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## Joe "Jose" Hernandez and David Gasca

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**Oral History Project of Colton, CA – 06/19/14**

**Dr. Rivera:** Good morning, I'm Dr. Tom Rivera, and this morning, in continuation with our oral history of South Colton, we have two guests. We have Mr. Joe "Jose" Hernandez, who is a lifelong resident of Colton, born and raised in Colton. Is that correct, you were born and raised in Colton?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay, very good. And we have Mr. David Gasca, who was also born and raised in Colton.

I want to thank you very much for being with us this morning, especially on a beautiful day like today.

We're at the Pfau Library at Cal State University San Bernardino; it is about 9:15 a.m. on June the 19<sup>th</sup>.

So why don't we get started: first of all, I know that both of you are military veterans.

Joe you were in World War II, and David you're a veteran of the Korean Conflict.

Why don't we start with you Joe: you mentioned that you were at Colton High School, and that you were a junior, and somehow an opportunity came to you where you could train to be an airplane mechanic at Norton. Can you tell us about that?

**Mr. Hernandez:** I didn't like to go to school too much, so I spent about 2 years in high school. They were just opening the Army Air Force Base in San Bernardino, [which later became Norton]. They were trying to get some more mechanics to get them [prepared] because the war was just starting and they didn't know how long [the war] was going to last. So I went over and applied for the schooling they were giving, and they picked me up and I went to school [to be] an aircraft mechanic.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you were there for [how long] after they [selected] you? [Because] you went to Valley College for some more training.

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**Mr. Hernandez:** Part of their training [program] was at Valley College.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then after Valley College you went back to Norton?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Dr. Rivera:** What year was that, Joe?

**Mr. Hernandez:** That was in 1943, I believe.

**Dr. Rivera:** You must have been about 16 or 17 years old?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, 15, 16.

**Dr. Rivera:** After a couple of years you joined the Navy?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah I joined the Navy.

**Dr. Rivera:** How long were you in the Navy?

**Mr. Hernandez:** I was in the Navy from 1944 to 1952.

**Dr. Rivera:** After that, you came out of the Navy as a veteran, and you went back to Norton?

**Mr. Hernandez:** They had a regulation that whatever job you left from the service, they had to pick you up again.

**Dr. Rivera:** That's what happened in your case. But you decided you didn't like that so you went back in the Navy, again?

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**Mr. Hernandez:** Oh yeah, well, [I worked for Norton] between 1944 and 46. [During that time,] I decided this is getting boring, so I joined the Navy, again. I got out of the Navy in 1952.

**Dr. Rivera:** You came back to Norton, again... They couldn't get rid of you.  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** How many years were you at Norton?

**Mr. Hernandez:** A total of 39 years... They included my service time into my seniority because [I worked at Norton, which] was a federal job. So they added my military time and my work as a civilian at Norton.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was a good deal. Also from Norton, you were trained to [work on the weaponry equipment and missiles, and perform] all those modern activities. [Norton] sent you to school to also train on how to repair or upkeep some of those missiles in different bases throughout the country.

**Mr. Hernandez:** That's right, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you like that?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, it was pretty good and interesting, and scary at times.  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Scary? What do you mean scary?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Well, you-know, when you work on these silos – the missile sits in the center of the silo. They've got platforms that sit at different levels... and the ones I hated, or the ones I didn't like to well were the ones that came from the bottom up;

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because you don't know [whether or not they will fall down, and if they did] well that would be the end of you.

(Laughter)

**Mr. Hernandez:** That was kind of scary. Some of those missiles, like the Titan 1 or the Titan II, they were loaded all the time. You could put your ear to the missile and you could hear the little bit of bubbling, you-know. They were loaded with atomic bomb warheads...

**Mr. Gasca:** 10-megaton.

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah. It was a risky business. You had to go into what they called a S.C.A.P.E. (Self-Contained Atmospheric Protective Ensemble) Suit in case they had a leak or something, or you smelled some of those fumes, it would kill you, you-know. So what they did was train you – they'd give you about 15 or 20 minutes of air in the S.C.A.P.E. Suit – and you had to get out of there quick – [before the air became contaminated...].

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned that you didn't graduate from high school, but you got your diploma. Can you show us your diploma that you recently got?

Apparently, the County of San Bernardino Schools provided diplomas for veterans of World War II that did not complete high school – and you got this from the County of San Bernardino. I cannot see a date here, but it was done just recently because Gary Thomas is still the County Superintendent of schools...

Can you hold it up and show it to the camera? (He holds up his high school diploma and the camera zooms in).

Congratulations! That is a wonderful thing that was awarded to you just recently.

And David, you were you were a Korean veteran – when did you join the service?

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**Mr. Gasca:** In July 1951. I had been out of school; and I got a notice from the selective board, at that time, I think it was. [They took me and others in a bus to L.A. (Los Angeles) for a physical]. I passed the physical, and I was told that I would be notified that I'd go into the Army.

I went home and said to myself: I don't want to go into the Army; so, I went to the Air Force recruiter to [enlist in the Air Force]. I left in July to San Antonio, Texas for basic training at Lackland Air Force Base. From there I was classified as an automotive mechanic because in high school I had taken a trade [such as] automotive sheet metal machine stuff; and so, I had a little background.

They sent us to a tech school in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, it was affiliated with Oklahoma A&M. We completed [the trade program], and it was kind of simple for me because I had already had the basics.

[From the tech school] I was stationed in Denver, Colorado at the Lowry Air Force Base; and I was there a year [when] I started working on the fire engines in fire trucks for the firemen. I had to keep up/maintain the equipment...

[But] let me retract back a little bit: in my last year of high school, I had to fill in a class so I took typing. That's where all the girls were.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** You were not a dummy...

(Laughter)

**Mr. Gasca:** Anyway, going back to Denver, I was working on a fire engine [when] some sergeant came over and said: Do you know how to type? I said, a little bit, and I guess he looked at my records. He said: We need you over in the office; so I [ended up] scheduling vehicles to come in for maintenance, and what-have-you. I was there exactly a year, and then I was shipped overseas to Casablanca, North Africa, Morocco. While there I started working on vehicles again because that was what they call my MOS (Military Occupational Specialty).

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Two weeks down the line, once again, a fella came over and asked me if I knew how to type? And I said, yeah. So again, they put me in the office to start scheduling vehicles for maintenance, after so many miles, they needed a tune-up, change tires, whatever. I was there for a year and a half – during that time I took leave and went to Spain, as a tourist. I came back 18 months later, and I was stationed at March Air Force Base in Riverside. Again, I was put into the automotive shop, and again, for my last year of typing.

**Dr. Rivera:** It really has paid off...

(Laughter)

**Mr. Gasca:** It sure did; I didn't have to get dirty or full of grease...

**Dr. Rivera:** Not only that but you got all the girls and you got all the cushy jobs overseas...

**Mr. Gasca:** I had to do the [outside] contracts for the jobs because the base couldn't do automotive. The JP4 tankers, the buses, the cars, the trucks, I had to have the general's car painted – but I had to contract [this work] outside the base.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you did that at March Field for how many years, David?

**Mr. Gasca:** I was there about a year and then I got discharged.

**Dr. Rivera:** What year was that when you got discharged?

**Mr. Gasca:** 1955.

**Dr. Rivera:** In 1955 did you come back to Colton?

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**Mr. Gasca:** I came back to Colton and started looking for a job. In South Colton there was a pipe... *Las Pipas* they used to call it. Anyway, I went over there to get a job – I'm a veteran and I want a job. The guy said: Come back tomorrow we got some weeds we want you to cut... I went home and I said, man, this is not it.

Meanwhile, I had put in an application at Norton and I got a job over there. I started in what they called a box factory; they used to make boxes and crates for shipping aircraft parts. I didn't stay there too long.

[Later, I found out there] was an opening in sheet metal; and they sent me to schooling for maybe a couple of weeks... I was working on the Globemaster, I think it was. [It's a huge cargo/transport aircraft] that had the big door in the front.

**Dr. Rivera & Mr. Hernandez:** Oh-yeah!

**Mr. Gasca:** I worked on that for a while.

Basically, I was more of an engine person, so [I found out about an opening] in jet engines. I went to work on jet engines, the j-78, I think, the j-57, and the Pratt & Whitney engines.

After that, I think we worked together on a couple of missiles (He points at Mr. Hernandez). The first missile that was there was a Thor, and that was basically used in England. Then the Atlas 1 and the Atlas II came into effect; and when I got in, the Titan 1 and the Titan II, which are the one's Joe was talking about earlier.

[Norton] sent me to school at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas, and there they taught us everything about missiles, except the bomb. I remember they put us in a room, they put their pencils down and just listened. I remember there were five safety devices before the bomb would ignite.

We came back to Norton and we covered the southwest... We were in our teams, and we covered Rapid City, South Dakota, Ellsworth Air Force Base, Cheyenne, Vandenberg, Arizona, Tucson, and Denver. Most of the time I spent was in South Dakota and Tucson, and we worked in the silos underneath. Joe reminded me of what he said earlier about the S.C.A.P.E. Suits... None of the guys wanted to get into them

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– so I said I'll get into it. It was like a space suit with a bubble and you had a pack in the back with oxygen so you could breath. All these valves were underneath the silo and they were pressurized, and you couldn't see or smell the fuel. If it came across you, they showed us pictures where your arms would just be sawed off. If you got the fluid on you it would affect your skin – so you had to where this S.C.A.P.E. Suit. So we'd go down the levels and they had these platforms that came down; the missiles were located within the platforms with doors, and you had to work inside of them to change pumps or electrical...

**Dr. Rivera:** So just the upkeep of the equipment?

**Mr. Gasca:** To maintain it and have it ready; and it was ready. Sometimes we would take a break and sit on the platform and lean against that bomb/missile. If that thing ever went off we'd be ashes.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Let me shift a little bit and just say, I had no idea that both of you were not only veterans: in World War II and Korea, but also, you had a wonderful opportunity to continue providing service to our country by working at Norton Air Force Base. Both of you had great opportunities, not only in the military, but also in job opportunities by working on the military base at Norton.

And getting back to Colton, David, you were heavily involved—much involved in the veteran's organization. You were part of the Fidel Hernandez Post in South Colton, you were also part of the American GI forum in San Diego; and now, you're very active, and have been for almost 40 years, with the American Legion Post 155 in Colton.

Joe, your brother, Fidel, was a bombardier; he was a turret gunner with the B-17s that flew from France to Germany. In one of the missions of November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, they suffered some plane damage, they did not make it to their base, and they were lost at sea. Your brother was one of the 11 Airmen that was lost at sea; so, the citizens of

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Colton and the veterans that came back from World War II decided to start the Fidel Hernandez Post in South Colton.

David, do you remember the number of that post?

**Mr. Gasca:** I think it was 754...

**Dr. Rivera:** Because we've had 26 sessions here with our oral history project and we could never figure out who the post was named after – so now we know it was your older brother who the post was named after.

Can either of you tell me who was involved in organizing the post?

**Mr. Gasca:** The Oliva brothers: Angel, Pasqual, Quito... my uncle Eddie Colunga was there... Nacho Cabrera was active...

**Dr. Rivera:** Where was the post located?

**Mr. Gasca:** It was located across from the Sombrero and the Caldera Building. It had 2 stories and we held our meetings upstairs. Downstairs was the tortilleria business... [It was owned by Caldera.]

**Dr. Rivera:** Mr. Juan Caldera?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yes, the older Juan Caldera, and there was another Caldera...

**Dr. Rivera:** They owned the building that was across the street from El Sombrero on 7<sup>th</sup> Street?

**Mr. Gasca:** Right, on 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay, and the American Legion, the Fidel Hernandez Post was on the second floor?

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**Mr. Gasca:** Correct.

**Dr. Rivera:** How long did that organization last? Do you remember?

**Mr. Gasca:** I don't recall how long.

**Mr. Hernandez:** I don't know, but I noticed they were getting less and less people, less veterans [participated] that's why it faded away.

**Mr. Gasca:** Members were dying away, and nobody was coming in—so it folded up because of lack of participation.

There was another post in Colton that was still going on.

**Dr. Rivera:** Before I talk about the other post, we have a picture of Fidel here. Joe, would you mind holding it up for the camera? (Joe holds the picture up as the video camera zooms in. Dr. Rivera mentions to Frank Acosta, the videographer, that he wants this picture scanned and added to the Colton oral history pictorial archive/collection).

Thank you both for the information about the Fidel Hernandez Post.

**Mr. Hernandez:** I brought this picture because I wanted to put a face on the subject.

**Dr. Rivera:** I'm glad you did...

David, you mentioned the other American Legion that you belong to, also.

**Mr. Gasca:** [It was post] 155.

**Dr. Rivera:** And when you first went to the American Legion Post, what happened? What was the reception like?

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**Mr. Gasca:** Well in those days, it was kind of cold...

**Dr. Rivera:** What year was that?

**Mr. Gasca:** I showed up there around 1955, after I got out [of the military]. It was very segregated, and you didn't feel comfortable in there. The first Hispanic who came in there was Tony Lemos. As a matter of fact, we just buried him yesterday.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tony Lemos was the first member of that post?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, Hispanic. He was the first commander also, and he went all through the chairs. He was originally from Casablanca, and he moved to Colton and lived there many years. Slowly, we started getting in there – and now, I would say it's a good 95-97 percent Hispanic.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many members do you have?

**Mr. Gasca:** Approximately, 200 – give or take.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay. And 95% of them are Mexican-American and Latinos?

**Mr. Gasca:** Right.

We have what they call "Boys State", which is one of the programs that we do. [It's one of the scholarship programs we provide]. We sent 2 boys to Sacramento to learn politics, and they stayed there at... Cal State University Sacramento... President Clinton was a [member] of "Boys State" from his state. Anyway, they learn about politics, and when they come back they're sophomores... So we foot all that money—and it takes money.

We have golf tournaments, we have scholarships, and we support the local little leagues, and-what-have-you.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Very good, so you're active and involved in the community. You're giving back to the community.

**Mr. Gasca:** Absolutely!

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, getting back to the Fidel Hernandez Post, were the members involved? Because, again, it was mostly South Colton participation. Were the members that were in the Fidel Hernandez Post actively involved with the Congress of Community Clubs? Or, the Progresistas? Or, Las Fiestas Patrias?

**Mr. Gasca:** Oh-yeah! There was Manuel Padilla who wasn't an American Legion member, but he originated the Congress of Community Clubs, I think. So that our clubs wouldn't conflict with the events, we met with a representative from each club and we would [inform them of] our events, our projects, whatever – so it was a good move.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it was a coordinating type of activity?

**Mr. Gasca:** Right, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** And that was in the 50s?

**Mr. Gasca:** Umm—yes, yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** Out of that came, not only the coordination, but also the partnership in putting the Fiestas Patrias together?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yes, the Fiestas Patrias; and on the veteran side: Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and the Christmas Parade. We had dignitaries come in from

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Washington, our local representatives, and our city representatives – and we still do to this date.

On Flag Day, I go to elementary schools and I [teach the students how to] fold the flag, and I give a little talk about what the Flag stands for and what it does. [I tell them] you don't worship it, you honor it. I get a couple of students to fold [the Flag] so they learn how to fold it in the proper way...

Some people think that we're just in the canteen, but we do a service...

**Dr. Rivera:** A lot of public service.

Again, both of you were military people and participated as personnel in the military service: Navy and Air Force.

You were in, David, [the military] 4 years?

**Mr. Gasca:** 4 years military.

**Dr. Rivera:** And, Joe, you were there 6 years?

**Mr. Hernandez:** A little over 6 years. I had a weird [situation], I reenlisted for 4 years and President Truman gave me an extra year. They called it the Truman years.

(Laughter)

I was supposed to get out and they said, no you're not, you're gonna stay another year.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Anyway, being in the military those many years, did it influence your life? How did it affect your life? Did it make you more appreciative of this country? Or, did it make you [feel] more [like] you belonged here because you've paid your dues? [Because you are] a citizen, [did you feel] privileged to everything that this country has to offer? Or, did it give you more confidence to face situations in the community? How did the military service affect you?

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**Mr. Hernandez:** Well, it did affect me quite a bit—for the better. It made me see the way the rest of the world lived, and that influenced me too, in a way. The way I went about doing things... Yeah, I learned quite a bit in the service and I wouldn't change it for anything in the world – I'd do it again if I could.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it was a positive experience for you, Joe.  
How about you David?

**Mr. Gasca:** Well I think, basically, first of all, [the military] showed you discipline, it showed you [to have] pride in your country and in yourself. It showed you to take care of yourself, and to be a team member. I wish every young man would serve, at least a year, because I don't think we would have as many people in prisons. But anyway, it made you proud.

I remember being in Spain at a movie, and when I saw the [American] flag it brought tears my eyes.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it affected you and made you feel that you were a part of this country?

**Mr. Gasca:** Absolutely!

**Dr. Rivera:** You know that sense of pride, that sense of belonging, that sense of [knowing] that you've paid your dues – that both of you got, how did that affect the community of South Colton? Because we had a lot of young people from South Colton that participated in World War II. For example, I read someplace in one of those big books that you have there, David... I read that the number of people from South Colton, the young people from South Colton that fought and participated in World War II was 487 young Mexican-American men, and 3 females. So that was almost 500, all together.

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My question is: you multiply yourselves almost 500 times, and you have that same feeling of pride and belonging – did that make a difference in our community of South Colton? Everybody coming back and feeling that way...

**Mr. Gasca:** I think it gave me more energy, more inner power, I would say, to participate.

There were human beings in combat that got shot, got killed, that were prisoners of war (POWs); and when you came back [home], you should be equal to anybody else. There was a lot of discrimination at that time because of the war. [But when] you come back, you have [this feeling] that you are just as good. Therefore, you participate or try to look for evidence of what you have coming to you.

**Dr. Rivera:** You got involved with the veterans organizations, and you got involved with other community organizations, which were geared towards helping people and also helping the community, in general.

Were there any memorials set up for our Mexican-American kids who participated in the war? Did we have any memorials in South Colton, like that fountain that's on the corner of 'O' Street and La Cadena?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, in Fleming Park there's a plaque there with some Hispanic names. In South Colton on 7<sup>th</sup> and 'N' Street there's a couple of them there, and also the South Colton Park is Veteran's Park.

**Dr. Rivera:** That's right. That's on Pine and 'O' Street.

**Mr. Gasca:** The cement company donated that big rock and there's a plaque embedded in there.

**Dr. Rivera:** So our community was proud of you guys serving in the military that they provided the memorials or recognition to our veterans.

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**Mr. Gasca:** Even today, there's banners that fly over the city of military people that had served. So that tells you something about the city that honors veterans and respects them.

**Dr. Rivera:** Also, Joe, you mentioned that you'd do it again if you had to do it over. For example, for participating in the military, did it affect the job opportunities for people who served in the military? For example, you came back and you were able to get your job because you left your job and you were given the job back. In your case, David, were ever given any points on the Civil Service Examination?

**Mr. Gasca:** I believe it was 5 points that you received when you applied for it because you were a veteran...

**Dr. Rivera:** So there was that advantage of applying for jobs afterwards?

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, it's something that was embedded there that you deserved – it was recognized.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about, getting back to the community, you-know, you started working with the organizations, the VFW's. As you know, Colton was chartered in 1857, and in 1948 we finally had our first councilman... Johnny Martinez Perez, who was the first councilman of Colton, and that was 54 years later. Now, you coming back as military people, were you actively involved, individually? Because you couldn't do it as an organization because that was against (inaudible) non-profit organizations. Did you as individuals help [folks like] Pete Luque [or] Pasqual Oliva get elected to office? Did you participate in activities where we would [have helped elect] representatives to City Council? Did you have any participation in the political process?

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**Mr. Gasca:** I can't say [I was]. I remember attending some meetings but I was young and not politically savvy... To me, meetings are formalities, you have meetings prior to the meetings...

**Dr. Rivera:** [At least] there was an awareness of helping people get into office like: Pete Luque or Pasqual Oliva, or other folks who were running for office in the City Council of Colton.

Let me ask you about education: Did you take advantage of the education that was offered by being a veteran?

**Mr. Hernandez:** I didn't, but I regret it now...

**Dr. Rivera:** It was available to you.

**Mr. Hernandez:** The reason I didn't was because I already had a job and I didn't need [anything more]...

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, I felt the same way. I went to Valley College and I just took some social studies, but I had a job and that came first, you-know. You have a family, children, you have a home and a car...

**Dr. Rivera:** Those things that you need to live...

**Mr. Gasca:** When we used to work out of town, we used to get a per diem. (Looking at Joe, he asks,) Do you recall? It was \$16.00 a day; that \$16.00 was not even wages an hour...

**Dr. Rivera:** But that was a lot of money back then.

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**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, we had our wages plus our per diem. Needless to say, you had a better car, you had a better life.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you know many of the guys that took advantage of the G.I. bill?

**Mr. Gasca:** I think Nacho's brother did.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tom Cabrera did; he went to Woodbury Accounting School in Los Angeles.

**Mr. Gasca:** Off-hand I can't right now think of anyone.

**Dr. Rivera:** When I was a kid over at Valley College back in the 70s – that was late, we still had many veterans that were enrolled either full-time or half time, and they would pick up their G.I benefits every month.

**Mr. Gasca:** I did buy a house with [with my veteran's benefits].

**Dr. Rivera:** You're an inquisitive guy because my next question was on housing.  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** The housing back in Colton, as you know, it was a segregated community. North Colton [and South Colton were separated by the railroad tracks].

2 veterans: one that was in the Navy, Sal Ayala; and the other one, I think, was in the Army, Ralph Cervantes – they wanted to buy a house in North Colton, but the situation that we had back then was that – no you cannot buy a house in North Colton. But Ralph went to court and he won his case; so he was one of the first people that bought a house in North Colton.

Sal had the same problem, I think he was 53-54...

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When you came back from the service, David, you mentioned that those guys laid the groundwork for you; and when you bought the house in North Colton, you didn't have any trouble.

**Mr. Gasca:** No, well, the house I bought was in Utah when I was transferred over there.

**Dr. Rivera:** But when you bought your house in Colton.

**Mr. Gasca:** No there was no problem.

Angel Oliva was another one who wanted to buy [a house] on the other side and he couldn't buy; so he went to Loma Linda and bought a house there in the middle of the orange groves. Now, there's houses all over the place – the orange groves are gone. Angel said, to heck with them I'll go someplace else.

**Dr. Rivera:** So there was that situation where you couldn't buy a house in North Colton.

**Mr. Gasca:** Well also, I went to the municipal pool and they wouldn't let me in because of the color of my skin.

We had 2 theatres: the New Colton Theatre and the Hub City Theatre; and we had to sit on the left side. Do you recall that?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, I remember that, yeah.

**Mr. Gasca:** And so-uh, that's the way it was.

**Mr. Hernandez:** That was when Pearl Harbor happened. [I remember] we were sitting there looking at the movie and all of a sudden they announced over the loud speaker or PA system for all military personnel to report to their bases; and we were wondering what happened.

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**Dr. Rivera:** That was December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah. [We found out] they had bombed Pearl Harbor, and I said: Oh-my-God! They said we were at war with the Japanese, and everybody was scared because we didn't know what was going to happen. We had never been in a war before.

**Mr. Gasca:** Do remember there were a couple of families in Colton who were of Japanese descent.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, tell me about that.

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, they came around and they picked them up and took them...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, Henry something, he owned a market and he had 2 boys, I believe.

**Mr. Gasca:** On my street.

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah. I used to hang around with them because I used to like to build model airplanes and they did the same.

**Mr. Gasca:** There was a barbershop on 'J' Street, that's where the freeway is now, and that was an oriental man. All of a sudden the next day they were gone – and we never seen them again.

**Dr. Rivera:** David, you mentioned that your Dad came to Colton in early 1900?

**Mr. Gasca:** My Grandfather.

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**Dr. Rivera:** He worked for Portland Cement Company?

**Mr. Gasca:** No, he crossed El Paso in 1901; and according my Grandmother, they paid 2 cents to cross. And what I heard when I was a kid, he worked at Patton State Hospital, he was a plumber. After that, I don't know what happened, but he got a job with the City of Colton.

**Dr. Rivera:** With the City of Colton, he worked as a street sweeper?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, a street sweeper. He had a broom and a little cart, and that cart is in the Colton museum now.

**Dr. Rivera:** Is that in downtown Colton?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yes. He would sweep around the main streets there, you-know, over the years

**Mr. Hernandez:** I remember him.

**Dr. Rivera:** You remember him?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah

**Dr. Rivera:** [I think] it was back in 1931, or so, what year was that when one of the councilman said, we have to fire him because he's not a citizen; and therefore, it came to a vote. It was during the.... Frank, how do you say that word?  
(Mr. Frank Acosta is the videographer)

**Mr. Acosta (Off camera):** Repatriation

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**Mr. Gasca:** When they were sending people back to Mexico.

**Dr. Rivera:** And he was caught in that situation.

**Mr. Gasca:** One of the people in the City Council put the finger on him that he wasn't a citizen. There were other councilmen that backed him up, they liked him a lot. He was very popular, very well mannered... I remember people saying, your Grandpa always tips his hat when the ladies come around.

So, he became a citizen.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well the vote was that he would keep his job, but then, 2 weeks later after the vote he became a citizen, and his job became permanent.

**Mr. Gasca:** My Grandmother became a citizen, too.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh-huh.

**Mr. Gasca:** It was tough in those days, you-know... Reading and writing English, and knowing the history of the United States, and stuff.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, that was a personal situation, but overall the feelings towards Mexicans was that they're taking our jobs, they're taking our schools, they're taking our health services, and [these opportunities] are taken away from American citizens. So, let's send them back to Mexico – that was the feeling, *verdad?* And that was during the 30s... And your Grandpa got caught up in that. Were both of you born and raised in Colton?

**Mr. Gasca & Mr. Hernandez:** um-hmm.

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**Dr. Rivera:** What did people do for recreation? When you were a little kid, you mentioned the plunge in South Colton. Was it the Caldera Plunge?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay, you mentioned the Caldera Plunge in South Colton; and you lived on 5<sup>th</sup> Street near that area?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Dr. Rivera:** Can you tell us about your experiences of what you remember about the Caldera Plunge?

**Mr. Gasca:** I guess I was 6 or 7 years old, and my Grandma used to take me over there. Juan Caldera's wife, Uralia, was my Grandma's *comadre*, so they would sit there, and I was in the children's [section of the pool], they called it, *La Pilita*, [it was like a little water fountain] with water coming out and water going in. I remember, Rick Castorena, he used to climb on the diving board, that thing was humongous, and he was the only one, man! He would come down and do his little swan dive. There were baseball teams...

**Dr. Rivera:** Where was it located?

**Mr. Gasca:** It was on 5<sup>th</sup> and Congress, right?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah.

**Mr. Gasca:** And next door on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Congress is where the ballroom or saloon...

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**Dr. Rivera:** The dance hall.

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, the dance hall was made out of PFE (Pacific Fruit Express) boards from the railroad cars.

**Dr. Rivera:** From the boxcars...

**Mr. Gasca:** It would have PFE on the sides there...  
(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** The building materials was from the boxcars when they were taking apart the PFE and the lumber was brought back and they built the dance hall...  
They also tell me there was a baseball field.

**Mr. Hernandez:** Further north on 5<sup>th</sup> Street just before you get to Congress there was a baseball field and also another place for dancing and things... The bleachers were up against the wall of the dance hall... On top of the dance hall there was an eagle made out of wood, I guess, and it had light bulbs on it... I used to go up there and sit by the fence and hear the music.

**Dr. Rivera:** How old were you then?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Oh I don't know, I wasn't too old, I can't recall how old I was, but I was just a kid...  
They had like a bar on the side, and the Caldera kids used to run it – they used to give me a soda-pop...

**Dr. Rivera:** You were in heaven with that soda-pop?

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**Mr. Hernandez:** I was just part of the gang there. It was a lot of fun just about every Saturday night, I think, they had dances.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they have good crowds from South Colton?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Oh-yeah, they had good crowds. Most of them walked there, I guess...

**Mr. Gasca:** I remember people from East Highland used to come.

**Dr. Rivera:** *Tambien?*

**Mr. Gasca:** They had a little hall over there too. At first I thought it was a dirt floor...

**Dr. Rivera:** So a lot of people came to the Caldera Dance Hall. They also mentioned the bullring, David.

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, I vaguely remember... there on Congress, west of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Caldera built a ring there and he would bring the bulls—they couldn't kill them, but... it was a fiesta type thing.

**Mr. Hernandez:** I helped a little bit, you-know, they brought the boards from the PFE and they [had me and others] take the nails out...

(Laughter)

**Mr. Hernandez:** We used a hammer, bang, bang, bang, all day long... But it was exciting in a way.

**Dr. Rivera:** This was good for the South Colton community because they had a place to be able to dance, to be spectators at the bullring, and swim.

David, you have a wonderful book about Colton there, what's the title of that book?

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**Mr. Gasca:** This book has about everything in there, it's titled: "As the Sand Shifts in Colton, California" by Hazel E. Olson.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh-huh. And you said it has about everything in Colton...

**Mr. Gasca:** It goes way back to [the town's namesake] when Colton was the gentleman who worked for the railroad; he was a superintendent...

**Dr. Rivera:** So it has a history of Colton, but mostly of North Colton, though, *verdad*?

**Mr. Gasca:** No, it has an overall [history of Colton] pretty much.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay. You also have some other books there...

**Mr. Gasca:** There's 3 books, and there's pictures of fiestas, parades, newspaper articles, school pictures... What they did was they went to a lot of people that they know and said, hey, donate some pictures we're making a book... A lot of people donated school pictures, fiesta pictures... That's my mother there (he holds up the picture for the camera).

**Dr. Rivera:** Your Mom was one of the few Mexican-American girls that worked in North Colton.

**Mr. Gasca:** She worked for a department store, Helman's; and after that she worked for Willits, another department store. When they made the freeway, she went and worked for Franks Furniture – so she was in sales all her life.

**Dr. Rivera:** But she was not the kind of run-of-the-mill Mexican-American girl because she worked in North Colton...

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**Mr. Gasca:** As I recall, she was the first Hispanic to be in the Colton Women's Club.

**Dr. Rivera:** Ah, tell me about that?

**Mr. Gasca:** Well she got in there through her boss, Mrs. Frank Dayton, who owned a furniture store. Mrs. Dayton introduced my Mother to the women's clubs.

**Dr. Rivera:** Was she the first Mexican-American?

**Mr. Gasca:** If I recall, I think so.

There was Hunters restaurant, remember that restaurant?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Hunters, yeah.

**Mr. Gasca:** We couldn't go eat there...

**Dr. Rivera:** Where was this?

**Mr. Gasca:** It was right next to the Hub City Theatre, across the street from Franks Furniture... The Candy Palace was there...

**Dr. Rivera:** And you couldn't eat at the restaurant?

**Mr. Gasca:** No. After a while you could eat there...

**Mr. Hernandez:** The only place they served us was the Mission Drugstore, remember the Mission Drugstore?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, Mr. McNair owned the Mission Drugstore, and he had these copper or brass cups that he'd make Root Beer sundaes, and stuff like that. At the back of the

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store he had a weighing machine with the scales, you-know, so everybody would go in the back of the store to weigh themselves.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** And that was downtown Colton?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, where the freeway is at now.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, just across from the street where the Anderson Hotel is?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, the Anderson Hotel, and there was a jewelry store there, a magazine store.

**Mr. Hernandez:** JC Penney was there...

**Mr. Gasca:** JC Penney was there, and on the corner, remember, the Greyhound Bus used to come by? And down the center of town to La Cadena all the way up to San Bernardino they had a streetcar.

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

**Mr. Gasca:** No

**Dr. Rivera:** La Cadena to San Bernardino, a streetcar?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, it was a red one and it had electrical wires up on top; the conductor would come out change the wires together [for the streetcar] to go back the other way.

**Mr. Acosta (Off camera):** Was that part of the Pacific Electric system?

**Mr. Gasca:** I don't recall...

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**Dr. Rivera:** Where did the streetcar start in Colton?

**Mr. Gasca:** Right there on 'J' Street...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Across the street from the railroad station... and there was a little park...

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, that was 'J' Street, and the Chamber of Commerce was right there on the corner.

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was the turn-around or the pickup, the start to San Bernardino?

**Mr. Gasca:** Right, and it would go to La Cadena, I think it went to Valley College...

**Dr. Rivera:** But we did have an electrical passenger [streetcar] company?

**Mr. Gasca:** (Pats on one of the books) I think it's in here.

**Dr. Rivera:** Where did you go to school, David?

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, I went to a north side school, even though I lived across from Garfield. My Mother had relatives that were close to the north side on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 'L', and they used to go to the north side school, to Grant School – it was a 4 room school. They had first-grade...

**Dr. Rivera:** Do you remember any of the Mexican kids that went to your school, to Grant School?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, Ruben Aguilera, Angie's sister, Sammy Hernandez, Bobby Aguilera... There was only about 5 or 6 of us.

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**Dr. Rivera:** A handful of you folks?

Where did you go to junior high school?

**Mr. Gasca:** Roosevelt [Junior] High School. I didn't speak English in elementary school, though, I was kept back one year. In those days they kept you back... So Roosevelt...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Roosevelt was a junior high wasn't it?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, it was a junior high.

**Dr. Rivera:** Roosevelt and then Colton High School?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah.

**Mr. Acosta (Off camera):** What years did you go to Roosevelt?

**Mr. Gasca:** Oh-God!! It was about the 40s

**Dr. Rivera:** When did you graduate from high school?

**Mr. Gasca:** 1950-51.

**Dr. Rivera:** 4 years earlier...

**Mr. Acosta (Off camera):** It's probably on your permanent record cards, too; still at Colton and when you attended Roosevelt.

**Mr. Gasca:** Okay, don't look at my grades - okay?

(Laughter)

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**Dr. Rivera:** Joe, where did you go to school?

**Mr. Hernandez:** For grammar school I went to San Salvador... Agua Mansa...  
(inaudible)

**Dr. Rivera:** Because you lived on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, *verdad?* There was a school on Aqua Mansa?

**Mr. Hernandez:** ... (Inaudible) There was a cemetery in Aqua Mansa... It's a road...

**Mr. Gasca:** It was the main road to Riverside in those days, and it used to go to the cement plant over in Riverside and Crestmore.

(At this point, Mr. Hernandez' dialogue is not clear and inaudible)

**Mr. Hernandez:** ...Aqua Mansa is part of El Camino Real; in fact, there was a little village there that got washed away...

**Dr. Rivera:** So you went to school in San Salvador there?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, and San Salvador was up higher... It was only a 2 room school, and I went there up until 6<sup>th</sup> grade... They had 3 classes in one room and 3 classes in the other room.

When I graduated from there, I ended up at Wilson Junior High.

There was a lot of early California families living in that area: the Alvarados, the Martinez'...

**Mr. Gasca:** Remember the milkman? What the heck was his name?

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**Mr. Hernandez:** Frank Soares, he was a Portuguese, and he spoke Spanish like-nobody's-business. He had a diary...

**Dr. Rivera:** So you grew up with those guys?

**Mr. Gasca:** Well they were older... [Yeah, Frank] used to deliver milk; and we had an ice man who also came around. If you had a little yellow card, and if you wanted 5 pounds, 10 pounds, you'd put the triangle...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Whatever was hanging on [to the triangle] that's the amount of ice you wanted. So the iceman knew and he would carry it into your icebox.

**Mr. Gasca:** And as soon as he went into the [house] with the ice – us kids would go into the truck and get some ice.

(Laughter)

**Dr. Rivera:** Frank, you were going to say something?

**Mr. Acosta (Off camera):** The Soares' house, isn't that on the corner of Aqua Mansa and Rancho?

**Mr. Gasca:** It was, I think the Rosales' lives there now...

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, Rosales...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Oh-yeah, around the corner.

If you ever go to the cemetery there on Aqua Mansa Road you'll see a lot of the old families still there – you'll recognize their name...

**Mr. Gasca:** I have an uncle there.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, Socorro Rosales lives in one of those houses...

So from the Wilson School?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, I graduated from San Salvador and went to Wilson, and then Colton High School.

**Dr. Rivera:** We've been here almost an hour – so let me ask you another question.

**Mr. Gasca:** Let me interject one thing. Remember the newspaper La Opinión?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, La Opinión.

**Mr. Gasca:** They used to come in a big old Buick, and he came from L.A. (Los Angeles) – I forgot his name...

**Dr. Rivera:** What years were those, David?

**Mr. Gasca:** In the 40s, I guess.

**Mr. Hernandez:** It was before the war...

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah I guess in the late 30s.

**Mr. Hernandez:** There was also another that used to sell clothes.

**Mr. Gasca:** Oh, Marquez. Marquez used to come with a car full of clothes...

**Mr. Hernandez:** ... And blankets, pillows, and whatever...

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**Mr. Gasca:** Even medicine.

There used to be another guy – the rolling man...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Oh, yeah, yeah...

**Mr. Gasca:** He used to sell this salve – I still got some at home, it was for animals and humans... any little cut you get – boom! You put some of that salve on it and you'd be ready...

**Mr. Hernandez:** They paid him, and he'd give little wrapped up candy to the kids of the families he sold the stuff to.  
Marquez had a beautiful daughter!

**Mr. Gasca:** Ooohhhhhh!!

**Mr. Hernandez:** Man! She was beautiful...

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, we were talking about... Javier, his son.

**Dr. Rivera:** Javier Marquez.

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, he's still around.

**Dr. Rivera:** [Well,] we're talking about old times, what about the "Three Flowers" pomade that you used to put on your hair? What was it?

**Mr. Gasca:** I remember they used to put "Jeris [Hair Tonic" in our hair], it's in that green bottle. When you'd go to the barber they'd put "Jeris" on your hair and you'd come out smelling like a – I won't say it here...

(Laughter)

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**Mr. Hernandez:** I think we had a pretty good young life...

**Mr. Gasca:** Oh-yeah.

**Mr. Hernandez:** We had a lot of fun. They said they were prejudice against us, but that didn't bother us whatsoever, you-know, life still goes on.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh yeah, well mostly because we were in our own community. Everybody that worked at the PFE, or the Southern Pacific, or the Portland Cement Company, or La Bolucha Citrus Company – they all lived in Colton.

**Mr. Hernandez:** Even I picked oranges when I was a young kid.

**Mr. Gasca:** We used to go to Hemet to pick apricots... They gave me a job picking the fruit for the ladies, and the ladies would cut the fruit in half...

**Mr. Hernandez:** And put them on boards to dry them...

**Mr. Gasca:** Then when you came back, [before] you'd go to school, you'd buy a pair of Levi's for \$5 bucks.

**Dr. Rivera:** And that was for the whole year?

**Mr. Gasca:** Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Joe, you mentioned that you had picked cotton?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, I picked cotton up north by Delano. You know what? I used to go to school there, it was a pretty nice school; it was an integrated school, beautiful.

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**Mr. Gasca:** Where?

**Mr. Hernandez:** The name of the little town was Earlimart. At that time they had what they called airmail week. [The students in each room] had to draw a poster about airmail week, and whoever won would win an airplane ride. I happened to be the one who won in my room, and another girl [won in her room]. They took us down to Delano at the airport, and that's where I took my first airplane ride in 1937, I think it was.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oooohhhhhh! You were 10 years old.

**Mr. Hernandez:** It was a 2 seater plus the pilot. He took us around the area for a half hour... When we [landed] my ears were plugged up and I couldn't hear him ask me [whether I liked it, or not].

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was one of the benefits of going crop picking, eh?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, yeah, it was an adventure, let's put it that way...

**Dr. Rivera:** One of the things I asked both of you yesterday, was we had a big flood in Colton in 1938, in March... Do you remember that flood?

**Mr. Hernandez:** We weren't in Colton [during that time], we were still up north, but we came back and stayed in Santa Ana... My father was working there for a little bit. When we decided to come back to Colton, we seen all the destruction...

**Dr. Rivera:** David, what areas were affected there where 'O' Street is...?

**Mr. Gasca:** I remember I had an uncle who worked in Santa Fe, right on La Cadena going south from Valley College; there was a dip, remember that dip? Now, there are flood control canals there... [Anyway], somehow my aunt got word that my uncle

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couldn't come home because it was flooded. So my Mother and I went to stay with her, and it was raining, rain, rain, rain, rain, I thought it would never stop. And we stayed there [at my aunt's] overnight a couple of nights. Finally, [the flood] receded and my uncle came home. But he couldn't cross... it was that bad.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you mentioned the damage that the flooding caused around the Veterans Park area... Pine Street.

**Mr. Gasca:** South Congress, yeah, Pine Street and Fogg Street, everything was soaked and washed away. If you went down to the river – it was bone dry... It was terrible. If you notice in some areas that the soil is sandy and rocky – [all of that came from that flood].

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, that did a lot of damage in South Colton, as well as North Colton. Let me just kind of wind up our conversation. Did I miss anything? Is there anything that you would like to share with us? Did I miss anything that I should have picked up? Or something that you would like to contribute to our discussion this morning?

**Mr. Gasca:** Well, I'd like to say something that I wish these young people [would do]. [I wish they] would look back and understand what happened in those days. Every time I go to a pool room, I see nothing but brown skins there, and they don't realize why they're there now.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah like that saying: I stand on the shoulders of people who were there before me, and that's how I got to this place.

**Mr. Gasca:** Because they wouldn't let us in. Now, it's different and thank God I believe we all get along and work together, instead of against each other.

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**Dr. Rivera:** But the idea that there was such a struggle before we got to this point. And [it] would behoove our young people to learn about our history because it just happened a few short years ago, *verdad*?  
You're 87, *verdad*, Joe?

**Mr. Hernandez:** Uh-huh.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you're 83 – and this happened a few years ago through your lifetime.

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, it's still fresh in our mind. The mind doesn't get old, the body gets old.

Oh, I wanted to tell you when I went to boot camp in San Diego, Gene Kelly was in boot camp with us, he was the dancer, [singer and actor].

**Dr. Rivera:** The Hollywood dancer, [singer and actor]...

**Mr. Hernandez:** Yeah, he was in the company ahead of us. I was in 619 and he was in 618, I think it was. We used to see him in the evening when they'd give us a little time off to cool off, you-know... And he'd go out there and do a little tap dancing...

**Dr. Rivera:** That was the early 1940s.

**Mr. Hernandez:** In 1944. I really didn't know he was there until they told us that Gene Kelly was next door. He was famous already... It was just one of those things that happened without you knowing it.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, Joe and David, thank you so much for providing for us a glimpse, a little window into the experience that you both went through, and were able to, I guess, not only contribute to yourselves and your families, but also to our community. Again, thank you so much for being with us this morning.

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**Mr. Gasca:** Our pleasure.

**Dr. Rivera:** And I would appreciate it if I could borrow some of your materials so we can scan them, and we will give them back to you.

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