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Oral History Project of Colton, CA – 2/3/14

Dr. Rivera: Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera, and in partnership with the library here at Cal State San Bernardino, we are doing an oral history of South Colton. The names of the committee members that we have for our program: first of all, we have Mr. Henry Vasquez who's here this afternoon, and Mr. Frank Acosta.

We are thoroughly interested in just recording some of the incidents that happened between 1890 and the late 1960s.

This afternoon we have Ms. Ramona Aranda Genemara. Welcome, thank you so much for being with us for this interview. I called you on short notice, and volunteered right away to be with us.

Why don't we start our interview: tell us about your Mom and Dad, where did Mom and Dad come from?

Ms. Genemara: Well, they originated from León, Guanajuato, Mexico, and they married in 1923. My father decided they didn't want to stay in Mexico because of the revolution.

My Mother had lost her Father in the revolution. My Mother married very young – she was only 16.

They lived in León, Guanajuato for a short time, and then they decided that they were going to come to the United States because they were offering them jobs in the United States. My Father hooked up with the (inaudible), which is a group that had come to Mexico to recruit men and families, and to bring them across the border with a green card to work. Some went to Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

Dr. Rivera: And your Dad came to California?

Ms. Genemara: No, they first took him to Arizona to some mines... I don't remember what kind of mines they were. But he stayed for a very, very short time there. He had a nephew living in Oro Grande, California; his nephew wrote him and told him they

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were hiring at the cement plant in Oro Grande. So, my Father said, okay, we're going to California because the weather was severe where they had stopped...

My Mother was expecting me at the time, in 1924 I was born.

Dr. Rivera: And you're the oldest of the family?

Ms. Genemara: I am the oldest...

Dr. Rivera: How many kids did your Mom and Dad have?

Ms. Genemara: Total was 11 of us.

Dr. Rivera: How many girls and boys?

Ms. Genemara: There's 5 girls and 6 boys.

Dr. Rivera: After Oro Grande you moved to Colton?

Ms. Genemara: No, my Father applied at the Santa Fe Railroad Station to work, and I think he worked maybe a few months there, and then from there he came to Colton.

They went over that bridge that used to go up over the railroads and make a sharp turn and then come down on the other side: in an L shape, before the bridge that is there right now. I got to go over that bridge several times, and I was so scared I didn't think that Model-A was going to make it... it was pretty steep...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: What year was that, Ramona?

Ms. Genemara: 1928.

Dr. Rivera: Is 1928 when you guys came to Colton?

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Ms. Genemara: Yes, well, my sister was born in San Bernardino, just before we moved to Colton.

Dr. Rivera: When you moved to Colton, where was your first house located?

Ms. Genemara: (Inaudible) in the middle block of 'N' Street, and that's where we celebrated one Christmas and several other things. That's where I first rode in a Model-T. It was a brand new car [that belonged to one of my] relatives... I think it was a Ford.

Dr. Rivera: A Ford Model-T. The biggest thrill in your life during that period... How old were you?

Ms. Genemara: I had to have been about 5. During the time that I was 5 years old, my Father knew a professor, a Spanish professor who came from Mexico, Professor Leira, and he enrolled me into the school. I learned Spanish before I learned English... There was a gentleman who used to come around selling Menudo in a little cart, he had a big pot, I don't know how he kept it hot, but, anyway, it was the best Menudo you ever had.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned that it was quite an experience when you started school, what did you meant by that?

Ms. Genemara: Oh, the experience was: you-know when you come to a new area, you don't know anybody. So this little school signed up most of the kids that were my age. When we went to kindergarten at 6 years old, it was the same gang – we were all going to the school, which was the old Garfield that was on La Cadena at the time.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, La Cadena and 7th Street?

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Ms. Genemara: No, La Cadena and 'M', actually. Not 'N' but it was 'M' Street. They used to have a little park there, before that little store went in.

Dr. Rivera: So you were one of the students in that original Garfield Elementary School?

Ms. Genemara: Yes, um-hmm. That was when they first built it; Mr. Heisner, [who] was our principal, he was German. You-know we were fighting with Germany then? But he was a real tall 6-footer, I guess, with red hair, very white skin, green eyes, and he was so into the Mexican culture. He got us kids all together in the schools different grades and made a great big fiesta in the front of the school. I only know of one time he even had it taped – with the first movie cameras that they had, he had one of them, and he filmed it...

Dr. Rivera: So you went to Garfield and then you went to Roosevelt?

Ms. Genemara: 1 year in Roosevelt while they were building our junior high.

Dr. Rivera: Wilson, Wilson Junior High School?

Ms. Genemara: Right.

Dr. Rivera: When did you start Wilson Junior High School?

Ms. Genemara: 1938, I graduated in 1939.

Dr. Rivera: You graduated from Wilson in 1939? And then went to Colton High School?

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Ms. Genemara: Yes, in the 40s. I graduated in 1943.

Dr. Rivera: So you graduated from Colton High School?

Ms. Genemara: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Ramona, during that period you said that you were actively involved in softball? What team did you play for?

Ms. Genemara: The Colton Mercuries, the girls Mercuries...

Dr. Rivera: What was your position?

Ms. Genemara: The catcher.

Dr. Rivera: Do you remember some of your players?

Ms. Genemara: Very few that I remember now. But I remember what they look like and how they played, but I cannot remember their names.

Dr. Rivera: What year was that?

Ms. Genemara: In 40 and 41.

Dr. Rivera: You were the catcher, and who was the pitcher?

Ms. Genemara: Lucy Garcia was the pitcher.

Dr. Rivera: And the first base person?

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Ms. Genemara: Carmen, I think...

Dr. Rivera: Second base?

Ms. Genemara: Connie...

Dr. Rivera: Short-stop? Third base? And the fielders?

Ms. Genemara: I don't remember. I used to fill in for the right-fielder when I had to take a rest from being the catcher; but other than that, I don't remember... Oh, I think there was a Ruby Garcia.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned Arredondo.

Ms. Genemara: Arredondo was more of a professional because she was older than we were. Our age limit was established, you could only be so old...

Dr. Rivera: Besides softball, what other recreation did you have? You mentioned that you were involved in Las Fiestas Patrias? The 16th of September. What was your role, you said your Dad coached you into actively participating in Las Fiestas Patrias?

Ms. Genemara: Yes, I was part of their program, and I was taught the dedication to the flag. The colors and what they represented, and we were taught to sing the National anthem in Spanish.

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

Ms. Genemara: Let's see, I started possibly [at] 10 years old, and I did that for a while – maybe about 3 years.

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Dr. Rivera: What years were those, do you remember?

Ms. Genemara: Well if I started at 10 it had to be 1934, 35, 36 – somewhere around there.

Dr. Rivera: So you were one of the main people that put the Fiestas Patrias together?

Ms. Genemara: Yes, that's what they featured me... I had fun.
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: What role did your Dad play in the Fiestas Patrias?

Ms. Genemara: Not much. He was a member of the local *Progresistas*.
The one who was really in charge of that was Mr. Sosa.

Dr. Rivera: Luz Sosa...

Ms. Genemara: He was the instigator with all that... they made the plans and the programming. Until he passed away, he was very active.

Dr. Rivera: So Mr. Luz Sosa was Mr. *dieziséis de septiembre* fiestas.
What other activities did you do? You mentioned that you went swimming in the Caldera swimming pool, tell me about that?

Ms. Genemara: Well, I think I was also about 10 years old. On Saturdays we didn't go to school... My Father was one of the first owners of an automobile; so we'd pile all the kids from the neighborhood in the car [on] Saturdays to go to the 'plunge' – we used to call it the 'plunge'. He used to drive us because we were in La Paloma – he'd drive us all the way to 5th Street, where the pool was. So we used to have a lot of fun there in the Summer.

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Dr. Rivera: Do you know anything about the background of Juan Caldera?

Ms. Genemara: I believe he had a bakery. He had a bakery on 7th Street, next to the Martinez store that's there on 'M' Street. He used to own that property south of the Martinez store – and he developed that into a bakery, he and his father... There was a big Caldera family, and the kids were very good swimmers. (Inaudible) Caldera was the owner of all that property over there where the pool was.

Dr. Rivera: That was on Congress Street and 5th Street, in that area?

Ms. Genemara: Caldera also sponsored or owned, I don't know which one, but he sponsored a team, a men's baseball team, one of the first ones before the Mercuries -- way back when they had dirt fields, nothing on there but dirt...

Dr. Rivera: Where was the baseball field?

Ms. Genemara: Right behind the plant... there was an open field. I think he used to grow corn in the field. When they drained the pool every, I think it was either Friday night or something, they used to drain the pool and use that water to irrigate. So they would recycle the water, and then they would fill clean water for Saturday. On Saturday it was crispy clean and beautiful... but that water was cold.

Dr. Rivera: So he had a baseball field in that area also? I also heard that he had a bull ring.

Ms. Genemara: Yes, for a little while they tried it, but I think the state of California came after him because it was animal abuse. They wouldn't put up with it, so that faded away very fast.

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Dr. Rivera: Very quickly, huh?

What about the dance hall? I heard that he also had a dance hall in that area, or some type of hall?

Ms. Genemara: Oh, maybe upstairs in his building where he had the bakery, I think there was a dance hall up there on top. I don't remember because I wasn't of age to be in a dance hall at the time, at 10 years old I wasn't into that. But I believe I heard something like that.

Of course, around that same time, there was another little dance hall down on Fairway that connects from around Valley, and where the wash is right now and there's nothing but dirt, and they have a storage there right now. They were even planning to make a soccer field there – Colton was planning to but it hasn't developed or anything. There used to be a dance hall there, I can't remember what it was called. The reason I know about it is because a lady that used to go dancing there had a little boy, a baby that was left with my Mother and me to babysit while she went to dance...

Dr. Rivera: I heard of another dance hall on the corner of 'O' Street and 7th Street (inaudible) – what was the name of it?

Ms. Genemara: Tivoli. I think it caught fire or got destroyed somehow – and just the pillars were left, the front pillars – and they used to use that for a background. Any fiestas or any presentations were done in front of those pillars. That's where they had that little school...

Dr. Rivera: That little school where you first started when you were 5 years old?

Ms. Genemara: Yes, where I first went to school at 5 years old.

And then, from there they moved that little school to where Sombrero is now – and there was a kind of theatre where they presented different plays, and stuff...

I wasn't too much into that because I was too young at the time...

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Dr. Rivera: You mentioned your Dad, where did your Dad work when he moved to Colton?

Ms. Genemara: At the time, there [wasn't much work]. He worked for a little while at the...

Dr. Rivera: Was this during the Depression?

Ms. Genemara: Yes. Most of my youth was during the Depression. We didn't get out of the Depression until World War II, which was in 1941.

Then, my Father got a job at the Pacific Fruit Express... By then the older boys had gone into the service, and they were able to send money...

Dr. Rivera: Ok, so your brother's joined the service?

Ms. Genemara: Well they were drafted...

Dr. Rivera: They were kicking and screaming...

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: But they went...

Dr. Rivera: Name your brothers who participated in World War II?

Ms. Genemara: There was Tony, Louie, and John.

Dr. Rivera: They were all veterans of World War II?

Ms. Genemara: Um-hmm.

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Dr. Rivera: Ramona, when they came home were they different because of their experiences in traveling and fighting? Because I know that it was hard for Mexican-Americans to be part of the community – the north part of the community. Were there any changes when your brothers came home and said: Wait-a-minute! I've paid my dues, therefore, I am a full American citizen, and therefore, I should be treated as such?

Ms. Genemara: Well, being that they were born American citizens – that wasn't the problem. The jobs were not available... but I take that back... Some of the people had jobs before they went [into the service], like my husband, when he went in he had a job. He had a job with the Riverside Cement Plant, and they kept his job. When he came back [from the service], he came back with a job, which was good. But my brothers, when they went in [the service] they were still single -- and they had not established a job. So they came back [and did] whatever they could do. My brother, Louie, he was a little shoe shine boy. Of course, the police were always chasing him away...
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Where would he shine shoes?

Ms. Genemara: Wherever somebody would stop by and let him shine shoes on his little box.

Dr. Rivera: Was this on 7th Street?

Ms. Genemara: Wherever, wherever... He would just walk [around] and somebody would call him over to do shoe shining because in those days that was the style – shiny shoes – that was it!

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about the Depression years, how did that affect the families?

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Ms. Genemara: I think we were very close to each other. If somebody had something they'd share. We were a very sharing generation. If somebody was making soup but they didn't have the vegetables for it and the other family did have vegetables, they'd contribute.

My Father, at one time, he used to collect all the oranges from the packing house. He had his little truck, he would collect all these oranges, and they would sort them out. There was nothing wrong with them on the inside [but the oranges were rejected for whatever reason]. He used to get full little truckloads of oranges and take them home, and we would all sort them out – there was nothing wrong with them...

Anyway, it turned out that he would sell some of those oranges or exchange, barter... He would deal with other farmers and their gardens, and stuff – so that's how we survived. But other than that, life was hard.

Dr. Rivera: I guess you didn't have any spending money during that period?

Ms. Genemara: If we got a penny that was big money.

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: I don't think anybody owed more than an hour...

What was very interesting, when I was about 10 years old there was a teacher, Miss Williams, and the Bank of America started a little of savings for the school kids. Now, every Tuesday they would bring a little bag from the bank, and a little bank book, and if you would put in your penny they would mark it down. We collected maybe something like, 27 cents or 50 cents...

Dr. Rivera: But the idea was to save money?

Ms. Genemara: The idea was to encourage us to save money. Of course, there were not any jobs to say you could earn so much or save so much, and use the rest for whatever.

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When my Father had a little extra money from wherever, I never did find out where that little bit of money came from. But my Mother was very economical; she made it go with that little money...

Dr. Rivera: With 10 or 11 kids...

Ms. Genemara: [My parents] would buy us milk and other stuff, and we survived. How God took care of us, I do not know.

Dr. Rivera: Tortillas and frijoles...

Ms. Genemara: My Mother used to buy the big old bags of *La Piña*. We actually have (inaudible)...

Dr. Rivera: *La Piña* flour came in big sacks. Did your Mom use them to make clothing or...? I know my parents used to...

Ms. Genemara: Yeah, they used to make our little panties out of those. Yep, I remember those – no elastic, it had a little string, and you'd tie the little panties... (Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: Like I said, my Mother was very economical, and since I was the oldest, there were 2 other girls, she would make us 3 dresses all alike but different sizes; I was the oldest one with a bigger size...

Dr. Rivera: What about zapatos, shoes, Ramona?

Ms. Genemara: You-know, I only remember one time when I needed new shoes. I don't know how he did it but my Father got us shoes.

Dr. Rivera: But [weren't] they difficult [to get] because they were expensive?

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Ms. Genemara: No they weren't expensive, it was the fact that we didn't have the money. But you could get a pair of decent shoes for a dollar and a half.

Dr. Rivera: During those years, did you work?

Ms. Genemara: No because I was still in school.

Dr. Rivera: How about Summers, during the Summers?

Ms. Genemara: Oh, we used to go to [pick] the apricots...

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about that, where did you go for the apricots during the Summer?

Ms. Genemara: In Hemet. During apricot season, the boys would pick the apricots and bring them to the sheds where you would slice them, take the pit out, and lay them on some boards; they would put them in the sulfur ovens, and then out in the sun.

Dr. Rivera: So your Summers [were spent in] Hemet to pick and prepare apricots? How many years did you do that Ramona?

Ms. Genemara: I must have done that [from the age of] 12 to 17.

Dr. Rivera: So about 5 years?

Ms. Genemara: 5 years every Summer.

Dr. Rivera: [Was it] just apricots? Did you go to go other places?

Ms. Genemara: No, we didn't do other fruits. We tried the boysenberries, but that was so hard on your hands...

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Dr. Rivera: Oh, in Bloomington... and that was not fun?

Ms. Genemara: No, no fun.

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: But over there in Hemet, you would pitch your tent, set up tables, pots and pans... (inaudible) so that the ants wouldn't get them... It was camping...

Dr. Rivera: It was camping during that time.

You met a lot of people that came from different cities that also went to Hemet to work...

Ms. Genemara: Yes. We would meet every year, we'd meet the same people who were hired on that particular ranch to do that kind of work. So that was interesting too.

Dr. Rivera: Did that create any long-lasting relationships with people? Did the boys and girls get together and get married?

Ms. Genemara: I don't know if they actually got married [after] meeting there. But we used to have my cousins from San Bernardino, and some of them used to play instruments. They'd [bring] their instruments – and play their guitars, and we all sang together in the evenings. After you took a shower and had some dinner, then we would [participate] in the entertainment.

Dr. Rivera: Do you remember any of the songs?

Ms. Genemara: No, not right off, but anyway it was fun.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned [something about] your sister, Rose. Tell me about how she met Chuck?

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Ms. Genemara: The way I understand [how] she met Chuck: He was from San Bernardino and she was from Colton. Somebody hired a bus to go to the mountains; they were planning a mountain trip to the snow. Chuck and some of his buddies were on that bus, and Rose and some of her girlfriends were on the bus. So they [all introduced themselves], and I guess Chuck got chummy with Rose – and that's how it started.

Dr. Rivera: On a bus trip to the snow, huh?

You-know, Chuck was a recipient of the Medal of Honor for his service that he provided during the Korean War. He's one of three in the area [who] was a recipient of the Medal of Honor. We have one from Colton: Rudy Hernandez; and one from Riverside: Ismael Villegas.

But tell me about Chuck. After he received the Medal of Honor, did he stay in the service until he retired?

Ms. Genemara: Yes. But he never came back to live in Colton because my sister, Rose, was so afraid of earthquakes – they moved to Texas... and that's where he passed away.

Dr. Rivera: When did he pass away?

Ms. Genemara: Almost 10 years ago.

Dr. Rivera: You-know, they have a school named for him here in San Bernardino: the Chuck Rodriguez Academy. It's just down the street here from Cal State.

Ms. Genemara: It's down the street from where I live.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned something about the school being built, or how they got donations from the community?

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Ms. Genemara: I don't know, I think they needed a school in that area.

Dr. Rivera: No, before that you mentioned that there was some donations...

Ms. Genemara: Oh-no, that's when they were going to build [Rose and Chuck's] home. When he came back from the service... they decided they were going to give Chuck and Rose a home. Anyway, all of San Bernardino got behind him with the little piggy banks from all the little kids in school who donated to this big fund to build his home.

While building [their] home, Rose and Chuck were picked to be on the Groucho Marx Show, and the famous actor, Robert Mitchum, was there, Rose met him. Rose and Chuck participated in the contest [on the show], and they won an O'Keefe & Merritt gas range that went into their house. (Inaudible) [My brother has the film of Chuck and Rose on the Groucho Marx Show winning the gas range].

Dr. Rivera: You also mentioned that they made a film of Chuck.

Ms. Genemara: Yes, some movie stars [were cast to play the parts of Rose and Chuck]. But it depicted that they had [met] at a Summer party in the movie, but it was really a snow party up in the mountains. That was the only thing that changed.

Dr. Rivera: What's the title of the film? Do you remember?

Ms. Genemara: No I don't know the exact title.

Dr. Rivera: Is it available?

Ms. Genemara: I don't know who would have it. Maybe Henry knows who has the original film that they filmed in Hollywood.

There was a big production at the California Theatre...

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Dr. Rivera: What year was that, Ramona?

Ms. Genemara: That must've been right after he came back from winning the congressional medal.

Dr. Rivera: In the mid 50's?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah. Early 50's

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about you, how did you meet your husband? What was his name?

Ms. Genemara: My children's father was Trini Mercado. We met at the baseball park, at Veterans Park.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, you're kidding – in South Colton? Were you playing, or did you just happen to be there?

Ms. Genemara: He was playing for the boys Mercuries Team, and I was playing for the girls Mercuries Team – and that's how we met in 1940.

We carried on this little attraction for each other until we were married in 1943, after I graduated... I was living in the neighborhood where the big flood was... we were neighbors of Margarita Gomez, across the street, and we were across the street from Ernie Garcia.

Dr. Rivera: Margarita lived on the corner of 'M' and 10th Street – the northwest corner or the southwest corner. And you were a few blocks away from Dr. Ernie Garcia?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah, he lived on 10th Street, opposite Margarita's house.

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Dr. Rivera: That barrio was named?

Ms. Genemara: La Paloma

Dr. Rivera: So you're a *Palomera* also?

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: That's right. So anyway, it's been quite an experience

Dr. Rivera: So you were married for [how many years]?

Ms. Genemara: The priest who married us was Father Valencia; and Father Luque was the altar boy. This was way back in '43; and of course, a lot of the girls my age were getting married at the time including Henry's mother (she points to Henry Vasquez who is present during this interview).

Of course, I knew Lupe, who was Henry's aunt... She was in my class and she was a little terror because she was so into everything. She used to be in a little click, and those girls would get into more trouble. One time, there was a Miss Snyder, and we used to fear her – she was tough. One time, I remember very vividly, this little click decided they were going into the classroom chewing gum – they were all chewing away. So Miss Snyder called them all up and said: you're not going to throw your gum away, you're gonna put it on your nose, and you're not going to take it off. She had them put the gum on their nose and they stayed that way until she told them they could get rid it. They never did it again.

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: It's all part of growing up.

Dr. Rivera: How many children did you have?

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Ms. Genemara: Now, I have 4 girls and 1 boy. After my husband passed away in 1974, I didn't marry [again] until 1990 – when I married my second husband, who has just [recently] passed away.

Dr. Rivera: When you graduated in '43 from Colton High School, did you get a job?

Ms. Genemara: No, I got married right after [graduating]... because that was kind-of the custom because there were no jobs available. But during the time that I was married, I worked for Helman's Department Store as a clerk.

Dr. Rivera: Helman's Department Store was located where?

Ms. Genemara: On the corner of 'G' and 'J' Street and La Cadena.

Dr. Rivera: Where the freeway is, right?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah, where the freeway is.

Dr. Rivera: How long did you work in the department store?

Ms. Genemara: I think I worked there 2 years, and then my husband came back from the service and I didn't have to work. So then, I dedicated my life to being a homebody.

Dr. Rivera: Ramona, what was the role of women back then – during the 30's and 40's?

Ms. Genemara: During that era, when I was still single, Roosevelt had the NYA, the National Youth Administration training, so I trained in a sewing factory. That sewing factory was on 'D' in San Bernardino. It was a great big warehouse. During that time, some of us girls who didn't have a job and weren't married, or anything like, we were taught to run the sewing machines.

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When Norton Air Force Base was new... we were sewing the uniforms that were issued to the workers who were working in the different departments on the base. I was wondering why we were making these uniforms. They were made out of blue denim, can you imagine? Blue denim is hard to work with, very hard to work with. So that was another experience that I went through...

I worked for Norton for about 2 years, and then I quit because I had my 3rd child... So I stayed home a while.

Then I got a job at (inaudible) in a sewing factory; I worked there for 15 years...

Dr. Rivera: That was a long time...

Ms. Genemara: That was a long time -- until it closed. They closed it up because China was taking over the garment industry.

Dr. Rivera: What was your job at the Norton Air Force Base?

Ms. Genemara: I was in instrument repair. We used to work with the gauges that went on the planes – to be sure that they were working properly, if they weren't working properly you would reject them.

I [also] worked for a period in electrical instruments, and we used to work with long cables – that was the central part of the airplane – that's what drove everything: air conditioning and everything...

After that I worked in the pumps and valves, and they shifted us around because they were starting to lay off people right around that time. So [while] working in pumps and valves, we worked with the fuel pumps, securing them and making the seals, and putting them all together and then shipping them out again. I don't know where they shipped them but they shipped them out.

I quit that [job] because I was having my little girl; and I stayed home another while.

Then [I got hired to work] at Motorgate, and that's where I worked...

Dr. Rivera: Where's Motorgate?

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Ms. Genemara: It was on 'K' Street and Rialto in San Bernardino. It was a big enclosed building, it didn't have any windows. It's still there, it's a uniform place right now...

Anyway, it's been quite a merry-go-round.

Dr. Rivera: Well, you've been very busy.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: When you were in high school did you participate in any of the activities there, like sports or clubs, or things that were there at the high school?

Ms. Genemara: Um-hmm, I participated in a play / a program: it was like a Summer program. It was dancing and music and performances; and they had a part for me that was a Spanish dancer. It was held in the basketball court.

Dr. Rivera: The McIntosh Gym?

Ms. Genemara: Um-hmm, the McIntosh Gym. It was beautiful. It was all from the music department...

Then I participated in three plays.

Dr. Rivera: You're kidding, what were the plays?

Ms. Genemara: The Mikado, Pirates of the Sixpence, and... well I can only remember 2 right now. Anyway, it was very interesting – I always kept busy.

One thing that I was very proud of was Miss Pesquera, who was the Spanish teacher, I was her top student – I was a double 'A' student. She would have me help all the other kids with their Spanish.

Dr. Rivera: So you were a tutor?

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Ms. Genemara: Kind of a tutor, yeah. I guess she used to like me because she used to give me a little time off to go and do some practicing in dancing.

Dr. Rivera: So you were teacher's pet?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah, I was a teacher's pet...

Dr. Rivera: Did you ever think of going to Valley College, or continuing your education?

Ms. Genemara: At the time I couldn't because my Father didn't have the money for it; and everything was just a rough time. So the only time that I ever decided to do anything like, well, I was already committed with a family – so I couldn't do anything like that. But with my brothers and sisters, I encouraged them to go. I said, I wasn't able to do it so you do it.

Dr. Rivera: So [you], the older sister said: You better do it, eh?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah, well we just presented the case that you don't wanna be like me...

Dr. Rivera: Because Joe did very well... [He is] one of your younger brothers?

Ms. Genemara: Yes. He was very bright... he is one of the middle brothers, the middle kid.

Velma, you-know, she was quite a little... I can tell you, I remember when one time I was visiting their home, and Velma's little nose would just hit the edge of the table. That little nose was just up over the table. She was bilingual: Spanish and English, fluently, at 5 or 6 years old. Because her mother is Panamanian and she spoke beautiful Spanish, and then she picked up English in school.

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But do you know that when she went to get a job she didn't want to speak Spanish. So she was having her mother tutor her to learn Spanish all over again.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: I remember Velma. Velma was one of our future leaders back in '85. But anyway, you also mentioned the flood, the 1938 flood – tell us about the flood?

Ms. Genemara: Well, we never encountered such rain, it was terrible.

Dr. Rivera: It was February or March when we had the flood?

Ms. Genemara: Right around there, I could look up the date.

Dr. Rivera: 1938? How old were you?

Ms. Genemara: I was 14 or 15. That's when we were living close to Ernie's family home, and Margarita Gomez was living across the street from us. We were the second house from the end, and she was the first house on the corner...

We were all surprised because we had never had that much water; and then, we had an open canal in front of the house. It didn't have a cover, it was just open with water coming down, maybe from the ice place, I don't know. Anyway, it was coming from the east side of Colton. I remember that it rained, and it rained, and it rained. The police came over and told us if it doesn't quit raining in the next hour, or so, everybody has to evacuate – you'll have to find relatives, or whatever, and go to a higher ground. Well, it just so happened that it quit.

Dr. Rivera: How [close] did the waters get to the neighborhood?

Ms. Genemara: Up to 10th Street.

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Dr. Rivera: Up to 10th Street? That was a lot of water.

Ms. Genemara: And of course, it took the railroad and the PFE. All those railroad tracks were mangled up. People actually died in that because they didn't realize that that rushing water through the Santa Ana River was so bad.

Dr. Rivera: Well, in 1938 the flood did damage to the PFE, Pacific Food Express, and its (inaudible) was on 10th Street. Did it affect the park?

Ms. Genemara: Which park?

Dr. Rivera: Veterans Park.

Ms. Genemara: The Veterans Park was not there at the time.

Dr. Rivera: It was just a field?

Ms. Genemara: It was just a field... it got flooded... it was part of the Santa Ana River at the time.

Dr. Rivera: [Did the water] also cover Congress Street?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah... but it was nothing there yet. Remember those projects that were built there next to the park?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Ms. Genemara: Those weren't there until after 1938. But very few things were [built] towards the river. Those projects were built during the 40's, after the flood.

Dr. Rivera: But the flood did a lot of damage to South Colton.

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Ms. Genemara: Over there from 10th Street on down... it really tore it up.

Dr. Rivera: 10th, 11th, and 12th Street, and then you have the river.

Ms. Genemara: My brother, Tony, had taken some pictures with a little Kodak camera. In those days, you could buy a little tiny camera.

A picture collector was given some pictures of the flood, and I'm hoping she will feature them in one of her collections of the 1938 flood.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, I've heard about that but I've never...

Ms. Genemara: Have you ever attended the Heritage... in San Bernardino?

Dr. Rivera: No, but I will...

Let me ask you another question: You said that your Dad was involved with the Progresistas?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah.

Dr. Rivera: Who were some of the leaders in Colton that you remember?

Ms. Genemara: Well, I know that Joe Saldaña was one...

Dr. Rivera: Joe Saldaña, okay. [That's] a large family.

Ms. Genemara: Pete Luque, Sr., and that's about all that I remember because I wasn't very involved in the politics of Colton.

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Dr. Rivera: You mentioned that you did some recreation or entertained yourself by going to the movies or the theatre. You mentioned there was seating for Mexicans and seating for Anglos, tell me about that?

Ms. Genemara: Well, we knew our place, let's put it that way. We never contested that. We knew that when we went to [the theatre], we [would] just sit where they told us to sit. We didn't fight it or anything.

Dr. Rivera: Was this at both theatres?

Ms. Genemara: Both.

Dr. Rivera: You also mentioned the swimming pool; and that you were lucky that you had the Caldera swimming pool because you were not allowed to go into the other pool on the north side.

Ms. Genemara: Yeah – that happened a lot; but we were content with our pool because they kept it so nice and neat. Caldera used to hire [some] boys who were about the age of 17 or 18 to clean – you-know how the moss [develops] around the pool. It was a big pool. They would clean it on Fridays and fill it up overnight, and on Saturdays it was all nice and crisp...

When we were living on 'L' Street (inaudible) we lived across from the Caldera family. They all knew how to swim – they were very good swimmers.

I went to school with Trini Caldera, he was my age, and he's the one who used to own Trini's Bar.

Dr. Rivera: Yes, in San Bernardino...

Ms. Genemara: He served time in Mexico for a while, but I don't know for what.

Dr. Rivera: In looking back, what's different now? How has life changed in Colton?

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Ms. Genemara: Insecurity... being out at night. In those days you used to go up and down the streets in little groups, families just walking up and down [the street] in the evenings in the Summer time. Now, you don't feel free to do that because you don't know what's out there. It's just insecurity—to me. I don't go out at night and I don't drive at night anymore. I used to be a driver; I used to go down to Mexico and take people down there shopping – I don't do that [anymore] because of the bad elements out there...

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned when you were growing up, you were in South Colton, and you felt very, very safe.

I remember South Colton was self-sufficient: you-know, we had our own stores, we had our own church, we had our own schools, we had our own restaurants, and we had our own sports activities. So it was kind of a self-contained, safe-city wasn't it?

Ms. Genemara: Yeah, we didn't desire anything else. We had enough with what was provided for us.

Dr. Rivera: So living in a segregated community, how did you feel about that? Or was there any feeling about them against us – or North Colton against South Colton?

Ms. Genemara: I think maybe at the time of the Pachuco era...

Dr. Rivera: The 40s, early 40s?

Ms. Genemara: Uh-huh. That was about the only time we started to get a little fearful about things that might happen because remember we had a great big war going on in the 40s with the sailors from Camp (inaudible) to Colton. The Pachucos from Colton were bad people... they were branded as trouble makers.
I think I have some literature on this...

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Dr. Rivera: Did the City Council do anything? Or did the City of Colton interfere to try to keep the peace?

Ms. Genemara: I think it was just a one-time thing; and it got taken care of. I think the police came in – and we didn't have a big police force in Colton. Most of them were in North Colton and the [police] station was in North Colton.

But being that it [was war time,] and the Pachuco culture was coming up, I think they were mainly fighting over the girls.

Dr. Rivera: That has never stopped...

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: But I think that is what started the whole thing. The Pachuco girls were going with the sailors [or vice versa]... But I never really figured it out.

[Anyway] that's when I began to feel a little unsafe.

Then, it stopped and [simmered] down – and that's it.

The only time I've been feeling uncomfortable is now because it seems everybody has a gun; and if you don't have a gun you're allowed to have one. You-know, it's not the gun that kills people – it's the person who kills or damages.

Other than that, in the area where I live right now, we're an international barrio. We have Jordanians, we have [Black] people, we have Mexicans, you name it...

(inaudible).

Dr. Rivera: I think in Colton, most of the people that grew up in the 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s, I see the change that a lot of people moved out of [South] Colton and bought their house in North Colton.

Ms. Genemara: Well because by then they were selling to everybody. But to say that the cultures are getting along – we did get along.

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Dr. Rivera: In South Colton?

Ms. Genemara: And even in North Colton. Because like you say, the people who are well-off did get out of Colton because they wanted to live in a new community. The newer generation was coming up and they also followed Anglos to the new communities.

(Inaudible)

I still remember the old families...

We used to sleep with our doors open. Nobody bothered you, nobody took anything from your house – nothing – it was just peaceful.

Dr. Rivera: It was safe and you trusted your neighbors.

Ramona, I think we've gone through all of our questions that we have here. Did I miss anything? Do you have any other points? Any additions to this?

Tell me this, then: How did people earn a living in South Colton? Like your Dad, you said he worked for the cement plant, he worked for the PFE, and the family went to Hemet... Did other people follow the same thing because I know that we had a few who worked in citrus, picking oranges?

Ms. Genemara: My husband was an orange picker with Velasquez, he was one of their top pickers.

Dr. Rivera: He made a hundred boxes a day – he picked a hundred boxes...?

Ms. Genemara: He and his brother would compete with each other...

Dr. Rivera: The contractor was Mr. Velasquez – and he would pick up the crew?

Ms. Genemara: Or, Mr. Colunga.

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Dr. Rivera: Juan Colunga. They would get their truck and pick up their crew from different parts of Colton; and then take them to the orchards. In the orchards they would have their sack and their clippers. They would wear Levi jackets so they wouldn't get scratched by the trees.

Ms. Genemara: We did have a lot of orange groves, which they eliminated because of the shopping centers that [were developed], and the new homes in the new neighborhoods.

So we've done away with a lot of our own agriculture.

Dr. Rivera: So your husband... a hundred boxes a day.

You-know, I remember for lunch... we used to light a fire with the branches of the orange trees. Then an hour later we'd have the *brasas* – and we used to put our tacos on top of them.

Ms. Genemara: Of course, in those days we didn't have [aluminum] foil.

Dr. Rivera: No, we put them on top of the coals. We had our bean tacos or bean tacos with eggs, or bean tacos with rice, or whatever.

Ms. Genemara: Or pork meat.

Dr. Rivera: Those were the days.

Ms. Genemara: That's about all I can tell you about the 30s, 40s and up to the 50s. My husband finished his last job, which was at the cement plant in Riverside. There was a Mr. Chema, I think that was his name, and he's the one that got him a job as a truck driver and a brick layer for Riverside Cement...

When my husband got into the service he became a truck driver, and his job was to drive one of the trucks [that carried the troops]...

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Dr. Rivera: Where did he go overseas?

Ms. Genemara: He was in Germany; and he wound up in a French hospital because when they were moving around with the canon, they didn't hold it up enough... and one of those tripods cut his leg. It just bruised it, it didn't break it, but the bruise was [severe enough] that they took him to the hospital in France. That's when the war ended, so he stayed over there for a [short] time and then he was shipped back to California.

Dr. Rivera: Thinking of your Mom, what good memories do you have of your Mom?

Ms. Genemara: My Mom was a very hard worker. Like I told you, she was very economical. If it hadn't been for my Mother we would have all starved. She could make anything out of any little thing... she kept us very well nourished. My Father never believed in junk food, no candy. He didn't want our teeth to get rotten. He'd give us a nickel and say: you either buy yourself a banana or an apple – and I don't want to hear that you went and bought candy.

Dr. Rivera: So your Mom kept the family together?

Ms. Genemara: If it weren't for my Mother, I don't think any of us would have survived.

(Laughter)

Ms. Genemara: It's been a rollercoaster with very pleasant memories.

Dr. Rivera: Well, Ramona, I thank you so much for being with us this afternoon.

Ms. Genemara: You probably get a mixture of other people's opinions... which is very good.

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Dr. Rivera: Not only that but, each of us has experiences, personal experiences, and I think when we share those it gives us a good idea of how life was in South Colton during those periods.

Ms. Genemara: It was rough but we all made it.
And like it's rough now – we're all going to make it.
Primeros dios.

Dr. Rivera: *Primeros dios!* Well, I thank you so much, thank you for being with us.

Ms. Genemara: Thanks for listening to me.

Dr. Rivera: We thoroughly enjoyed it, and I think the interview was very interesting, and also very educational.
So, Ramona, thank you so much.

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