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Mayor Frank Gonzales

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Recommended Citation

CSUSB, "Mayor Frank Gonzales" (2013). *South Colton Oral History Project*. 12.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history/12>

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Oral History Project of Colton, CA - 11/22/13

Dr. Rivera: Good morning, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera. I am the Associate Dean, Emeritus, for Cal State San Bernardino, and today is November the 22nd, 2013, and we're in the Pfau Library on the 5th floor. We are continuing our oral history of South Colton; and before I introduce our guest this morning, let me introduce to you the Dean of the Library, Mr. Cesar Caballero.

Dean Caballero: Hi, how are you? Good morning. *Buenas dias. Bienvenidos.*

Dr. Rivera: *Por favor*, will you tell us a little bit about what we're doing with this project?

Dean Caballero: Of course. Dr. Rivera and I have started this project for the sole purpose of gathering oral history from prominent citizens, as well as, leaders, as well as, business people [who] know the history of the Colton area; and for the sole purpose of developing an oral history archive here at the University, specifically, in the Special Collections Department of the Pfau Library.

Dr. Rivera: Cesar, thank you so much, and we truly appreciate all the support that you're providing for the project—it's a wonderful project...

Dean Caballero: You're welcome.

Dr. Rivera: ...And I think it's really due, really due. And Cesar, this morning we are honored to have the many time Mayor of Colton, Mr. Frank Gonzales. Frank, welcome to our discussion this morning, welcome.

Mayor Gonzales: Thank you very much, Tommy; and I appreciate even being involved with the project – I think it's a wonderful thing. I think it's a good... whatever it takes to motivate your children, hopefully, to get involved in the government. Because

government is what it's all about; our lives are around it. Politics is not only in city government, or what-not, but it's even in our daily life.

Dr. Rivera: Well talking about politics, Frank – why don't we get started? Frank, how did you get involved in serving the community? You mentioned that your son was at Colton High School, and he came and talked to you about 21 issues. And you were just minding your business—doing what moms and dads do on a daily basis. So what happened after that?

Mayor Gonzales: Well my son was a senior in Colton High School... (inaudible) and at that time MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan*) was just starting. So he came over and had 21 issues; and they were issues that could have been resolved easily, you-know, things that weren't getting attention [or] given the support they needed from the school district, you-know, with the other clubs. They needed a place to meet; they needed to have the same things that the other clubs in the school district had. So, they ignored him. So then, my son came over and talked to me and my wife, and I was a union organizer at the time, I was in organized labor—I was a steel worker... So I was involved mainly in politics in the unions. So I said, okay, let's get together and [let's] get you kids together and I'll see if I can get a place to meet for the community, you-know, so your parents can come. Because we need support if we're gonna approach the district. So what I did, I talked to, now, Monsignor Luque, to loan us the church, the San Salvador Church – to meet, cause we had no place to meet at that time. Nobody would loan us a conference room or whatever, you-know, we didn't have access to... So he agreed to loan us San Salvador Church. So the parents came over, and about 200 hundred, or so, came. We talked about the issues; so then, we elected a small group to go to the district [to present] the issues to the school district to help the kids. Well low-and-behold, Dr. Tom Rivera, we went over there and we got ignored—they shined us on.

Dean Caballero: Really?

Mayor Gonzales: We got ignored. I mean, we're the parents, right?

Dean Caballero: At the school... they blew you off.

Mayor Gonzales: Oh they blew us off... We went to the school districts' school board meeting and we started talking... and we were 'out of order'...

Dean Caballero: Really?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh-yeah, they basically called us 'out of order' – they ignored us. I mean, they threw us out, basically, you-know. So we did that I don't know how many times. So then, we decided... me and Sonny Abril...

Dr. Rivera: Who was with you at that time? Who were the main characters? Sonny Abril?

Mayor Gonzales: Right, Sonny Abril was, at that time, we were the officers of the union: I was the president of Local 47, United Steel Workers of America, and he was my secretary.

Dr. Rivera: Ah, okay.

Mayor Gonzales: ...So I said, Sonny, we're getting nowhere. We have to get organized, and more, to get the community behind us. And then, in order to make a difference, we're just gonna have to get in there because on the outside looking in—you can't do anything because they cut you off. You-know, they just call you 'out of order' and throw you out. They got the muscle, so-to-speak. So then, we said, okay, what are we gonna do? So then, Pauline Garcia was another member, and we told him: Pauline you run for school board? And he said, I'll run for school board. Okay then, I'll run for city council. So, that's what we did. We ran and we won.

Dr. Rivera: All three of you?

Mayor Gonzales: All three of us.

Dr. Rivera: You, Pauline, and Sonny?

Mayor Gonzales: Right.

Dean Caballero: So how many board members were there at the time?

Mayor Gonzales: At that time, I think there were, in the school board, I think there were 5 districts... about 5 members.

Dean Caballero: So you were able to get 3...?

Mayor Gonzales: We got 2 in the school board...

Dean Caballero: So you still didn't have the majority but you were getting close to it?

Mayor Gonzales: No, but we had 2... (Inaudible) Andrew Sahi, I think Dr. Rivera knows him very well, he was very vocal. I mean, he told it is... and then Pauline was another one. So we had 2 representatives, at least, you-know, seeing that we had people in there and we knew what was gonna take place, right? Cause before, you-know, we were in the dark with everything. So then, when you get an agenda, then you know what's gonna happen; then you can strategize... We strategized, you-know, this is what we're gonna be doing on the agenda to get things done. So when I went to the city council and I got in there and, at that time, I think I was the youngest councilman, I was 32 years old. So I got in [and I thought], oh-my-gosh... Jesus Christ... it was all complicated. I'd never been in government before, [so I'm thinking] what am I gonna do, right? (Inaudible) *Si se puede!* I've always been a firm believer and I tell my kids,

you can do whatever – you can do anything you want as long as you apply yourself. I'm old-school, so-to-speak.

Dr. Rivera: So, Frank, you were elected in the city council—what year was that? Late 60's early 70's?

Mayor Gonzales: Around 1971-72 I got elected... and I served two terms. Which was at that time 4 year terms. So I served two 4 year terms as city councilman. Then I ran for mayor and I won. And the mayor's race was for two year terms. So I ran and I won six terms as a mayor.

Dr. Rivera: Ah, you were mayor a long, long time?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh, I was the mayor forever—they called me the 'mayor forever' in Colton. But I was fortunate because when I got involved, I've always been the type... to me, if you represent somebody and they have issues, you gotta do the right thing. I'm not there for popularity... you gotta do the right thing. (Inaudible) If people have an issue, sometimes you can't please everybody, but if you do what your heart tells you, and right is right and wrong is wrong. I'm not saying we're all perfect, I'm not perfect, you-know, but I think people [saw] that I [was] trying to do the right thing for the community for everyone.

Dr. Rivera: So, Frank, were you the first Mexican-American mayor of Colton? Or was there somebody before you...?

Mayor Gonzales: Tommy, the system, the way it was set up then, there were 5 councilman elected, at large. Then, the councilman, themselves, appointed the mayor.

Dean Caballero: Oh really? It came from the council?

Mayor Gonzales: It came from the council, themselves. They appointed the mayor they wanted. So the first appointed mayor, Mexicano, was Pasqual Oliva.

Dr. Rivera: Pasqual Oliva, okay. And that was in the 60's?

Mayor Gonzales: Right, back in the 60's... And then, the second one appointed, I think it was Beltran.

Dr. Rivera: Abe Beltran, okay.

Mayor Gonzales: And then what happened was they changed it because the Anglo communities, so-to-speak, didn't like that the Mexicanos were taking leadership groups. So what they did they pushed to get an elected mayor. So then, of course, the first elected mayor was Huntoon, he was Americano, he won the seat. So then, after that I ran and I bumped him off, and I became the mayor – elected, first elected Mexicano mayor. And I did it for 6 terms.

Dr. Rivera: And that was back in the 70's?

Mayor Gonzales: That was back in the 70's, and '84 – yeah, for 6 terms, that was for a long time.

Dr. Rivera: Well you-know, Frank, Colton, as you know was incorporated in 1887. Right? 1887 it became a city, Colton became a city. And it was not until 1941 that we had our first Mexican-American councilman – and that was Johnny Martinez, Jeremias...

Mayor Gonzales: The boxer...

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, the boxer. He was the first council-person that represented South Colton. Before that we had no representation for South Colton.

And then, your son got you involved and you haven't stopped.

Mayor Gonzales: I got involved back in the 70's, '71-'72. I served 8 terms: 2 terms as councilman, and 6 terms as mayor. I left for 17 years... but then again, you-know, I'm the type of guy who would sit back and I'd listen. Issues came up again, you-know, anything that was right for the community. So I went to the city council and tried to share, share my thoughts and [when] I did, I got shined-off... And I [saw] the council sitting there... and in every city, every government there's always the powers-that-be; money talks. So they put whoever they wanted in office and they [told] them what to do – they [didn't] represent us. And I saw that happening

Dean Caballero: Not much has changed. Principle opinion...
(Laughter)

Mayor Gonzales: So, I said, oh-man, this is not working out. Then, when I went to the council meeting and I was being ignored, and I [saw] what was going on – they were going downhill... You-know, Tommy, we were going to be in bankruptcy...

Dr. Rivera: Oh, that's right, that's right.

Mayor Gonzales: We're a self-contained city. We own our companies, we own multi-million dollar companies. Our utilities are worth a billion and a half, you-know. We generate, right now, 650 thousand a week; 620 thousand we take in – cash. Can you imagine the multimillion dollar corporation? Then, we have the utilities, the water, sewer plant, that's another one that we serve. We serve the (inaudible) 11 thousand residents. So you can imagine if you're getting \$30 dollars from each resident a month, times 12, you-know, how much money is that? Millions, we're talking millions. We own our water company – that's another million. When you come to Colton and you want to open a business, it's mandatory that you do business with us, the city. So, you-know, we're blessed.

But you'll always have people out there, you-know, they're greedy. So they get some of our people, I don't say everybody, but they go out and they start taking them to dinner, you-know, and all that stuff... and all of a sudden they forget who they represent.

Dean Caballero: Start making some *movidas*

Mayor Gonzales: *Ándale*. So I said, you-know, this can't happen – so I'm gonna try and make a difference again. So I ran again, and I won – so here I am... I put a year and a half back in office – my 9th election.

(Laughter)

Dean Caballero: Wow! You've been the longest serving mayor in this area...

Dr. Rivera: Well, Frank, you said you were a union representative—and what was your function, what office were you with the union? What was your office with the union? Were you the president of the union?

Mayor Gonzales: I was the president of Local 5647 United Steel Workers of America. And then I did organizing. When I started organizing, in organized labor, they send you to school... They sent me to become an arbitrator... to arbitrate cases. (Inaudible) So all my background is really [in] union organizing, in arbitration, and grievance procedures.

And I used to teach. Later on... I've been there about 10 years, I used to teach the classes at the conventions... (Inaudible). And it made me aware of a lot of things and how to do things. And that was a blessing because when I went to government that helped me a lot because it's all contracts, everything is contracts. I learned how to read contracts and understand them.

Dean Caballero: Negotiating.

Dr. Rivera: Well, along with being an officer for the city, a union representative – you also own your own business. Tell us about your business?

Mayor Gonzales: When I was in high school, I used to work for Al's Liquor Store. Tommy you-know...

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, I remember, I remember...

Mayor Gonzales: ...You lived on 'O' Street on the Palomas, and I used to live on the (inaudible)... 131 West 'O' Street... I was born there, incidentally...

Dr. Rivera: Where?

Mayor Gonzales: On 'O' Street... 131 'O' Street. I'll never forget it, me and my brother were born there. We were delivered there when, low-and-behold, [doctors] they used to come to [your] house. So, I was born there and I was raised in the Barrio – and I'm proud of it, you-know. And I'd tell everybody, and everybody said: Ah, Frankie, yeah you made it man. They [thought] I was born with it, I said, no, I worked hard for it – I was a steel worker, you-know.

And then, later on in the years when I was in high school for 4 years, I used to box in that liquor store, I used to be a box-boy. Me and Frankie Valdivia, I know you remember him.

Dr. Rivera: Yes, I do remember Frankie...

Mayor Gonzales: Me and Frankie used to be box-boys, you-know.

So, later on, and just by accident, I guess... after Griffin Wheel, after 27 years they shut the place down. So for 2 years I didn't do anything. They [Griffin Wheel] kept me on the books... I went from organized labor, I went to management; I became overall production. So, when they shut the place down, and they did [this] because they didn't want to pay more wages.

Dr. Rivera: And that was Griffin Wheel?

Mayor Gonzales: That was Griffin Wheel.

Dr. Rivera: And what year did they shut down?

Mayor Gonzales: 1984.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, 1984.

Mayor Gonzales: So then, they built a plant in Iowa. It was underground, and it was Tornado alley, so-to-speak, right? And so, they wanted to ship me over there, and I told Lee, my wife, I said: Hey, hon, *siempre compañeros*. She said: Well too bad I'm not gonna go man... So I didn't go – I stayed here.

But, going back, Tommy, you-know, what's interesting is that my Grandfather was the first Mexicano police officer.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, that's right. What year was that? Early years...

Mayor Gonzales: ...Colton was incorporated in 1887, right?

Dr. Rivera: Right.

Mayor Gonzales: I would imagine—I would say about a year or two later he became an officer.

Dr. Rivera: How did a Mexican-American become a policeman in Colton?

Mayor Gonzales: Well you know what, in those years... (inaudible) they were afraid of us. I think in every city they like don't like us when they fear us and I don't know why, we're no different than anybody else. And I think that the powers-that-be in [the] police department—they needed somebody in the Barrio, right? And it had to be a Mexicano

so my Grandfather... he got the job... They used to jump him, and that was the *Pachuco* area; I know you guys remember, right?

(The dialogue is inaudible at this point)

Mayor Gonzales: ...I guess that's when I got involved in big business, right? Cause me and my brother used to shine shoes... and we used to go over there and shine shoes.

Dr. Rivera: You were around the corner from 7th Street; that was a busy area.

Mayor Gonzales: It was a business area. And I can picture back—I see movies that goes back and it reminds me of those days. And then that reminds me when we used to get out of school... It was the Garfield School, Wilson School, and so we all went – it was 98%, 99% Mexicano. There were no Mexicanos on the north-side... Tommy you went to school there... So we all spoke Spanish...

Dr. Rivera: *Y nos pegaban.*

Dean Caballero: Those were the days of segregated school systems.

Mayor Gonzales: And I remember, I'll never forget, when we got out of school the *madrecitas* used to be waiting for us and march us to catechism at San Salvador... remember?

Dr. Rivera: 2nd and 3rd grade...

Anyway, you were a shoe shine business, and then, you opened up your own liquor store?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, liquor store-market. So I had my business... I was a union organizer, I've been in politics for almost 30 years, I'm a 6 term mayor and 3 term councilman.

Dean Caballero: You've done it all. He's just getting started...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: The other thing, Frank, is that you mentioned Garfield Elementary and Wilson – those were the schools that were in South Colton. However, you mentioned that your Grandfather had a little business on Valley Blvd., on 'I' Street, and that affected you going to school – [will] you tell us about that?

Mayor Gonzales: In those days my Grandfather was a police officer. And right on the corner, it used to be on the south-east corner of Mt. Vernon and Valley, it used to be two gas stations [and] a restaurant... and my Grandpa used to own the property. And my Grandpa, my Mom and Dad – that used to be our business. So for them, it was convenient for us to go to Lincoln School... or I think [it was] Washington – down the street on Mt. Vernon. But it was all Anglo; and me and my brother Gilbert was gonna make out... we go over there, you-know, we're... Mexicanos. Washington used to beat up on us all the time. My Mom said, don't send them over there [cause] they get beat up all the time – [and] we were in kindergarten. So my Mom said to my Dad, put [them] over there – we live in South Colton anyway. So they changed us to Garfield because, you-know, we were getting beat up all the time...

At that time, you-know, my Grandfather was a patrol officer... (inaudible) and him and Eulis Hubbs' dad used to be partners.

Dr. Rivera: Footnote: Eulis Hubbs was a board member for 25 years, and a Morman family. And they basically controlled all of Colton back then. Now, Eulis' father was a friend of your [Grandfather]?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, a friend of my Grandpa... and they were partners in the police department...

So they'd pick on me and my brother, Gilbert... and we used to have a radio in a wagon, remember those red wagons?

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, yeah.

Mayor Gonzales: (Inaudible/unclear)

Dr. Rivera: ...Tell us about growing up in Colton, Frank, because you said you were born and raised there on 'O' Street. And you went to Garfield and Wilson Junior High School. Who were your friends in that area? I know that you used to hang around with Cruisers. Who were the Cruisers?

Mayor Gonzales: It was a car club... and we had our jackets... In those days it was for parties... And we used to hang out with Ralph Villa, Ray Colunga, [my] little baby brother, Oscar (Cancan) Berajan, and Eddie. There were about 5 or 6 of us...

My Mom used to work in a coffee shop as a waitress, and in order to get there she needed a ride, but she didn't drive. So she bought an old car, a Chevy – a '36 Chevy; and she let me drive it to take her to work. (Inaudible/unclear) In those days those cars were well built.

My Mom, she worked a lot to help support us.

In those days, I think all of South Colton, used to buy from (inaudible) dairy, or we used to buy stuff from the Raleigh man... so there were salesmen coming to the house. My Mom would get us to do the errands and we were waiting for [them] too to get what she needed. So, you-know, we did everything.

I'll never forget, my brother, Johnny, used to work for (inaudible). And he used to go in at 4 o'clock in the morning before he'd go to school – to milk the cows. So at that time I wasn't working... (inaudible). They told me they needed some help. So I went... 5 o'clock in the morning, colder than heck. So I went over there and showed up and the old man said, come on! So he [took] me out to the field... and he gives me a wooden shovel, huge! So what do you want me to do? I'm over there pushing manure...

Dean Caballero: Shoveling the manure out.

Mayor Gonzales: Shoveling (inaudible) - I did that for 2 hours... I'm out-a-here man.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Frank, talking about jobs: What did people do back then? Because we couldn't cross the railroad tracks but, there were some manufacturing companies across the railroad... Crane, where they made the toilets... But anyway, what did people do to work aside from being involved with the railroad, Southern Pacific, in the yard there, in the (inaudible); and then we had the cement plant that brought a lot of jobs for people who lived in that area.

Mayor Gonzales: Tommy, see, in those years... I think the majority of the people who lived in South Colton worked in the cement company, Kaiser, PFE...

Dean Caballero: What was PFE?

Dr. Rivera: Pacific Food Express. It was a subsidiary of Southern Pacific, and what they did [was bring] in the vegetables and fruit so that we had a lot of citrus. And they would pack the products and then they would put ice in the box cars and ship them out.

Mayor Gonzales: South Colton really was the center of industry. On the north side you hardly had any industry – [it was totally] in the Barrio

Dean Caballero: Oh-really? It was an industrial area?

Mayor Gonzales: And the dividing line, and I think that's important... In those years the railroad tracks going east and west was the dividing line. If you went to school, after school, in high school or whatever, [and] a Mexicano – you could not cross that. If you wanna cross to the north side, the cops pick you up and bring you back.

Dean Caballero: Really?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh, absolutely. There was so much prejudice.

Dean Caballero: It was totally segregated; it was segregated spaces? Apartheid.
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: It was. It was.

Mayor Gonzales: That was back in the early 50s, by the way...

Dr. Rivera: It was only 60 years ago because Brown versus the board of education – we integrated and we built Colton Junior High School where they closed down our junior high school – Wilson. And they combined Roosevelt, the gringo school, and made it Colton Junior High School – and then we were out there '53-'54

Mayor Gonzales: So the only recreation we had to go to... because they had a municipal pool and it was a huge Olympic size pool; but the Mexicanos, we were not allowed to use it until the day they cleaned it—that was on a Friday. And on a Friday, it was dirty water [but that's only when] we were allowed to go swimming. And it was sad because, you-know, the water was filthy but we had no other place to go, and that's the way it was; but we had to change that.

Dr. Rivera: Getting back to the occupations, Frank, what did kids do or people do besides the ones that we talked about – *la bolucha*, I know that the picking of oranges was one of the big things that we had. We had, at least, five contractors that would pick up people and take them to orchards to pick up oranges because it was citrus industry...

Mayor Gonzales: Well besides that, Tommy, don't forget the Mexicanos – we were (inaudible). Even my principal, Mr. McIntosh, when we were in high school he used to tell all the girls: You're only good to be domestic help, clean houses, right? And us [the men] we were supposed to be laborers, I mean that was it. There was [nothing else] that was good for us.

Dean Caballero: There was a level of expectation.

Mayor Gonzales: (Inaudible). I think based on a lot of it was because a lot of us... (inaudible). We used to go pick oranges and we used to go to Hollister, (inaudible), Hemet [for] apricots... I remember a lot of our families. My wife used to [pick] apricots (inaudible) ... it was a *tablero*...I used to go over there and help...

Dean Caballero: What does a *tablero* do?

Mayor Gonzales: ...When the ladies finished filling up the tray of apricots, then we'd pick them up and we'd stack them. So that was my job...

Dean Caballero: By hand or by machine?

Mayor Gonzales: By hand *echalé*...

(Laughter)

Mayor Gonzales: We used to take them out of the oven...

Dr. Rivera: For the dried apricots...

Dean Caballero: Oh, for the dried apricots...

Mayor Gonzales: Absolutely, you-know... that was our way of getting money for school, for clothes. That was [a yearly] event, going up north to make money for our clothes and then going to Hemet...

Dean Caballero: Up north, when you say up north, where was that?

Mayor Gonzales: Fresno, Northern California, Hollister... (inaudible)

Dean Caballero: For the harvest?

Dr. Rivera: And then, most families would leave early summer and come back before September before school started.

Dean Caballero: So what percentage of the population in Colton, at that time, do you think was involved in this kind economy with the whole family harvesting, and doing stuff like that?

Mayor Gonzales: I think 98% - the majority...

Dean Caballero: So it was a farm working community at that time?

Dr. Rivera: Well... the dad's worked in the areas [of] the PFE and the cement plant, or picked oranges during the year. And then, families were involved in the summer harvest when they went out of Colton to do some harvesting in central valley, or in Hemet. But 98%...

Mayor Gonzales: Our parents used to take time off to take us because the salaries weren't the same [as] what they are today. Those who were working at (inaudible) cement were fortunate [families]... The Mexicano had big families...

Dean Caballero: To supplement, either way.

Mayor Gonzales: To supplement their incomes, you-know, and that's what they did. At least my parents did; my parents used to take us, I remember I used to go to Hollister... me and my older brother... We used to pick up (inaudible) from the ground. I remember we used to sleep in a tent and it was fun for us—we were kids, you-know.

Dean Caballero: What? When you went to the fields you would sleep in the tents?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, we used to go up to Northern California. So we did alright; my parents did everything. My Dad... later on in years he was a meat cutter, he was a butcher. So later on in the years, he used to be at a big supermarket in Riverside. And my Dad was very innovative, I would say. My Dad used to say: *Mijo*... don't rock the boat, but don't take you-know-what from anybody... because we can do anything we want in this life if you apply yourself. He became a manager at one of the biggest stores in Riverside. A.M. Lewis used to be a whole bottom department of supermarkets, and he used to manage all the meat department. So in those years when he was manager, hey, we ate meat... You know what

Dean Caballero: You were lucky you ate some meat.

Mayor Gonzales: ...I remember hearing a siren when the Second World War, I think it was the Second World War, and we had black curtains and we used to close them... (Inaudible)

Dr. Rivera: Well tell us about Colton High School, you went to Colton High School?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, I went to Colton High and I always liked sports.

Dr. Rivera: Which sports did you play Frank?

Mayor Gonzales: I played basketball, I played in the high school marching band on clarinet. And then, I was in track because I was tall and lanky, and I used to high-jump. So I used to do high-jump, track, cross-country, and basketball, I did all those things. I tried to play football but soaking wet I was 120 pounds... (inaudible). ...They put me up against [a guy that was 350 pounds] and the first time I got hit twice, I said forget it, I'm outa here...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: So did you play sports all the years that you were in high school?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, I played sports and I enjoyed it... I played basketball and the [other] sports except football...

Dr. Rivera: When did you graduate from Colton?

Mayor Gonzales: In '55.

Dr. Rivera: '55? You said you were in the marching band? Did you guys travel any place?

Mayor Gonzales: ...We went to Riverside... (inaudible)... San Bernardino... Valley College... (inaudible)... we used to walk... it was like going to the Orange Show. We're used to walking... I mean, we're in the Barrio... we would jump the fence [to get into] the Orange Show.

Dr. Rivera: You never got caught?

Mayor Gonzales: No... (inaudible)
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Frank, you-know, Colton has an area of 1.3 square miles. You mentioned the north boundary, which was the railroad track, and then, the west boundary was 3rd Street all the way to Fogg Street? All the way to Fogg Street, which was the southern part of Colton.

Mayor Gonzales: ...It's south of the freeway to 12th Street... If you're down south of the freeway, take the Santa Ana River going south to the west, that's south, all the way down to Fogg Street. Then it cuts across to Rancho...

Dr. Rivera: ...By 3rd Street

Mayor Gonzales: It jumps the Santa Ana River to Rancho; and then it goes a little beyond Rancho maybe about a half a mile... that's considered South Colton (inaudible). Fogg Street is the Barrio.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, on the east side would be 12th Street... So the area would be one square mile.

We were self-contained because of businesses, gas stations, schools. Tell me about church? I think one of our priests, Father Valencia, during Easter would burn Judas. Remember those activities?

Mayor Gonzales: ...I'll never forget... Father Valencia was something else, he had all of the customs from Mexico. *Semana Santa*... For Easter, he used to burn Judas, and we used to hang them from the church chapel (inaudible). Me and my brother, Gilbert, we used to ring the bell – cause I was an Alter boy.

Dr. Rivera: You were? You're kidding?

Mayor Gonzales: Believe it or not. It was mandatory, my grandpa, my Mom's dad, he used to go at 6 o'clock every morning (he knocks on the table to mimic knocking on the door) and wake up Father Valencia, [and say:] it's time to get up. And we'd go and prepare the church for the Father. And me and my brother, Gilbert, we'd go with him to help him set everything up, clean up... So, me and my brother were Alter boys, we used to help pull down the rope with Judas. Both of us would be hanging and pulling the rope and two on the other side. So we were active in the church. Father Valencia was very good at *Semana Santa*; he used to play an apostle... (inaudible). Mexicano style we did it... we might not have liked it, but we did it and it was fine. Now, when we go back it's a bit of history, so-to-speak...

Dr. Rivera: Everybody from South Colton would go to the church to see Judas burn, *verdad*. And then, the little whip that Father Valencia had, remember the little whip? He'd go around and get the kids to get away from the fireworks.

Mayor Gonzales: Father Valencia was very strict and all, but he really wasn't. Father Valencia was an expert at handball. We used to go to South Colton Park and play handball; and he'd beat everybody – the guy was so good. And then, I'll never forget, he was such a good man that a lot of us couldn't afford to go to the games – in high school -- because they didn't allow us to go... we didn't have money... they'd charge us to go to the football games, so he'd stick us in the trunk... (inaudible) and we'd get in free.

Dr. Rivera: Did he go to confession?

Mayor Gonzales: I don't know; I don't think so.

He used to walk out every morning, even before church, he used to walk out on 'K' Street... [going] back and forth. And you'd see him go by, I don't know if he did this to you, Tommy, [but] if I go by or walk by, he'd turn around... he knew everybody, [and he'd shout:] Hey Gonzales!! He'd shout at you... he knew everybody—a *la familia* because he was [their] priest. I'll never forget that... but he was a good man.

Dr. Rivera: Tell us about 7th Street, Frank. 7th Street, I defined it back then as the Broadway of South Colton.

Mayor Gonzales: It was like Broadway man, we had a lot of dancers...

(Laughter)

But Sombrero was a popular one. I remember, I had my business, you-know, (inaudible). Everybody told me, how come you got your store in the Barrio man? I had opportunities to buy a store on the north side, and it was cheap – it wasn't cheap but at that time it was reasonable. It was right on Laurel and Colton Ave., it was the Barrio (inaudible). And then, I thought to myself, me and my wife (inaudible) she thinks ahead.

Really, to tell you the truth, she's a motivator—she pushed me. You-know, the women behind a man... (inaudible). We think we're the bosses, right Tommy? But in reality we're not because... (inaudible).

I'd go to city council meetings, I was the mayor... and I'd go and I make decisions for everybody, and I'd think I'm doing the right thing. At home, my wife [would say] why'd you do that? Sometimes she's right [and she'd say] you better go back...

(Laughter)

Dean Caballero: That's why they called them first ladies.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Tell us about Lee because I was in the same class that your wife, Lee, was in... Where did you guys meet, and where did you guys get married?

Mayor Gonzales: We met in school, and then, you-know, it was just one of those things. At that time, she was one of the few [who] lived on the north side of [town].

Dr. Rivera: Right! She lived on 'H' Street.

Mayor Gonzales: First, she lived on 'O' Street. I didn't know her too well when she lived on 'O' Street, but she's younger than I am by 3 almost 4 years. So she lived on 'O' Street [and] she was younger than me. And then, she moved to 'H' Street, and they lived over there on the north side. So we couldn't go over there... (inaudible).

So then I got to know her in school, and then we just evolved and became friends, and then started going out... (inaudible). Then we got married.

But let me go back to the story. When [I was talking about] buying the store on the north side because they had money, (inaudible) ...the Anglos have money, the Mexicanos don't have any money. But my Dad told me, he said: *mijo*... cause you-know, me and my Dad used to confide. My Dad was in business, later on, for 32 years in a wholesale and retail meat packing company in Pomona, right off of the 60 freeway. So I asked him: Hey Dad, what do you think I ought-a do, buy that one? He said, *mijo* buy the one

in the Barrio. Why? He said: An Americano, when they want to buy something they go and they get a coupon and they save a nickel... they will drive to save a nickel; no matter where. Mexicanos... they will walk to the neighborhood store...

Dean Caballero: Convenience

Mayor Gonzales: And when they go buy, he said, you-know Anglos, Anglos go over there or anybody, they go over there and they look at the prices... they buy one for themselves. Mexicanos goes over there and they go buy a 12 pack of soda... (the dialogue is inaudible at this point). When you get customers, don't give credit; only get 30 strong customers and give them so much money; but they have to be loyal customers. And that's what I did. And I think I was a success because it helped pay for everything. Tommy, in 5 years I paid off the property, I paid everything—I didn't owe anybody anything. And in 9 years... it allowed me to retire... the Lord blessed me...

Dr. Rivera: You sold the business?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh-yeah, I sold it because I got robbed twice. And then, my kids... The last time I got robbed, people almost got hurt bad. And then, my kids used to varnish the store... on weekends... so I just sold it. It's not worth it, you-know. And at that time I was in politics, I was the mayor. And then my wife was carrying... and then she started getting sick. It was a lot of pressure. A Korean guy sat next to my store for 9 months, or 8 months: you want to sell...? He used to come in with gold bars.

Dean Caballero: Really?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh-hey, he used to come in with a money belt, I'm serious. Come on, sell...

Dean Caballero: I bet you those gold bars are worth a lot of money now-days. 3 of those would have been more than the store...

Mayor Gonzales: Are you serious?

Dean Caballero: The current price of gold... you'd [a] multimillionaire...

Mayor Gonzales: ...7 or 8 months later my wife said, he likes to pressure you... [So] I gave him a price and he said: Awe-man! So I went to talk to a friend of mine, an accountant, and he said: Jesus-Christ! Sell it! So we sold it.

Dean Caballero: That was good advice.

Mayor Gonzales: That was a good experience.

Dr. Rivera: Now tell me, getting back to Lee, when did you guys get married?

Mayor Gonzales: We got married in a church. I was born in South Colton, I was baptized in San Salvador Church, my wife, too, both of us. We got married in San Salvador Church, we went to school in Colton High... (inaudible).

Dean Caballero: You are definitely a Colton citizen. With that statement, let me ask that I be excused because I have another commitment. But it's been a pleasure sharing with you this interview with Dr. Thomas Rivera, and thank you for joining us today and sharing your memoires, your memories.

Mayor Gonzales: Well, my pleasure. I hope that I will be able to... that the kids will see... (inaudible).

Dean Caballero: *Claro, claro*, a lot of the things that you have said I'm sure are gonna be valuable lessons for the new generation. Thank you, gracias! Gracias Thomas – please continue.

Dr. Rivera: Anyway, you got married in Colton. Tell me about your family, how many kids do you have?

Mayor Gonzales: Well, I have 4 kids: Frankie Jr. we lost in 1977, he was 21 years old, and he had just graduated, Tommy, from University of Riverside; and he'd just started working—he was 6 months away from getting married when a drunk driver hit him celebrating his 21st birthday, too. So we lost him... there's Cindy, Cynthia is married now and has 3 kids. And then I have Ricky, my son, Richard; and then I have Laura, Laura's my baby. And they're all... my son used to live in Colton but now he's living in Redlands. And my daughter, Cynthia, works for Human Resources in the Colton School District; she does the screening of kids for hiring. My baby, Laura, she works for the school district; and she's the one that does the checks, financing. And then my son, Rick, used to be a planner, and then he's a supervisor over all the utilities, he does that...

Dr. Rivera: How many grandkids, Frank?

Mayor Gonzales: I have 7 grandkids and 2 great-grandkids.

Dr. Rivera: Really? You have 2 great-grandkids?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, I got 2 great-grandkids.

Dr. Rivera: Great, wonderful. Let me look at my questions, Frank. Now tell me Mom and Dad, where did they come from? Did they cross the border or were they from Mexico?

Mayor Gonzales: My Mom was brought over the border when she was an infant. And at those times, they told me that my Grandpa paid a penny to cross over. So they brought my Mom when she was an infant. So my Mom was really born in Guadalajara but went to school here. My Dad was born in Los Angeles; and so my Dad was from

here. And then, my Mom and Dad came over and later and they lived with my Grandpa. My Dad and my Grandfather were from Mexico and he was in the Navy—the Navy in Mexico. But when things got bad over there... they threw them all out and they came over here. And then, that's what happened to Father Valencia, too, when they were trying to kill all the priests, remember?

Dr. Rivera: Oh, in the 20's... The Cristero War, the war between the Mexican government and the Church.

Mayor Gonzales: So, my Mom's side is from Mexico and my Dad's side is from here. Early on, my great, great-grandpa was Greek and German – that's where they say my height [came from] because I'm tall. And then, on my Grandma's side – she's a tall woman. No, [my great, great-grandpa] was from Portugal; he was a [Portuguese] – German...

Dr. Rivera: What year did they get to Colton, Frank?

Mayor Gonzales: Gee I don't know, I know it was back before they incorporated the city in the 1800's. In those years, when they got to Colton... they used to have land grants, remember Tommy?

Dr. Rivera: Yes, yes...

Mayor Gonzales: The Santa Ana River – when they came from Arizona, I understand my parents, my ancestors migrated from Arizona to Colton, and ended up in the Aqua Mansa area by the river. So, La Placita is on the Riverside side, right?

Dr. Rivera: Right, right

Mayor Gonzales: So my ancestors owned property by the river. So that's where they all settled. My Grandpa had property there, and then later on he sold it and then he bought land down in the valley where he bought the business.

Dr. Rivera: Well, you-know, that was back in 1834 when the Placita and Aqua Mansa established settlements... in the early years...

Mayor Gonzales: In the cemetery, a lot of my ancestors are buried, and probably yours too, Tommy, right at the Aqua Mansa Cemetery. And then years later, say-about 15-20 years ago the Hell's Angels [desecrated] all the graves. Remember, they came over and they just partied and they just tore up the place.

There was an old saying that when you go out there *La Llorona* would appear crying... Everybody was afraid to go to the canal...

Dr. Rivera: I know that was a very popular tale... people would tell at bonfires with Boy Scouts. Were you in the Boy Scouts?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh-yeah, Troop 45, absolutely. That was the place because that was the only place... (inaudible) because, Ray Abril, Sr., used to be my scout master. And Salvador Duran used to be at that time too but he was a younger guy. And his brother used to be an Eagle Scout, Neto...

Dr. Rivera: Ernie Garcia?

Mayor Gonzales: ...He was an Eagle Scout... a head honcho...

Dr. Rivera: Ernie Garcia?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, Ernie Garcia... (inaudible). He was the first Eagle Scout South Colton ever had... Dr. Ernie Garcia.

Dr. Rivera: So he was a troop 45'r also?

Mayor Gonzales: Troop 45... we were troop 45. We used to go... our outings were Blue Mountain or the Santa Ana River. We used to go out and camp out... I'll never forget, we went camping out on Blue Mountain, up in the hill, right? And there's snakes and everything; so we took it all the way up. (Inaudible)... I'm gonna give you guys a treat, I'm gonna make some barbeque, I'm gonna kill some rabbits and we'll barbeque. So he took a 22 and he [shot] some rabbits... and then what he did was skin them, and then he hung them up. And then, low-and-behold, during the night... we got up in the morning – dang! Where's the barbeque! Man, our scout peed all over them.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: What else did you guys do in South Colton for entertainment?

Mayor Gonzales: We used to cruise around the Barrio and try to make time with the girls...

Dr. Rivera: ...And ride around in that '49 convertible.

Mayor Gonzales: ...Yeah, that '49 convertible – Mercury...

Dr. Rivera: You drove a motorcycle?

Mayor Gonzales: ...When I got married... I used to race... I did everything... I used to have a (inaudible) Triumph, a racing bike... (inaudible). I used to have 9-10 coats of lacquer on the tanks and the fenders. (Inaudible). We used to have a racetrack, and we use to go to Riche Canyon and race a quarter mile. But I did that for 9 years—almost 9 years. But I got hit twice: I got hit one time from behind. People don't like motorcycle people, for some reason. So, one time I was coming home from racing in Riverside; but in those days when you race, we used to wear all leather, and that's what saved me. I had on all leather, pants, jacket, a helmet; and I was coming down Colton Ave., and there used to be [some] eucalyptus bushes; so I was coming down – all I

remember is somebody hit me from behind, boom! It was truck, it hit me and I went up in the air, and the bushes broke my fall. I was lucky...

Dr. Rivera: You were lucky.

Mayor Gonzales: That was the first time I got hit—I wasn't hurt bad, you-know. The second time, a guy ran me down right in front of the library. He purposely came over, I was stopped at a stop sign, and he comes at me, I'm pushing back but I can't move any further cause there's a car behind me, and he hit me... (inaudible). So my wife said, you better hang it up, you [going to] get hurt... So I parked it, I fixed it, and I had it for a year and a half, then I finally sold it. I raced it in... (inaudible)... and it was fun. (He faces the camera) Don't buy a bike, they are dangerous.

(Laughter)

Mayor Gonzales: Wear protection... and you have to respect it. But when you're young, you're young.

Dr. Rivera: You said you played the clarinet. Were you a good dancer?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, I think so. My wife was a good dancer. We used to go out dancing [and] we used to win competitions, man. Another good dancer was Paulie, *verdad*...

Dr. Rivera: Oh, my cousin...

Mayor Gonzales: ...And then, I'll never forget that guy... I can't remember his name... he was pretty good... And then, we used to go to the Valley Ballroom... that was the place to go... We used to boogie all over the place.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Did you ever go to the Rainbow Gardens?

Mayor Gonzales: Yeah, that was another place, Rainbow Gardens and the Valley Ballroom – that was the two... and the Sombrero. But the Valley Ballroom was the place.

Dr. Rivera: When you played clarinet, did you have a band in Colton?

Mayor Gonzales: No, when I was in high school I played, but that was it.

My kids... my daughter Laura played in band; and now my grand-daughter, Frankie, she plays clarinet in a band.

Mr. Lochner used to be a music teacher; and he encouraged me to take it up...

One time I was in there and there was a clarinet and I was just messing with it. I can't play the piano... I don't know how to read music... I tried everything... (inaudible).

We'd go to the after party after the convention, and we'd go to the hospitality room, and there was a big old grand piano, a white one, and then when saw it and it was open I went over and started messing with it (inaudible)...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Frank, you've always been involved with community issues, and you told us about how you, first of all, got involved because of your son's issues at the high school. Do you still plan to continue your work in common service or civil service, or community service?

Mayor Gonzales: Tommy... everybody asks me that because I've been involved for almost 30 years, but I enjoyed it; as long as health permits – I think so. I think right now when I came back for 10 years (inaudible) the deficit spending, there was nothing done. When I served, all the projects you see in Colton, like the Gonzales Center that was named after me; I had that built as the Frank Gonzales Community Center. So they honored me by naming it after me. I built the Luque Center; I built a park, the George Brown Park; the (inaudible) park; all these new buildings that went up—I made the library a museum because they built a new library. So (inaudible) I think there's a lot of

things to do. Now, I built a senior complex, and when I was gone, rather than [renovate] the senior complex – they went ahead and tore it down.

Dr. Rivera: Yes they did.

Mayor Gonzales: And then, what they did because of what happened—they blew-it, and so they sued and the city got 5 million dollars. And then rather than go out and build a new one they went and spent it (inaudible), we got nothing in return. So when I came back, I said we've got to build it because they were looking to build a place [that] I thought was dangerous for the seniors... And in a year and a half's time, they've got a new one coming up... I pushed it. (Inaudible)... Davis, when he was running, I was gonna run for mayor, but then when Davis said he wanted to run, I told him, well you-know if you run (inaudible)... you need to do what we need. We need to give our community a 10% decrease in utilities. You support them, you have to say it... he said, okay. I said, no, you have to use that in your campaign cause that's the only way I will support you—cause I'm gonna push for that. And he did... so I backed him up. So I said, okay, I'll run for the second [term]. Davis said okay, he wanted me to run because I have more experience. So we ran and we won.

So now (inaudible)... with a balanced budget... (inaudible)... so there's a lot of things now we're trying to build up... (inaudible)... in the community to bring the manpower back. They laid off over 100 in the workforce. The city was looking very dirty, I don't know if you remember; so I'm trying to bring the maintenance crews back. Our city is being cleaned up; if you go down the underpasses we got (inaudible)...

So a lot of things to better our community and to make a better quality of life for our citizens—I'm pushing to do that—[it's a] small part. We need more parts for our community. So, all those things are still there, and if I can be of any help with my experience I can do something to help the community.

Dr. Rivera: So you will continue with public service?

Mayor Gonzales: Oh-yeah, I intend to...

Dr. Rivera: Are you planning to run for mayor?

Mayor Gonzales: I never say no... I think right now if you look at the meetings, you can look at channel 3. I tell everybody, if you can't watch them on Tuesdays, the (inaudible) Tuesday of the month, get a [ticket] their only 5 bucks, you can see the council meeting, and you can see the things that are being done and who's preventing the leadership.

The Gonzales Center, if you back to the Gonzales Center, you have all the services that are available. They have a swimming pool, (inaudible)... we have recreation for kids... people go there to use the facility (inaudible)... we have programs for the kids...

Dr. Rivera: You're always busy. So public service is at the top the list for you?

Mayor Gonzales: (Inaudible) Yeah, I'm always thinking what I need to do next. But I think I'm a firm believer in, you-know, you have to set your site on one thing and then do it; and then, go to the next goal, otherwise you never get nothing done.

Dr. Rivera: You-know, Frank, it's been a wonderful conversation we've had over the last hour. Are there any stories that you would like to share with us? Just think back, any stories that we haven't touched or experiences that you've had that you would like to share with us that we haven't talked about?

Mayor Gonzales: I think you've been talking about (inaudible) in my life.

I would like to say, I'm grateful that God has given me the opportunity and the ability, verdad. I think I was blessed with always being able to... I'm the type if I can't read an agenda I can speed read (inaudible)... and that's been very humbling to me. And I learned that when I was in organized labor. The training was (inaudible)... contracts... But I've always been lucky (inaudible) to look at something and it sticks with me. And so, that's been very helpful. And then the second, is that I've been fortunate and lucky to have my wife, Lee, always being supportive of what I do. And I know that without

her, I wouldn't have been able to do it. Because when you're in politics, it's not only me, it's the whole family involved. Because what happens to me happens to everybody in my family. So they have been very supportive, very instrumental in my career, my wife, especially; she's put up with a lot of things in my life... It's been hard sometimes because there's always people that don't want or don't like what you're doing. Because there's always the element that want control. They don't care about the community-at-large, they only care about their self-interest. And every city, even in Colton, there's always gonna be a millionaire (inaudible)... to have all the business to themselves and forget about saving money for the community. That's why we always have to get people to support. And I encourage the young kids, particularly Mexicanos, everybody, [and] the young kids to get involved. And they say, well, how can I get involved? When there's an election, get involved with the campaign. That's how I did. I got involved when I was younger – a union campaign. So I learned a lot... the first time I ever got involved in politics was when Pasqual was running. So I got involved because by accident (inaudible)... I put up flyers house to house... and that helped because he won; and the exposure you get... And then I used to sit and hear them talking, I'm listening... and a lot of it you don't understand, but then when you go to a council meeting [and] you hear something, then you go – ah that's what it was. So I encourage the young Mexicanos, everybody, Mexicanos, especially, to get involved, participate in the system. And never forget that if you apply yourself, if you want to do something in the world and be somebody – you can do it. All you gotta do is go for it—go for it. I tell my kids that [and] they've all done it and they've all got good jobs.

My son is going to be retiring; my son is 51-52 years old; and he's going to be retiring. Do you know what his pay check is gonna be when he gets out because he worked and went to school? And he got involved... All my kids, when they were small, my daughter, my baby when she was 5 years old, she use to watch TV... she studied everything (inaudible). So all my children... (inaudible)... they learned to fend for themselves, protect themselves...

My boy is gonna retire [making] 9 thousand 70 dollars a month – that's gonna be his retirement. Think about it. Because I told him, I said, mijo, don't give up... Every job that you have, it's not all wine and roses. There's always gonna be somebody picking

at you, or jealous, or doing something, but hang in there – just do your job and ignore him. To heck with you, God bless you but I'm moving forward; you keep going, keep on truckin'.

And it's very important to know that the more education you get, I know that all of us cannot afford to go to school, it's hard, it's very difficult... My kid, I helped him to go to college, it's very expensive.

Dr. Rivera: It is.

Mayor Gonzales: And the sad part about is, they can't get no grant because if you make a few dollars... you-know, Tommy, to me that's discrimination. In this country anybody should be able to go to school. The government should support if the children want to go and get a college education – it benefits all of us... And what makes it very sad is even in our government and our jobs, you have an engineer, he's an Indian from India, or an Oriental, why? We should have all those talents here, they should be the ones getting the jobs. I'm a firm believer that they should giving a number to everybody; but the government is to blame for a lot of it because they make funding very difficult for children to go to school, they make it very hard – that has to be (inaudible). And I think that the more we get involved, and the more we do, if we could tell our representatives up there – you-know, you need to go up there... if a person wants to go to school, he can pay it back in a grant... come on, you-know. It's ridiculous... it should be free education. If China can do it... and they say, awe they're communists... look at the Chinese over here, they got the good jobs. That ain't right, Tommy; we should get free (inaudible), and the government should pay for it – free education for everybody.

Dr. Rivera: Frank, those are very, very wise words, and I think those are things that people should consider seriously because we do need our kids to get a good education. And we do need our kids to be in those positions of making decisions and they should be our leaders in the future for our whole country.

Mayor Gonzales: That's what it's all about. To me that's very important. It's important for our children to grow up to be presidents someday. If Obama can be President, we can too.

Dr. Rivera: Well, thank you so much, Frank. It was a delight being with you this morning, and thank you very much for being with us this morning

Mayor Gonzales: Hey, thank you for inviting me, I really enjoyed it, seriously, I hope that I can make a difference for the kids. And Tommy, [if] you need me anytime, for whatever, even if the kids want to talk to me, I'm always available. All they gotta do is call my office – city hall; if I'm not there, (inaudible) they'll know where I'm at.

Dr. Rivera: ...And thank you, Manny, for taping this episode.

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