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**Alfonso "Hok-Lee" Garcia**

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**Oral History Project of Colton, CA - 10/3/14**

**Dr. Rivera:** Good morning, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera, and I'm the director for the oral history project of South Colton. My partner in crime is Mr. Frank Acosta, who is behind the camera and taping this session for us. Today we are at the Pfau Library at Cal State San Bernardino (CSUSB), and it's approximately 9:30 a.m. on October the 3<sup>rd</sup> is the date today, and we're on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the library. Our guest today is Mr. Alfonso Garcia; also known as 'Hok-Lee' Garcia.

Welcome, welcome to Cal State this morning, and thank you very much for being with us today, and helping with the oral history project, [we] truly appreciate that, Hok-Lee.

Now, why don't we get started with the interview; should I call you Alfonso or should I call you Hok-Lee?

**Alfonso:** Well, it's up to you...

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay, it doesn't make any difference?

**Alfonso:** Doesn't make any difference.

**Dr. Rivera:** Alright, I'll call you Hok-Lee then. Hok-Lee, tell us, were you born and raised in Colton?

**Alfonso:** Yes, I was.

**Dr. Rivera:** When were you born?

**Alfonso:** July the 6<sup>th</sup> 1929.

**Dr. Rivera:** What part of Colton were you raised?

**Alfonso:** I was raised mostly... in South Colton on Maple Street. 449 Maple Street.

**Dr. Rivera:** And that was la calle cinco barrio?

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**Alfonso:** Off 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Dr. Rivera:** [That was] a very famous barrio because you not only were close to the railroad there but also many of the people that lived in that area worked for the Colton Cement Plant. And you mentioned that your Dad worked for the cement plant.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, he worked there for many, many years. At that time you had to work about 40 years to get any place, I guess.

**Dr. Rivera:** Was your Dad born and raised in Colton? Or did he come from Arizona or New Mexico?

**Alfonso:** He came from Mexico, originally. Then, when he came from Mexico he came to the United States in Ajo, Arizona; [and] he worked there for a while, I don't know what... maybe construction or whatever. That's where he met my Mother, in Ajo, Arizona.

**Dr. Rivera:** And they got married and came to Colton?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, in Colton.

**Dr. Rivera:** And they came to Colton in the '30s or so?

**Alfonso:** That had to be the '20s, I guess...

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned that you had a picture or you saw a picture of your Dad -- when your Dad was in uniform in the early 1900s, but you can't remember which army he was in...

**Alfonso:** He was in the service probably in Mexico.

**Dr. Rivera:** Right, right. Was he with the revolutionists, or was he with the government forces?

**Alfonso:** The government, probably... I would assume that because of his uniform. I'm pretty sure the revolutionaries didn't get uniforms.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, the revolution started in 1910, and if your Father was in uniform he could have possibly been with the government army. And then after that, [he] left the army and went to Ajo, Arizona, met your Mom, and then they came to Colton.

Where were you born? Were you born in Colton? Or were you born in Arizona?

**Alfonso:** I was born in Colton.

**Dr. Rivera:** In Colton in 1929. And you mentioned that your Dad started working at the (inaudible) cement plant right after that. And then, you lost your Mom, your Mom passed away when you were 3 years old?

**Alfonso:** About 3 years old, yes, she passed away – I never knew her.

**Dr. Rivera:** And who raised you Hok-Lee?

**Alfonso:** Well, I had older sisters; and Rosa was the oldest. She was 5 or 6 years older than me. And then some of the families around the neighborhood used to help me, feed me, take care of me when possible, I guess.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well you mentioned that one of your neighbors, I forget the name that you mentioned, she also changed your diapers.

**Alfonso:** (Inaudible) We used to go across the street and she would, more or less, change my diapers, or whatever I had on me. It was hard [during that time because whatever I was wearing] could be part of a canvas or could be part of a blanket as a diaper.

**Dr. Rivera:** You didn't have the modern diapers that we had?

**Alfonso:** We probably had no money to buy them.

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was 1929 or 1932, or so.

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**Alfonso:** 1931, 32.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you said you had 2 sisters?

**Alfonso:** 2 sisters, and 2 brothers.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then yourself?

**Alfonso:** I was the 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Dr. Rivera:** You were the baby?

**Alfonso:** I was the baby.

**Dr. Rivera:** You said your sisters were Rosa and...?

**Alfonso:** Elena

**Dr. Rivera:** Elena, and your brothers names?

**Alfonso:** Robert and Gilbert.

**Dr. Rivera:** Are they still alive Hok-Lee?

**Alfonso:** No, they all passed away. The last one was Gilbert, he died about 25 years ago. I'm the last one of the family surviving.

**Dr. Rivera:** Your parents names? Your Mom and Dad's name?

**Alfonso:** My Dad was Garnacio Garcia, my Mom was Ardelena Foster Garcia.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you marry somebody from Colton or outside of Colton?

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**Alfonso:** Yeah, I married Ruth Moscoro from Colton. [We] had about 4 kids: 2 boys and 2 girls, and my oldest daughter died, the first one died when she was about 2-3 years old.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned that you lost your wife recently?

**Alfonso:** Oh-yeah, I lost my wife about 11 months ago.

**Dr. Rivera:** Sorry, and our condolences to you.

In your barrio, who were some of your friends that you grew up [with] in the barrio? La calle cinco.

**Alfonso:** The Ruiz family; Niko Leyva; the Aparicio family, I used to go to school with them, that's a big family; and the Gutierrez [family] lived next door to us (inaudible). (Inaudible) Castro, the Castro family – because my sister married a Castro, my oldest sister, Rosa, married a Castro [who] lived next door to us.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now you grew up with these friends?

**Alfonso:** Well, more or less, I did.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you went to school together?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, I went to school with the Aparicio, Gutierrez, and (inaudible)...

**Dr. Rivera:** You went to Garfield Elementary School?

**Alfonso:** ...And then, graduated to Wilson – from Wilson to the high school.

**Dr. Rivera:** At Wilson School, what years were those, were those the early 40's?

**Alfonso:** '44, I graduated from high school in '48, so 4 years difference.

**Dr. Rivera:** When you graduated from Wilson you went to Colton High School?

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**Alfonso:** Yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you graduated from Colton High School in 1948?

**Alfonso:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned one incident at Colton High School that you got caught playing hooky, can you tell us about that?

**Alfonso:** I can't remember right now, but we got caught. We used to take off, go to school in the morning and somebody would bring up the subject, let's go have a milkshake or something someplace... okay, we'll meet at 12 o'clock or 1 o'clock and we'd all go from there. But I didn't do it very often because my Father would spank me if he ever found out... [he would give me the] riot act...

**Dr. Rivera:** What did you guys do when you played hooky?

**Alfonso:** Play, go uptown, and just roam around, that's all we used to do. At that time, we couldn't go uptown too much because they were kinda prejudice. They didn't want us up there in the other town because we used to live in South Colton, and the North side was kinda prejudice [when] we'd go up there.

**Dr. Rivera:** So if they caught you [in] downtown Colton, what would happen?

**Alfonso:** Well, the police would come over and say: You guys don't belong here. [Then they'd] make us go south.

**Dr. Rivera:** So they chased you back home?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, [they] chased us back home.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Now, when you were growing up there on Maple Street... and you guys would get together in elementary school, what kind of activities did you have? What kind of recreational activities did you...?

**Alfonso:** At school, or...?

**Dr. Rivera:** There in the neighborhood.

**Alfonso:** Baseball, softball in the street; just roam around I guess, back and forth...

**Dr. Rivera:** How about *escondidas*? Did you have...hide-n-go-seek?

**Alfonso:** Hide-n-go-seek, yeah, we used to have that... hide-n-go-seek at night.

**Dr. Rivera:** So at night, it must have been a fairly safe place.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, it was because it was just neighbors [who had] been there for years. There [were] no cars coming down [or] racing down the street [because] nobody had a car during that time. Very few people had cars at that time.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about other activities that you did? Did you build scooters?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, we used to get those little old skates. The wheels we used to make little *carritos*—they called it—*carritos*. [It was] a board on the bottom...

**Dr. Rivera:** ...a 2 by 4 at the bottom and [you] nailed the skates on there.

**Alfonso:** ...nailed skates on the bottom. Because very few had skates... sometimes we would find them or go to the dump. We used to go to the dump too... on 'O' Street. We used to find little things [and] junk. Frozen oranges, they used to throw [away] a lot of frozen oranges at that time, [and we'd] bring them home.



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**Dr. Rivera:** So anyway, from Maple Street, which is about 4-5 blocks going east on 'O' Street, at the end of 'O' Street was a dump, *verdad?* And then you guys would go there from La Calle Cinco – you'd go all the way to the dump; and there it was heaven because you had oranges the packing house would throw away.

**Alfonso:** Or frozen, mostly they were frozen because at that time they didn't have control of the weather. They had (inaudible)... there [were] orchards all over the place.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then you'd go through whatever was dumped at the dump and you would find goodies?

**Alfonso:** Goodies, oh yeah, sometimes junk to go sell junk. [We'd] go sell it to the scrap iron place.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you would pick iron and collect iron... and sell it to the junk man? What about the rags, *tambien?*

**Alfonso:** There were rags at that time too but there weren't that many rags. They didn't throw away that many rags in the town. But we would pick up anything that we [thought] we could sell later on. The junkman would come every Saturday, and we had enough just to go to the show—10 cents. At that time they charged 10 cents... the show was the New Colton Theatre, and later on the Hub City was another theatre that came on. Of course, at that time we had to sit on one side of the show, we couldn't sit in the one side [where the white people sat].

**Dr. Rivera:** What side were Mexicans allocated to sit?

**Alfonso:** The left hand side as you go into the new Colton – and that's about it. And the whites would sit on the right hand side. Eventually, we started mixing up a little bit and you could sit any place you wanted to.

**Dr. Rivera:** Do you remember when the segregation was lifted? Where you could just go ahead and sit anywhere you wanted to? Was that in the '50s?

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**Alfonso:** The '50s, gradually. Like I said, gradually, we didn't know too much about segregation at that time. We knew we had to sit [in a certain area] but the word 'segregation' didn't come until later on.

**Dr. Rivera:** So that's the way it was, and that's the way it was.

**Alfonso:** We knew our place, let's put it that way.

**Dr. Rivera:** And knowing your place means that everybody in Colton understood that, *verdad?*

**Alfonso:** Everybody understood that was south of the tracks. And later on it started to change, little by little. There used to be an ice cream parlor, Hunters, we used to go there and get cones, ice cream cones. And of course, they'd stare at you like: What are you doing here? We'd buy cones for 5 cents, or whatever... and the people used to stare at us, like: What are you guys doing over here? You don't belong here.

**Dr. Rivera:** Like, you don't belong here... yeah. So you knew you weren't welcome?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, white trade only...

**Dr. Rivera:** Is that what it said?

**Alfonso:** That's what the sign [read] in the window.

**Dr. Rivera:** But did you get your ice cream?

**Alfonso:** Yeah. Course, they wanted the money, see... 5 cents at that time...

**Dr. Rivera:** So, what other experiences did you run into Hok-Lee? Because you mentioned they would chase you when you played hooky, they would chase you from downtown Colton; and then, in the theatre you had to sit on the left side. What other things did you experience that was segregation that we didn't know about – but still, it was there? How about the plunge?

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**Alfonso:** Oh, the plunge. We couldn't swim in the plunge uptown because Caldera has his plunge down south [on] 5<sup>th</sup> Street. We used to go swimming there and course, it wasn't that good or that bad, but it was a swimming pool for us. But the north side where the plunge was, we couldn't swim there. They were prejudice against us... you guys don't belong here, [was] one of those statements. Sometimes we'd go through the Cuninos – (inaudible) they used to call it (inaudible) up on the hill the canal there, the irrigation canal would be there, we'd walk across the river just to go swimming there in the Summer. And La Cadena down there used to be a canal too, and we'd go swimming there.

**Dr. Rivera:** But mostly when you went... the Caldera plant was there and it was close to your house; it was only a couple blocks from your house...

**Alfonso:** Yeah, a couple of blocks.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about the Caldera plunge, was it a big plunge?

**Alfonso:** It was fairly big... and they used to sell candies and whatever; course, most of the time we never had even a penny – a penny to buy anything.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they charge for admission?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, I guess they charged 10 cents for minors and 15 cents for adults, or something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** You said that you used to help the son of a Caldera clean the pool?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, and later on we used to help sweep because they would drain the water on a Thursday and then we'd go help clean it, you-know, scrub the walls and that green stuff that hangs around...

**Dr. Rivera:** The algae?

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**Alfonso:** The algae, yeah, we used to clean some of that and just ordinary cleanup a little bit, and they would give us 1 or 2 free entrance to the swimming pool. That's how we used to do it because we didn't have any money to pay 10-15 cents to go swimming at that time.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you said you helped, what was the name of Caldera's son?

**Alfonso:** Oh, there was Trini Caldera, Justino Caldera, and Juanito, I think used to help clean, and he was the youngest of the Caldera's – Trini was the oldest.

**Dr. Rivera:** I understand that they also had a dance hall, Caldera Hall.

**Alfonso:** Yeah... At one time the (Caldera) men had the plunge, had the dance hall, (inaudible) and they had an enclosure there – [where] once in a while they had bullfights...

**Dr. Rivera:** But they had bullfights?

**Alfonso:** Rodeos or something like that... [They] kinda had 2, 3 things going all the time. And I would go in free sometimes because my Dad would play the coronet in the little band they had, so we would go in free. I didn't have 10 cents to pay, or whatever, to go in.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they have a baseball field there too?

**Alfonso:** Oh-yeah, they had a baseball field across the street from [where] El Salvador Grammar School is right now – they used to have a baseball field down there. (Inaudible)

**Dr. Rivera:** So a lot of people from South Colton would go to the Caldera properties to entertain themselves and recreate themselves.

You were lucky because you lived around the corner; and you helped clean so you got in free; or your Dad would play there in the dance hall and you'd get in free.

But you had it made Hok-Lee.

**NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION**

**Alfonso:** I remember my Dad used to sometimes give me a quarter, and my friend (inaudible) he had a big family and his Dad used to work at the cement plant too. I guess he never had any money at that time and [I'd say], come on let's go to the show; I'd invite him [by saying], oh, I got a quarter. At that time they charged 10 cents a-piece, and we'd have 5 cents left for a soda or something. The good old days.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were a good guy then. You've always been good guy, eh?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, because my Dad would give me money, a quarter or 50 cents.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now, Hok-Lee, after you graduated from high school, you got sick? Tell us about your illness.

**Alfonso:** Well, I had TB (Tuberculosis). I was in the County Hospital for about 9 months. Then later on, I started working for the school system. I've been actually alright since that time and I was hired by the school to be a custodian there.

**Dr. Rivera:** But before that, you spent 9 months at County Hospital? What kind of treatment did you get for your TB?

**Alfonso:** At that time just shots once in a while, [and] rest was the main thing.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then you left the hospital after 9 months?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, my Dad was working at the cement plant, so I just stayed home, I didn't do anything. I had to run the store across the tracks; I could go buy anything I wanted at [the] 7<sup>th</sup> Street store, Esperanza. I could buy anything because my Dad had an account there...

**Dr. Rivera:** So your house was just across the railroad tracks from Esperanza Market? And your Dad had credit at the Esperanza Market; and you took advantage of that credit?

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**Alfonso:** I didn't over-do-it, but just to stay alive I could buy anything I wanted. Usually my meals were eggs in the morning, bologna at noon, (inaudible), bread [and] bologna. At night, I would buy a piece of meat and cook it myself. But my Dad would be working or doing other things at that time, so I would cook. We were one of the first ones to have gas in our neighborhood.

**Dr. Rivera:** What year was that Hok-Lee?

**Alfonso:** Oh, I graduated in '48 so it must have been the 40s...

**Dr. Rivera:** That you had your first gas stove in the neighborhood?

**Alfonso:** At first we had a wooden stove. But later on we were the only ones that had a gas stove in the neighborhood. So it was easy for me to just turn it on – sometimes it wouldn't light [so] you get a match.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about indoor plumbing?

**Alfonso:** Well, just enough for water so you could wash the dishes.

**Dr. Rivera:** In the sink?

**Alfonso:** It was just a table with pans... you'd get the water there. If you needed hot water, you would [fill] one of the pans with water and put it on the stove, heat it up, and wash the dishes. That was it...

**Dr. Rivera:** What about bathing?

**Alfonso:** In the Summer, I used to be outside with the hose and a can of Hills Brothers coffee – we'd put a lot of holes in the [can] and we'd have like a shower outside in the Summer. But in Winter, we had to heat the water inside and in a tub we'd take a shower there.

**Dr. Rivera:** *Y, latrin, eh?*

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**Alfonso:** *Latrin.*

**Dr. Rivera:** What about outdoor facilities like the outhouse? Did you have an outhouse?

**Alfonso:** We used to have an outhouse, and every so much we'd have to dig another hole to change the outhouse to another place; and cover the old one... The toilet paper was newspaper.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh, what-can-I-say, you do with what you had.

Now, you mentioned that you started working for the school district. When did you start working for the school district? [Was] it a few years after high school? 5 years afterwards?

**Alfonso:** About '51 I think I started.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay. Now, how did you get the job? Did you apply?

**Alfonso:** Somebody mentioned that they were hiring or something; and I went to apply... The junior high was just being built or something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was '53, '54.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, and I went over there... and I think Bailey was superintendent. Well, I got the job – I just applied.

**Mr. Acosta:** Was it (inaudible) Bailey or Paul Rogers?

**Alfonso:** Paul Rogers, [was] at that time a principal at Wilson. He went to the main office, and eventually, he became the superintendent. And Bailey I think was second in command because when Rogers retired, or something, Bailey took over.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you applied?

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**Alfonso:** They interviewed me, and blah, blah, blah... [They asked me:] When can you start work? [I said,] well, anytime. [They said:] Okay, start here Monday. (Inaudible)... I worked at Colton Jr. High... (inaudible).

**Dr. Rivera:** So that must have been in '54 then? And you worked there and you were a custodian?

**Alfonso:** A custodian there for about 6 to 8 years. And then they moved me around.

**Mr. Acosta:** Were you there when Robert Rosales started working (inaudible)?

**Alfonso:** He was just starting, I think. He came in later...

**Mr. Acosta:** There was a Glover?

**Alfonso:** Gene Glover, Gene, yeah—you remember that? He was a chubby guy. He said he was a ladies man...  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** And then from junior high school what school did you go to?

**Alfonso:** They changed me to Alice Birney, I think it was Alice Birney. I worked there for a little while; then they moved me, again, to Washington School. I worked there, and gradually, I went back – and at the end of my career I was at Wilson... Garfield-Wilson [is] what they used to call it.

**Mr. Acosta:** Was Chester Slepsky at Washington when you were there?

**Alfonso:** Slepsky? I remember that name. He was like a coach, or something like that?

**Mr. Acosta:** No, he might have been a principal at Birney or at Washington.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, he was at Birney, I think, then he went to a junior high, or something. Slepsky, I remember that name. Yeah—the good old days...



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**Dr. Rivera:** When did you retire Hok-Lee?

**Alfonso:** I retired when I was 62 years old, I'm 85.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, a long time. 23 years ago; and here I thought you retired a few years ago. Like you said, time goes by quickly.

How was it working with the schools back in those days Hok-Lee? Was it easier? How were the teachers? How did they relate with you guys?

**Alfonso:** The teachers [who] were real nice to me were the ones [who] kept their room clean. And the teachers [who] weren't, they were real sloppy. You-know, with papers on the floor and blah, blah, blah, you-know. Basically, whenever it [was] raining there was no grass, nothing like that. One of the teachers would put a mat out there [and tell the students to] shake their feet before [coming into the classroom]. And the others didn't care, they'd just go in [and there would be] mud all over the place... But, as a rule, they were alright – I never had too much problem with them.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about the kids, Hok-Lee? Were the kids better behaved back then? Or was there a difference later on before you retired?

**Alfonso:** Over there, there wasn't too much hassle, but... of course there were fights between the Spanish speaking [students] and the white [students].

**Dr. Rivera:** You said that the gringos and the Mexicans had some misunderstandings. Was this at the junior high school or some of the other schools?

**Alfonso:** The junior high. Because at that time, there weren't too many Mexicans on the north side of Colton, there were just white people living over there; all the Mexicans were on the south side. [Maybe] a few in between there but not many. Like right now, I've got a lot of relatives living over there.

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**Dr. Rivera:** So, before 1953 all the Mexicans lived in South Colton, and all the gringos lived in North Colton. And then, when we got them together at the junior high school, there was some misunderstandings?

My question was, now that we have changes in the population with the kids that go to school now, the majority of the kids now are Mexican, *verdad*?

**Alfonso:** Oh-yes, they are now. Myself, I've got relatives on the north side, nephews, cousins, or whatever. Sometimes I stand there and I see just Mexicans coming out of the school. One [of my relatives] lives near the junior high, one of my nieces, and then my sister lives by one of the grammar schools... Rogers... Mexicans [are] all we see. They say we've taken over.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** So now what happened, Hok-Lee, is that I guess the transition of buying houses in North Colton took place when they integrated the schools, but that was '53,'54,'55. And then you had the World War II veterans coming back home, and then with the GI Bills and veterans loans they bought houses in North Colton.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, that helped a lot because a lot of them I'm pretty sure that they had run down houses before they went to the service. But they came over and started building houses, buying houses.

**Dr. Rivera:** So the GI loans helped buy the new houses in North Colton.

**Alfonso:** Oh-yeah, that helped a lot.

**Dr. Rivera:** Kids are kids, I guess they haven't changed in attitude? Did you see them different when you started working [in] '53, '54, up until you retired?

**Alfonso:** Gradually, they started acting more cordial or more quiet. Because at first it was like we're coming in and nobody's gonna tell us anything, you-know, blah, blah, blah. And gradually everything was more quiet.

**Dr. Rivera:** Mellowed out?

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**Alfonso:** Of course, there's always braggers, you-know, braggers are trouble makers; but as a rule everything kind of evened out, to me it did. Because they used to see me at school, at Stater Brothers – [they'd say,] Oh Hok-Lee, how are you? (inaudible)

**Dr. Rivera:** So you had a good relationship with the kids? And the teachers?

**Alfonso:** I had a good relationship with the kids and the teachers too. The kids [and their] parents knew me: Oh I know him... They were real cordial after-a-while.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many Mexicans worked for the school district when you first started? Were you the first one?

**Alfonso:** No, no. There were quite a few; I mean, not that many but there [were] 5, 6, or something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** And Ralph Martinez?

**Alfonso:** Ralph Martinez was one of the first ones. I never worked with Ralph but I know he was working for the schools. And that's about it; I can't remember if there [were] that many. And at Colton Junior High there was a Sharp, Don Sharp, his Dad used to work for the high school, and he got a job there, and he's the head custodian. He was real good; originally, I guess that family came from Oklahoma, or something, but he treated me real good. He never was prejudice to me—he wasn't prejudice like a lot of them who didn't even talk to you or didn't want to sit next to you, or something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** Who didn't want to sit next to you?

**Alfonso:** No, [I meant in general,] people didn't. You go to the show they didn't want to sit next to you, you-know. Or they'd neglect you [when you'd say:] Good morning. And they'd look at you [and not respond]... people like that.

As a rule, I had pretty good relations and I didn't have no problems; there were minor ones, nothing serious—like someone trying to beat me up or something like that, no.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Now, talking about beating up. We had the Fiestas Patrias; was your Dad ever involved with the Fiestas Patrias? Or were you involved with the Fiestas Patrias? Or did you just enjoy the Fiestas Patrias?

**Alfonso:** Well, my Dad was a coronet player, him and Arturo Castorena, and Gonsalo Vasquez used to play the coronet or the blah, blah, blah. And they used to have a little drum and bugle corps, [and] a couple of girls tah, tah, on the drums... My Dad used to practice at home once-in-a-while; blow the horn, and people would complain [about] him making noise. So besides that, that was more or less my concern.

Where the Circle K is right now, they used to have the stage there.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, that's the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and 'N' Street.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, where the store is they used to have the stage there and they had booths around it. My Dad would give me a dollar, a whole dollar to buy things that at that time was 10 cents, 11 cents. When they started collecting with tax, it wasn't 10 cents or 11 cents, it was a big deal, you-know, if you remember that.

And sometimes I would invite some of my friends that didn't have money. [I'd buy them a snow cone or something]. [They'd say,] oh, I ain't got no money. [And I'd tell them,] oh I'll buy you one, I got money...

**Dr. Rivera:** So the Fiestas Patrias was just kind of a recreation for you?

**Alfonso:** A recreation.

**Dr. Rivera:** And your Dad played for the Fiestas Patrias?

**Alfonso:** Gonsalo Vasquez... and there were drummers there... and that was about it. And they have the regular band, of course. Delgadillo had a band, Emilio Delgadillo had a band; he used to be a teacher in music, musical instruments, and he would have a group that would play there. [He would play] the national anthem, the Mexican National Anthem, and things like that. And they would have a dance around the stage; they'd clear all the chairs out, and they'd play for the dancing people there.

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**Dr. Rivera:** So it was a big fiesta? They had queens, or girls that ran for queen, and they sold tickets.

**Alfonso:** The one who sold more tickets was the winner. I remember Monica Alba was a queen, she married Rudy Alba. She was a nice beautiful girl, Monica Alba, I remember that. And there are others that I can't remember, off hand.

**Dr. Rivera:** After they introduced the queen, they had the program on the *si se de siempre*; Father Hildago de Costilla leading the battle against the Spanish. And then after that, they would have the dance.

**Alfonso:** They used to go around the whole neighborhood with the queen... Somebody had a truck, they had trucks that took the orange pickers to work; they would kind of decorate it a little bit; they had the queen up there... and they had the little band... So people would come out, [and see] the queen.

**Dr. Rivera:** So they had a parade?

**Alfonso:** They had a little parade.

**Dr. Rivera:** Talking about orange pickers trucks, what did people do for a living back then in the '30s when you were growing up? Where did people work?

**Alfonso:** Well mostly it was citrus. A lot of people would go up north to work up in Fresno, or whatever... When school was out, they would go up [there during the] Summer – Fresno, up north. They would come back [with] a little money, buy clothes for the kids, or whatever. Then the cement [plant] came on and started hiring Mexican people... and the PFE [with] the freight cars – things like that. [The main places of employment were] the cement plant and the PFE.

**Dr. Rivera:** And the citrus.

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**Alfonso:** And the citrus, of course. From oranges to grapes – anything. Any job they could find to make a little money because most of them had 1 or 2 kids or 4 or 5 kids, you-know; so they had to eat.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now, you mentioned that before you worked for the school district you worked for Caldec. What was Caldec?

**Alfonso:** I'm gonna tell you the truth, I can't even remember. I worked there for a little while... it was something minor they assembled there.

**Dr. Rivera:** TV trays?

**Alfonso:** Something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** Hok-Lee, you mentioned that you had credit at the Esperanza Market. Where did most of the people of South Colton do their shopping?

**Alfonso:** Grocery shopping or uptown shopping?

**Dr. Rivera:** Let's talk about grocery shopping.

**Alfonso:** Esperanza, Cervantes, Martinez, Rodriguez, and they used to have Bocanegra on 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about Bocanegra on 5<sup>th</sup> Street; you were there, you lived there. And also, Ruiz had a liquor store there.

**Alfonso:** Oh, Jimmy Ruiz, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about those 2 places.

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**Alfonso:** Jimmy Ruiz was kind of cripple. And he had that little liquor store there, and he had a lot of business because a lot of people would go buy there. Like my Dad used to go there after the cement plant where they worked and buy their beer there; and then they'd go up the hill and guzzle it down. (Inaudible) They'd drink just about everyday, I think, quarts [of beer].

**Dr. Rivera:** And the Bocanegra Grocery Store?

**Alfonso:** It was a man and his wife, they had a daughter named Bertha.

**Dr. Rivera:** Bertha and Trini?

**Alfonso:** Trini, yeah, he got on the wrong side of the tracks...

**Dr. Rivera:** But they were there for a long time?

**Alfonso:** Oh-yeah, that was the [main] business right there on 5<sup>th</sup> Street... for all the people around there. But 7<sup>th</sup> Street [had] about 2 or 3 stores, then as you go on 'N' Street, before you go to the tracks, Aguilera had a store there down on the bottom. Eventually, they moved to Mt. Vernon and San Bernardino... (inaudible). Martinez's [store] is where they used to make the Mexican bread. And then Tucker came up later on; and Lala Morales [had a store] by the church where Hollywood used to be, next to Hollywood House.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about La Paloma, what stores did they have?

**Alfonso:** ...I can't remember... I know businesses were there because all the people started to go to 7<sup>th</sup> Street... but I can't remember.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you mentioned 7<sup>th</sup> Street, [where] they had bars, they had restaurants.

**Alfonso:** Oh-yeah, they had the Sombrero, Sarape, Bolero, and Club Trinidad... Llamas had his liquor store on the corner there on 7<sup>th</sup> Street... The pool hall.

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**Dr. Rivera:** And the pool hall. The barber shop, Ornela's.

**Alfonso:** (Inaudible) The building is still there. I go to Highgrove to get a haircut at his son's barber shop.

**Dr. Rivera:** Adam?

**Alfonso:** I go to Adam's.

**Dr. Rivera:** Adam Ornela's barber shop in Highgrove?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, in fact, I'm due to go there.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about clothing, shoes, and things like that?

**Alfonso:** People would come and sell, they would come from – I don't know where. Mostly they were, not to be prejudice, but I think they were Jewish people [who] used to come sell clothes with their cars full of pants, shirts, or whatever. They'd go in the neighborhood and sell clothes...

**Dr. Rivera:** What year was this Hok-Lee – that you remember? Was it in the '30s when you were a little kid?

**Alfonso:** '30s, early '40s – they used to come over and sell until (inaudible) one of the guys opened a store up on the north side. I can't remember his name.

**Dr. Rivera:** Helman's?

**Alfonso:** No, Helman's was uptown and J.C. Penny's was across the street. But down south, [I can't remember the name of the store,] he was Jewish. My Dad used to trade there too; he'd give credit [when] you'd buy your clothes there. I had my wardrobe: 2 pairs of pants, about 2 shirts, and about 2 pairs of socks.

(Laughter)



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**Dr. Rivera:** So you were rich?

**Alfonso:** I was rich. A lot of them didn't have any[thing].

**Dr. Rivera:** I know, that's why I said you were rich.

**Alfonso:** (Inaudible) They didn't have anything – 1 set of clothes and that's it, no sweater.

**Dr. Rivera:** Remember your friends that didn't have clothes, sweaters?

**Alfonso:** They didn't have money to go to the show – they'd charge 10 cents; but my Dad, every pay day, would give me 25 cents and I would invite (inaudible), especially. His Dad used to work at the cement plant, but I guess he ignored them or something. And I would say: Let's go to the show? [And he'd say:] I ain't got no money. [I said,] I got a quarter let's go to the show – they charge 10 cents. Sometimes he would have 5 or 10-15 cents and we would buy a bag of popcorn—we were in heaven. (Laughter)

**Alfonso:** And sometimes if we had more money, we had a soda too, we'd share a soda.

**Dr. Rivera:** You were growing up during the time [when] Colton was segregated. There was North Colton and there was South Colton. When did people start getting involved in politics in Colton? And do you remember who the leaders were back then, Hok-Lee, that were running for office, or wanted to register to vote? Who were some of the leaders back then?

**Alfonso:** The first man that I can remember [who] became a councilman was (inaudible) *Heramias*. Remember, *Heramias*, the boxer?

**Dr. Rivera:** The boxer, yeah.

**Alfonso:** Yeah, he was a councilman at that time. I guess he was one of the first ones.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay. That was Johnny Martinez, *verdad*?

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**Alfonso:** Johnny Martinez, yeah. Everybody called him *Heramias*, that was his nickname. And he lived [in] the south side by the Garfield School [in] a 2-story house.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well let's go back to the 2-story house. Across the street from Garfield, on the corner of Congress and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, that was his—that was his family's [house]. There used to be a little grocery store there—lots of years before that. I guess you wouldn't know because you were too young.  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** But there used to be a grocery store before that. But anyway, he was the first person to be on the council. And then, who else were some of the leaders Hok-Lee?

**Alfonso:** Manuel Padilla, he was 16<sup>th</sup> of September.

**Dr. Rivera:** He was 16<sup>th</sup> of September.

**Alfonso:** (Inaudible)... the committee *Trabajadores Unidos*, or something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** How about the Congress of Community Clubs?

**Alfonso:** Congress of Community Clubs. What was the name of that lady [who] lived about 2 houses up [from] where I live? She was real active...

**Dr. Rivera:** Bea Hernandez.

**Alfonso:** Bea Hernandez, she was in charge of the Luque Center. She had an office there too; [and] she was in charge of accounting or something...

**Dr. Rivera:** Who are the other people that you remember [who] ran for office or [who were] active in trying to get people to participate in community activities?

**Alfonso:** Mr. Cisneros, Marina's Dad...

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**Dr. Rivera:** Marina's Dad... Marina Vidari – yeah, she was a Cisneros. She lived at the end of east 'N' Street. I forgot her Father's name but, yeah, the last name was Cisneros.

What about Pete Luque, Sr.?

**Alfonso:** Pete Luque, Sr., *esta bien*. He was elected to the city council, later on. He was always dressed up in suits; and he used to be the announcer for the Mercury Club: softball and hardball.

**Dr. Rivera:** On Sundays?

**Alfonso:** On Sundays at the South Colton Park.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about Pasqual Oliva?

**Alfonso:** Pasqual Oliva became a councilman, later on; after the Second World War he became a councilman. I used to hang around with 2 of his brothers: Manuel and Val, both of them died already. In fact, a lot of people used to hang around that house. Marina was there, [and] the Mother had about 6 or 7 sons. Everybody had little brothers: Rudy, Rudy is still alive — 5 or 6 [of his little brothers] would come and visit him; Manuel [had] another 5 or 6 [little brothers]; and then, Chito de la Rosa and Laqua, they called Pasqual: Laqua; he had his group [and] they would go to the dances at the San Bernardino Valley Ballroom.

**Dr. Rivera:** At the Valley Ballroom?

**Alfonso:** [Sometimes people from San Bernardino didn't like people from Colton,] and there would be fighting sometimes.

Yeah, that was the good old days... everybody used to hang around that house. Sometimes there'd be about 30-40 out there.

**Dr. Rivera:** The Oliva family was very popular... That's why they were actively involved in city activities and politics; and even now they're still involved.

**Alfonso:** They were friendly to me.

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**Dr. Rivera:** How have things changed in Colton, Hok-Lee? From when you were a little kid, you were born in 1929, and now we're in 2014, how have things changed in Colton?

**Alfonso:** Well, there's more participation of Mexican-Americans, or whatever you call it, Chicanos... into politics and business, or something like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** Everything!

**Alfonso:** Everything! Yeah, they're more active now. A long time ago they used to be afraid or they [would] be refused – which a lot of them [were told:] No you can't open this. No we have one already. And things like that. I do remember that.

**Dr. Rivera:** So the changes that you see now is that we and our kids had better opportunities at participating.

**Alfonso:** Sure do, we do. I tell my grandkids, my nephews, my nieces that are younger... to go and try it! Go over there and try it! Open your mouth and tell them something.

**Dr. Rivera:** So the big change that you see is the attitude?

**Alfonso:** The attitude, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Because when you and I were raised in Colton, we thought that we couldn't do it because that's the way it was... And now you have a different attitude that *que si se puede!*

**Alfonso:** But you know what I noticed, I'm a cruiser, I like to cruise the streets of the north side [because] I have relatives who live on the north side. Anyway, every once in a while I like to go up and down the streets and I know a lot of people who used to live in South Colton. If I know them I will stop and talk with them for a little while. [They would say to me:] What are you doing cruising? Cruising! You're wasting gas. [I'd say:] Who cares, I can't take it with me. So I go up and down the streets... I do that all the time.

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My sister lives on the north side with one of her daughters; I've got a nephew and nieces [who live there too.] Do you know Roman De La Rosa?

**Dr. Rivera:** *Si*

**Alfonso:** He's married to my niece – so I stop there occasionally to talk to him [about whatever is going on in his life]. [Then I go visit his Mom, my sister, and I take her out to] *puerquito*...

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh-yeah, sweet bread.

**Alfonso:** She's a diabetic and 90 years old, and I take her a banana, or something, sugar free... Then she tells my niece: Look what uncle brought me, they call me uncle, look what uncle brought me... [Of course] they know already.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about... those *puerquitos*? Do you still like bologna sandwiches?

**Alfonso:** I always buy bologna, the thick one. In emergencies at my house, [get some] bologna, 2 pieces of bread, lettuce – I got a sandwich. Forget the tomato, that's too much trouble, just get a little lettuce and put a little meat on it.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** So bologna is the filet mignon?

Also, you were talking about attitudes, there's a different attitude in Colton now with things changing. I mentioned to you, Hok-Lee, [when] you asked me how many Mexican-American or Latino kids do we have here at the university, and I said about 50-60%. You smiled, and your eyes were bright, and you said: That's great! Why did you say that?

**Alfonso:** Because, for a fact, education can help others – that's my philosophy. You-know, I don't like dropouts, I never liked dropouts, which I have some in my family: dropouts. Younger nephews and nieces... [I would ask them:] How come you quit school? They get lazy, that's the trouble, lazy. [They would say,] I want to dropout so I can get a job so I can buy a car. I just mention to them, one of these days you're gonna need it... I don't argue with them. Get your education.

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**Dr. Rivera:** So you're a firm believer on kids getting educated?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, because we never had the chance. [They] have a chance to get a good job, get a good marriage, have a good house, car, kids, whatever.

I know this for a fact, I got nephews [who] used to be druggies – it's affecting them right now. [Their] health is affected [because they're in bed sick]. They're older now: 50 years old, and they used to be druggies.

**Dr. Rivera:** So, one of the things that happened or changed in Colton was kids getting involved with narcotics, alcohol, or dropping out of school? And that was not a benefit to the community.

**Alfonso:** No. Like, mostly my nephews and nieces are drinkers, they drink beer... I haven't drank in about 20-30 years, I don't like it.

**Dr. Rivera:** So there was a culture of beer drinking in the community, then?

**Alfonso:** Yeah. At that time it was Coors.

**Dr. Rivera:** So hopefully things have changed. Have things changed?

**Alfonso:** To me, a little bit, they changed. I mean, in my family, they have changed a little bit.

**Dr. Rivera:** That's good.

You-know, we were talking about recreation before, Hok-Lee, and what you did for recreation?

Remember Ray Abril, the scout master?

**Alfonso:** Oh-yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** And in his backyard we'd go through the alley and we would weightlift in the backyard... And we had a big sign there, and we called it: Willy's Gym. One of the things I think I remember about you is that you would go into Willy's Gym, and you would ask people: Are you tight? Is that tight?

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(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** The last question: What was the best thing about living in Colton? What fond memories do you have about being a Coltonite and being raised in Colton?

**Alfonso:** Well, one thing about it – I have never liked big cities. Like, Colton has grown but, like you said, you can still relate to people... You go to other cities, you don't know nobody and you don't know what's happening.

I got a niece [who] lives in Corona, she has 2 kids, and she's a young one, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation niece, she comes over my house all the time. Anyway, Corona has grown, I remember there used to be orchards, just orchards, [now you] see houses all over the place. There's no communication, some people don't even know their neighbors.

**Dr. Rivera:** But in Colton, you know everybody in South Colton and North Colton; and you have family in Colton.

**Alfonso:** ...Like I said, that's why I like something small... you can relate to people. They wave to you, at least, something like that...

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, Hok-Lee, is there anything I missed that you would like to tell us about?

Well, let me go through my notes. Dances, we talked about that; theatre we talked about. What about weddings and baptisms?

**Alfonso:** (Inaudible)

**Dr. Rivera:** What about church? Were you a church person?

**Alfonso:** No, I've never been to church. My Dad used to go to a Seventh Day Adventist Church a long time ago, and I used to go [but] I didn't know what religion it was. And he used to go and he used to take me. It was in South Colton... near the Catholic church there. He used to take us and once in a while they used to have a big picnic in Redlands, and the people [who] had cars would take us over there at the picnic. I still remember that... I was 8 or 10 years old... I never was actually a church goer until my Dad started going in the other direction, so that was the end of my going to church.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Were you a handball player?

**Alfonso:** I used to play but not very much...

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, Hok-Lee, thank you so much for being with us this morning. We appreciate it; and I'm delighted that you were able to give us some information of you growing up in South Colton during that period; and [for sharing] some of the experiences that you went through in growing up in Colton. And then the fact that Colton is home to you.

**Alfonso:** A lot of [people ask:] where do you live? [I tell them,] Colton. [They ask,] what part of Colton? [I say,] South Colton; [and they say surprisingly,] you live in South Colton!? [I respond,] yeah, why?

**Dr. Rivera:** So they're surprised that you're still in South Colton?

**Alfonso:** Yeah, it doesn't bother me... (inaudible)

**Dr. Rivera:** So it's a wonderful place to grow up in; a wonderful family with good relationships; and you still have those relationships in tact with your family.

Hok-Lee, you didn't meet Henry Vasquez; Henry Vasquez is also part of our committee, and Henry is over there in the corner...

Well, again, thank you so much.

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