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### Mayor Abe Beltran

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**Oral History Project of Colton, CA - 11/07/13**

**Dr. Rivera:** Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera, I'm the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, Emeritus. Emeritus means that I've been retired for a couple years now. Today is November the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and it's about almost 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and we're in the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino. Our guest this afternoon is Mr. Abe Beltran. Abe has been the Mayor of Colton for 6 years, and his main topic this afternoon will be to talk about Mexican-Americans involved in politics in Colton.

Abe, welcome to Cal State San Bernardino, it's great to have you here.

**Mayor Beltran:** It's nice to be here.

**Dr. Rivera:** Thank you very much for helping us with the oral history of Colton, California.

**Mayor Beltran:** It's my pleasure.

**Dr. Rivera:** Why don't we get started: I mentioned that you were the Mayor of Colton for 6 years, but you were involved in politics for more than 20 years or so. How did you get interested in politics?

**Mayor Beltran:** I first started in politics, or getting involved in politics when I was around 7 maybe 9 years old. I'm 81 years old now so it's been a long road. But one of the reasons I got involved was [because of] my Aunt Candy. [She was] a lady by the name of Candalaria Morales, she got me involved in politics — she always used to take me to the meetings, and she would get me involved in passing out literature for different candidates. [She encouraged] just an all-around interest in politics. [Aunt Candy] was a great lady...

I stayed involved until the early 1950s; the Korean War and other thing's got me away from here, and I [didn't] get back into it until 1953, 1954. I stayed involved until,

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basically, 1975. In 1975, there's been various people that've come in and they want some advice on politics and I try to help them as much as possible.

So it's been a good long road and I've really enjoyed it.

**Dr. Rivera:** You also mentioned the first Mexican-American councilman in Colton, and that was Johnny Martinez? Am I right, Johnny Martinez?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, Johnny Martinez was the first elected council-person in the city of Colton. That was followed by Pete Luque, Sr., followed by Pasqual Oliva, and then myself. And there've been others.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you mentioned Johnny Martinez, and we're talking about the early 1940s, and I understand that Colton became a Charter City in 1887. So when you look at 1887 to 1941, Abe, we're talking about 54 years that our Mexican-American population never participated in policymaking for the City of Colton. [This means] you, Johnny, Pasqual, and Mr. Luque were pioneers to do so.

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes we were, yes we were. It was needed, and basically, I think what happened was the different organizations, and mainly the *Progresistas* in the City of Colton...

**Dr. Rivera:** What was the *Progresistas*, I'm sorry?

**Mayor Beltran:** The *Progresistas* was made up of gentlemen [who] had taken it upon themselves to try to bring the Mexican-American population forward—move them forward, to get them into the mainstream in Colton. You see, Colton was an old town, and while we were back in the, shall-we-say, shadows, now we were starting to come forward and make ourselves known.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Now, you say the *Progresistas* kind of inspired and motivated you to run for office, and also some of the other gentleman that you mentioned. How did you decide that you were going to run for council member or for office in the City of Colton?

**Mayor Beltran:** Back in 1970, before that, of course I had been involved in politics all during this time, and I had been in the service and all that. In 1970 I decided that I would run, and I was encouraged by some of my Anglo friends to run for office. With their support and then support from Mr. Luque and Mr. Ayala – I made the decision that I was going to go. I did, and I got elected in 1970.

**Dr. Rivera:** To be a Councilman?

**Mayor Beltran:** To be a Councilman...

**Dr. Rivera:** And when did you become Mayor?

**Mayor Beltran:** The first time that I became Mayor was in 1976 to 1980. My second term was 1980 to 1984. So I spent approximately 8 years as Mayor in the city of Colton. The rest of the time I spent as a council-person. I served as a council-person from 1966 through 1984.

When I say council-person, it's a Council-person/Mayor type of relationship.

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

**Mayor Beltran:** My last term as council-person: I left the council in 1984, I was on through 1990. In 1990 I decided that I would go back for another term. You-know, sometimes you start thinking, well, there are some things that can be done better. So after being out of the council for a period of time, I decided that I was going to try to better the situation. So I went back and I served another term from 1992 to 1996.

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**Dr. Rivera:** You're a season veteran of the City of Colton's politics.

Looking back on your tenure as a Councilman and also a Mayor, what was the highlight of your tenure with the City of Colton in those particular positions?

**Mayor Beltran:** I'm very proud of my service as a Council-person and Mayor in the City of Colton. We have done a lot, a lot to move the City forward; we have begun 2 or 3 youth centers, parks, and you-name-it, an underpass... I could just go on and on to tell you all the improvements that we've made, but at this stage of the game I would have to start listing them...

**Dr. Rivera:** It would bring us into another session, right?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes, yes, definitely... when you have more time.

**Dr. Rivera:** Was it tough being a politician in Colton?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes it was. It was hard because of the politicians that were already in there. But not because of those that supported me; the people [who] supported me – people like: Pete Luque, Pasqual Oliva, Manuel Padilla. Manuel Padilla being the major contributor to [and supporter of] my time as a Councilman-Mayor. Mel Fuchs, Harry Roque those were people that were supporting me – beautiful people. That's what made it good. But in the inside political arena it gets a little hard, and you work yourself through it.

(Laughter)

**Mayor Beltran:** You can't be too powerful. If you do, you're gonna get in trouble.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you obviously did a good job and were able to kind of move in and out, and you knew specifically what to do in those particular situations. Now tell me, tell me about your family – when did they move to Colton?

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**Mayor Beltran:** I would imagine that my Grandparents moved into what it's called now: La Placita, which is around the Aqua Mansa area and out by Aqua Mansa Cemetery. When they were recruited to come into Colton, they lived out there around the riverbed in Colton – my Grandparents. They started moving into the inner part of Colton, and I'm going to say, the inner part being the southern part of Colton. I would say in around 1928 – they moved there. They built houses and they moved there, which is where I was born in 1932. Two of my other sisters: one was born in 1930, and the other one was born in 1928. We lived in Colton in the southern part; like I said, I was born in 1932 in Colton in a house located on La Cadena Ave. I lived there all my life... I was born with a twin sister – I have a twin sister and I have 5 other sisters. All-in-all, I have 6 sisters and myself.

**Dr. Rivera:** So they took very good care of you...? You were a spoiled kid?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes. No, no, no – they kept me in-check, let's put it like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** Dad, what did Dad do for a living? You said he worked in the mines.

**Mayor Beltran:** He worked in the cement plant, and he was a radio announcer when I was 5 years of age. That's the last thing I remember of my Father. When I was 5 years old, after that Christmas or right before Christmas, he left the family and went back to Mexico – and never did return. I understand that he had a family of around 30 kids in Mexico – from different families, of course.

**Dr. Rivera:** How did your Mom cope with that? How did she survive and made sure that you had a roof and some food on the table?

**Mayor Beltran:** My Mother was very, very strong, and my Aunt Candy was very, very strong. And between both of them they were able to support us, and we got along very well.

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As soon as school would let out, after the age of 8, we would all hit the migrant farm worker trail. We were grape pickers, tomato pickers, prunes and what-have-you. In fact, one of the places that we visited in our journey throughout the state of California was Hollister, California – where your wife (Dr. Rivera's wife, Lily) is from. It's a nice town, nice town.

**Dr. Rivera:** Beautiful town. You picked avocados there?

**Mayor Beltran:** No, we picked prunes.

**Dr. Rivera:** Prunes?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, that was great, that was a great trip.

**Dr. Rivera:** How long did the family follow the crops?

**Mayor Beltran:** We followed the crops until I was the ripe old age of 18. I had joined the Naval Reserve, and we were at Hemet, California picking apricots – and they called me in for active duty. I came home on a Saturday after working all day long in the apricot orchards... and the next morning I left for San Diego. I went through boot-camp there; and the next time I saw my family was approximately 6 weeks later when our company was transferred to San Francisco to join our respective ships. I happened to be riding on a train going through Colton and my family: my Mother and my sisters were all out there saying goodbye to me as I went through.

(Laughter)

**Mayor Beltran:** It was very, very touching. I was leaving, I never knew where I was going to go. Consequently, we went to Mirror Island, from Mirror Island I went to Pearl Harbor, from Pearl Harbor I went to the Philippines, and in the Philippines I caught my ship. I was in the Korean conflict for war; and about 6 months later I went on board the USS (inaudible). We were cruising outside of Wonson and we got hit by a mine. [This] killed 27 people and injured 40; and luckily the ship did not sink. We made some repairs

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on it and went to Yokosuka, Japan... and then we came stateside in San Diego, and then to Hunters Point in San Francisco. We repaired it and it took about 6 months, and we were ready to go again.

But before we went again, my sisters had arranged for us to visit the City of Mexicali. We went to Mexicali, my sisters and I, and there I saw for the first time in, I would say 15 years, I saw my Father. And he told me who he was – and started crying, and the usual thing. I reminded him that men did not cry as he had told me before when I was 5 [years old]. It's a very, very touching type of story but, you-know—it's great, it's great. It's touching and it makes you grow.

Everything that I have ever done in my life...

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, before you leave that point Abe, it does give me chills when you mentioned meeting your Father after all those years. It just gives me goosebumps.

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, it hurts but, what it does is make you grow out of the things you're dependent upon... The shadow of your Father being there at all times – it cuts that relationship off – cuts it off completely. All you can do is wish a person like that [good] luck; and if you can help him along the road someplace, you help him. But, you-know, it's just one of those things.

**Dr. Rivera:** That's a wonderful attitude...

How long were you in the service?

**Mayor Beltran:** I was in the service with the Naval Reserve and on active duty in the Navy 4 years.

**Dr. Rivera:** Abe, let me ask you... We had World War II end in 1945, and you participated in the Korean War, and you were there for several years. What affect did World War II and the Korean conflict have [on] our guys [from Colton who served and who came back to] Colton? Did they have a different attitude – like, I paid my dues, and therefore, I'm going to improve my community? Or, I'm going to run for office, and I want

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to go to school and get my degree? What impact did those wars have on our Mexican-American kids that went into the service?

**Mayor Beltran:** Very much so, very much so. I would not say that most of them were going to go to school – some of them did. But what it did was give us a certain amount of freedom. Before Colton, while we moved from the riverbed up to the main streets of Colton, we could not enjoy the city as a whole.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you mentioned the main streets of Colton, we're talking about South Colton, the main streets of South Colton.

**Mayor Beltran:** Colton was divided.

**Dr. Rivera:** Because we were a segregated community. We had South Colton, Mexican town, and we had North Colton, which was across the railroad tracks.

**Mayor Beltran:** South Colton... There's basically two parts in Colton: North and South Colton – [but] not anymore, it changed, believe me. We have North and South Colton all being one Colton. We still have the 4 sections in Colton: La Reserva...

**Dr. Rivera:** You're talking about barrios?

**Mayor Beltran:** Barrios: La Reserva...

**Dr. Rivera:** Where was La Reserva located?

**Mayor Beltran:** La Reserva was that area from 'N' Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Street to the northwest area of town.

**Dr. Rivera:** Up to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street?

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**Mayor Beltran:** Up to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street – that bordered on the cement plant property.

**Dr. Rivera:** Ok.

**Mayor Beltran:** La Calle Cinco was from ‘N’ Street [and] 5<sup>th</sup> Street to the southwest part of Colton all the way where La Cadena joins the river.

Then there was Calle Siete, which was basically ‘N’ Street to 5<sup>th</sup> where the railroad or 5<sup>th</sup> Street north and then to the northeast part of the city to the river – that was called ‘N’ Street.

And then we have Las Palomas.

**Dr. Rivera:** That’s where I’m from.

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes, yes – that I know very well. Las Palomas was... I built a park there.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** I know.

**Mayor Beltran:** Las Palomas was from 8<sup>th</sup> Street, correct me if I’m wrong, 8<sup>th</sup> Street to the railroad tracks [going] north to Congress Street [and] to the south all the way to the river.

Great, great areas! In fact, [when] my wife and I get up, and [after] I do my level workout, we take a ride and go down and see if all the barrios and all the sections of Colton are still there.

(Laughter)

They’re still there and getting more and more beautiful by days... or maybe I’m just getting a little bit older.

**Dr. Rivera:** (Requests panning the camera over to show Jo Beltran, his wife, and their daughter, Candy... and then returning the camera back to Mayor Beltran & Dr. Rivera).

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**Mayor Beltran:** ...When I came back from Korea in '54, I was very active in the Congress of Community Clubs. The Congress of the Community Clubs was different organizations in Colton, and we all formed one.

Colton was great for Las Fiestas Patrias [and] we used to have it on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September in Colton. We had a parade every year, and my wife and I volunteered to organize the parade for the 16<sup>th</sup> of September... It was a great, great, and beautiful parade...

At that time, Colton was moving; nowadays, it's sad to say there are not that many Coltonites left, let's put it that way.

**Dr. Rivera:** When did you meet Jo? How did you meet Jo?

**Mayor Beltran:** We've been married 60 years, so it's been a long, long time. You-know, I'm 81 years old and sometimes I don't remember that very well.

**Mrs. Jo Beltran:** (Off camera) You were my bus driver.  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** You were Jo's bus driver?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes, I was working for the high school. You-know, when I went to work with the high school... this is a story on its own. When I was in high school, I took the usual courses, college preparatory courses...

**Dr. Rivera:** We're talking about Colton High School?

**Mayor Beltran:** Colton High School. I took the usual college preparatory courses [and] that lasted for about—oh, no more than 6 months. The teachers that we used to have were not very receptive to the Latino students. I remember this teacher sitting there... and apparently they used to get the Examiner Newspaper, the Los Angeles Examiner

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2 or 3 days ahead of time, and he (the teacher) would sit 2 or 3 Mexican-Americans to the left of the room and the rest of the class, an algebra class, to the right. And he would sit there reading the newspaper, and every once in a while when an Anglo would ask him a question, he would respond. I'm sorry to say that we never did get too much of a response from him. So that basically dove me into the mechanical arts area where I learned how to rebuild engines, do brake jobs, do drafting – I liked drafting, I was a great draftsman. So I went through school majoring in the mechanical arts area instead of the ABCs.

When I graduated, the principal at that time, Donald McIntosh, asked me if wanted to drive a bus, seeing I had done the upkeep on most of the buses in the fleet. And I told him, yes, that I would like to drive. He said, remember, if you do well there will be other Mexican-Americans that might have jobs like this. I promised him that I would do the best that I could, of course. But I used to have this bus run—and who do I meet? This little red head, and of course, she took to me. Right away she went wild over me...  
(Laughter)

**Mayor Beltran:** ...and here we are. After I came out of the service we got married... we moved to Colton [and] we lived there for about 6 months...

**Dr. Rivera:** What date did you get married?

**Mayor Beltran:** June the 6<sup>th</sup>...

**Mrs. Jo Beltran:** (Off camera) ...1953. He was still in the Navy.

**Dr. Rivera:** He was still in the Navy? Ok.

**Mayor Beltran:** We moved to Bloomington because over there it was free country, you could live any place you wanted to. We lived over in Bloomington for about 2 years, or so; and then we decided that we wanted to move to Colton. We were looking for a house over in Colton, and Jo was house hunting, and she comes back and she says: Okay great, we've got a place to live – we can buy this house.

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I told them that we would be over there Saturday to sign up in order to buy the house.

We went over there on a Saturday morning, and when we got there the real estate person asked her (his wife Jo) who I was. She said, well that's my husband.

Oh! He started shaking and going into convulsions – and he said, we can't allow this.

We cannot allow Mexicans to live over here in this area. Needless to say, we went back to 'N' Street, and my Aunt Candy and my Mother gave me shelter there – and we lived there for at least a couple of years.

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was a tough blow going to... What was the address Candy? Do you remember? Where was the house located?

**Candy:** It was over off of Rancho in those houses around Citrus and north of there.

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, they were just cement blocks, little shacks... it was nothing. But that would get us into the areas of 1956 or so. The thing that the Anglos were doing against the Mexican-Americans started way before that. I remember when I was maybe 15, 16 years old, we would try to go to the municipal pool but we could only go on Sundays because they needed to clean it on Mondays. They cleaned all the grease out after the Mexicans went swimming there on Sundays.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about the theatres – the New Colton and the Hub Theatre?

**Mayor Beltran:** The New Colton Theatre and Hub City Theatre, you would sit on one side of the theater and the Anglos would sit on the other side. When you went home up 'E' Street and then turn on La Cadena to go down to South Colton there was a police station at approximately 9<sup>th</sup> Street and 'I' Street. There was an old police station with a jail there, and I remember there was an alley way type of situation there, and they announced real proudly because they had put this sign up that no Mexicans or dogs were allowed in the restroom. That was their way of saying: Hey! It's our place and you don't come over here...

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**Dr. Rivera:** So that was late '40s when you saw that?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah... We had a little group of guys who were called the Kingsmen, you might have heard of us. [Anyway,] we would go to see what was going on up town; as we went across the tracks going north, the assistant chief of police, at that time, would be up there and he'd say [to us:] Where are you boys going? And we would announce real proudly that we were just going to be walking around taking a look at what's going on on the north side of town. And he (the assistant chief of police) would announce right away: No! You're not going to go north; you Mexicans [go] back south where you belong.

A lot of those little things have happened like that – they were corrected. They were corrected, believe me.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now tell me, if you can, do you remember the guys that were in the Kingsmen? Who were they?

**Mayor Beltran:** The Kingsmen were good guys: Bobby Vázquez, Rudy Serrano, Rudy Oliva, Frank Sanchez, Junior Beltran—that's me and I'm guilty, and about 2 or 3 other guys.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were all in the 7th Street area?

**Mayor Beltran:** All from 7<sup>th</sup> Street, yes...

**Dr. Rivera:** What did you guys do for entertainment during the time when you were growing in South Colton? Did you play baseball? [What kind of] recreation? [Did you go to] dances, were a musician?

**Mayor Beltran:** No...

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you go to the (inaudible) beach?

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**Mayor Beltran:** Basically we just hung out, and we used to have softball teams. We did a lot of softball, we used to ride scooters—ride around the sidewalks, wherever there were sidewalks in the streets of South Colton.

We did all that but, I mostly shined shoes on 7th Street out in front of the bars: in front of the Sombrero and in front of El Sarape. Man! I used to make extra money... it was nice, it was really, really nice.

Never too much recreation, not too much dancing or anything else. Music, no, you-know, we'd just hang out.

**Dr. Rivera:** What was your music, was it the swing music that you guys were listening to and dancing to?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, it was the old swinging years type of music at that time. You-know, not too much of it because radios were a little bit scarce – much less television... we never had television.

**Dr. Rivera:** You're also a very religious guy – have you always been part of San Salvador Church?

**Mayor Beltran:** I was born and raised in San Salvador Church. I was baptized when I was probably 6 months old – that was 81 years ago, [and] I've been a member all this time.

We live about 3 blocks from the Immaculate Conception Church on the north side of town. It's a Catholic church [and] my children went to school there. Basically, we went to church there for a little while. But they rebuilt the church and built a new one down in South Colton. While they were building the church, my wife and I decided that we would move and become parishioners at San Salvador because San Salvador needed us more than Immaculate Conception. And we could do more for them from a financial stand point and from our work efforts... and we're still there.

[Fortunately], we've got a large group of people there, but unfortunately there's not too many people that go to church there [who] are... Coltonites: [people who've] lived in

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Colton all their lives. The people [who] lived in Colton have dwindled quite a bit; there's not too many Coltonites anymore. You see some of the people that we grew up with... and it's great. But the rest of them... God only knows, they're from South America, or someplace. But nevertheless, they speak Spanish so I can understand what they're saying.

**Dr. Rivera:** Let me shift gears. When you were going to school did you go to Garfield or Wilson?

**Mayor Beltran:** Those were my great days. Of course, my twin sister went with me to school, and we used to go to Garfield. When I used to raise a little cane, she would straighten me out – I mean, straighten me out. She always has or tried to. They used to dress us up in old Mexican outfits, and we used to dance *El Jarabe Tapatío* (a Mexican hat dance). My sister and I, for every assembly we used to dance... that was great. But I went through Garfield, a segregated school, by the way, and then we went to Woodrow Wilson, [another] segregated school, and then I went to San Bernardino Valley College.

I also became, and I'm probably the only one that I know of, I'm the only president of a local PTA (Parent Teacher Association)... that served... back at Woodrow Wilson. That was when I had leased the gas station across from the school, and I became the chairman of the PTA. That was great, those were great days...

**Dr. Rivera:** Was it [just for Wilson or was it for Garfield, too]?

**Mayor Beltran:** It was for both, both together: Woodrow Wilson / Garfield PTA. Great schools...

One of the things you did not do when you were in those schools was speak Spanish. It was all Anglo – you had to speak English; English is spoken here – you don't speak Spanish. If you did speak Spanish, you were punished. And nowadays I understand that Spanish is in.

(Laughter)

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**Dr. Rivera:** The more things change, the more they remain the same.

(Laughter)

**Mayor Beltran:** I've got a great-granddaughter, believe me, [who] goes to the Charles Rodríguez School (Colonel Joseph C. Rodriguez Prep Academy) over here, the magnet school, and she doesn't like the Spanish – but she speaks the language.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you mentioned Charles 'Chuck' Rodríguez, a Medal of Honor winner, born and raised in San Bernardino. And then we have a Medal of Honor winner from Colton, Rudy Hernandez from South Colton. Did you ever meet him?

**Mayor Beltran:** No, I never had the pleasure of meeting Rudy Hernandez. I heard a lot about him... I don't know what happened to him but, he came in and out and that was it. Not too many people knew Rudy... but he was a great guy. I mean, anybody who gets a Medal of Honor has done very, very well.

**Dr. Rivera:** Let me ask you another question Abe. You know my Dad, Rumba? Well, you were one of his people that he admired because you did things; and you mentioned that you did a lot of improvements in South Colton while you were Mayor. I do remember the park; I do remember [you having some of the streets paved] that were dirt streets; I do remember [you having the sewers extended] to many of our homes in Colton.

In the old days we had the outdoor-Johnnies... you remember those?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, that's all we had when I was growing up.

**Dr. Rivera:** So anyway, my Dad was a big fan of yours because he knew you'd roll up your sleeves and you went at it – and just did whatever needed to be done to get a project completed in South Colton.

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**Mayor Beltran:** Yes, your Dad was one of my favorite people. Another companion of his, Alberto Castillo... also, Arturo Chavez... In fact, they put in my driveway – over a couple of years the driveway got done. It goes in a little bit (he motions with his hands) but, your Dad, Arturo, and Alberto were good, good friends of mine – I loved those guys. What happened was, I would hang around with the older people, older – senior in age than me. I would hang around with them... come Saturday we were together. I wasn't with the Rudy Oliva's anymore, I wasn't with Bobby Vázquez, or Rudy Serrano anymore. So I lost the young group [but] I see them every once in a while. I cut my ties with them, basically, and started (inaudible) my companionship with older men. That's what moved me forward in those age groups. That's why I didn't mention friends like, Pete Luque and Manuel Padilla... except Manuel Padilla was very, very instrumental in moving me forward. He's the one [who] taught me Spanish. We never spoke Spanish until maybe 27, 28 years old. We were all English speaking in our family. My mother graduated from Colton High School.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was unusual.

**Mayor Beltran:** Yeah, my mom graduated from Colton High School.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you say you're part of the original settlement of Aqua Mansa?

**Mayor Beltran:** Yes, I would say we were.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay, and then the church moved to 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street – Rancho, and then from there they moved to their present location on 'L' and 7<sup>th</sup>.

Abe and Jo, is there anything else that you would like to discuss or tell us about during this session? [Is there] anything I forgot that was important in terms of your experience in being brought up in a segregated community?

**Jo Beltran:** I think, honey, it would be nice if you told him about the integration into the fire department and city appointment, and all.

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**Mayor Beltran:** After Luque and Pasqual Oliva – some of these people went in there... we still had, in Colton, a fire department that was very segregated and a police department that was segregated. The main reason, and this is hard to say, that I ran for council was because I didn't feel that these gentlemen were doing anything about the segregation. And both of them said: Oh, he's just gonna get in here and raise all kinds of hell. And true enough, I did. I went in there, and one of the first people that visited my office was the fire chief and the police chief. And they were telling me what a good Bombero Program they had—and all this and that. And I told them in so many words that I was never interested in their little programs, [and] that one of the ones that we were gonna get was a fair employment type of situation.

Needless to say, within a matter of 3 months they all had Department of Labor funds to bring in Mexican-American generated departments. Of course, the fire chief said that there will never be a Mexican living under his roof or sleeping under his roof at any time. That all changed, that all changed! And I can tell you, this segregation issue in Colton, and what had happened to me, [personally], and what had happened to us... [all I can say at this point is] there's been a lot of change.

My wife and I were probably the first segregated group that lived in the north side of Colton, and that was because of the fellow [who] was the Mayor at that time. [He] had a dry cleaning shop, [and he] asked us to move into his place in the garage where he had living quarters upstairs. That was Alva L. Duke (Mayor in 1955), he was one of the first ones to ask us to move into the northern part of town. We used to walk to South Colton, and we would stop at Hunters Drug Store—they had an ice cream parlor there. One day Jo and I stopped by there on our way down to South Colton, and we sat there, and we sat there... and I finally called the lady over [who was] the waitress. I said: May we have some service please? [She responded:] What do you mean service? We don't serve Mexicans here. [So] they would not give us anything to eat. Ray Hunter (of Hunters Drug Store) was the post office manager/postmaster at that time, and he had great segregated feelings about people.

I don't know why it was that I got into so much, but I see a lot of people my age, in my age group... they didn't see a lot of this. But there's a lot of things that happened... but all in all, we made Colton a better place to live – and I can tell you this, there is nothing

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better... We've traveled all over the world, my wife and I, [and] I used to go into San Francisco maybe twice a week, and there was nothing as beautiful than when the plane [was flying] over these mountains that we see here. They would come over and enter the valley, and we would see Colton down below, and man! It was so beautiful...

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, Abe and Jo, I would have ended on that note, however, another thought came to mind when you were talking about the soda shop. Was it hard as a Mayor to work with the Chamber of Commerce?

**Mayor Beltran:** No, as long as they understood what the Mayor wanted. That's one of the things we were talking about. When you become strong or very strong, that can get you a lot of things... they didn't cater to it too much but maybe they enjoyed it a little bit. They enjoyed a little punishment every once in a while, and I'm ready to give it to them. Not anymore, I'm 81 years old...

**Dr. Rivera:** You still have the energy. But going back to flying in from San Francisco to our valley and landing in Ontario, and then taking 20 minutes to get home, and you're back in Colton. I tell people that Colton is a belly button [of the] world – and that's the way I feel.

Well, Abe, Joanne and Candy – thank you very much for coming to the university today to share your thoughts of how it was growing up in Colton. Thank you so much.

**Mayor Beltran:** We appreciate being here, thank you very much.

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