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### Rose Mercado Robles

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### Oral History Project of Colton, CA – 2/27/14

**Dr. Rivera:** Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera, and welcome to our history project: the South Colton Oral History Project. The purpose of this project is to get an idea of how it was growing up in South Colton during the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. Before I introduce our guest, we're at Cal State San Bernardino in the Pfau Library on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. The committee members with us on the panel is Mr. Henry Vásquez. Henry, welcome to our taping this afternoon; and also, behind the camera is Mr. Frank Acosta, who will be taping for us this afternoon.

Our guest is Miss Rose Mercado Robles. Rose, welcome to Cal State, and particularly, welcome to this oral session this afternoon. We will be talking about growing up in Colton, okay?

You told me earlier that you were born and raised in Colton, and that means that your Mom and Dad came to Colton. When did your Mom and Dad come to Colton?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I don't remember exactly, I just remember what [my Mom] used to tell me. They lived in Oro Grande for a time, and then they came down and settled in Colton. That was when the PFE (Pacific Fruit Express) was still in effect, and a lot of my relatives worked there.

**Dr. Rivera:** So your Dad worked in Oro Grande for a while?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I think he did – that's where he got his arm hurt...

**Dr. Rivera:** From Oro Grande to Colton; and I would imagine in Oro Grande he worked at the cement plant. In Colton he also worked for the cement plant for a little while.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No, I don't think he went that far. I don't remember exactly, and if he did I never heard of it.

**Dr. Rivera:** You said your Dad got injured, what happened? What was his injury?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Well, he broke [his] arm. After that I guess he didn't do heavy labor, or anything like that.

[He started his own business,] he had dairy cows, he had a lot of running chickens and stuff for eggs. He had goats, and at one time he made cheese and sold it; and he sold milk, if anybody wanted it.

I don't think he really wanted to work.

**Dr. Rivera:** It's amazing because I never knew that about your Dad. He was kind of a farmer, he grew his own vegetables, took care of some animals, some chickens... He was able to provide for the family with milk, cheese, and eggs.

Tell me about him making cheese – he made cheese?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He made cheese and we were all there to witness it. He had these big tubs for the [caseins taken] out of the milk. He would pour it in [the big tubs] and put some stuff in it and let it sit over night to coagulate. Then, we would break it up, we would cut it in small pieces.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it was a family affair?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes...

**Dr. Rivera:** He would sell the cheese to...?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He would sell the cheese to merchants or whoever wanted to buy it...

**Dr. Rivera:** You said he had some goats?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He had some goats, he had dairy cows, and I remember one time there was an incident when they were all dead... they must have had some bad

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grass or something. There must have been like 9 cows that we lost... We had quite a few cows on this one lot and they had some bad grass or something and they were all with their feet up in the air...

**Dr. Rivera:** You said he had chickens?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** We had chickens, sometimes we would have ducks, not often. Goats, we used the milk from the goats; I used to milk the goats... But it was interesting...

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were a milkmaid?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Well, I was a milkmaid, I think I was just about everything.

**Dr. Rivera:** How old were you when you were doing that? You were a young little girl?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I was a young little girl – oh-so cute.

(Laughter)

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** But I learned how to do all that and it didn't hurt me none. We couldn't play after school with our friends, we had to go straight home and get to doing our chores, and stuff.

**Dr. Rivera:** You also had a large family...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** A very large family...

**Dr. Rivera:** How many kids in the family?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Growing up, there was about 12. But then they started to marry or go into the service – they weren't all there at the same time.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Who was the oldest?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Rosendo, he was the one who injured his leg. I think he cut it because it was terrible... and he couldn't walk very well. So he never really had a job like the others.

Mike, started to work (inaudible) at the PFE, and so did my other brother, Ropito. Candido or Candi, as you call him, he was a lazy one – he escaped, he got lost all day long.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** I used to play handball with Candi, he was not lazy.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He was never around to do chores.

**Dr. Rivera:** So your older brothers worked for the railroad, for the PFE. What about the girls, like you?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I was the oldest of the girls so I got to do a lot of stuff that the boys did because we were short on boys.

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

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I went to Garfield, yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** Wilson?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Wilson...

**Dr. Rivera:** And Colton High School?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** And Colton High School and the Junior High, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** You said that you didn't finish Colton High School, why?  
You went up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** ...Yes, the reason they told me that I couldn't go was because they couldn't buy me clothes. They couldn't afford to buy clothes for me; but if it had been a boy they would have provided for that boy—but because I was a girl I was dispensable.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were a second class citizen?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I think so. Even though my Mother new better she should never have done that. She corroborated with the rest of the family because I think she decided what went on in that house, more than I thought. And so I had to stay home and feed the chickens, do the laundry, and do the stuff she couldn't do.

**Dr. Rivera:** You stayed at home to help Mom – and Dad take care of the animals?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yeah, to help Mom... I helped Dad with that. My Dad didn't do a whole lot, my Mother did, she did everything; but I was there and I helped her with just about everything.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you went up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade? Did you ever get your high school diploma?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes. I went and got the classes that you need, and I went from one school to the other. I went as far as Fontana to see if I could get into a class. I finally got my diploma...

**Dr. Rivera:** When did you get your diploma?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I'd have to look it up.

**Dr. Rivera:** How old were you when you got your diploma? *Mas o menos.*

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I don't remember, to tell you the truth...

**Dr. Rivera:** But it was way...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** It was way back when... But I did get my diploma; and then, I missed high school for the same reason – they couldn't afford to send me to school. However, I did go to night school: I went to San Bernardino; I went as far as Fontana to take adult education courses so I could get my diploma – I finally did!

**Dr. Rivera:** You got your GED?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** My GED? Yes I did – so I evolved.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Do you ever regret that you didn't continue your education when you were young?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** (She clutches her fist to her chest.) Don't you just feel it? I do, I do – because I knew that if Connie can do it, I could have done it. But she was younger, she [always stood-out] when she was a little girl. Wherever we went, when we went to pick fruit we enrolled her in a school. She was always outstanding, and of course, we were all proud of her but at the same time we were also envious.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned Connie, Connie was your younger sister?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** She was younger, and there was another one: Angie, *Angelita*, and then Connie, Concepcion.

**Dr. Rivera:** Connie got her master's degree here at Cal State, and that book that's over here (the camera pans out to show the book sitting on the table), she wrote that book, it's her master thesis in the School of Education – she did a wonderful job [writing] about people [who] were born and raised in Colton – she did a great job! Call her and tell her I want to borrow her book.

Now tell me, having lots of kids, and you helped Mom take care of the house and the animals, did you also travel to work and pick crops in California?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes, we went to Fresno; they put us in one of the cattle trucks – they piled everybody in there [with] their *mochilas* and our clothing was in blankets... They took us for a long drive and I enjoyed that part but afterward it was hell!  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Where did you go to pick crops?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** We went to Fresno, and there was a little town there, I forgot the name of it, and we'd pick apricots and stuff like that... But it was always fruit... very little vegetables, it was mostly fruit.

**Mr. Vásquez:** Did you climb up into the trees to get the fruit?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No, they would get somebody to shake the trees, or it would fall and we would gather it from the ground. I was a *rata*.

**Dr. Rivera:** You were a *rata*. *Rata* were the people that didn't carry ladders but picked everything they could reach or that was on the ground.  
(Laughter)

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**Dr. Rivera:** You did that every Summer? Was it every Summer?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Whenever it was time for the fruits to be picked, or whatever, they would let us know. We didn't do that for too many trips, maybe twice. But it was some experience because it was hard. You had to live in tents, which really wasn't all that bad. You'd have your stove up there and your food...

My Mother was always there, she'd make the tortillas and the lunches and stuff. But my Father was non-existent.

**Dr. Rivera:** So your Mom really took care of everything!

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** She took care of everything and she did a pretty good job, considering.

We would go to church on Sundays...

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about church? Did you go to San Salvador?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes. Father Valencia was there, and it was an experience but it was good. [He had] this loud personality but he was a good man – he really was. He never did anything to anyone – to hurt anyone, I don't think that I know of.

**Dr. Rivera:** He was a good handball player.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I know he was; and he would go to my neighbor's a lot to see Mrs. Candelaria [who] lived across the street from us. I think they were from the same town in Mexico – they had a connection from way back when...

I was jealous because he didn't come to our house.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** But you did go to church on a regular basis?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Oh, we went to church every Sunday.

**Dr. Rivera:** 8 o'clock or 10 o'clock mass?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Whatever it was, we went to church. We had to walk all the way from by the park all the way to the church. What street was it?

**Dr. Rivera:** 'L' Street.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes, we had to walk – well it really wasn't that far. We were clean when we left but we weren't clean when we got back.  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Where did you folks live?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** On Fernando Street in a very small, little house. It was 3 bedrooms and they added more in the back so the big boys could sleep back there. But it was a very small house with a kitchen and that's it! We had an outhouse for our bathroom until finally they put in a regular [bathroom]. That was the worst part of my whole life.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, I think most of us who lived in South Colton experienced that, *verdad?* We didn't have the services...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes. We didn't have them and it was expensive to [have that] kind of service... There was not that much money in South Colton, people were poor, they really were poor down there. We were one of the poorest [families].

**Dr. Rivera:** Well especially during the Depression, *verdad?* Because you were a little girl during the Depression.

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I remember one time, I was so sick – I had this belly ache, or something, we couldn't afford to go to the doctor so I had to get well by myself. Somebody must have prayed awfully hard for me because I got well all by myself. If you got stung by an animal or something... you had to recover on your own. It was a very drastic thing when they took us to the doctor.

**Dr. Rivera:** As a little girl, you went to school and you had to get home quickly.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yeah, we couldn't stop and talk and have fun with friends, uh-uh. I had to get home right away.

**Dr. Rivera:** As a teenager, Rose, what kind of entertainment did you have?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Nothing.

**Dr. Rivera:** Nada?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** My brothers went to dances (inaudible)...

**Dr. Rivera:** Near Inland Center.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They would have fiestas and stuff there and I wanted to go so bad – but they never took me.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about the Fiestas Patrias in Colton?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Oh, we went to all that – we would walk over there and I'd go with my brothers. That was a little bit of fun.

Easter was fun because they would hang the devil up, he was dressed in black, and then we would bang on him.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Judas.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Judas, yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was one of the projects Father Valencia had. He would hang Judas from one building to the steeple of the church, and he would swing back and forth—back and forth. He would like all the fireworks, and boom!!

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Other than that, we didn't have a whole lot of stuff going on down there.

**Dr. Rivera:** But you did go to church regularly?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** If there was a function at the church, a fiesta or something, we might go.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they have *Jamaicas*?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Well, they bring musicians in and they play and you can dance to it or whatever... But we didn't participate in it that much because I was little, I was too young. We went and we saw what was going on and we went home.

**Mr. Vásquez:** Where did they have those *Jamaicas*?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** There was a little vacant [area] across from the liquor store in South Colton on La Cadena. It was an empty lot and they would have them there. It was in walking distance.

**Dr. Rivera:** On the corner of 'N' and La Cadena?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yeah, it's right in there someplace – I might be mistaken a few yards or whatever, but they had that and we participated...

**Dr. Rivera:** Do you remember your friends that you went to school with? Either at Garfield or Wilson?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I didn't have any friends. I didn't hang around with anybody because my Mother said to get home, come home right away...  
I had some friends but I never associated with them.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it was tough for girls then?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** It was tougher for the girls than it was for the boys. The boys could get away and play handball, or do whatever, but not the girls. Especially with me being the eldest.

**Dr. Rivera:** You were told to get home and [you weren't allowed] to go out – you were controlled?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I couldn't have boyfriends... But you know what? I don't feel any hate about it...

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you work after you left high school?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I went to work in a laundry in San Bernardino.

**Dr. Rivera:** How did you get to San Bernardino?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** The bus.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Was there bus service in South Colton or did you have to walk to North Colton?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I used to catch it by... 'N' Street; around there I think I would catch it. If not, then, I wouldn't go to work...

**Dr. Rivera:** How did you meet your husband?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He was a friend of my brother.

**Dr. Rivera:** Your husband's name is Ralph?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Rafael.

**Dr. Rivera:** Rafael Robles, he's also from Colton?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** *Si*. He's actually from Beaumont. They came from Arizona... He was born in Arizona, I think.

**Dr. Rivera:** His Dad worked for the railroad?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He was a big chief with the railroad – he ran the crew.

**Dr. Rivera:** So, from Beaumont to Colton, his Dad worked for the railroad; Rafael worked for the railroad, and you met Rafael in Colton? How did you meet him?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He was friend of my brother...

**Dr. Rivera:** Which brother?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Agapito. Did you ever know him?

**Dr. Rivera:** *Si!*

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** [Rafael and I] loved each other so we wound up getting married.

**Dr. Rivera:** Was it love at first sight?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No love at first, or second, or third site.

(Laughter)

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I didn't have too many chances to go out. So when he kind of fell for me, well, I was proud.

**Dr. Rivera:** How did he ask you out?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I don't know how he did it but we did get to go out.

(Laughter)

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** But it was mostly during the day – and he took me to places like the park. But never in the evening, and I don't know why.

**Dr. Rivera:** It was during the day that you got together...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Father Valencia married us.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many years did you go out with him before you got married?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** It wasn't years but maybe a year -- because he was friend of my brother I had to be careful.

(Laughter)

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They went to school together with Agapito... and that's how I got to know him a little bit better.

My brother didn't like it but he didn't object, he couldn't stop me.

**Dr. Rivera:** You got married at a church in Colton?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** At a church in Colton and Father Valencia married us, and the whole thing... And I did not get pregnant... there were some girls that did, you-know.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** How come? Tell me about your children, how many children did you have?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I had 4 children. My eldest is my daughter, Victoria.

**Dr. Rivera:** Your daughter is a chemist?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** She is a chemist and she works at Bourns; she's divorced—she's been divorced for years. She's got 2 children: a daughter [who is] a graduate of Stanford; she's now in Texas and I don't know what the heck she's doing down there. I think she's some kind of a lawyer. But she was an outstanding student all her life; and I don't think she's gonna get married either.

[Victoria] had a son with troubles, and he's still with her – they live together.

**Dr. Rivera:** Do they live also in Grand Terrace like you live in Grand Terrace?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now, [how about] your son?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** My son, Ralph, Jr. (Rafael, Jr.). He lives close to L.A., and he was a slow starter. He was very bright but he had problems learning. One of the school teachers used to go out of her way to come to talk to us at the house. We knew he had the capability, it's just that he was slow in some ways. But he came out of it and he's done very well... He works for the State – he's a big shot for the State.

**Dr. Rivera:** He works for the State of California? The employment office? EDD?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yeah, EDD (Employment Development Department). He goes up to Sacramento sometimes.

**Dr. Rivera:** And your other son?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** My other son, Teddy, he didn't amount to too much. He's still sick and still chugging along. He's a good student, though.

**Dr. Rivera:** Where does he live?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He lives in Colton, as well. So they're all around me – kind of close.

Eric also lives close to my house... He's a lieutenant with the Highway Patrol.

**Dr. Rivera:** He works for the Highway Patrol? He's a lieutenant and his territory is this area?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes... [His territory] is Palm Springs – in this area. He's been there a long time, and he's going to retire before too long. He hasn't had any close calls (knock on wood) – thanks to God. But he did one time: he got injured on the freeway, he got banged up...

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**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you-know, talking about your family – your second oldest brother was Mike Mercado. I knew Mike, he was a great handball player [and] a great baseball player.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He was very good at everything.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell us about Mike.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Mike was different from the other ones. He was tall and very nice looking, very *güero*. He always excelled in whatever he did in sports. The other ones tried but they just couldn't match up. But he did very well – he met Margaret Aranda and they were married.

**Dr. Rivera:** He married one of the Aranda girls? Margaret Aranda?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** There was Ramona, Margaret, Rosa, and on down the line. But he married Margaret.

**Dr. Rivera:** Mike played for the Colton Mercuries.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yes. He also worked for the railroad, and so did my brother, Agapito. They worked for the PFE... and then, they branched out: Mike got married; and Agapito still stayed home and went to school. They were in the army...

**Dr. Rivera:** Was that World War II?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Must have been... Because they talked about the [Japanese] camps...

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**Dr. Rivera:** You talked about your neighborhood – did your neighborhood have a name for it? Did they call it La Paloma?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** More or less, La Paloma.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were born and raised in La Paloma?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** It wasn't the greatest place to be raised up in.

**Dr. Rivera:** Why?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** People were so poor and it was close to the dump...

**Dr. Rivera:** Were you close to the river, *tambien* the Santa Ana River?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** The Santa Ana River wasn't very far – maybe a block and a half or at the most 2 blocks away...

**Dr. Rivera:** Do you remember the 1938 flood?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Must have been the year that they took us out.

**Dr. Rivera:** *Que paso?*

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** (Inaudible)

**Dr. Rivera:** So they asked you to vacate?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They finally told us to vacate, so we went to stay with some friends of my Mother's.

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**Mr. Vásquez:** Was your house damaged, or anything?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No, the water didn't get that close. But it could have, very easily.

**Dr. Rivera:** You were young, you were about 5 years old then, and you remember that?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I've gone through hell... and I survived.

**Dr. Rivera:** You said you went through hell. *Porque?* What does that mean?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I went through my own personal hell because I wanted more out of life. I wanted to have a better job; [although,] I did do that. I worked for the County for a while, but nothing permanent – I wanted a permanent job. Then I got married and that was the end of everything – I started to have the children.

**Dr. Rivera:** When you lived in La Paloma, you lived off of Congress Street?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Well, Congress was...

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, it ended at the river...

Were you familiar with the projects that were close to that area?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Yeah. They finally finished them...

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you have any friends that lived in the projects?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No.

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**Dr. Rivera:** What about the Van Akens, they almost lived across from you?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Sarah Van Aken, she used to visit my Mother a lot. My Mother never even had time to talk... [Sarah] would come see us and she would try to help us, but it was an impossible thing because my Mother was oh-so overwhelmed with all the kids and everything – my Father was never around, he did whatever he wanted.

[Sarah] tried to help us but we couldn't be receptive to it because life was such—that there was no way.

I knew Mary and Bobby Van Aken, but I think they're all gone.

**Dr. Rivera:** They are except for Mary, Mary is still alive. Freddy Van Aken, Jr. passed away, George Van Aken, he was the oldest, he passed away too...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I see her but I don't see her that often. The reason I see her is because she is [friends] with Paul, Mary and Danny Muro... I haven't heard from her; I don't know how she's doing or anything; I hope she's doing okay.

**Dr. Rivera:** She married Gil Garcia. I saw her at the Wilson picnic and she is doing well.

While you were going to Garfield Elementary School, did you have a good time being a student at Garfield?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** (She nods her head: no). We couldn't enjoy dressing up or anything – but I liked to dress up. We were happy, as happy as a poor person could be. We always had enough to eat...

**Dr. Rivera:** How did you know you were poor?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Compared to the neighbors, they would wear new shoes once in a while.

My Father refused to go on welfare, he was too proud. He said we would not go to welfare, we would not be getting those dresses they gave the girls, and whatever clothes they gave to the boys... So, we did without. He was too proud. He didn't enough for us, yet, he wouldn't let us do anything for ourselves.

**Dr. Rivera:** At Garfield, you said you were too poor, and you knew that you were poor. What are some of the other things that you liked about Garfield?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Garfield was an opening door for me because I was able to see what the other kids were doing, and wearing, and saying. A lot of them were poor like we were, we weren't the only ones. It helped me to open my eyes up about other people's lives, but it wasn't pretty, though. We got through it, but not because we wanted to, but because we had to. We didn't have a choice – we either did that or we died, or starved, or whatever. My Mother probably would've killed because she did the best she could with what she had.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about your experience at Wilson?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** It was kind-of-a happy experience; I was more involved with social stuff. They had little dances, and they had sports...

**Dr. Rivera:** Were you a good student?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I was fair. I would go home and I wouldn't be able to do my homework because I had to help – and that didn't help me any. However I never failed anything. So I held my own with what I had. I probably would have done better if I had the chance.

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**Mr. Vásquez:** How about the teachers, did they treat the students well, as far as you remember?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Some of them did, some of them didn't.

I remember this male teacher at the junior high, and there was a Hispanic girl with buck teeth, and she was tall and skinny... [This teacher] didn't like her for some reason – he kicked her in the hallway of the junior high school, I remember. I was on one end of the hall and they were on the other – she was going into a math class, or something – and I could see him go like this (she kicks her foot). He actually kicked her. I never said anything because it wasn't my place, but I wish I had. They probably would have overlooked everything...

**Dr. Rivera:** Did Mom and Dad complain?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Mom and Dad never knew anything. They never knew about our lives – my Father could care less. He didn't care about us.

**Mr. Vásquez:** Were you allowed to speak Spanish at school?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** That's all we did...

**Mr. Vásquez:** That's all you did to each other?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** [Yes], to each other... But later on, as you can tell, I can speak English.

(Laughter)

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Actually, I liked school a lot because I didn't have enough of it. I encouraged my kids to do the same thing: to go to school, to go to college, to do the best they can.

I helped my daughter, who is, [again], a chemist. My eldest son works for the division of highways; he's got a big important job; and my Teddy is the one [who] is kinda slow. He feels sorry for himself a lot. He's always sick... The little one, Eric, is a little fighter.

**Dr. Rivera:** Your husband and your brothers were in the military?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** My husband was and... Mike and Agapito were in the military. Mike went to Germany, Agapito didn't go out of the country.

**Dr. Rivera:** And your husband?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** My husband was in Korea.

**Dr. Rivera:** So he was in during the Korean Conflict?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** He was in during the Korean Conflict and he was a Sargent... He was pretty smart: he learned a code talk, you-know, like the Indians did?

**Dr. Rivera:** When they left Colton, they experienced another world, another language, another culture, different experiences, different training. When they came home, was there something different about them when they came home? Did they want a better job? Did they want a new house?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They must have because they all improved themselves. They all bought houses, and they went to school.

My brother, Ropito did very well in school. Mike didn't go to school that much but Ropito did. They both married okay – so, I guess in their own way they survived because it was tough for them—it was tough for all of us.

**Dr. Rivera:** When you were living in South Colton, you had the Fiestas Patrias, the *Progresistas*, you had the *Trabajadores Unidos*.

Who were the Mexican-American leaders in the community? Do you remember the Mexican-American leaders?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Pasqual Oliva.

**Dr. Rivera:** How about Pete Luque?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I remember him, he was always involved. He wasn't a group speaker, or anything like that, but he was always involved.

You probably remember better than I do.

**Dr. Rivera:** How about Johnny Martinez? Jamaicas? Early 40's

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Did he play with the Mercurys?

**Dr. Rivera:** No, he was a boxer.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No, I don't know about him... I know baseball...

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you know any community leaders like: Manuel Padilla?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No, I didn't like him.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** But he was one of the leaders...

[There was] Angel Oliva, Pasqual's brother.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I didn't know them, but I heard about them. They appealed to me more because they were a little bit different. They were more like I was.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about the businesses in Colton, Rose? Like the market where you shopped and where your family shopped?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Martinez: We would buy our sweet bread from there, and cheese, and stuff like that. My Mother would go and sit in their store all day long and do nothing.

La Paloma [is another] little store – and that was about it.

**Dr. Rivera:** How about La Esperanza?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Oh-yes, my Father was very chummy with the owner of La Esperanza; but that was a little bit further... We would go there and order stuff like meat for tamales, or something like that.

**Mr. Vásquez:** Wasn't there a Caldera?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Caldera had the plunge. What street was that on?

**Dr. Rivera & Mr. Vásquez:** 5<sup>th</sup>.

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They had the plunge in Colton for years and years. But as I grew up they shut it down, I don't know if it was condemned or what.

**Mr. Vásquez:** My dad said that there was a Caldera Market, or something, at some time.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, on 'N' Street across the railroad tracks. So tell me about the plunge, you-know, I've heard about the plunge but I never saw... the Caldera Plunge. It was on 5<sup>th</sup> and Fog Street, Henry?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Between Agua Mansa and Fog, yeah.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Well, I saw it and I saw when they were using it, but I never participated in it. It didn't have a very good reputation. I don't know if they didn't clean it, or what. But we never went there, we went to the other one.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about the other one?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** We were discriminated there too – we had certain days we couldn't go swimming.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, I know. There were certain days when Mexican-Americans couldn't go to that plunge.

What about the show, the New Colton and the Hub?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** [It] was the same thing, we had our little section where we would have to sit. We followed the instructions, we followed directions.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you go in the New Colton and you knew where you were supposed to sit.

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** (Inaudible) We kept out of trouble... [so they wouldn't] put us out.

It was a bad place to live – it wasn't that great. As far as discrimination goes – they all looked down on us; but we survived, despite their desires, or what-not.

A lot of them (White-American people) I don't know where they came from – they weren't human. They were beyond that...

**Dr. Rivera:** Who was that, Rose?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Los Americanos... They would mistreat us and stuff.

**Dr. Rivera:** There was segregation and prejudice. They didn't hold back.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** No, they knew they had nothing to fear.

**Dr. Rivera:** How was it growing up in a segregated community? Because the railroad track was the border.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** It wasn't good. It didn't affect me too much because I was always at home. But it did affect me when I went to school; [when] we went to buy something they wouldn't wait on us – we'd have wait and wait, and finally we got up and walked out, that's what happened a lot of times.

**Dr. Rivera:** Those were the stores in downtown Colton? Those gringo stores?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They wouldn't wait on us so we got up and walked out.

**Dr. Rivera:** How did that make you feel?

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Not good at all.

Our hands were clean, we weren't dirty. We also worked for the little money that we had – because we all worked in one thing or another. But they didn't see it that way, they just hated us.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned your daughter and your sons: they're pretty successful now, they're very successful, Rose. I would imagine that things changed for them compared to what we went through.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** We had struggles, and all the stuff we had to overcome made it easier for them. Not entirely because it's still there, you could still hear the remarks...

My son has done very well; the other one has also done very well but he's up there in the L.A. area – where you don't see it. The youngest one is a lieutenant, he's done very well, and he's smart. He didn't go to school, he didn't go to college, and he did everything just right – he's lucky that way. He's the one that takes care of me because I'm alone now...

**Dr. Rivera:** Rose, how do you know Henry's Grandmother?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Henry [Vásquez]' Grandmother? (As she points to Henry who is sitting next to her). Margarita Gomez?

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** She was so well known because she played the piano and she gave instructions. Everybody went to her for lessons.

**Mr. Vásquez:** She led the choir at church.

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**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Ernie Gomez is your grandson?

**Mr. Vásquez:** He's my uncle.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** They were always involved in the church. I knew Martha and I knew Ernie. We never hung around but I did know them – we talked to each other...

**Dr. Rivera:** Henry, your Grandma was very involved with the church?

**Mr. Vásquez:** All of her life.

When she was a small girl she was given piano lessons by a lady who had learned in the conservatory, and some place in Mexico. So [my Grandmother] learned at a very early age.

There was a priest from Spain that used to be in charge of San Salvador when it was still on 5<sup>th</sup> Street. I don't know if you're familiar that it was close to the corner of Agua Mansa and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. That was the original San Salvador [Church]. Later on, they moved it over there to 'L' Street. [My Grandmother] used to play the organ for that church, and I'm assuming it must have been a pump organ.

She would tell us funny stories about how the priest would call her as he was walking to the church – he had a funny pet name for her. I don't remember what it was but he would tell her something like: *Margarita, levantate ya, ya es hora de la misa.*

(Laughter)

**Mr. Vásquez:** I don't know exactly, but she might have been maybe about 10 years old by then...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** She was already playing?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Yeah, probably very simple stuff I would imagine.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Well, that's all we had there at that church was simple stuff.

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**Mr. Vásquez:** Later on, she became a much better pianist and taught lessons, and everything. But in her early days, she probably just accompanied the very simple hymns.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** But you know what? She was well known. I know Martha very well – and she is also musical.

**Dr. Rivera:** When did your Grandma come to Colton, Henry?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Well, according to our family history, she was born in 1898 – so that would place it around 1900; but it could have been, you-know, give or take, a year or two.

**Dr. Rivera:** So she came to Colton in the 1900s?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Around 1900.

**Dr. Rivera:** Her parents came – they were the ones [who] were from Chinampas, Jalisco, Mexico. They started on the road before she was born. Her brothers and sisters were born in Chinampas, Jalisco, but she was born in Coahuila, San Pedro de los Colonias...

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** That was still in Mexico?

**Mr. Vásquez:** That was in Mexico, and by the time they got to Colton she was 2 years old.

**Dr. Rivera:** [She] was almost a Colton native from day one?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Your story sounds better than mine.

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**Mr. Vásquez:** Oh-no.

**Dr. Rivera:** No, it all ties in because you brought [up] Margarita.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Margarita was an influence to all the people in South Colton because she was a musician, she was available for lessons, if you could afford it, and everybody knew her kids.

**Dr. Rivera:** She married the other Henry when she was...?

**Mr. Vásquez:** She was very young, I think between 14 and 16.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many children did she have?

**Mr. Vásquez:** There were 8 that survived, and many more that were still born.

**Dr. Rivera:** How do you fit in the family?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Well, my Mother, Luz, was the oldest of the surviving children. I think some had been born before her. I'm the 3<sup>rd</sup> son of my Mom, Luz.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Is she still living?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Oh-no, she passed away in 1996.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Oh-my-God, no wonder I couldn't remember her. But I remember her.

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**Mr. Vásquez:** My Aunt Oralia is still alive, and my Aunt Carlotta, they're both still alive. Carlota is 91 and Oralia is 89. So, they're getting up there. Raul is the next one in line [who] is still alive; Antonio died, I guess, about 4 or 5 years ago – I don't know, it's been a while.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** And that's it?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Oh-no, and then Gabriel, I think he actually was a little older than Raul. Then there was a gap and then Ernie...

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

**Mr. Vásquez:** Well, he was the oldest surviving son, but he passed away about 5 years ago.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Tony? Oh! I didn't know that.

**Dr. Rivera:** They were all musicians?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Yeah, Tony was a band leader. He was the main trumpeter for the Sal Vasquez Orchestra. He basically did the arranging, and all of that sort of stuff, but Sal was like the manager and he played the piano...

**Dr. Rivera:** Raul played the saxophone?

**Mr. Vásquez:** Raul played the saxophone, the clarinet, and occasionally a few other [instruments]. But the reed instruments like the sax and clarinet were his main instruments, and the trumpet was played by Antonio, [by] Tony.

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**Dr. Rivera:** I just read a story, Henry: Juanita Rodriguez was born in 1913 in Colton, and when she was 7 years old she took lessons from your Grandma.

**Mr. Vásquez:** Really?

**Dr. Rivera:** She was from the Rodriguez family [who] were owners of the Esperanza Store... She mentioned that she thoroughly enjoyed learning how to play music. She also helped Margarita at the church with the music.

Anyway, to her, it was a wonderful experience of being able to learn how to play the piano with your Grandma, and I think that should be another interview that we will have and talk about the musical influence that your Grandmother had, and also the bands that we had in Colton during that era of the 1916s all the way to the 60s.

**Mr. Vásquez:** I think my Uncle Raul would be the one [who] would remember the most about that because he was in the bands; and Ernie was asked, or kind of actually almost forced to participate for just a little while, and he didn't like it because he was more like a coral musician and a [pianist].

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** We used to have him in the choir at church...

**Mr. Vásquez:** He didn't enjoy playing popular music that much. I think he likes it more now than he used to back then...

**Dr. Rivera:** Well that will be for another interview.  
But Rose, is anything that I missed that I should ask you about in this interview?

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** I can't remember – I know there's a lot of stuff but I've forgotten... I appreciate the opportunity, though. I'm very proud about my sister, but she always was a stand-out...

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**Dr. Rivera:** She didn't go through the hardship you went through.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** We did for her what she couldn't have done for us. But I'm grateful, I really am.

**Dr. Rivera:** I'm grateful that you were able to be with us today, and give us that little background on growing up in South Colton as girl and as a young woman [who] was limited in opportunities to be able to do anything.

**Ms. Mercado Robles:** Not only by the area, the people, but my own Mother and my own Father, they had put some restrictions on us whether they were verbal or not, they were there – we couldn't get out and go to do stuff. But anyway, it's over and done with.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, thank you so much.

And Henry, thank you for introducing and giving us that background about your [Grandmother].

Frank, thank you for [recording] this interview.

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