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**Dr. Tom Rivera**

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**Oral History Project of Colton, CA - 11/07/14**

**Dr. Rivera:** Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Tom Rivera, and welcome to our oral history project. Today is November the 7<sup>th</sup>, and we are at the Pfau Library at Cal State San Bernardino (CSUSB). Our interview session will be conducted by Mr. Frank Acosta, who is part of our committee; and Frank, you'll be interviewing me.

[Again,] I'm Dr. Tom Rivera, I retired from Cal State (CSUSB) 3 years ago, and my official title now is Emeritus Associate Dean. So Frank, if we can get started with the interview?

**Frank:** Sure. We can start with your grandparents.

**Dr. Rivera:** Papa Sixto and Mama Victoria are from Mexico, and they came to this country in the early or the late 1900s.

**Frank:** Do you know what part of Mexico?

**Dr. Rivera:** They both came from the northern part of Jalisco. Grandpa was from Santa Maria de Los Angeles, and my grandma was from Colotlan, Jalisco; and these little towns are about 50 miles close to Zacatecas. Grandma came here in 1897, and then grandpa followed in 1899; and they both came to Los Angeles via the Southern Pacific Railroad. The husband of my Grandmother was recruited to work for the railroad, and then my grandpa was recruited afterwards. But, being in Los Angeles for 5 years or so, my grandpa and grandma got together. Grandma had 2 kids from her first husband: my aunt Frances and my uncle Augustine. Grandpa and grandma got together and they came to Colton in 1905. That was the time when they were opening up the Pacific Fruit Express (PFE) plant – where they would manufacture and make ice for the boxcars that were transporting fruits and vegetables from Southern California and the low desert—to all parts of the United States.

Like I said, they came to Colton, and when they arrived in Colton in 1905, they settled and lived at the workers section house, which was located on the south side of Valley

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Blvd. and 'I' Street, and at the end of Mt. Vernon Blvd. So they were there for several years, and then they moved close to the plant; about two blocks away from the plant because the plant was located on 'M' Street and they moved to 'O' Street where they bought a little property. As a matter of fact, the property still belongs to the family.

**Frank:** And what's the address there?

**Dr. Rivera:** 427 East 'O' Street; and my brother lives in the in the property now.

**Frank:** That area where the section house is, [is] all part of the freeway now, so that's gone.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes, that's completely gone, Frank. Like everything else, we've had a lot of changes over the last several years. But they lived there for several years before they bought their property on 'O' Street.

**Frank:** Where did your Grandfather work?

**Dr. Rivera:** He worked at the PFE the Pacific Fruit Express, and he was there when they first opened the plant in 1905.

**Frank:** What kind of work did he do there?

**Dr. Rivera:** He was a laborer. At that point, during all those years, Frank, the early years, Mexicans could not rise above the position of laborer. They were laborers forever and ever; so they came in as laborers, hired as laborers, and they retired as laborers. And my Grandfather retired as a laborer in 1959 when they closed the plant.

**Frank:** Did your Grandmother work at all?

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**Dr. Rivera:** Not at all. She was a homemaker, and she took care of the family. She had 4 boys, [who] were born in Colton:] my uncle Cruz, who got killed in 1935; my uncle Ysidro, who followed; and then my Dad, Ruperto Rivera, he was born in 1919; and then my uncle Nacho, who was the youngest of the family.

**Frank:** No daughters?

**Dr. Rivera:** No daughters. You-know, in the old days, Frank, we had that custom of adopting the youngest daughter of one of the relatives. So anyway, aunt Frances had 4 daughters, and Margaret, the third oldest, was given to my grandparents... She would take care of my grandparents and be with my grandparents; and Margaret was, I guess, the only daughter that they had, and she was raised by my grandma and grandpa.

**Frank:** You've mentioned that the community was a segregated community, do you want to explain a little bit [about] that?

Do you use the phrase: surrounded by gringos and downtown Colton?

**Dr. Rivera:** Our community of Colton was divided into two areas, and then the dividing line was the Southern Pacific Railroad. On the north end we had the gringo community, and these were the folks [who] were instrumental in building Colton, in establishing the business that we had in Colton, and they were the ones that were very much able to get the railroad in Colton – and [hence,] developed from the railroad. These were the people [who] were the movers and shakers of the community.

**Frank:** Many of them were growers, fruit growers?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well we had, as you know, Southern California in the 1860s started the citrus industry; and then the citrus industry covered most of Southern California from Pasadena all the way east to Redlands; and then from our San Bernardino all the way to Orange County. [We were] completely citrus, and we were the number one citrus

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growing area in all the world. And we shipped a lot of oranges out of the area; for example, when my grandpa was working at the PFE, they would manufacture ice to go in the boxcars [to keep the temperature inside of the boxcars cool or cold so the vegetables and fruit would not spoil].

It's estimated that in the 1920s, in 1925 or so, they were able to ship [approximately] 500 boxcars of oranges throughout the entire United States, and all over the world. So it's a pretty busy business that we had in the citrus industry.

Also Frank, like I mentioned, my Grandfather came in because Southern Pacific came to Colton. But the citrus industry also brought a lot of Mexicans from Mexico during the latter part of the 1800s, and many of them landed, first of all, in Highland, the little community of East Highland. And from East Highland they had relatives there, they had jobs there picking oranges, and from there they moved to San Bernardino, and then many of them moved to Colton. Like the Padilla family, and the Sanchez family from that Highland area, and the Castorenas moved to Colton.

**Frank:** Did your grandparents then come directly to Colton or did they go to East Highland and then over to Colton?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, like I mentioned, the citrus workers came from Mexico to Highland... But the Southern Pacific people came directly from Mexico to a specific area... And you-know, El Paso was the place where everybody came to, first of all, and then they branched over to Kansas City, Chicago, and many of those places where the railroad needed workers.

So grandpa came to Los Angeles and from Los Angeles he transferred to Colton.

**Frank:** Now, your Grandfather, aside from being a family man and then working at the PFE, was he also involved in the community in other ways?

**Dr. Rivera:** Very little. My Grandfather was kind-of-a very traditional kind-of Mexican; you-know, very serious, and [he] didn't get too much involved with the community. But

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he belonged to the union, he belonged to the *Progresistas*, and he belonged to the *Trabajadores Unidos*. And the *Trabajadores Unidos* had their headquarters at the Portland Cement Plant because we had a lot of Mexicans also that came from Mexico to work at the cement plant.

The cement plant started their business in 1890; so we had a whole lot of workers that worked in the cement plant. So we had those 3 businesses: the cement plant, which occupied many laborers; we had the PFE that also occupied many laborers; and we had the citrus industry that also occupied many of our people.

**Frank:** And the fourth area that provided employment was the railroad, itself.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, that's Southern Pacific.

**Frank:** Okay.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, yeah. And then we had the agriculture, you-know, the agriculture which was the Cooley Ranch.

Grandpa Gonzalo Mejia, my mom's Father, came from Aguas Calientes, Mexico, and then he lived in Chamberino, New Mexico, and then from Chamberino in 1921-22 he came to Colton. He was an agricultural worker so he worked for the Cooley Ranch and other areas that raised crops—he worked for them.

**Frank:** You mentioned the circus.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, my grandpa, like I said, [he was a] traditionalist, but he loved the circus. I can't remember the name of the Mexican circus that came to town, but it was from Los Angeles.

**Frank:** The one that I'm familiar with is (inaudible).

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**Dr. Rivera:** Could be that one. But it was a Mexican circus that came to town every year and grandpa would take us to the circus, and that was a lot of fun.

**Frank:** Where did they set up the circus?

**Dr. Rivera:** In South Colton someplace, Frank, but I can't remember. I was a little guy maybe 4 or 5 years old; so I can't remember, but I do remember the circus and my grandpa. The only place that he took us was the circus, no other place. Maybe he took us grocery shopping because he didn't drive, either. He had a little bicycle that he would ride to work or he would ride to the store. On the handlebars of the bicycle he'd carry his little *mochila*, his little bag, and that's where he put his groceries.

Again, I do remember that we lived about 3 or 4 blocks away from the grocery store: the Rodriguez grocery store. He had an account there that he would purchase food, and they would put it on his bill; and then we would go home. But when we went with him, he would buy us soda, Frank.

**Frank:** A special treat...

**Dr. Rivera:** He would buy us soda; and we never had soda so it was a special treat that he would get for us. But he was very traditional, Frank, he was kind-of-a no-nonsense kind-of quiet person.

I remember my cousins, the daughters of my *Tia-Pancha*, Frances... my Grandmother's first born. [Frances] had 4 daughters: Ruth, Mary, Jo, and Margaret. They had given Margaret to my grandparents. So when Ruth, Mary, and Jo would come to the house, they would go over and kiss my Grandfather's hand.

**Frank:** A very traditional greeting for someone that people in the barrio respected; [and] usually reserved for grandparents and *padrinos*.

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**Dr. Rivera:** And I didn't know that, it was completely new for me. So they did that, Frank, and I thought that was, [well,] it was strange for me.

You-know, even though he worked for the railroad he had passes to go to Mexico and passes to go to his hometown. I remember he went once, he went once back to his hometown and that was the last time that he went. And I remember him bringing those colorful bags made out of Hemp; and he brought one for my mom – I do remember that, but he never went back to Mexico.

And grandma was very traditional, *muy chiquita*, she was tiny, maybe 4 feet 11 inches tall, and very Indian features... But she was the opposite of my Grandfather, she loved to sing, she loved to dance.

**Frank:** That's where you get that from.

**Dr. Rivera:** Anyway, grandma loved to give people food and welcome them and give them a coffee. You-know, she was just a wonderful person [who] enjoyed being with people. She was going blind in her latter years, in the late '40s and '50s, [and] she was a diabetic. I remember she would be watering the plants outside, and we lived in the back house, you-know, grandparents lived in the front house, and *la casita detras*, you-know very Mexican tradition, *verdad?*

**Frank:** Probably built with wood from the railroad cars.

**Dr. Rivera:** It was built, you're absolutely right, it was built with wood for the railroad cars.

Anyway, we were next door to them in the back and we would come – and we were tiny, 4, 5, 6, 7 years old; and we would come and visit grandma. She couldn't see well, and [when] she was watering her plants she would get us all wet.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** ...But that was kind-a fun. The other thing [was] she liked to dance, she liked to sing and dance. We would gather at her kitchen and the music, she would be



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listening to the radio, and then the music would play and she liked: *La Marcha de Zacatecas*. And then she would grab us and we would dance with her in the kitchen – so she liked that.

As for entertainment: they had parties, they would buy a calf, and they would invite all their friends and compadres. My Dad and my uncle Nacho had a little garage where they would slaughter a calf, and then they would butcher the calf, and then they would prepare for the party that was going to take place that afternoon.

I remember these big cauldrons Frank, big, huge cauldrons [and] they would put fire under those big cauldrons and they would boil water. They would also get a whole bunch of chickens, and then they would strangle the chickens, twist their necks...

**Frank:** Did they have chickens there at the house?

**Dr. Rivera:** We had chickens at the house but they would buy more chickens for the party; and they would wring their necks, and then they would put them in hot water, and then pluck the feathers after [taking them out of] the hot water. After they pluck the feathers, they would put them on top of the fire so they would burn the little...

**Frank:** Singe the remnants of the feathers.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes. From there they would put them back into another pot of hot water and make *Caldo* out of the chickens. *Caldo* was used to make the *Molé*. So we had the *Molé* and we had the beans, we had the rice, we had the tortillas. Some of the compadres played their guitars...

**Frank:** You had to use some of that *Caldo* for the rice too.

**Dr. Rivera:** Exactly, exactly.

The compadres would play their guitars... and grandpa didn't dance, so there's grandma dancing either by herself or with people in the...

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**Frank:** And your grandma provided the tortillas?

**Dr. Rivera:** The ladies came and they used her kitchen and they made all those things that needed to be made [including] the tortillas.

**Frank:** *De mano?* (By hand?)

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, *tortillas de mano*. There were flour tortillas, some corn tortillas, but most were flour tortillas.

So the Mexican traditions continue with my grandparents.

**Frank:** About how long did your grandparents remain?

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh let's see, grandma passed away in '58; and I had just graduated from high school that year. And then grandpa passed away in '72 or so. So I was lucky that I had grandma during all those years. I do remember grandma [because] she would babysit for us, Frank. Mom and Dad did not allow us to have coffee, but grandma's was an *alcahueta*. Early in the morning she would get up, and her room was next to the kitchen; so we were in her bed, my brother and I, and she would get up early and bring us a little cup of coffee – that was really neat!

**Frank:** Did she make the coffee with more milk than water?

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes, yes, yes... that was fun, those [are] good memories of my grandparents. We were lucky that we live next to them. But again, *la casita detras*, you-know, that was a little old house that didn't have indoor plumbing. We had an outhouse, we were connected to the sewer, but we had an outhouse. And it was just like you said before, it was made out of that wood that was from the boxcars that were taken apart. But I had no idea it was not a good looking house, *esta feyeíta*, but that was home throughout until I was 18 years old.

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**Frank:** Did you have a water tap on the property?

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes, yes, yes, we did.

**Frank:** An outdoor shower?

**Dr. Rivera:** I don't remember the outdoor shower but I know we bathed in a tub.

**Frank:** *Tinas?*

**Dr. Rivera:** We had a small kitchen, and mom would bring in the *tina* on Saturdays.

**Frank:** How did you heat up water?

**Dr. Rivera:** She would heat up the water. We had a little stove an old stove, and she would heat up the water in the old stove, and put it in the *tinas*, and then we would take turns taking a bath – and that was Saturday night.

**Frank:** Now the area where you grew up—you have very fond memories of that barrio?

**Dr. Rivera:** I grew up in *el barrio La Paloma*.

**Frank:** Which is approximately what area?

**Dr. Rivera:** It would be 8<sup>th</sup> Street and La Cadena, it would be the west side of the barrio, and the east part would be up to 12<sup>th</sup> Street. The north part would be 'L' Street all the way to Congress Street. So it covered a good-sized area. And we were lucky because we had the park, and we spent a lot of time at the park. They call it the Veterans Park now. At the park...

**Frank:** What was it called before it was Veteran's Park?

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**Dr. Rivera:** It was the South Colton Park. We used to call it *el parque*, and the kids that lived in the projects in that part of Congress Street, Pine and Congress Street...

**Frank:** That was south of where you lived? South of the park?

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, that was south of where I lived, south of the park along Pine Street, the park bordered Pine Street, and then it went all the way to Congress Street. So we had a lot of kids in that area, and we would put together a baseball team, a softball team, and we'd get together and play some of the kids from 5<sup>th</sup> Street or (inaudible) – they would come down to our park and play there.

**Frank:** Was there a ballpark in that area?

**Dr. Rivera:** The Veterans Park, or the South Colton Park, did have a ballpark, and the ballpark was used extensively. It was built in 1939, the property was given to the City [of Colton] by the Colton Cement Plant, and the Colton Cement Plant provided the property with a stipulation that the people from that area would build the park, would provide the watering system for the trees, and they would also plant the grass, and they would plant the trees. The community came together in 1939 under the direction of Gabe Castorena. Gabe Castorena worked for Parks and Recreation for the City of Colton, and he was instrumental in bringing the community together to build that park. He was also instrumental in forming the Mercuries Baseball Team. The Mercuries used to play on the corner of La Cadena and 'N' Street – it used to be a ballpark – and before that it was the location of the Garfield Elementary School, as you well know. But the Mercuries played there, and Gabe Castorena said, well, why don't we move to the South Colton Park because at South Colton Park there's the diamond, and there's also lighting. So the Mercuries Baseball Team moved to the South Colton Park. And they had two teams: they had the softball team, and then they had the hardball team that played on Sundays.

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**Frank:** Now, your team was able to use that facility?

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes.

**Frank:** It wasn't sandlot baseball then?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, in the barrio on 'O' Street, our street was not paved. We didn't have curbs, gutters, or sidewalks; it was a dirt road. So, yeah, that's where we played, we started playing in the street.

And then, the other fun place was half a block from my house on 'N' Street; that was the main thoroughfare for the city people to use... the dump was located there, the city dump was located two blocks [or] a half a block away from my house.

**Frank:** At the end of 'O' Street?

**Dr. Rivera:** At the end of 'O' Street. So that was fun too because when the dump trucks came, maybe twice, two, or three times in the morning, we saw them come down 'O' Street to go to the dump. Everybody in the neighborhood rallied and followed those trucks, and they waited till they dumped their trash in the dump and then we'd go through. It reminded me of third world countries; but we'd go through it and saw [things] like comic books and some toys and some things that we use at the house. We would collect, you-know, old rags that were dumped so we could use them and sell them to the junkman on Saturdays. So that was a fun place – that was a great place...

And then the river was next to us, Frank. The river provided for us... the Santa Ana River and Lytle Creek came together in that area. It provided a wonderful playground for us to play soldier... we'd use our BB guns and we hunted lizards. It was a great place to play soldier – we could build foxholes and go back and forth and use some of the branches that grew along the river as spears – we would cut them and use them as spears. And then, when I was a boy scout we used to meet as boy scouts at Garfield Elementary School. We would have weenie roasts in the Summer at the river; and we

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would build a bonfire, we'd roast weenies and marshmallows, and play 'pigs-come-over-the-hill' — so that was great fun.

But [when I got a] little older, Frank, I mentioned that we used to go hunting with our BB guns and shoot the lizard's; then we graduated to 22's... We had 22's and then we had a lot of cottontails in that area, lots of cottontails – so we would be hunting cottontails with our 22's. [We would] go all the way to the Santa Ana River, [and] cross the Santa Ana [where] we had the Cooley Ranch. The Cooley Ranch had alfalfa, had watermelon, had melons, and we were able to use that area to hunt for cottontails. And then we'd cross the Cooley Ranch and go up to Jap Hill, which was not too far from the Cooley Ranch. Jap Hill had a canal, and the canal was [an] open canal.

**Frank:** Is that the Gage Canal?

**Dr. Rivera:** I don't know what it was, but it was a canal [where] the water was cool, just cool and wonderful. It ran throughout Grand Terrace, and we would swim there. There used to be a lot of orange groves, a lot of citrus groves. And then, on the other side of the canal we used to have peaches that grew, we had apricots that grew, and of course, the oranges. So we had a wonderful time playing in that area.

**Frank:** You did this with your friends? Can you tell me something about who some of your friends were?

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, my friends were just our neighborhood kids, you-know. We had the Castorenas: Mickey and Eddie were our age, so we used to play with them. Next to the Castorenas we had the Castros: we had Peter, Bobby, Marylou, Terry, and Margaret, and they were also our playmates. After the Castro house we had the dump. Over to the left we had Arturo Colunga, his brother Manuel; and next to them were the Cisneros: we had Julie, Dolores, and Jesse – anyway that was a large family. Next to them on 'N' Street, we had the Compas; Alfonso Compa was about 3, 4, 5 years ahead of us. When he was in high school he was a good athlete, he loved sports. He was on the track team

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at Colton High School, and he thought it'd be a good idea to organize the kids in the neighborhood and teach them everything about track. So here we were, Frank, we would run the 50-yard dash – and [he'd] bring a stop watch—I don't know where he got the stop watch. We used to run the 100-yard dash and we used to run the 300-yard dash. He taught us how to high-jump and he taught us how to broad-jump – and you-know everything about being a track runner. He also said, instead of [running] the oval, he said, let's run around the block and that'll be one lap. So we started on 'N' Street and went over to 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and then [we] went east on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, then made a left turn on 'O' Street, and a left turn on 12<sup>th</sup> Street and we wound up making that one lap, which was around the block. So we did that—it was great fun.

**Frank:** Did that interest you in track and running?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you-know, it did because he was also a good football player; and I remember he talked about Glen Davis, one of the football players. And like I said, the dump was just next to us, so we'd find football shoes... and Alfonso would tell us, well, you-know these are football shoes that I found at the dump, and these belonged to Glen Davis. Well, you-know, we were gullible enough to believe that that was the case, so you-know, Glen Davis was one of our heroes back then. So again, Alfonso taught us [and he would] organize us and we'd play touch-football. So we learned about the different positions and we learned about plays. Anyway, he was a good mentor for us. Also, we played at night Frank [because it was] a safe community. We use to play hide-and-peek at night with all the neighborhood kids; we'd go back and forth from one house to another—one property to another, and had a good time. We also played tops, *los trompos*, and we used to play *canicas*, also marbles; we had our own favorite *churi* that we used to use to be able to get more marbles from the other guys. So those were great, great times. We [also] made our own toys, you-know, the scooters [were] made out of old skates [and we would] take a two-by-four [to make] the base for our foot, and then we'd take a box, a little lug and that would be the face of our scooter, and then we would put handles on them. [We] used to build our own bicycles from parts that we found at the dump. We were able to get the wagons that were discarded at the dump

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and bring them home and repair them... It was a great time with the kids in the neighborhood. And like I said, around the corner from our place – we [had] more kids that formed a baseball team that we needed. [It was a] wonderful time growing up in our neighborhood, Las Palomas.

**Frank:** Now, as you grew older, what kinds of activities did you get into as you entered high school?

**Dr. Rivera:** I played football for Colton High School. I played 'B' football and we had a great team, we only lost one game that year by 1 point, 6 to 7. We missed the punt and Poly High School beat us; [but] we had a great team. I played up to my second year, but after that Frank, the guys were just too big for me. I didn't play junior varsity [and] varsity was out of the question, you-know, the guys were just too big and they hit hard Frank, so I said, I ain't playing with these guys.

But I did play softball, baseball for Colton High School up until the end of my junior year. We had a wonderful team, it was a great team, and that was a good experience too. [I played] a little basketball but I played with the little guys: the 'D' and 'C' squads. [I] didn't play the 'JVs' or the 'B's or the varsity – but I had a great time at Colton High School.

**Frank:** No track?

**Dr. Rivera:** I tried it Frank, but it was not me. I tried cross-country but it was not me. The game was just a little too hard for me.

**Frank:** Where did your interest in *reboté* start?

**Dr. Rivera:** It started there at the Veterans Park when I was a little guy. We had a handball court, we had 2 courts: one was for the pros, you-know, the big guys that were pretty good at handball; and the other handball court was next to it – on the other side of it was for us [who] were beginners—the little guys. So that's where I started handball



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because the guys that played handball very good, and they were kind of our heroes. We wanted to be good handball players [like] them.

And then the other one that gave the impetus to play handball was the priest, Father Valencia, [who] would come down to the handball court and play there, and we'd watch him play and he was also very good. You-know, he'd pick up his... I don't know what they call that black thing that they wear. What would you call it? The dress, it's not a dress...

**Frank:** A cassock?

**Dr. Rivera:** I don't know what it is but he would pick it up and wrap it around his waist and he'd play handball with us.

The other thing is that Father Valencia would bring watermelons to the games with him.

**Frank:** Well, what kind of social activities were you involved in, in high school?

**Dr. Rivera:** The boys forum, I was a member of the boys forum. Mostly, there were sports activities Frank that we participated in. [I] wasn't too interested in some of the other activities because again, getting back to [what we were] talking about, we talked about culture; and we talked grandpa but being very, very Mexican and following the Mexican ways.

And then, remember that saying that was *no lloré – los hombres no lloran* – remember that?

**Frank:** Right.

**Dr. Rivera:** Right. So anyway, we were brought up with that type of mentality. People that dance, *los hombres no bailan*, okay? Or people that sang, *tampoco los hombres no cantan*. People [who] played an instrument or a violin, *menos es, menos no*, guys don't do that.

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**Frank:** Well unless it's part of your family's culture

**Dr. Rivera:** It wasn't part of ours, it wasn't part of mine so we didn't do that; and you-know, my Dad frowned on that, my grandpa frowned on that—so I didn't do those things.

**Frank:** You must have gone dancing?

**Dr. Rivera:** [I] didn't know how to dance Frank; you don't dance because... you go to parties but you stand around, you don't dance. We had the garage parties Frank.

**Frank:** Because you mentioned cruising in out-of-town dances and church *jamaicas*.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, I went to them as a spectator because the church even had those fundraisers, the *jamaicas*. But we were spectators; and when we went out-of-town I went with my neighbor, Eddie Castorena, and he would take me to the dances, I was 15, 16 years old. I just went with Eddie, and Eddie was a good Mambo dancer. He wanted to teach me how to dance Mambo but it wasn't me.

Some of the other things that, you-know, along with playing the violin, you also didn't play tennis because that was not a 'he-man' sport... We didn't play golf either, what was that, it was a gringo sport. So we didn't participate in any of those games.

**Frank:** Getting back to schools, we kind of skipped over junior high.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, junior high school. You-know, Brown vs the Board of Education the national legislation that came to fruition [in] 1953 where [the schools were to be integrated.] We had a junior high school that was all Mexican: Wilson Junior High School. The gringos on the other side of the track had Roosevelt, which was their school. In '53 they moved us to the new junior high that was being built in North Colton on Valencia.

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**Frank:** Colton Junior High.

**Dr. Rivera:** Colton Junior High School [on] Valencia and Laurel. The construction was not completed until 1954. But in the meantime, in '53 we went to school at Roosevelt, and that was tough because there was not enough space. I think we had 3 sessions of people coming in, you-know, 1 group [came in] at 7:30 or 7 o'clock; group 2 was at 8 o'clock; and group 3 was at 8:30. I can't remember what the schedule was, but we had 3 sessions and that was tough—that was tough for everybody...

Many of us were disappointed that we were 8th graders at Wilson and we were not going to be graduating from Wilson Junior High School...

We lived in a self-contained neighborhood, you-know, South Colton was self-contained. The square area of South Colton was about 1.3 miles, and it was a self-contained neighborhood where all of us were Mexican; and then, we had our own businesses; we had our own grocery stores; we had our own church; we had our own schools; we had our own restaurants; we had our own gasoline stations; we had our own *tortilleria* – we were self-sustained. So everybody was the same, but when we moved to North Colton, it was very different because it was a different culture. And then, many of us had never experienced being with gringos at all. You-know, so it was a tremendous...

**Frank:** Culture shock.

**Dr. Rivera:** Complete cultural shock. So anyway, at our school – we were the best students. At our school, at Wilson, we were the top athletes; at our schools we were in the ASB (Associated Student Body), we ran the government; we were the presidents, the vice-presidents, secretaries and treasurers.

[Also,] at our school, if we had a play we were the actors, we were the leading actors. So anyway, we got that experience of being able to be the leaders of our school. Now when we moved to the new school, we were not the leaders; for example, playing flag football at our school, at Wilson School, we were the first stringers. At the new school we were the benchwarmers. And that was true of all sports, basketball and everything, and all the other sports; and even in the classroom we were not the leaders in ASB.

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In our old school we were the top students; in the new school we were regulated to the beginning classes, or the dumb classes, you-know, the remedial classes, we weren't part of the school. So that experience, Frank, I think it was the worst academic school year that I've ever experienced.

Then we moved to the new junior high school, Colton Junior High School in '54, brand new school, beautiful school. But again, there was still that adjustment period where none of us, the kids at Roosevelt and the kids at Wilson hadn't adjusted to that situation, the teachers hadn't adjusted to that situation.

**Frank:** And you only have half a year there at that school.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then the community people hadn't adjusted to that situation. But we knew as people coming from South Colton that the kids from Roosevelt didn't want us there, we knew that the teachers didn't want us there...

**Frank:** Well, a lot of the teachers from Wilson transferred to Colton Junior High, also.

**Dr. Rivera:** But we had teachers from Roosevelt that we were taking classes [with] and we knew that they didn't want us there. We knew that the community didn't want us there. Moms and Dads from that area didn't want us there. So it was a hard academic year Frank, very, very difficult.

**Frank:** Did any of that continue in high school?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, in high school it was a little different because, you-know, you had...

**Frank:** It had always been integrated.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes. Yeah, then we had kids [who] were in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade – and then, the kids [who] were sophomores, juniors, and seniors [were]

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pretty well integrated into the school. So they served as role models [for us by showing how] we would be able to adjust at the high school.

We had kids from Bloomington [who] came to Colton High School; and they also had a tough time coming from Bloomington...

**Frank:** That's right, Bloomington High School hadn't been built at that time. So all the Bloomington kids had to graduate from Colton High School.

**Dr. Rivera:** Right, right. But when trying out for football, you-know, freshman football, that was a wonderful experience because the coaches that we had – their only motivation was to win. And how do you win? Well, you get good ball players; so we were able to play and have a good freshman team.

And then, we integrated not only Colton kids and South Colton kids but also we integrated the Bloomington kids.

I remember Ed Rollins was from Bloomington – a big kid, a fullback, and he was just a great football player.

Anyway, we adjusted well to Colton High School.

**Frank:** Changing subjects: You grew up at a time when two wars affected South Colton, actually it affected the whole country, but what was the impact on South Colton?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well first of all, the kids or the young men that went into World War II were born in the late 20s or the early 30s; and many of them did not graduate from high school. Many of them were grabbed before they were able to graduate from high school. So we had a lot of our kids [who] were males that were born in the 30s [who] participated in World War II as soldiers. They were taken out of the barrio, Frank; they were sent to training camps throughout the country; and at those training camps they got three square meals, they got shoes, they got uniforms, they got clothing, and they also got training in different vocations. So they got [their] training; and after they went through basic training, then they were sent to different bases, not only in the country but also overseas. So when they went overseas, Frank, they met kids from all over the US;

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so they became aware of something other than Colton. They became friends – and they were introduced to not only different people from different parts of our United States, but also different cultures from the different parts of our states: the southern states, the mid-western states, [and] the city states. Then, they went overseas – and when they went overseas [it was a] completely different place. Like Tom Cabrera, one of the soldiers from my neighborhood, around the corner from 'O' Street on 'N' Street, he went to France and he was introduced to the French culture. Some of our guys [who] lived in the projects went to Italy. Lo and behold [when] you don't have recreation where do you go? Well you meet girls. Some of them met those girls and married them and brought them back to South Colton. So that was one of the positive things that happened that it took our boys out of South Colton and introduced them to not only vocational training but also lifestyles, cultures, languages, and everything else.

**Frank:** It opened their eyes.

**Dr. Rivera:** It opened their eyes completely. So when they came back to Colton, Frank, they said, well wait a minute, we live in a segregated community and that's not the way it is – we paid our dues; therefore, we should be able to buy a house in North Colton. So that's when the movement started in 1952 with Ralph Cervantes. Ralph wanted to buy a house near the junior high school, just south of the junior high school, and they said, no you can't buy. Well why not? [Because] you're Mexican, you can't buy the house. But he went to court and he won his case, and he was the first one to buy a house in North Colton.

We interviewed [for this] project, Sal Ayala, and he bought his house in '53, '54 also, he was a Navy person.

From then on Frank, there was a construction boom that happened in the mid '50s, and we had new projects that were built in North Colton along Rancho Blvd.

**Frank:** Rancho Ave.?

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, Rancho Ave.

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**Frank:** Around the junior high really... which was originally the main agricultural area of Colton. And the orange groves were chopped down and turned into houses.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah. That area was known as a terrace area. Anyway, we had a lot of house building, so a lot of our veterans that not only fought in World War II but also in the Korean conflict – because the Korean conflict was in the early '50s, '51, '52; and they served there 2 years—came back in the mid '50s. They were eligible to buy with home loans – to buy housing. Many of them bought houses there on Rancho [Ave.]; and then you had the big housing that was built north of Mill Street – huge housing area; and many of the veterans bought houses in that area. So that started the immigration going from South Colton to North Colton. That was one of the positive areas that happened with World War II.

The other one was: Norton Air Force Base [, which] was built in San Bernardino [and] was established San Bernardino because of the war effort; and that provided a lot of military materials to the different bases that we had overseas.

After the war, many of our veterans, Mexican veterans got jobs at Norton Air Force Base. So that, again, [was] part of the training that they got and also some of the benefits that they needed to be able, as veterans, to get jobs in that area.

In the late 30s and early 40s, Kaiser Steel developed; and Kaiser Steel needed to manufacture steel for the war effort. A lot of jobs opened in that area Frank; so I don't know, maybe war was good. I tell people that the best affirmative action that happened was World War II.

**Frank:** Followed by the Korean conflict.

**Dr. Rivera:** But more so the World War II [was] the best affirmative action that happened because our kids were brought out of the barrio; our kids were provided with training, not only to be soldiers, but vocational training; and also that war kind of, after our kids came back, it gave me them a sense that: I paid my dues, therefore, I should be treated as a full American and not as a Mexican-American. I should be given those

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rights as a veteran to be able to do those things. I should be able to buy a house wherever I want; I should be able to work wherever I want; and I should be able to raise my kids and give my kids a good education because I paid my dues.

So, I tell people that was the best affirmative action program that developed. And people say, well, you-know a lot of people were killed during that war. I said, yeah, but freedom is not free; and therefore, our Mexican community benefited from that war.

**Frank:** Definitely.

Now, you graduated from high school what year?

**Dr. Rivera:** 1958.

**Frank:** And then what did you do after graduation?

**Dr. Rivera:** I went to the community college for 2 years, transferred to Cal State Los Angeles, and I graduated in '62 from Cal State – 4 years after high school graduation.

**Frank:** Now, you were successful academically in high school?

**Dr. Rivera:** That's the irony, that's a different story. When I went to high school... the bad academic experience and also personal experience... [was] when I was placed in remedial classes. The English, the math... [were] some of the remedial classes. And then I had a friend, Omar Sosa. Omar's family was very pro-education, and he had older sisters that went through Colton High School, and they prepared themselves to go to a university. So when Omar was there, Omar was taking college prep courses; and Frank, I didn't know what college prep courses [were]. So I asked Omar, how come you're not taking the same classes that we're taking? [He said,] I want to go to college—so I'm taking college prep courses. [I said,] you're kidding, are they different from what we're taking? [Omar said,] yes, they're very different, these are college prep courses.



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So Frank, I started my college prep in my sophomore year, rather than my freshman year, and I had to make up all those college prep courses during my sophomore, junior, and senior [years]. And that's what happened in my case in getting prepared for college. And as I mentioned before, [I attended] Valley (San Bernardino Valley College), and then Cal State Los Angeles. I graduated from Cal State 4 years after high school in '62.

Then at that time, Frank, the draft was still in effect. They were drafting you into the service; and if your number came up...

**Frank:** That was the Vietnam War?

**Dr. Rivera:** That was prior to Vietnam...

**Frank:** Okay.

**Dr. Rivera:** Vietnam was in the '60s, but this was '58 to '62... you were still eligible for the draft. So if your number came up – you were drafted, but if you were in college you'd get a deferment.

**Frank:** Right, a 2-S deferment.

**Dr. Rivera:** So I got 5 deferments. The 5<sup>th</sup> deferment was me becoming a teacher... I got a deferment and I said I was going to be a teacher; and so I got my teaching credential the 5th time. That was a good racket, Frank, and so I thought well maybe I'll get the master's degree. [I thought I'd] get [another] deferment and get the master's degree in '63. [But] that didn't work Frank. They said no you're not, you're coming into the Army. But on the same day that I got my notice into the Army, I was invited to go in the Peace Corps. So I went into the Peace Corps for a couple of years, and finished my stay in '65. Then after that, I got my master's at Cal State Los Angeles, and I got my doctorate degree in '73 from UCLA (University California, Los Angeles). That was the extent of my educational experience.

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**Frank:** You must have had some jobs while you were in high school? And then after high school, while you were getting your education, you must have had jobs? What kind of work did you do?

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, I picked oranges, I picked berries, and you-know, just little things during the summer. One of my friends, Art Chavez, his mom organized a group of us to go pick berries in Bloomington – so we picked berries in Bloomington during the summer. And then I got a little older: [at] 14 years old my Dad thought it was a good idea for me to go pick oranges; and my uncle Alcadio Alcalaz was an orange picker, and he said, yeah, I'll take you – you can work the bottom of the trees. We were called *ratas*... [because] we could get the oranges from the bottom of the trees. So I did that with my uncle, and he taught me how to cut the fruit from the trees, how to carry a ladder, and you-know, everything, everything that I needed to be a good orange picker, so I was a good orange picker.

The following year I was old enough to be able to do the orange picking by myself. I didn't need my uncle so I brought my little brother with me and he was a *rata*...

After that, my friend Omar, I mentioned Omar Sosa, his Father used to cut hair – so they had the hair clipping instruments; and my Dad used to cut our hair and we had the equipment also. So Omar said, well, if I cut your hair and you cut my hair—we won't charge each other; so we started cutting each other's hair.

Then, the neighborhood kids in my area found out that I cut hair – so I started cutting hair on Saturdays and Sundays, and I [would do] maybe 10 haircuts on weekends, and I'd charge 50 cents. So that was 5 bucks that I would make on weekends; [and] I did that for 4 years that I was in high school...

After graduating from high school, I worked at the gas station, Henry's gas station; I worked there for 4 years.

**Frank:** Where was that?

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**Dr. Rivera:** That was on the corner on La Cadena between La Cadena and 'N' and 'M' Street on the east side of the street...

**Frank:** Is that building still there?

**Dr. Rivera:** It's still there, it's kind-of-an auto repair shop but it's still there. It's still there operating, Henry's no longer there; Henry retired a long time ago.

But I worked there for four years and that paid for my education [at] Valley College (San Bernardino Valley College) [and] at Cal State... The last time I think I left the job in '62 [was] when I was finishing up at Cal State Los Angeles.

Then after that, you-know, Peace Corps, then teaching... The last 40 years I worked at Valley College (San Bernardino Valley College) for a couple years as a counselor. I worked at Cal State [San Bernardino] for about 40 years. My title was Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies and also [a part-time] assistant professor of education. That's the extent of my work experience; and like I said, I just retired 3 years ago.

**Frank:** A pretty important thing happened to you in the Peace Corps.

**Dr. Rivera:** Ah! In the Peace Corps. You-know, Lily and I met at Cal State Los Angeles in '62, and like I said, I went into the Peace Corps. Lily [was] also in the Peace Corps. I went to Colombia, South America and Lily went to Peru, South America. [In '65 when] I was through with my mission, I thought I could transfer to Peru and work there until Lily got through with her mission, but the Peace Corps didn't think it was a good idea. So I said, well let's get married – so we got married in South America on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1965; and then we traveled through Central America [and] Mexico. It was the first time Lily had traveled in Mexico, and she discovered that [Mexico has] a wonderful culture and a wonderful history... We became very, very enlightened and very proud that we had our roots in the Mexican culture.

**Frank:** Outstanding. Ok, tell me a little bit about your community involvement in social issues?

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**Dr. Rivera:** Well you-know, the Peace Corps did a wonderful job in training me to do a lot of volunteer [work]. When Lily and I came back to Colton, we both got teaching positions with the Rialto Unified School District. Also, we thought it'd be a good idea to start a scholarship. So we started a scholarship in Colton and we did that for about 5 years. We collected funds, we had a fundraiser at the Van Aken home, and they had a wonderful place for barbecues, so we started having our fundraisers there. From there, you-know, things just developed... you become involved in different activities in the community. That's what happened to both of us, we became very, very involved with community activities.

I ran for the school board in 1978 and I was elected in 1978, but unfortunately in '81 I got sick. I got the flu, which introduced a virus through [my] body, and the virus paralyzed me from the neck down and I became a quadriplegic. But this still didn't stop me from being active in the community.

[When] I got out of the hospital in 83, I met some educators led by Susan Vargas, and you were one of them, Henry was one of them, and Bill Ellison was one of them. You introduced me to a project called, "Future Leaders."

**Frank:** That you said was the best thing since *frijoles* and *tortillas*.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, that project was the best thing since *tortillas* and *frijoles*. We started in 1984; we saw the high dropout rate in our Latino community was 54%; and then we looked at the college going rate and the college-going rate was only about 15% or 16%. So we thought, let's start a leadership program where we involve 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, and teach them leadership skills but also teach them to be actively involved in their high school and also take the A through G requirements that would prepare them for high school.

We started with 96 kids in 1985, and to date, we just celebrated our 30th anniversary. We've had over 3,800 students that come through our project; and the results of what you guys started was from a survey the kids participated in [via] our program. It was a 4-year service [survey] of the 4-years they've been with us. And we found that 99% of the kids [who] participate in our program graduate from high school, versus the terrible

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dropout rate that we had back when it was 54% for kids [who] don't participate in our project. The college-going rate for our kids [who] participate in our program is 90% versus the college-going rate of maybe 20%, now 25%.

Recently, we just had an election a couple of days ago, 2, 3 days ago this week: we've had two of our kids that we met in 1987, Dr. Raul Ruiz, he was elected to congress.

**Frank:** And the other one was in 1993?

**Dr. Rivera:** The other one is Pete Aguilar in 1993 [who] we met when he was an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, 9<sup>th</sup> grader, and he was also just elected to Congress.

[Therefore] Frank, the project works. You guys brought in a project that was the best thing since *tortillas* and *frijoles* – and it works!

**Frank:** WE brought in the project...

**Dr. Rivera:** And we know what makes it work.

**Frank:** Part of the reason for becoming involved in Future Leaders was the conference that was held here at Cal State San Bernardino to address the problems of the dropout rate. I know our principal at Colton Junior High, Dale Chilson, participated in that. He and you started another project parallel with the beginning of Future Leaders.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was project "Upbeat" – that's right, I forgot. 'Upbeat': university preparation begins with early academic training. We started that—we got kids from the junior high school to come to Cal State (San Bernardino) and we would have little lectures for them and their parents when they came to Cal State (San Bernardino). Frank I think that's still going on, I'm not sure...

**Frank:** It is, it is. I just got a request for some help with a flyer for this year's 'Upbeat' program at Colton Junior High. It's the 31st year for project 'Upbeat'. Now, that also led to another program that you started for elementary school students.

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**Dr. Rivera:** The 4<sup>th</sup> grade project was in '86, I think.

**Frank:** I'm going to college too...

**Dr. Rivera:** "I'm going to college" project – where we would work with the elementary schools' 4<sup>th</sup> graders and we'd have a curriculum for them, a 6, 7 week curriculum where we had a little notebook they were supposed to complete. The notebook had topics like: What is college? How much [does it cost] to go to college? What can I do with a college education? How do I prepare myself for college?

I saw one of the moms at Stater Brothers (supermarket) the other day, and she said: "My son participated in your 'I'm going to college' project, and he's a senior this year at Cal State San Bernardino." So that was a wonderful little project.

**Frank:** A number of project Upbeat and I'm going to college students ended up being in Future Leaders.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes, yes, yes, yes...

**Frank:** Well, you've also been involved in other community groups in various capacities. You've mentioned mental health, the Sheriff's gang task force, and others.

**Dr. Rivera:** The bilingual education, county bilingual education program – [are] just a slew of different activities [that are] not only community-based but also countywide, Frank. So I've been very actively involved in many aspects of...

**Frank:** What are you involved in right?

**Dr. Rivera:** Let's see...

**Frank:** You and Lily are both in LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens)?

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**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, we started a LULAC chapter here locally, and we're involved with LULAC... League of United Latin American Citizens. The idea is to provide social justice through our community, encourage voter registration and also voting, encourage education for our kids, and you-know just look at the community issues that happen in our community...

**Frank:** You're also on the water board aren't you?

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh that's right, I'm on the State Water Board. We have 9 regions in California, and our Santa Ana region is number 8. There's 7 of us on the commission, we are appointed by Governor Brown for that commission. [Former] Governor Gray Davis also appointed me to another commission, and that was the Disability Commission, State Committee for our area.

It hasn't ever stopped Frank, it's always been one activity after another. I was contacted by one of our students from Colton Junior High School, Ted Housely; Ted mentioned that he's writing a book on little league baseball in Colton. He interviewed me and, you-know, we got involved with that project too.

**Frank:** Well as you've lived your life, there have been people who have influenced you greatly.

**Dr. Rivera:** I think, first of all, my mom and Dad, Ruperto and Jennie, taught my brothers Ray, Danny and me work ethics. You-know, the work ethic that you prepare to do whatever you're going to do and you do it until you finish whatever project you're assigned.

**Frank:** Your core values?

**Dr. Rivera:** My core values and also the fact that you're always prepared; like [my Dad] said, you always keep your tools clean: your shovel, your rake, your pick, and whatever

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you use you always keep it clean. Before you leave a job you get it clean and get it ready for the next day.

So mom and Dad were very instrumental in my core values, as you mentioned, the work ethic.

Some of the other mentors that I had was Ray Abril, who was my Boy Scout Master and he also taught us those Boy Scout values... the pledges. I still remember them: [be] clean, thrifty, and kind... be prepared.

**Frank:** That's Ray Abril, Sr.?

**Dr. Rivera:** That's Ray Abril, Sr. who was a Scout Master; and also very influential because he would open up his house—his backyard for us to be able to play basketball in the backyard, also use [his] weights... So we called that Willie's Muscle Gym (named after our friend, Willie Colunga).

The other is Henry Portillo who owned the gas station and, again, the honesty in providing good service and being friendly to your customers and providing the best service you could at the gas station.

Another mentor was Ernie Garcia – he's been my mentor for almost 60 years now. I met him just after high school, and he would always stop by the gas station and ask: Are you in college? Are you doing your homework? Are you getting good grades?

The other mentors that I had were Don José Vázquez. Don José Vázquez worked at the gas station with me. He was an older guy, an older gentleman; he was in his 80s when I met him; and he was retired [when] he opened up the gas station and provided services [during] the morning. [He was a] very practical person...

At that point, I had a 50 Chevy, and I would take some time while I was at the gas station, when we were not busy, and I would be working on my car and I would be waxing and polishing it there. [While I was working on my car] Don José would come up to me and say: *Tomasito, que estas haciendo con es se carro? A sovi, sovi, sovi* – massaging and massaging... *y de lamina no pasa* – you-know, it doesn't go past the middle. So what are you doing wasting your time massaging that piece of metal... don't waste your time with that.



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The other thing he would say, *Tomasito*, you have to take care of your partner because some of your friends that you would meet at the bars and you would buy a round for them – they will not be around when you need them, but your wife will be there when you need her. She'll take care of you... so you cannot mistreat your wife. Your friends are not your friends, they're only your friends when you're buying drinks for them.

The other mentor that I had was Rex Dye. I met Rex at Cal State Los Angeles, and Rex showed me how to be a student. Here I was at Cal State Los Angeles, I wanted to come home; I didn't have any friends there. Anyway, he talked me into getting involved in clubs at the campus; he taught me the social graces, you-know, the table setting; he taught me how to identify classical music, and being comfortable with that. He also would take me to different functions in the city and we'd participate in some of those functions. He taught me to be comfortable in those functions. He wanted to teach me how to drink Martinis Frank, but I never got the taste for Martinis... I never acquired the taste...

Then, my other mentor was Dr. Kenton Monroe; he hired me here at Cal State San Bernardino. He was just a terrific administrator, and we spent every day at 7a.m. for at least a year – he would teach me how to function at the University. He would teach me what relations needed to be developed at the university to be successful. He would teach me the governance of being an administrator. He would teach me how to interview and hire people. So I had a wonderful time with him. He [was] also very supportive. He was number two on campus, you-know, we had the president then we had him, and he would support whatever programs we had to service underrepresented students. He made sure those programs were not placed out in right field. [Instead of the programs being] recognized [as a] stepchild program, he would say: No, they're part of our unit, and Rivera has the same status as not only our administrator of student services, [along with] the same title and position, but he's also part of the faculty. And being part of the faculty – you participate in faculty committees where your decisions and policies are made. He said, Rivera, I will not give you tenure unless you get your terminal degree, which was a doctorate. I was pretty close, I only had a few months to go; and he said, to work at the University you have to have the same credentials as the faculty has, and everybody else that works here. Otherwise, you're not part of the team.

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So he made sure that I got that doctorate, and was placed in positions of policymaking where it made life easier for me, my department, and everybody else that was working with me.

**Frank:** Just briefly, can you go back to Esther Armenta and Estella Castorena?

**Dr. Rivera:** Esther Armenta was my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. [She was a] tremendous and wonderful influence...

**Frank:** That was at Garfield?

**Dr. Rivera:** That was at Garfield, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and I had never had a Mexican-American teacher. When I saw her I said, I'll be darned – I didn't know that Mexicans could be teachers.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** She was a wonderful, wonderful role model for me. I [felt] very, very good in her class. It was a wonderful year...

Estella Castorena was my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. And again, [a] great teacher, [a] creative teacher, [a] smart teacher, [and] a pretty teacher – and a Mexican-American. I said I'll be darned, this is wonderful.

[Both teachers] were wonderful role models for me Frank, and I think that's why I wanted to be a teacher; and maybe because of Ernie Garcia I wanted to be a teacher. [Anyway,] they were good role models for me.

**Frank:** You were very fortunate.

**Dr. Rivera:** I was fortunate.

**Frank:** Now, getting down to the present. We're working on the oral project, can you tell me a little bit about how that came about?

**Dr. Rivera:** It was your fault.

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(Laughter)

**Frank:** Blame it on me.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, it was your fault, you and Henry for years and years you've been talking about doing a history of South Colton—and we just didn't have time. You were working and you were busy, and I was working and I was busy.

**Frank:** ...And we had Future Leaders.

**Dr. Rivera:** We had Future Leaders – so we didn't have time; but you talked about it for many years. Then, what was it? A year ago, a little over a year ago, you and I, and Henry got together in my office here at Cal State, and we said: let's start, let's get started... We got together with the Dean of the [Pfau] Library, Mr. Cesar Caballero, and he thought it was a wonderful idea. So we started a year ago, and so far we've interviewed 35 people; and Frank, it's been the best experience for me in learning about the history of South Colton and growing up in South Colton.

We're still working on it and we will continue working it. It's been a wonderful history lesson and also very insightful in terms of what our people, not only parents and grandparents, but also our neighbors – what they went through in living in a segregated community and not being able to participate in [anything] past the railroad tracks in the larger communities.

**Frank:** As the community evolved into a more integrated community.

**Dr. Rivera:** I think we will continue with the project; like I said, I don't know how long we will continue with the project – but it's been a great project.

**Frank:** And it's obvious from the glee that you've taken in interviewing people that you're enjoying yourself.

**Dr. Rivera:** Have fun with it.

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(Laughter)

**Frank:** Well, is there anything else that you would like to bring up or mention?

**Dr. Rivera:** I mentioned Ted Housely a few minutes ago, Ted contacted me [about] interviewing me a couple of days ago, and that brought to light a different appreciation of living Colton.

In '52 we started the little league in Colton; the Lions Club started a little league in Colton...

**Frank:** And you were part of that?

**Dr. Rivera:** There were 4 teams that were established... and I played for one of the teams, I played for the Indians. We had the Cubs, we had the Giants, and I can't remember the last team but, Ted said we started the team in '52, and when [we] started the team, we had a lot of kids from South Colton [who] participated. I said, no Ted, we only had maybe 6, 7 or 8 that participated in the 4 teams; and there were 13 of us on each team. So you multiply 13 [times] 4, and that's what? About [52] people [who] participated in those teams. And there were maybe 6 or 7 of us from South Colton that participated – because [if] you look at the picture of the Indians, there's only 2 of us: myself and Joe Amador.

But because of our grandparents and our parents influence, and being afraid of crossing the railroad tracks in North Colton, we didn't know what North Colton was about. We only knew of the stories that are grandparents would tell us – that you're not wanted there, and you're not supposed to be past the railroad tracks. They would tell us about the policeman – if they caught you in downtown Colton they would say: Okay Mexicans, you go back to where you belong. That's what the attitude was. But little league opened the door for us to be able to participate in an activity that you would try-out on a Saturday, and then you were assigned to a team, and that team consisted of 13 different ballplayers. In developing teams, Frank, we did not look at skin color, or that you were from South Colton. [We were asked:] Can you play second base? Are you

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good enough to play second base? Are you good enough to compete with everybody else? And we were. Which gave us or instilled in us self-confidence, and knowing that you could compete with everybody else including the gringo's on your team.

So that was very, very exhilarating for me that I was part of that team; I was a valuable player on that team; and people wanted me to play with them. That was one of the experiences that I had in team building.

The other [experience] was [when] you were introduced to a foreign country, a foreign part of your town that you had never been involved with... The people that started the little league were the movers and shakers of Colton. You-know, the mayors, the bankers, owners of businesses, and the managers of the cement plant, and all those people. And you were part of that development...

The other thing, Frank, was that the ball players on my team became good friends. We became very, very good friends; for example, we had Kenny Hubs who played shortstop for us, and I was on his team. You-know, he was one of the great ballplayers that we have [who] came from Colton.

Our catcher was Mike Briggs, and I still keep in contact with Mike Briggs. [During] that year we were playing ball with him (Mike) invited us to his home in North Colton, and he had a nice new house, Frank, you-know, a living room, a kitchen, and bedrooms, and everything else. [Meanwhile,] I had a very poor house behind my grandparents – no comparison. But he invited us to a slumber party – [and] Frank, I didn't know what a slumber party was—I had no idea what a summer party was. [Anyway,] we went to the slumber party and we had dinner and breakfast, and we had a wonderful time in the backyard. Mike took us to his church, my brother and I, and it was a Pentecostal church; so, you-know, we were Catholic – we didn't know what the church was... Anyway, we went to the church and I guess [that was our] introduction to that part of town.

I reciprocated [by inviting] Mike and his little brother, Jerry, to come and have a slumber party at my house. [Of course, at] my house, you-know, [we had] dirt roads, and it was a lot different.

**Frank:** It was as much of an eye-opener for them as it was for you.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Anyway, Mike spent the night with us, and we went through [some of our] different activities that we do during the day.

Years later, maybe 5 or 10 years ago, Mike said: You-know Tom, [when] we had that slumber party at your house with me and my brother, Jerry, man was it hot at your house!

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Again, Frank, I think those were wonderful experiences for me that I was able to walk 13 blocks to the ball-field, make friends, and play, and have a wonderful time.

When we were in junior high school... those were some of the friends that I had...

In high school, we played ball together – we had a great baseball team! Because we played the same team when we were little leaguers... through the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades – a good baseball team.

I think that was one of the best things that happened to me when I was 12 years old, when little league came into my life and... got me out of the barrio and exposed me to a different culture, and to different people. There was a wonderful... cornerstone that was late in my life that added to my foundation.

So if I were to say that one of the best things that happened in Colton, I think the little league coming to us in '52 was one of the best things.

**Frank:** Well, that pretty much raps it up.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well thank you, thank you for our interview this afternoon...it worked out very well.

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