera built the plunge that was on 5th Street, which was all in that same area. He built a bullring for bull fights; he had a nightclub, a dance hall, this guy did a lot. He was an early entrepreneur, you-know.

Dr. Rivera: What years [did this happen], the 20s and 30s?

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Mr. Salazar: Probably the 20s and 30s, yeah. Betty Caldera is his daughter – so, out of that big family I'm trying to find [one of them who will] give me a little picture; that's all I want...

Dr. Rivera: So these ballplayers played at Caldera Field?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah. They called it the Cubs Park, or the Corralon, or something... I never even knew there was a ballpark there.

Dr. Rivera: Did the Portland Cement Company have a ball field?

Mr. Salazar: I heard they did and I'm not sure if that was their thing, but then I heard that they had another park on Rancho too – so there were probably 2 parks there; but I never saw that one.

And going back to the plunge that Caldera built, that's because we couldn't swim at the Municipal Park – we weren't allowed. The only day [we could use their pool] was on Wednesdays when they were going to change the water.

I heard my generation before me, I don't think you went through it, but at the new Colton Theatre: one side for the Mexicanos, other side for the Anglos.

Dr. Rivera: That was a reality back then.

We had the barrier, the border, which was the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Mr. Salazar: Yes, yes.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned that your Dad came from Casablanca?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah.

In the later years, he went to Banning High School, he was a 4-year Letterman and I've got his sweater. He was in track and basketball; in fact, I've got a picture of my Mom

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where she's wearing his Letterman sweater. I gotta look through the yearbooks because I have old pictures of how he looked back then but, nothing like a yearbook picture when he was playing – so that's another project.

Dr. Rivera: How did your Mom and Dad meet?

Mr. Salazar: I heard it was at a dance at the Valley Ballroom. That's where the Inland Center is at, but that's changed names several times. They had the big bands there, they had Tommy Dorsey and all those big guys. That's where a lot of people met each other...

Like I said, my Dad graduated from Banning High School in 1936-37, [I think]. He didn't stop there, he went on to Riverside City College and he lettered there – I've got that jacket...

Dr. Rivera: So it was a wonderful combination between him and your Mom, they were both sports people.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, well, you-know, I ran track and cross country, and I played basketball with the guys. But I made my mark [during] my last year, I ran cross country and I took second in CBL (Citrus Belt League). Gabe Castorena, Jr., who was my Mom's coach, he was better than me in the longer distance. But in track, the mile was my specialty; and in my last year I took first in CBL and broke a 10-year CBL record; I broke our school's 15-year record, too. I did all that and went to the CIF [track and field] (California Interscholastic Federation), I took the 5th in CIF. I didn't get anything, no scholarships, or nothing. Now, the first 8 go to state [competitions], I didn't go to state, they only took the first 3. Of course, it was less schools back then, but I didn't hear from anybody... I'm not gonna put the blame on anybody because I could have gone, but then, I got married... I got married [when I was] 18...

Dr. Rivera: You got married young.

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Mr. Salazar: Yeah, but that part I don't regret because I've got 4 daughters, I've got 10 grandkids, and I've already got 9 great-grandkids, and that's because we started young.

Dr. Rivera: How old was Lucy when you got married?

Mr. Salazar: She was 15, and I was 12.

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: No, I always throw that in because every time people look at me...

(inaudible)

Dr. Rivera: How did your Mom get your Dad to move to Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Well, my Dad never lived in Colton because when they got married they went to Casablanca – that's where he lived. From there he went to San Diego when he worked for Consolidated. My brother was born in San Diego.

From there I guess they drafted him or he signed—I don't know, that I never found out.

But he died within a year after that in Fort Lewis, Washington.

I was 3 years old, but I don't remember him. I do remember what a great athlete he was – then, I found out about my Mom—so I've got some pretty genes...

Dr. Rivera: So after your Dad passed away, you and your Mom moved to Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, we lived there with my Grandparents on Walnut Street/Tobacco Road. My Mom worked and my Grandparents, which was the same with a lot of people, they helped raise us. So I looked at my Grandma and my Grandpa as another [mom and] dad, a dad that I never had.

Dr. Rivera: Where did your Mom work?

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Mr. Salazar: At that time she worked at Rosken's, it was a women's apparel where they sold mainly wedding gowns; she did very well there; and she supported me and my brother. My Mom remarried and that lasted 3 years; and she had a daughter, who is my half-sister, Jeannie.

Then we moved to Northern California for 2 years, and when I came back to Colton I was already a junior, and that's when I started running track.

But my Mom was a very hard worker. In her lifetime, by herself, she bought 4 homes, not all together, one right after another. But how many women could do that by [themselves] back then? But she did, God-bless her, and I still have her—she'll be 90 in July.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned you have a half-sister? Do you have any other brothers and sisters?

Mr. Salazar: Well, do you want me to get into that?

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: There was a guy who came to my house... He said his name was Ramon and that he was my brother. Evidently, before my Dad met my Mom, he got this lady pregnant, and at the time, this lady was already married but her husband was on his death bed, and he was older than she was. Whether my Dad knew, I didn't know if he knew; I don't think he even knew that she was pregnant. She went to Kansas, had the baby... he was adopted over there, but somehow he found out who his Dad was. He looks more like my Dad than I do... So that's another story about my Dad.

Dr. Rivera: But with your Mom and your Dad, you have another brother?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, Al.

Dr. Rivera: Is he older or younger?

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Mr. Salazar: He's younger. He's a year and so many months younger, and he lives in Lancaster. He just retired from Corrections...

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned your family, [you have] 4 daughters?

Mr. Salazar: 4 daughters, yeah.

Dr. Rivera: Mel, you started working very early because you married very [young]. How did you get into barbering because you were a barber for how many years?

Mr. Salazar: When I retired, it was 50 years right there at the same place.

Dr. Rivera: Where was your barber business located?

Mr. Salazar: On the corner of Rancho and Mill – there's a Stater Brothers center there. I lived more than half my life there; and people ask me: Do you miss it? I don't miss the work, cutting hair, but I miss the people – because you have to become a people person. And there at the end, mostly it was guys who I've been cutting their hair for 20 years, or more; and I've done 2nd, 3rd generation kids.

Dr. Rivera: How did you get into barbering?

Mr. Salazar: My Mom suggested it. But like I said, when I was young and I got married young, luckily for me my Mom was getting help from the Veterans people. Through them, I was able to get [my barber school] paid for.

Dr. Rivera: You had Veterans benefits because of your Dad?

Mr. Salazar: Exactly. And to this day, my Mom still gets her checks from the V.A., so she's lucky there.

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Dr. Rivera: So the V.A. paid for your training as a barber?

Mr. Salazar: Exactly. [But she's the one who made that possible.] But like I told you earlier, she's used to cut my hair until I was about 12 years old. I used to wear the flat tops, but after a while the flat tops were [sideways], so she said, just walk this way [with your head turned sideways] and it will be flat.

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: She used to cut my Grandpa's hair and one of my uncle's. [Anyway,] she suggested [that I go to barber school], and at that time, I [thought], I gotta do something. Because I never worked one day in my life, you-know. It was almost like from high school and I went half a semester at Valley College. I had to get in there [and figure out what I was going to do]. It's not like today where these guys get these gals pregnant and then they disappear and make other babies, you-know. I had to do the right thing and [my Mom and Grandparents] made sure I did.

Dr. Rivera: Well, congratulations to you and your family because, like you said, 4 daughters and many grandkids...

Mr. Salazar: This year we will be 53 years married.

Dr. Rivera: Congratulations!

Mr. Salazar: I had my medical problems and that's why I had to retire... I had clogged arteries... [My buddies would say that I looked pretty good, but I told them:] you haven't checked under the hood...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Mel, you grew up in Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Yes.

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Dr. Rivera: Back in those days we had social clubs. The guys would get together, the guys from one of the barrios, like groups of guys from Las Palomas, guys from La Calle Cinco would be another group...

Mr. Salazar: La Niclé, they called it La Niclé.

Dr. Rivera: What were some of the names of these different groups we had in Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Well, back then they call them gangs but, I look back and they were social [clubs/groups] because we were sponsored by the... What were they called?

Dr. Rivera: Congress of Community Clubs (CCC).

Mr. Salazar: They (the CCC) were [a group of] elderly men.
I'm gonna call them gangs, but they weren't going to cause any problems.

Dr. Rivera: What were the names of them?

Mr. Salazar: Well my gang was the Emperors.

Dr. Rivera: Who was your advisor/sponsor from the CCC?

Mr. Salazar: I think it was Mr. Manuel Padilla.
And then they had the Conquistadores, who lasted for a long time. I forgot who sponsored them.
They had the Solteros – Bobby Amador, Deacon Bobby Amador.
They were all good guys

Dr. Rivera: It was just kind of 'hang-out' kind of groups...

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Mr. Salazar: Exactly. It wasn't to go start trouble or shoot people... Like now it's ugly. We got along, all the social clubs got together, we all went to school together, and there was never any problems.

Later on there was other gangs, like the Boleros. But those were older guys who hung out on 7th Street – the rough guys...

Dr. Rivera: I'm surprised that the Congress of Community Club's members would go out of their way to work with you folks.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, and we'd have our meetings and one of them would be there during the meetings... They did a good job.

In fact, one of the guys that's going to be at the at the Hall of Fame, Ruben Acevedo, he was in my gang, you-know; and he's got a brother, Richard, who went on to college – that guy is a brain. I don't know if you know Richard, he's an accountant, a very smart man – always was.

[Another guy,] he became a correction officer, Art Reynosa, you know him, don't you?

Dr. Rivera: Yes, yes.

Mr. Salazar: Like I said, most of them became law abiding good guys.

Dr. Rivera: So the majority of "gang members" became active members and participants in our community?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, yeah, sure. When we had the Emperors, there was only a couple of guys that had the jackets because [all of us] couldn't afford the jackets – so we would share: [one member] would have it for 2 days and another... At that time we could all fit the [same size] jacket.

The Conquistadores, they all had jackets because they had a little bit more money and they were in existence a little longer.

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Dr. Rivera: Who was the president of the Conquistadores?

Mr. Salazar: Jack, Joaquin Granado – he was the original.

Dr. Rivera: Who was your president?

Mr. Salazar: I think, Ray Marques, who was a very good friend of mine. He was from New Mexico, and he was brand new in the community. He wound up being my best friend who passed away... I don't know if you remember Helen Cortez, Sharon Cortez...?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Salazar: He married Helen Cortez.

Dr. Rivera: And Deacon Bob's group, who was there president?

Mr. Salazar: I don't know who their president was. Could have been Deacon Bob because he is still a leader; that guy is a very good man...

Dr. Rivera: Yeah.

Mr. Salazar: He does a great job for the community. Whenever there's a funeral or when they're in need of a rosary, or something, he's there johnny-on-the-spot.

Dr. Rivera: As club members, Mel, you guys got together almost every day. You palled around, made fun of each other, and did all those crazy things... What did you guys do for entertainment? Did you have dances? Sports?

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Mr. Salazar: Yeah, we had a basketball game one time against the Holy Barbarians, do you remember them?

Dr. Rivera: Yes, yes.

Mr. Salazar: That was the older guys – but we didn't have any problems with them. There was one year, I think, we did have a dance with the Conquistadores and we just merged... I don't remember what we did with the money, but we never made big money.

I remember one year I was the treasurer, and there was this old 49 Chevy that was being sold, and amongst all of us we bought – I think it was only \$50 and it just barely ran; but we would use it to go to that hidden lake over up near Pickled Pete's – that restaurant over there.

Dr. Rivera: Yes, yes.

Mr. Salazar: There was that little hidden lake there that we'd go to... [The car] broke down so we left it at Charlie Aboytes' place so he could work on it. The next day we went to [Charlie's place] and all the car windows were broken...

Dr. Rivera: So when you guys got together you went swimming, you went to parties...

Mr. Salazar: We'd go swimming in the canals; we used to go to Highgrove with Ruben Acevedo, Art Reynosa, and Bobby Fernandez – those 3 were in our club. Also, those 3 married 3 sisters from Highgrove: the Diaz sisters. I think they're all still married except Bobby is divorced...

But that's all we did, we were still young and dumb but we had a good.

On weekends we'd go to dances, we'd go to parties; there were garage parties at different home. The word got spread around at school, and there were little invitations that they'd spread around.

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But that's what we did – and we had a good time.

Mr. Salazar: I couldn't get in trouble because by the time I was 18 I was out of the club and I was married... So I was out of that.

Dr. Rivera: Do you remember any of the music that was popular during your era?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, and [the music] is still popular now; even my kids love the old great songs that were [popular]... The Penguins' [song] "Earth Angel" – yeah, there were a lot of songs that are still popular now. The guys singing the songs would all dress nice; now, they go with t-shirts or no shirt, and they're making millions of dollars and they can't even dress right.

Like I said, those songs continue – even to my kids... That's why [my kids watched] my PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) all the time [because they aired the 'Doo-Wop' music]... A lot of those guys are old, but I'm old too so we're all old.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Is there a difference now? How different is Colton compared to when you grew up and looking at Colton now?

Mr. Salazar: Of course, back then all the Mexicanos were in South Colton – they all lived there. But you go back there now, it looks the same but I don't know any of people. A lot of the people are people who've come from Mexico, and the ones who lived [in South Colton] are all living in North Colton. But Colton all together is probably 70% Mexicano.

Now, you're looking at mayors and councilmen – where you didn't see that before.

When I was growing up there was Mel Fuchs, and (inaudible) the meat guy. But now we see a lot of Mexicanos; a lot of them were my customers. Max Loafy is not Mexicano, he's married to Bob Alvarez's sister, a great guy; I've never heard anything bad about him.

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Dr. Rivera: Bob Alvarez was a Principal...

Mr. Salazar: ... At McKinley Elementary School for a while. I think he went to Bloomington High School later on...

Dr. Rivera: ...Crestmore Elementary School.

Mr. Salazar: Yes...

Like I said, they all live on the north side now – where we weren't allowed.

I remember as a kid we'd come over to the north side to go mow lawns because the Anglos paid more money.

Dr. Rivera: You-know Mel, I don't remember having a lawn at my house...

Mr. Salazar: Well, we'd use their lawnmower because we didn't have one... We had a lawn but it was just devil grass, and we had no street that's why I never learned how to skate...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: No sidewalks...

You-know, when they integrated the junior high schools: Wilson and Roosevelt in '53, '54, the new school was located on the north side of town – that's when I saw my first long sidewalk, curb and gutter...

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: Well I saw them earlier when I was mowing...

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: But it was nice, and now I live there; I've been there... In fact, I bought my house, the one I'm living in, back in '65 – it's still there.

Things have changed on the north side where everybody knows everybody.

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Dr. Rivera: The other thing that I noticed about Colton is that almost everybody is related to everybody else.

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: Don't talk bad about anybody because they might be your *primo*... You [shouldn't], you better find out first [if you're related to whoever].

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned Max Loafy, even the gringos have gotten into the picture – they're related to us now.

Mr. Salazar: Exactly, exactly. I knew [Max's] other sister, Velia, who was married to Jim Barthal, he was a mail carrier. He played for the Mercurys—just a little guy, but he must have been good.

My wife, Lucy, cleaned their house for a lot of years. They're both gone now. Natalie and Max still live down the block from [where Velia and Jim used to live].

Like I said, they integrated through marriage, and stuff like that.

Dr. Rivera: So it's completely different now?

Mr. Salazar: I've got 2 granddaughters who married 2 Black guys, which was kind of, you-know [frowned on], but that's just the way we were brought up. I'm sure the Anglos were brought up the same way.

But I learned when [my great-grandchildren] were born, and I saw them, I love them just as much as if they're mine. My blood, my wife's blood are in them too; so, that's the way I am now.

One of my granddaughters is married to a man whose parents are from Guatemala; they're still Latinos... But that's the way you see, you see a lot of Mexicanas or Mexicanos with Black girls or Asians, but that's the way things [are]. I think they handle it better, probably, than maybe we did.

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Dr. Rivera: Because we were indoctrinated with a bias.

Mr. Salazar: Exactly, exactly. There was a story where we went to Garfield, and we'd have our lunch at this big table, you probably ate there too, there was a big table where we would eat our lunch on the table... I'd take my paper bag and the other guys would have their paper bags, and (inaudible).

We couldn't speak Spanish; of course, I never learned Spanish like my wife does because they spoke Spanish at home, and English, too. I remember my Grandparents spoke broken English, but my Mom spoke mostly English, which I was glad. And I don't look down on guys that have an accent, they were born and raised here, but they do because they speak both languages.

We had one Black guy, Johnny Lewis, and he lived on Congress, the only Black guy, him and his sister. [He played] varsity basketball, varsity football, and [ran] track. When I got my gold medal for the mile when I broke the record. He [got a medal] for the long jump, it was called the broad jump back then. He was a great guy, a good athlete – and we accepted him—he was one of us.

Dr. Rivera: We're getting to the end of our interview, Mel, is there anything that comes to mind that you would like to share with us? Any war stories that come to mind?

Mr. Salazar: What do you mean [by] "war stories"?

Dr. Rivera: Things that have happened to you that are very memorable.

Mr. Salazar: Well, no not really, [except], I remember [the girls from the other cities were always better looking]. Even though I married a Colton girl – that's the way it was. [Sometimes,] the guys from Berdoo were here and guys from Redlands were here. [One time,] I went to Redlands to this party and I met a girl there; of course, the guys from Redlands didn't like that, you-know, so they broke up the [party]. There were

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more of them than us, and we were a little tipsy... I got a scar right here (he points to the side of his face)...

Dr. Rivera: Battle scar, huh?

Mr. Salazar: We went back into the house [where the party was] at because I thought I had just a bloody nose – but [half my nose was almost cut off]... I would have looked like the Phantom of the Opera... mister nostril, but luckily they were able to sew it up. That's about the worst thing that ever happened to me; but we had no business going there. Because we'd do the same thing to the guys from Berdoo, if they came to Colton.

We wouldn't kill them or anything like that...

Dr. Rivera: How old were you when that happened?

Mr. Salazar: Well, I was at the end of my junior year or senior year.

I smoked [cigarettes] because everybody smoked, and I drank on weekends. But I always look back and say [to myself], if I hadn't smoked or drank, maybe I would have gotten the first in CIF – who knows. But, I look back [and I think:] I had fun.

I remember my coach when he took us to the CIF finals, he told me the night before: "Hey Mel, let's go get a motel, you'll get a good dinner, [you can get to] sleep early" – and I said: [we're] at the Civic Auditorium... I didn't want to miss any of that, you-know. When you're growing up you don't want to miss nothing... [Anyway,] I did good, but I could have done better...

Dr. Rivera: How long have you been retired now?

Mr. Salazar: It was a year this past December on the 22nd.

The last day I was there we had a get together, we did a pot-luck with my kids and my wife, and I invited as many customers as I could... Whether you got a haircut or not

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that day—[I just wanted folks to come...]. Because I was thanking them for coming to the shop all those years.

Mr. Salazar: Later, this last March, my kids put on a dance with Ron Cabera and his band. You've heard them, they're very good. One of my grandkids hired a trio... and they played for an hour. Most of the people who [came to the dance] were my customers. I announced: this is for you, this is my thank you to you – and I meant it sincerely. That was my farewell speech.

Of course, they were all mad at me because I'm no longer cutting their hair...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: That's a wonderful legacy on your part.

Mr. Salazar: I enjoyed it. Like I said, I don't miss cutting hair, I just miss the people. Sometimes on Christmas I will call a bunch of [my customers] to wish them happy holidays, and all that. [I remember] when I called one of [my old customer's they asked if I was coming back to work to cut hair again]. I said: no, no, no... I can't be there forever...

Dr. Rivera: Mel, thank you so much for being with us this afternoon.

Mr. Salazar: It was my pleasure.

Dr. Rivera: You have an open invitation – so you can come back and tell us about your other project, working with the old-timers. And your next project, the history of the Mercuries, you have an open invitation for that too.

Mr. Salazar: Thank you so much, I appreciate this.

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