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CSUSB, "Fernando Rodríguez and Sammy Hernández" (2014). *South Colton Oral History Project*. 24. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history/24>

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Oral History Project of Colton, CA –9/18/14

Dr. Rivera: Good morning. I'm Dr. Tom Rivera, it's September the 18th, 2014, and it's approximately 9:30 this morning.

With us this morning, we have the Dean of the Pfau Library, Mr. Cesar Caballero, Cesar, welcome and thank you very much for being with us.

Dean Caballero: Thank you.

Dr. Rivera: Our guests today are Mr. Fernando Rodriguez. Fernando, welcome to our interview this morning, it's good to have you here.

Mr. Rodriguez: Good morning.

Dr. Rivera: And also, we're delighted to have Sammy Hernández.

Mr. Hernández: Thank you.

Dr. Rivera: Sammy is Fernando's cousin and they were gracious enough to be with us this morning. [When] I called Fernando, I said, Fernando, would you do us a big favor and interview with us because we'd like to talk about the businesses in Colton; and your Grandfather was one of the few people [who] had a business in Colton – he started his grocery store in the early 1900's.

Can you tell us about your grandfather?

Mr. Rodriguez: Sure.

Dr. Rivera: Where was he from? When did he come to Colton? What was his name?

Mr. Rodriguez: He was from Aguascalientes, Mexico. [His name was,] Víctor Rodriguez, I don't think he had a middle name. He came here prior to the turn of the

century. He married my grandmother, Manuela Ramirez; about 3 years later, after they were married, they had enough money to buy a piece of property, and that's where they decided to build the store.

Dr. Rivera: Do you remember what year he was born?

Mr. Rodriguez: Oh, no I don't. When he came here he was 11 years old – [he came here] with his uncle.

Dr. Rivera: What year was that?

Mr. Rodriguez: I don't know the exact year but...

Mr. Hernández: He was born in 1896, no, 1886.

Mr. Rodriguez: That's correct because I visited the tombstone...

Dr. Rivera: Why did he come to Colton?

Mr. Rodriguez: Actually, he and his uncle first came to Highland, California – where they settled with some family, the Ramos family. Then later on, he got a job at the Colton Portland Cement plant; so he moved over closer to the job; and I guess that's when he met my Grandmother.

Dr. Rivera: So he moved to Colton and worked for the cement plant.

Mr. Rodriguez: He worked there for 45 years.

Dr. Rivera: And he met your Grandmother...

While he was working at the Portland Cement Plant, he got the idea of starting the grocery store?

Mr. Rodriguez: I think that idea had been in his head, it had been a dream of his way before the Colton Portland Cement plant. I think that's one of the reasons why he migrated here in the first place. He had those visions, like many people do, and it became a reality because of his persistence.

Dr. Rivera: Well, you said he bought a piece of property?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah.

Dr. Rivera: Is that where he built his store?

Mr. Rodriguez: That's exactly where he built the store, right on the corner of 6th and 'O' Street, adjacent to the Santa Fe railroad tracks.

Dr. Rivera: Did he start from the foundation on up? Did he put up the walls...?

Mr. Rodriguez: He built it block-by-block by hand... Because the *familia* was all centrally located right there, you-know. Like Sammy mentioned earlier, my Great-grandmother had ten kids, and they had their children; so there was abundant help right there like it was in the old days. The *familia* was so close that whenever anybody wanted to do something the family pitched in. So that's how the store got started...

Mr. Hernández: His Grandfather never went to school. He could build anything... There's nothing he couldn't do: carpentry, plumbing, and electrical, he did it all – everything.

Dean Caballero: Self-taught.

Mr. Hernández: We don't know how he did it. No schooling... Every place he ever built had a basement, and he dug it by hand.

Dean Caballero: Really? Wow! Amazing!

Mr. Rodriguez: After the store got going, and actually, this became later when the Rodriguez family came into the picture, and then my *Tia* Juanita and my *Tio* Cuco Rochín were involved in the store, also.

He started to build like little apartments on the property. Again, he built everything from scratch; and he started to get tenants there on the different rental units. Eventually, he finished off the house where he and my Grandma lived at the very back of the property.

He was a very sharp guy, very business minded; and he just kept helping people, people needed things and that's what he did, he helped people – that was his main concern.

Dr. Rivera: How did he help them?

Mr. Rodriguez: Well, when people were migrating – in pursuit of their dreams, the railroad tracks became the highway, if you will; and they would come on the railroad cars [where] the train would stop before it went into the yard in San Bernardino. So they would get off the cars, and my Grandfather saw them and he related to their journey. So he would feed them, he would talk to them, he would put them to work, and give them a little bit of money if they needed money... It became a fact to those people who were on that journey that there was a place – that place became Esperanza Market.

Dr. Rivera: Is this where the name Esperanza comes from?

Mr. Rodriguez: No, actually the name Esperanza was the very first name of the store, but as it turns out, it relates because it means: 'hope' -- and that's exactly what they did for, I would say, thousands of people over the years that stopped there for a little sandwich or a glass of water...

Dean Caballero: And they were coming from different places?

Mr. Rodriguez: Different places. The ones I saw were, I'm gonna say, Latino because all I heard was Spanish. I was a little kid, but all the conversations were in Spanish, so I'm just saying they were Mexicans just like us – in search of their dreams, as well.

Mr. Hernández: When his Grandfather married his Grandmother, he was already a settled man. He had built his own house and had a job; in other words, he wasn't 20 years old, he was already focused on what he wanted. He was 26 years old and he was 11 years older than his [Mr. Rodriguez'] Grandmother; but he was settled, he had a job, he had a house...

Dr. Rivera: Well you mentioned Sammy that he had a job, [but], who ran the store, Fernando?

Mr. Rodriguez: Well during the day, my Grandmother would run the store and take care of the kids, simultaneously. And then, when my Grandfather came home from work, he would run the store in the evening, and my Grandmother would go in the back and she'd make dinner for the kids, and do the things that families do. Then, when the kids got older, it got a little bit tougher for my Grandmother to take care of the kids because now the kids – they're all over the place. It was harder to run the store at the same time that the Depression was showing its face. It made it difficult for them to run the business, but my Grandfather didn't want to leave the security of the cement plant because that was a job...

Dean Caballero: Regular pay.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, regular pay, a regular paycheck. So they had a decision to make and that's where the Enciso family comes in. They made a deal and they ran

the store. I think they leased the store to them for a couple of years – until they left there, I forget what year it was; [but] they stayed for a couple of years.

After that, my *Tía* Juanita came in and my *Tío* Rochín, and they ran the store, I think, until 1938. In 1938, they left to go to Oceanside, California to open their own market. At that time, that's where Estevan and Mariana Hernandez come into the picture.

Dr. Rivera: Going back to your Grandpa and his family, how many kids did he have?

Mr. Rodriguez: Okay, first of all, there was Juanita, she was nicknamed: *La Reina* because she was the queen, and not only at the house there, but also at many of the fiestas they had in the barrio. She was an entertainer in the community, so everyone knew her, and everyone knew her as *La Reina*. After *La Reina*, [wait], let me go back a little bit, she had five kids.

Then there was Manuel, my *Tío* Manuel, later on when he grew older, he would make deliveries, also – [he would] go to L.A. (Los Angeles) and pick up merchandise; not only for my Grandfather, Rochín and Juanita, but also for my *Tío* Steve. Manuel started a business in the produce, and eventually, when he got older he came back to Colton [got] settled, and he opened up R&O Mexican Food Products right there on La Cadena – right close to the original property. [My *Tío* Manuel] had 8 children. After him was my Dad, Victor. Victor married my Mom, Carmen. There were 4 of us. Then there was Antonio. Antonio died at a very young age, he was 8 years old. And the last one was Antonietta.

Dean Caballero: Is R&O still functional?

Mr. Rodriguez: No, my Uncle passed away, and when he passed away—so did the R&O.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned Juanita: Her son wrote a wonderful story about her.

Mr. Rodriguez: That's beautiful.

Dr. Rivera: It was a beautiful story that he wrote about her.

You mentioned that she was known as *La Princesa*: she could sing, dance and entertain people at the Fiestas Patrias; and she took music lessons from Mrs. Margarita Gomez.

We have one of [Mrs. Gomez'] family members, one of her grandson's here, Henry Vasquez. I think Margarita was one of the people [who] was a cornerstone for many of the people that took music [lessons] in Colton.

Mr. Hernández: Yes, yes she was. She gave lessons in her house. She must have given so many lessons because the ivory was worn off [the keys on the piano].

Dr. Rivera: Yeah. And then, she also did a lot of work for the Catholic Church.

Mr. Hernández: [Her] older boy, what was his name, Tony? He played trumpet.

Dean Caballero: Oh-really?

Dr. Rivera: He played trumpet, yeah. The [whole] family was musicians.

Mr. Rodriguez: After my *Tio* Rochín and Juanita opened the market, they also opened [a] restaurant. It was called the Acapulco Restaurant, and it was right on Pacific Coast Highway in Oceanside. And that became a very popular place – she would play the piano during the dinner set, and sing, and just entertain the people...

Dr. Rivera: Getting back to the early years: When [Juanita] was maybe 15 or 16, she went to Redlands, and there was this young man, Rochín, [who] saw her. And lo-and-behold *se enamoraron*... They couldn't stay away from each other.

Sammy, go ahead and continue your story about Juanita.

Mr. Hernández: My Mother told me that she matured very young. When she was 12-13 years old, she was already a grown woman. The other girls stayed like little girls, but she [had a very light complexion] and was very beautiful. Victor, her father doted on her, you-know...

Rochín had a job, and when they eloped they wound up in Mexicali.

Dr. Rivera: Tell us how she eloped... Fernando you mentioned that she pretended...

Mr. Rodriguez: I don't know the story of when she eloped. I just know that they were in, was it Brawley?

Mr. Hernández: Brawley (he acknowledges).

Mr. Rodriguez: They had the store in Brawley that my *Tio* Rochín started, and that's where they stayed. They didn't dare come home because my Grandfather was not too happy at all with Refugio's moves. Eventually, he talked to Refugio Rochín, this is when the transition took place from the Enciso Family to the Rochín Family at the market. But [my Grandfather] talked him into coming home – that everything was taken care of, everything would be fine and dandy, don't worry about a thing.

Mr. Hernández: He lied.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, he lied.

(Laughter)

Because when [Rochín] came home, [my Grandfather] had him arrested. So Refugio Rochín spent a little time in jail. Then my Grandmother got the better edge of that argument... So, he came home to roost, and everything was forgiven.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: We have a copy of that story with our collection of things that we're doing for this project. But that was a wonderful little story...

I want to ask you, *tambien*, in running the store, did he give credit to his customers?

Mr. Hernández: That's what it was, a credit store.

Dr. Rivera: Tell us about that, Sammy.

Mr. Hernández: Well, everybody bought for the day; nobody had an icebox. They bought whatever they were gonna eat that day, they bought it that day because there was no refrigeration...

The people in those days, when they got married and had family, they didn't move away, they moved down the street or across the alley—nobody could go anywhere. And we had people trading at the store [from family-to-family]. What were they gonna do, nothing... Nobody had a car, so you're pretty [much] locked in the neighborhood. You walked everywhere, there was no bus service in our part of town. The only bus service was over on the other side of town. If you worked somewhere, you walked. So everything was in walking distance: you walked to the cement plant; you walked to the PFE; and if you worked at Santa Fe, you would walk downtown and get the trolley and walk to work. There was no transportation. Bicycle or walk.

Dr. Rivera: Or if you picked oranges, they would pick you up at the corner.

Mr. Hernández: People think that picking oranges is a menial job, but it's like any other thing.

There was a gentleman in our home town called Tiofilo Hernandez, and he was probably the best orange picker... See, oranges cannot be pulled off the tree, they have to be cut – they have to be trimmed because otherwise if you pull the stem out it will rot from there, and if you cut too much stem it will pick the next ones. [Tiofilo Hernandez] was the guy they called *el cienero*. Before the day was over he already had 100 boxes, when the rest of the guys had 20. He was that good.

Dr. Rivera: What was his name?

Mr. Hernández: Tiofilo Hernandez. He was a distant relation to his Grandfather (he is pointing to Mr. Fernando Rodriguez).

The average guy goes on a ladder and holds on with one hand, not him, he had terrific balance. The ladder you use for picking oranges are not that heavy because you'd hurt the tree. But he could (he uses his hands/fingers in a cutting motion...) – *el cienero*.

Dr. Rivera: Sammy, your Mom and Dad took over the store. When did they take over the store?

Mr. Hernández: In 1938. My Mother and Father both worked for Luciano Martinez at the bakery... My Mother worked for them and the girls used to take care of me – we lived on the same street. So when my Dad opened his store, my Dad and my Mother ran it and I used to go stay with my Grandmother across the street.

Dr. Rivera: Now, across the street is what street?

Mr. Hernández: 'O' Street. Right there I'd stay with my Grandmother. And then, when it got late at night – they didn't close the store until after dark – I wouldn't go home, I'd stay with my Grandma.

Mr. Rodriguez: The Martinez Market was also family-run. Lupe Martinez was my *Tia*, and she was one of Bernadina's daughters—my Grandma's sister. So she married Don Luciano and they open a store of their own, and everybody worked for Don Luciano at one time or another.

Mr. Hernández: One of her son's was Nick Martinez, a musician...

Dr. Rivera: Oh, the musician, okay.

Mr. Hernández: That was his son, Nick. Albert was a musician also, but he didn't pursue it like Nick did. Nick went into songwriting and he'd do arrangements. There's not a club in the valley that he didn't play at.

Dr. Rivera: And he played during the 30's and 40's?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah.

Mr. Hernández: When he was in high school, they already had a band... Nick and Albert were born in the same calendar year, they weren't twins but they were born in 1920, both of them. They grew up together.

Dr. Rivera: The Martinez Bakery was on the corner of 7th and 'M' Street, on the northwest corner?

And you were all related?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, we were all related.

So it's pretty common for us to get out of church on Sunday with Padre Valencia, and to go get some *pan dulce* at the bakery. And then, we'd go to my *Tio* Steve at Esperanza Market. On Sundays it was more of a social event. There was very little shopping done, there was more yacking, *la tijera*, I guess you could say – and everybody talking about one another. Everybody knew each other in the store, which made it unique, and I think that's what made the store special.

You mentioned credit, or you asked a question about credit: my *Tio* Steve, I think, started that. He understood how difficult it was for young families to put food on the table, pay the bills, and just do the basic necessities of life. So he extended credit, I think, to everybody that came into the store. I don't remember ever hearing any discussion about issues about somebody not paying, or having to go knock on

somebody's door to collect a debt. I think people just respected the fact that my *Tio* Steve and my Aunt Marianna were able to do that for them—and really it was a blessing to the whole neighborhood that that was made available to them.

Dr. Rivera: Marianna was your Mom (he indicates to Mr. Hernández)? And she was your *Tia*? (The question is directed to Mr. Rodriguez but Mr. Hernández responds).

Mr. Hernández: She was his (he points to Mr. Rodriguez) Grandmother's sister.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah-okay.

Mr. Rodriguez: My Grandmother was the oldest, and Marianna was the youngest girl—she would be the 9th in line, there was 10 kids. My *Tio* Pete was the youngest one.

Dr. Rivera: Okay.

Sammy, [with] running the store: we talked about credit. What made the store a popular store where people would go there...? Tell me about your Dad?

Mr. Hernández: I never heard him say anything bad about anybody. He was just a people person. He never went to school. He could figure out mathematical problems, I don't know how he did it. He'd make numbers here, he'd make a number in the corner (Mr. Hernández uses his hands to mimic writing). I'd ask him how he did it. He'd say, I don't know but that's the answer...

Business-wise, he was very smart business-wise. He could figure out things in his head. My uncle [who] owned the bakery, Don Luciano... Remember in the old days they had the adding machine... [My Dad] could add up a column of numbers before you could punch them in [on the adding machine] – and he never went to school.

Dr. Rivera: Well, your Father, Estevan, made the best *Sangre*.

Mr. Hernández: *Longanisa* is what he called it.

Dr. Rivera: It was the best... It was great! I used to go there to get my *Sangre*. What other products was he famous for and that provided for the festival?

Mr. Hernández: [As for the *Longanisa*] he never would tell anybody what he put in it. He ordered the chili from some guy who came from New Mexico. He couldn't get it here; he tried all kinds until he found something he liked. He used garlic, but he wouldn't buy garlic – I mean, he'd buy garlic but he had one of the hired help peel the garlic—she hated to do it... But it had to be fresh garlic, he didn't use the powder—and that's just the way he made it.

Dr. Rivera: What about the other products, the meat products, the bologna, *tambien*?

Mr. Hernández: The bologna: well, in those days I remember going to the packing house. There was a packing house where the Orange Show is, the Smith Packing House, and we'd go there. I was little, [but] we'd go there and we'd go in the packing house and we'd look... See when cattle is slaughtered they put jackets on them, it's a canvas jacket they put on them, they put them in the cooler, and that's where they all look alike. But when they're going to be sold, they bring them out and the grader comes out and grades them... When my Dad went there he would look and say, "I want that one, and that one..." He would pick which ones he wanted, so they'd cut it in half and load it on the truck and we'd take it to the store.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned that your Dad sold ice also. Tell us about the sign that he had in the front of the store in the window.

Mr. Hernández: No-no that was the iceman.

Dr. Rivera: Well tell us about the iceman, then.

Mr. Hernández: Well, they had a sign that said “ice” on it, and it was square. And at the very top it had 25, 50, 75, 100 – so however you turned it and hung it in your window, the iceman knew how much ice you wanted. So he wouldn’t have to make 2 trips, he’d bring the ice, put it in your wooded icebox that they had there.

Dr. Rivera: This was for the customers?

Mr. Hernández: For the customers.

The iceman came once a day – everyday he came. And then, my aunt bought the first gas Servel Icebox in the whole neighborhood.

Dr. Rivera: The first what?

Mr. Hernández: Servel, remember the Servel iceboxes that were gas operated? She had the only one in the neighborhood. We used to run over there and she’d make us Kool-Aid in ice cubes...

Mr. Rodriguez: One of the selling points of the Servel icebox is that there were no moving parts, so that was a big selling point.

I’d like to mention something also about the product at the market. There’s some products that sometimes can’t be bought or sold, and that’s what La Esperanza was famous for. I get emotional, even thinking about it. You can’t sell love, you can’t sell respect—you can’t buy it. But it was there, and that’s what made this place what it was.

Mr. Hernández: Like I was telling you before... There was a door between the store and where we lived. My Dad would close the store at 8 or 9 o’clock [at night], and we’d be sitting in the kitchen eating, and we’d hear a bang-bang-bang on the back door... [Someone would say:] “*No tenemos leche...*” My Dad would go and open the store... [Or they would say:] “*No tenemos lunchmeat...*”

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: Like I said, they couldn't keep anything overnight, the houses didn't have air conditioning, no refrigeration...

Dr. Rivera: It was a 24/7 operation.

Mr. Hernández: Well, yeah, they would beat on the door in the back because they knew where we lived...

Mr. Rodriguez: You-know, the other thing that they were famous for, I think, is my *Tio* Steve would have a nickname for everybody that came to the store. He even had his own nickname, it was *El Pilón*, I mentioned that in the story – and he was proud of that. But one story that I remember the most was of Mr. Shockley. The Shockley family lived in Colton also. They had a ranch there right across from 3rd Street where the Cement Plant is now. Mr. Shockley had a hunchback, so he was doubled over most of the time looking at the ground wherever he walked. So, my *Tio* Steve called him *El Maromero* because it looked like he was always gonna throw *maroma* when he came around, you-know... *El Maromero*, it was a term of endearment, he wasn't making fun of him, it was a term of endearment. But that's the kind of names that my *Tio* Steve would apply to most of the people that came into the store. Some of them I can't even repeat, but everybody had a name.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Fernando, in the picture that you have of the store, the front part of the store, you mentioned that your Dad (he turns to Sammy Hernández) would provide a home service.

Mr. Hernández: Oh-yeah, we'd close the store and do deliveries.

Dr. Rivera: Tell us about some of the deliveries that you did? You mentioned that you went to houses that at that time, this was in the late 30's – that did not have floors, they had dirt floors.

Mr. Hernández: There was a family called Perez, Jeremias Perez, remember him?

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, the boxer.

Mr. Hernández: He lived right there on the corner of Congress, and it was a two-story house. I was about in high school then, and they'd buy [100 pounds] of flour, and they lived in a two-story house – I had to go up those stairs; I hated to carry the flour up there... They lived right next to the Colungas.

Dr. Rivera: Oh-yes, okay.

Mr. Hernández: That was where Chayo had a gas station, then Jeremias, and the 2 boys who went to school with me: Boxey and Sammy...
Jeremias went to school with my Mother, he was the same age as my Mother...

Dr. Rivera: [There were] other houses that you made deliveries to.

Mr. Hernández: They had a lot of houses that had no hot water, they had water but no hot water. They didn't have sewers, they had a toilet in the alley, and the water from the sink would drain out into the yard for the plants – that was it.

Dr. Rivera: A poor neighborhood.

Mr. Hernández: His grandfather built 2 community toilets: one had [just] a toilet; and one had a shower and a toilet. [The toilets] were there for everybody. It was free water and hot water. On Saturdays and Sundays there were people we didn't even know bringing their kids to give them a shower.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Where was this located, Sam?

Mr. Hernández & Mr. Rodriguez: Right there behind the store...

Mr. Rodriguez: It was adjacent to my Grandmother and Grandfather's house.

Mr. Hernández: We had a little water heater on the side and you had to build a fire under it to heat the water. And people we didn't know – everybody was welcome.

Dr. Rivera: It was a community shower then?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, it was the first one. I think it was the first indoor plumbing in South Colton. Nobody had anything like that. I remember, as a kid, walking into the shower and I was amazed that it was inside, it had walls, you-know...

(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: Then, the overhead shower—I mean, you could stand [under] it and let the water run all on you...

Mr. Hernández: ...You had hot water – all you wanted, and it never ran out. And like I said, there were people we didn't know, they'd bring their kids and shower them down. And then, it was a toilet on the side – because, let's face it, it was a different life. Quate Abril, you probably heard of him?

Dr. Rivera: The baseball player.

Mr. Hernández: They lived across the tracks, and I used to go there to play ball.

Dr. Rivera: Across the tracks?

Mr. Hernández: On Maple Street.

Dr. Rivera: Okay.

Mr. Hernández: Well, one of the things we had to do, first of all, was to move the outside toilet because they didn't have any inside plumbing.

Dr. Rivera: So you had to move the Johns...

Mr. Hernández: ...We'd dig a new one, and it was like a little tool shed. We'd move the tool shed, put it over the new hole, and go get dirt and fill in old hole.

Dr. Rivera: Okay. So the infrastructure in South Colton was not there?

Mr. Hernández: Like my Mother said, there was gas and electricity, but the people did not have the money to bring it in.

We didn't get a telephone until I was in high school. We had a phone in the store...

Dr. Rivera: When did the old store burn down?

Mr. Rodriguez: It was 1976 when it burned down. That was a pretty sad day, I remember the phone call, vividly. It was pretty sad, you-know, people and family crying. People rushing down—there's nothing you could do, I mean, the store was already burnt down. All that history got wiped out in just a very short period of time. My *Tío* Steve, he wasn't buying any part of that [because] it didn't take him long to, I guess, get with the Navarro Family [who] was one block away because the Navarro store was sitting there idle...

Dr. Rivera: On the corner of 7th and 'O' Street...

Mr. Rodriguez: 7th and 'O' Street, one block down.

So, my *Tio* Steve moved there and they opened the store again. They were closed on Sundays and they were only open half day on Saturdays. But still, [it was] the same community they just went a block over, and business continued. It was a successful business even at that location for years until my *Tio* Steve retired in 1989.

I think everybody that's still around remembers that time—it was pretty sad because the store went idle... It's just like a car breaking down and it's just parked there and nothing's going on with it; but everybody knows what happened to that car when it was a brand new Chevy, or whatever it was, you-know. All the things, all the fun, and the stories – well it was kind of like that. I still have those little stories about just going to visit my *Tio* Steve. And of course, he's always offered me something to eat; and I don't look like I'm hungry but, they always offered. My *Tio* Steve always wanted to make me a sandwich [or give] me a soda, or something...

Dr. Rivera: Going back to the old store when your Grandfather ran the store, and also when your Dad ran the store. Were they part of the Chamber of Commerce or any of those...?

Mr. Hernández: My Dad was not political. They went after him many times for the City Council.

[There] was a bunch of guys, do you remember Jesus Llamas?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Hernández: He was very political... a councilman.

Dr. Rivera: He was also a business guy.

Mr. Hernández: Yes. Pete Luque was a councilman.

Dr. Rivera: Right.

Mr. Hernández: And there were a lot of guys that were into that – my Dad didn't want no part of it...

Dr. Rivera: What about Fiestas Patrias?

Mr. Hernández: He worked for that.

You-know going back on the toilets, I'm going to tell you something that I told him (pointing to Mr. Rodriguez). His father is 8 years older than me, so one day, I don't know how it happened but, I was in the backyard and I had a tomato in my hand; his father came out of the house with a white shirt and I threw it at him and I hit him. He caught me, took me in the toilet and stuck my head in the toilet.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: He picked me up, stuck me in the toilet, and then turned me loose. I'll never forget that day.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Did it teach you a lesson?

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: Well, I didn't know what he was gonna do, you-know, he got me—and I thought, he's gonna hit me. No, he just grabbed me and dunked me in the toilet...

Mr. Rodriguez: I don't think my Grandfather was involved in the Chamber of Commerce, or anything like that either. He believed in family, and that was the organization that he was associated with.

Dr. Rivera: Was the Chamber of Commerce of Colton open to anybody from South Colton?

Mr. Rodriguez: I don't know.

Dr. Rivera: What about Las Fiestas Patrias?

Mr. Rodriguez: Anything in the community, they were involved.

Dr. Rivera: Did they sponsor the Queens?

Mr. Rodriguez: Oh yeah, because Juanita was involved and my Antonietta, and also the Martinez Family...

Dr. Rivera: Who is Antonietta?

Mr. Rodriguez: Kelly or Hernandez.

Dr. Rivera: Okay.

Mr. Rodriguez: She was the youngest daughter... Antonietta Kelly or Antonietta Hernandez was born to my *Tia* Amelia, and it was Amelia Hernandez. Back in those days Amelia and her husband – that's when they would go follow the *pisca*, whatever: peaches, cotton, oranges – whatever it was, that's how they lived. [Antonietta] was the third daughter born [to Amelia and her husband]... and they were gonna go on another trip, and [Antonietta] was pretty sick. My Uncle Manuel, he was Antonietta's *Nino* (Godfather), he argued with my *Tia* Amelia and said: no... I'm the Godfather and I'm not gonna let you take [Antonietta] because she's not feeling well. [He said:] so when you come back then you can come get her. Well, that trip turned into a year and a half, and by the time [Amelia] came back, Antonietta was maybe 2 years old, and she didn't want to go back—she cried all the time. So my Grandfather said, you know what, she's gonna stay with us... she became the baby sister.

Mr. Hernández: I could never figure out how her brother was a Rodriguez and she was a Hernandez – she kept her name Hernandez, and I could never figure out how come Jake’s name is Rodriguez and Antonietta is Hernandez. They said, well, they’re not really brother and sister—but I thought they were brother and sister.

Mr. Rodriguez: But to my *Tia* Juanita, my *Tio* Manuel, and my Dad, that was her sister. My Grandfather, I mean, he treated her like... you-know, my *Tia* Juanita, boy he treated my Aunt Toni like a queen too.

You-know, you talked about the fiestas and being involved with the fiestas; well the Martinez Bakery was also involved because Carmelita Martinez, she was a queen many times, as well as Celia.

The kids were always involved, our family was always involved. I remember, I don't know how many Easter Sundays we'd go to the church after mass and Father Valencia would hang Judas... It looked like the whole place was family, to me. I know it wasn't, but there were so many of us, and those were just great times. Anything that happened in that community: the La Esperanza, the Martinez Bakery, and the family — we were part of it.

I think Frank (he points to Frank Acosta who is off camera) mentioned about when did they start doing the fiestas at the patio, I think? We were involved in that too in some way or another. We had great times growing up there.

Mr. Hernández: Antonietta was very unusual for a Mexican because she was very smart and she was very – not aggressive, but, in other words, if somebody said: no... she took classes in school that weren't open to everybody—they had to be selected like: she took journalism... she took public speaking; and Mexican people don't like public speaking, but she did.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: She had all her credits in her senior year. Well, the rule is, you have to be in school all day, you can't go home because... so they gave her a job in the attendance office, 50 years later she retired from the school district.

Dr. Rivera: Umm-hmm. Yeah, she was the secretary to the superintendent for many years.

Mr. Hernández: She put all her work in the school district, and she started when she was a senior... She could have been anything she wanted, she was smart, she was really sharp, but the way things were at the time... What happened to Tony was, she was so dedicated to his Grandmother (he points to Mr. Rodriguez) that she didn't want to leave her. My Mother and Father offered to sponsor her to college—to go to college. She said, I'd like to but I can't leave my Mother.

Dr. Rivera: A very tight family...

Mr. Hernández: She was so grateful for the life [her Mother] had given her – she said, I can't do it...

Dr. Rivera: Let me ask you about entertainment in barrio, Sammy, when you were growing up and when you were a teenager...

Mr. Hernández: Dances – the weekend dances.

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about those dances.

Mr. Hernández: It was a family called Juan Rios, who played violin.

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Hernández: And he had a thing at the end of the dance, he would play a solo for his wife – his wife would be sitting... and he'd move in front of her and play just for her. And all the women [thought] how touching [that] he'd play for her only. That's the way it was.

Dr. Rivera: So the dances, what year was this, Sammy? In the 40s?

Mr. Hernández: [Because] my Mother and Father [were] running the store, they couldn't stay [at the dances] real late because when the people went to the dance, se *madrugaban* – my Mother and Father said, we can't stay, we gotta work in the morning. So they'd go to dances, which was the only entertainment they had. My Mother said, when she was young that was the only entertainment there was – that was it...

Dr. Rivera: Where were the dances held?

Mr. Hernández: At a *salón* on the corner of 'L' Street and 7th. It's gone now, it was a 2-story place with the *salón*, and there was one where the Valley Ballroom is, it was another *salón* called the Pickering, I believe it was. It was a lagoon, it was a lake – at one time it was a lake there and there were canoes...

Dr. Rivera: Where Inland Center is now?

Mr. Hernández: Yeah.

All that was underwater during the flood of '37, it flooded everything...

But that was it, everybody looked forward to the weekend because nobody worked and you had someplace to go.

Dr. Rivera: What about you when you were in high school? Were you at Colton High School?

Mr. Hernández: I went to Colton High School...

Dr. Rivera: What years?

Mr. Hernández: Well, here's the thing: my Mother and Father didn't send me to the local school. They bussed me across town to Grant School. Do you know where Grant School was?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Hernández: Well, at Grant School there was David Gasca, Ruben Aguilera and his sister, Rosie de la Rosa, me, and Ramos. There was only about ten of us Mexicanos in the school.

So later on, did you ever know the Carrascos?

Dr. Rivera: Si.

Mr. Hernández: Did you know their mother?

Dr. Rivera: No.

Mr. Hernández: Carmen Carrasco was another liberated woman. They didn't want the Mexicans at Grant School, and she went up to the superintendent and said, my kids are here and they're going to stay here.

You couldn't just arbitrarily throw the kids out...

So I wound up at Grant School, and then I wound up at Roosevelt, I didn't wind up at Wilson...

In those days, if you didn't live in the district... I didn't know anything about that—I didn't know nothing about school. When they took me to school, I couldn't go home, I didn't know where I was [because] I'd never been in that part of town. So I wound up at Grant School, they only had 4 rooms and 6 grades, and I had the same teachers my Mother had had in that same school – 20 years later that same school.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: In those days the teachers didn't get married, they were single women... Once they got into teaching they died there and that was it.

Dr. Rivera: When did you start at Colton High School?

Mr. Hernández: I started in 1947.

Colton was a 4-year high school, the 9th grade was in high school. In San Bernardino 9th grade was in junior high, but we had a 4-year high school. So, consequently, being a 4-year school, we had a lot of kids, so they put us in with the big schools. Like San Bernardino they only had three grades, but the biggest grade was the freshmen.

Dr. Rivera: Did you play any of the sports?

Mr. Hernández: Oh yeah, I played baseball. [For 4 years] I played [baseball] on the same team. There was a gym in San Bernardino called Chuy Mendoza.

Dr. Rivera: Yes, I remember him.

Mr. Hernández: I played ball against him...

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, a first baseman.

Mr. Hernández: He was a pitcher too. In fact, I remember Mítla Café had a baseball team that was a big family of Peloteros, they were all Peloteros. All of them played ball, a great big family that played for Mítla's – and that's how I got to know most of those guys, through sports.

But in those days, it was different than it is now; there was no trouble in the neighborhood—not like now. They'd go to the park and behave [themselves].

Mr. Rodriguez: You-know, Sammy started high school in 1947, I was born in 1947. Sorry Sam.

(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: We're like twins.

But I went to Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Mr. Harris was the principal, and my Aunt Toni was his secretary... in all my elementary school years. I went to Colton Junior High, which is now Colton Middle School. They were the Falcons then...

Dr. Rivera: They're still the Falcons. (He turns to Frank Acosta, who is off camera and asks:) Frank, are they still the Falcons? (Frank responds: yes).

Mr. Rodriguez: I was a Colton "Yellow Jacket", and I graduated in 1965. I played football and baseball...

Dr. Rivera: I was gonna ask you, Sammy, in '53 they had the Brown versus the Board of Education...

Mr. Hernández: I wasn't there, I was overseas.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, but that was a national legislation where they integrated the schools. For entertainment purposes, what did the teenagers that were in high school—what did the Chicanos do if they couldn't cross the railroad tracks?

Mr. Hernández: They mostly hung by themselves. Do you remember the Caldera Plunge?

Dr. Rivera: Yes, well, I don't remember that but I heard about it.

Mr. Hernández: Well, that was ours. It was a cold water plunge and it was COLD! But that was ours, carte blanche. Like on a day like this, we spent the day there. We had

the highest diving board in the valley, a 10-meter platform at 33 feet, and if you went off of there, you were grown up – you were somebody.

There was a guy named Chito de la Rosa, he would dive off of that thing, he was the best diver, and another guy Ricky Castorena...

Dr. Rivera: Yes, he's my neighbor

Mr. Hernández: They're the ones that would dive off the ridge, and we'd just watch...

Dr. Rivera: And besides the Caldera, what about dances?

Mr. Hernández: They had dances there, but to this day I don't dance, and I never have; I wasn't interested...

At school we had dances in the gym, they called them 'sock-hops'. I went but just to pass the time.

Dr. Rivera: What about in high school, they said that they had the Mexican-American Club?

Mr. Hernández: They did.

Dr. Rivera: They had a Pan-American...

Mr. Hernández: Antonietta was very prominent in that Club.

By the time Toni got to school, it was a little bit different. Antonietta was *no se hacia de menos* – in other words, if she thought she was right...

Dr. Rivera: Now, who were your pals, Sammy, during the high school years?

Mr. Hernández: My parents?

Dr. Rivera: Your pals?

Mr. Hernández: Oh, the first guy I met in school was Ruben Garcia; he sat in front of me. I never saw him before in my life because we didn't live there. So, him and his sister were in the same class.

David Gasca, the 2 Ramos boys were there with me...

Dr. Rivera: The Ramos boys – was it Mike or?

Mr. Hernández: No, Louie and... they were related to the Gasca's, they were cousins, [and] they lived on 3rd Street.

And a kid named Bub Aguilera was the son of the Aguilera's, he moved to San Bernardino.

But they went to school there, they were a year ahead of me... So those were the first ones that I met.

Dr. Rivera: What about Ernie Garcia, was he in your class?

Mr. Hernández: He didn't go to Grant [Elementary] School, he went to Wilson...

Dr. Rivera: No-but, high school? I thought he went to high school [with you].

Mr. Hernández: Oh-yeah, he went to high school: he ran track, he was a cross country and a miler – he was very, very good.

Dr. Rivera: You said you were a baseballer?

Mr. Hernández: Yeah, he wasn't...

Dr. Rivera: What position did you play in baseball?

Mr. Hernández: I played outfield.

Dr. Rivera: And your batting average was? Say 500 –
(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: Ernie was a very good track man.

Dotty, Ernie's wife now, and her sister: she had a sister named Marty [who] was in my grade, and Dotty was a little bit older, but they were an item already in school...

Dr. Rivera: Talking about that, we mentioned 1953, and you were in the Korean Conflict, how did World War II and Korea affect a life in Colton?

Mr. Hernández: They took everybody, and they were waiting for them to get out of school. They lowered the draft age in 1943 – they lowered the draft age from 21 to 18. They came out and got all the ones who were left. They took him right off the bat (he is pointing to Mr. Rodriguez) barely out of high school, and they took his Father. (Again, referring to Mr. Rodriguez) His Father his graduated from high school at 16, they got him as soon as he turned 18. My Dad was born in 1907, and there was a guy he grew up with—they took him because they couldn't prove how old he was. He came from Mexico with no records, and... he was already in his 30's. My uncle was in his 30's with no family and they took him, he was born the same year as my Dad so he was already 35 when they drafted him.

Dr. Rivera: So as long as your body temperature was 98.6 – *vámonos!*
(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: But I was referring more to when you came back, was there a different attitude of the people that served in the service of World War II and Korea? That I paid my dues, therefore, I need to buy a house in North Colton or...?

Mr. Hernández: No, what happened was, when my tour of duty was over in Korea, some of the guys who had come back already told me – they wrote me a letter [that said:] they're opening up 29 Palms, it's terrible! He said, they're gonna send you there, [but] if you could find a way to go someplace else, go there. So I stayed another year in Japan, and I didn't come back until January '54. So when I came home, I came home by myself, I didn't come home with a group, they flew me to San Francisco... Some of the kids who went overseas together came back together, but I came home by myself. I didn't want to go to 29 Palms.

Dr. Rivera: I was referring more about the people who served in the service feeling that they paid their dues, therefore, they [shouldn't] be treated like a second class citizen...

Mr. Hernández: My cousin, Nechi, they sent him to Jacksonville, Florida – and he's on the train coming back, [while] they went through Texas, he wanted to go in the club-car, they wouldn't let him. He was in his Navy uniform, Mexican, no way, until they got out of Texas and into New Mexico... It was that way.

There was a place in Colton called the Hunter's Sweet Shop, it was a combination drugstore, fountain and everything. Now, I don't know this for a fact, my mother told me: if you wanted service you gotta go around the side and there was a window there. You'd go to the window and they would give you what you wanted, and you'd carry it out, you couldn't go [inside]. It was understood, in other words, nobody tried to go in [the store] because they knew that you couldn't go in – it was unwritten. But they had a window, they wouldn't deny your service, but you went on the side...

Dr. Rivera: And that's the way it was and everybody accepted that...

Mr. Hernández: That's it, everybody accepted it. It was better than no ice cream.
(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: I remember my Dad, I mean, I was a little kid, but I remember him and my Mom talking about the VA (Veterans Administration). Of course, I didn't know that it was about veteran's benefits, and about going to school, and things that he could do. I just remember the conversations I really had no idea what they were doing, but he did take advantage of that – he went back to Valley College and he got is AA (Associate Arts) degree. I remember vividly him talking about the VA loans in the very first house we moved to up in North Rancho in 1959; I remember him using his VA to do that—so I know that he took advantage of those things, and he was really proud of his service... I didn't get it the whole time he was doing it because I wasn't there—I was still a knucklehead kid. But I know that those things that you put on your collar, I know he had those. He had so much memorabilia from the military, you could tell that there was some pride.

Mr. Hernández: His father (indicating toward Mr. Rodriguez) was one of the last classes at Randolph Field, I think that's where it was, where cadets were being trained for pilot training [before] they did away with it in 1943. He was smart; and they transferred him to the Air Force, but he didn't finish because they cancelled the classes. But had they gone any longer he would have probably become a pilot. He was very smart and very affluent, and he had a way with people, also. He was another one who asserted himself – he didn't back down.

Mr. Rodriguez: He was a lot like my Grandfather. My Grandfather used his imagination to see something and actually build it. My Dad was exactly the same way, he could imagine things and go out in the backyard and make something out of absolutely nothing. You-know, even the ping-pong table that he built for us just to have something to do, he built that and it ended up being the centerpiece for the entire neighborhood for all the kids during the summer, and we would actually have tournaments there. But the rule was for when my Dad came home from work, there was peace, everybody had to go because my Dad wanted to sit down and relax.

At the dinner table, that's another thing, if I could [mention]: dinner [was] very special at the house, you could not speak English. He would put everything in front of him, and you had to ask for [everything in Spanish: the plate, fork, knife, food...]. And if he asked you a question, you better not respond with a 'yes or no' answer – it had to be conversation in Spanish. So that was [how our dinner hour was spent]. I remember thinking I was gonna outsmart my Dad [because] I [was thinking:] I don't want to do this. So I told my Dad, I'm not hungry, I'm not gonna eat. [He said in Spanish,] oh good, you can just sit there and talk with us anyway—in Spanish. So, I did that one time – after that I ate.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: You-know, you asked me about how things were in town?

There was still a lot of prejudice, basically, in jobs. There was this gentleman named, Beto Rueda...

Dr. Rivera: Yes, I remember Beto.

Mr. Hernández: Beto Rueda worked at the cement company. Beto Rueda was one of the few guys who had a car. He had a 1938 Ford, and his brother had the identical car. They didn't buy it new, but it was a nice car. Beto Rueda went to Valley College at night to study diesel mechanics. It took him a long time. He took the test and he passed it, they promoted him to diesel mechanic, the other workers said: we ain't dressing with him and we ain't working with him. The foreman said, well, your union set the rules; he passed the test, finished at the top of the class, he's gonna work. So you guys can dress here or you can dress outside, or shower outside, but he's staying.

Dr. Rivera: What year was that Sammy?

Mr. Hernández: That was right after the war.

Dr. Rivera: When they were making the transition.

Mr. Hernández: You-know... you were a threat to their job... and they didn't want you there... Everybody was a laborer...

Dr. Rivera: It was hard to get promoted...

Mr. Hernández: They didn't assert themselves. The Mexicans at that time had an attitude: I'm here, don't make any waves, you-know; we're gonna leave things as they are.

(He points at Mr. Rodriguez) But his Father and Antonietta were not that way; they were headstrong, they pushed...

Dr. Rivera: Sammy, you also mentioned about a person [who] had worked for the city as a street-sweeper...

Mr. Hernández: Colunga.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, tell me about his situation. What was his first name?

Mr. Hernández: Doroteo Colunga. In fact, they named the grandson Doroteo also. He was one of the first ones in Colton; he got a job with the city, and he cleaned the streets. But he didn't have a truck, he had a wagon, a shovel, and a broom. He had worked for quite a few years, and then somebody decided to say: hey, he's not even a citizen, why is he working for the city, he's gonna have to go. [But] they got together and let him keep his job – they did him a favor and let him keep working. The wagon is at that museum in Colton, his grandsons have got the shovel – and you can see it is his shovel.

Dr. Rivera: It was quite an issue, it had to go before the City Council, and the City Council voted that he would keep his job. I think the vote was 2 to 3 or 3 to 2 – something like that...

Mr. Hernández: Yeah, it was very close.

Dr. Rivera: So that was one of the, I guess, victories that we as Mexicans were able to, you-know, say that we got that one.

Mr. Hernández: It was many, many years before we got a Mexican fireman in Colton. In fact, it was a saying that one of the firemen said: you might have a mayor, Oliva was the Mayor at that time, you may have a mayor but you'll never have a fire captain. That's just the way it was.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, and Pasqual Oliva the Mayor. What year was that Sammy, do you remember?

Mr. Hernández: I don't remember.

Mr. Rodriguez: I think that was in the 60's... Dwayne was my age, that's Pasqual's son, and I remember hanging out at their house during high school when Pasqual was the Mayor in the 60's.

Mr. Hernández: In fact, the older brother is still alive, Angel, he's 95 or 96.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, I tried to get him to interview with us, but his grandson told me that he is not healthy enough to do so.

Mr. Hernández: Talk to Rudy. Rudy Oliva will talk to you.

Dr. Rivera: Rudy was one of our first people that we interviewed.

Mr. Hernández: I stopped to see him the other day, and he told me that Angel is still the same...

When their father passed away, their father died before Stella was born; and Augustine quit school and supported the whole [family] by himself. He became the boss of the house.

Dr. Rivera: And that was a large family.

Mr. Hernández: It was, and Augustine was the same age as the boys. He didn't get married until all the boys had grown up.

Te comentia ya no hasta hombre como este hombre – he pointed at Augustine and said: *es eso hombre?* Which was true, he was like 17, 18 years old; and [he was giving] up this whole life that he had ahead of him to take care of his family.

Dr. Rivera: Now, Sammy, tell me about you? We've been talking a little bit about history, having family history. But before we get into that, you mentioned the first fireman in Colton. When did we get our first Mexican-American fireman in Colton?

Mr. Hernández: I forget his name, he went to college and came out and took the test.

Dr. Rivera: Was it Eddie Cortez?

Mr. Rodriguez: I remember Eddie Cortez.

Mr. Hernández: Yeah, uh-huh, I think it was.

I was an only child for 9 years. My Mother and my brother didn't come along until 1942. So, I basically spent most of my time with my Grandmother. My Father and Mother were busy in the store, [but] I got to go a lot of places where they went. I went to Los

Angeles sometimes on a holiday, and my Dad always had a car. He bought a brand new pickup in 1938 and I went with him when he bought it; and in 1941 we bought a new car – nobody had a new car but we had one. I remember going to Los Angeles, and we'd go to the Orpheum Theater to see a matinee or a stage show, and they'd show a movie. In fact, at that movie [theatre] I saw the first Mexican movie I'd ever seen called "Maria Candelaria"... [It] was a very famous Mexican movie. (He points to Mr. Caballero who is off camera) Do you remember that? Dolores Del Rio...

We'd go to a lot of restaurants; I'd get bored, and my Mother, Father, and uncle they'd go eat and they'd spend all day at the restaurant, and I'd go into the car and go to sleep.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: What about after the war? Where did you work after the war?

Mr. Hernández: I went to the service, and then, I came back and I went to work for the phone company. That's what I did in the service. They sent me to teletype school when I went in the Marine Corps, and I got out—so I [was] kind of interested in it. I put in an application at Kaiser, but at Kaiser to get a job there you had to go there. The first day they give you a piece of paper [and they'd tell you]: come back tomorrow, come back next week. Then, the next day they give you [a paper], you fill in the paper, [and they tell you]: come back next week. Then, they give you a thing – a test; then, [they'd say,] come back, again. So, in other words, you can't get hired the same day, it takes about a week with going back and forth. People get tired, I got tired of going back and forth, so I got a job with the phone company...

A lot of the guys went to work for Kaiser: Pio Carreón, he was smart, he was one smart Mexican. They made him a millwright foreman after about 4 years there. They sent him to Chaffey College for a crash course on blueprint reading.

Dr. Rivera: Como se llama?

Mr. Hernández: Porfirio Carreón...

Dr. Rivera: Oh yes!

Mr. Hernández: His brother's name is Camilo...

Dr. Rivera: Well, let me change the subject a little bit. We were talking about entertainment a few minutes ago, and prior to the interview, you mentioned that part of the entertainment was baseball. Tell us about the baseball?

Mr. Hernández: The Colton cement plant had a team; and there was a guy who went to school with my mother, Gordon Multsburger. Gordon Multsburger was the CIF player in 1941, I believe; and he went to play with the White Sox, and he played with Hollywood. And his son went to school...

Dr. Rivera: Well, his son was in my class – yeah, Billy.

Mr. Hernández: Yeah, he looked just like his father with glasses and the whole thing. But the cement plant had a team, and Santa Fe had a team. They had this Black guy, big, tall, skinny Black guy, his last name was Morris, they nicknamed him Santa Fe Morris, and he pitched for years, I mean, he must've been 60 years old and he still played.

There were a lot of commercial teams: Redlands had a team, and on Sundays, everybody would go to the ballgame – it was a treat, it didn't cost anything.

Dr. Rivera: What about Colton, did they have their team?

Mr. Hernández: Colton had the Mercuries, they came in after the war. Albert Martinez, which is Nick's brother, Baker, Ralph Martinez. Remember Ralph Martinez?

Dr. Rivera: Ralph and his brother, uh-huh...

Mr. Hernández: Teo Duarte, Gilberto Rosales, Mike Mercado...

Mr. Rodriguez: The Abril brothers played...

Mr. Hernández: Yeah, but they were later on.
Tony Garcia, he played and was a very good player.

Dr. Rivera: Tony lived almost across the street from your store.

Mr. Hernández: Yeah, he lived up the street. Chayomano was his brother, his real name was David... There was Gail, Darla, and Cherry – that's the *muchachas*; *el padre* was Rob Garcia, he was a carpenter.

Dr. Rivera: So, baseball was big in Colton?

Mr. Hernández: It was, it was a big thing.

Dr. Rivera: What about but the Berdoo team? You mentioned Mítla's

Mr. Hernández: Mítla's had a good team, I mean, the Peloteros was a big family; they played at the park – it's up north of Mount Vernon, there's a park up there and that's where they played at.

Dr. Rivera: Was it on the corner of Mount Vernon and 7th Street?

Mr. Hernández: Uh, farther up...

Prop Room had a team, and it was a softball team called the Generals... It was a big thing. They were sponsored by local [businesses].

There was a team in Bloomington called the Cedar Lumber Company, and they had a really good team – they all played each other.

Dr. Rivera: It was the Sunday entertainment...

You mentioned that you worked for the telephone company, and did you retire from the telephone company?

Mr. Hernández: I started with General, then I went to Victorville and it became Interstate, and then that company changed to Contel, then it changed to Verizon, and I wound up with General, again. All the big companies eat the little ones – that's the way it is now... Pretty soon there won't be a telephone company because of the cell phone. That's what I tell people, if you see a telephone you better take a picture of it because it's gonna be gone.

Dr. Rivera: Well people don't remember the rotary phones that we used to have...

Mr. Hernández: That's what I told the kids the other day: you see that thing—you put your finger in the hole and you dial. [They replied:] Really?

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Did you have family?

Mr. Hernández: My first wife, in fact, one of them looks just like my Mother in the picture (he reaches for the pictures on the table in front of him). She's the spitting image of my Mother... I don't know what it is – because like I told you, my family is split in two halves. (He points to Mr. Rodriguez) They are Ramirez, which was the first group, and the last three are Gonzalez, and we're very different. (He points to Mr. Rodriguez, again) His side, his father...

(Mr. Rodriguez pulls out a picture and shows it to Dr. Rivera).

Dr. Rivera: Okay.

Mr. Hernández: (He looks at the picture too.) That is my girl, that's Pete – he hasn't changed, *lo mismo*, and that's Amelia.

Dr. Rivera: (He tells Frank Acosta, we're gonna have to scan these, eh?)

Mr. Hernández: See, to tell you how things were in those days. My Grandmother had kids from 1897 to 1920 – that's a long time.

Dr. Rivera: 20-some years, yeah.

Mr. Hernández: Well, when Pete was born, my Grandma was already in her 40s. She couldn't breastfeed Pete... His older sister breastfed Nick, Baker and him because that's the way things were done...

Dr. Rivera: So Sam, what are you doing now?

Mr. Hernández: Nothing. I lost my wife almost 3 years ago, [she had] Parkinson's. I live by myself.

Dr. Rivera: Where do you live?

Mr. Hernández: I live in Victorville, [in] a gated community. We had a nice house before; it got too big, we couldn't take care of it. So, all I do is pay the rent – pay the lease, and they mow the lawn. I don't do anything; I just get up, eat...

Dr. Rivera: Well I'm delighted that you're able to do that because... we lucked out with you today.

Mr. Hernández: In fact, you know what I got? When I was taking care of my Mother, my Dad had just bought a '93 Honda, guess where it's at? I got it. A '93 at 21 years old [and] I'm still driving it.

Dr. Rivera: You-know, your Mom was a very good friend of my Mom. You said you took care of your Mom. How long did you take care of your Mom?

Mr. Hernández: She was on dialysis for about five years—the last five years of her life. I used to live in Victorville and I would come down Monday morning, and I would take her to her sessions on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And then, on Friday night, Estelita, my cousin, would come and spend the weekend with my Mother; she looked after her; and then I would come back the following Monday and stay the week. So that's what I did.

Dr. Rivera: You-know, Fernando, you mentioned Sundays after church. (While looking at Mr. Hernández) And your Mom was very involved with the church.

Mr. Hernández: Yes, she was. That's the thing that used to make me mad: I'd come back on Monday and I'd go in the garage and get the car and the mirror was crooked the seat was all the way forward. I said [to her]: Have you been driving? [She replied]: Oh, I only went to church with the ladies, and I'm the only one with a driver's license...

Dr. Rivera: That's true... She was a taxi for all of them.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: Her license expired... She said: oh, my license expired and I don't know if their gonna give me [another] one... [Then one day,] I go visit her and she comes out the kitchen door – she's waving [a driving permit while saying,] she got three more years...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: But anyway, that was a good group of ladies that got together and did their thing, not only for the church, but they go together and had lunch. Fernando, what about you and your family?

Mr. Rodriguez: My own children?

Dr. Rivera: Yeah.

Mr. Rodriguez: I'm on my second marriage; [from my first marriage:] I had Julie, Jennifer, and Victor; and then, my wife now, she's got three kids, so we're all pretty close we have 6 kids, collectively, and pretty much – it's the family unit that I thought that we could have that took a long time to actually put together by just getting together...

Dr. Rivera: But you're retired also?

Mr. Rodriguez: I'm retired but I still teach.

Dr. Rivera: Several places?

Mr. Rodriguez: I'm retired from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), I retired in 2002.

Dr. Rivera: And you were president?

Mr. Rodriguez: I retired as the president of the local union. I am retired from here at Cal State [University San Bernardino] where I worked in maintenance in the electrical department for Fred Roybal – Fred was my boss. I'm still teaching, and this is my last year that I'm teaching for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) – for their apprenticeship program.

Dr. Rivera: Uh-huh.

Mr. Rodriguez: I've been doing this... I've been involved in the electrical industry since I graduated from the Valley College.

I went to work for an electrical wholesale house, Southern California Edison, and then I went to work in construction, which is something that suited me best. I had a great job with Edison, but it wasn't what I wanted; and then when I got into construction, it was something I could do, you-know, with my hands and use my brain at the same time.

And, [I could] take on those responsibilities of building like the Union Hall; I was the general foreman when we built the Union Hall—right on this campus here.

So, it was a pleasure to take on those responsibilities, and it was a pleasure to become the president, you-know, eventually.

Dr. Rivera: How many members did you have?

Mr. Rodriguez: About 900, currently it's about a 1,000. And the irony of this whole thing is that my son is now the president.

Dr. Rivera: Your son is now the president of the Brotherhood...?

Mr. Hernández: Nepotism, huh?

(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: No, he worked for it. Um, I never wanted him to do that – I wanted him to go to college because he had the brains, but he also had the mechanical aptitude that my Grandfather, my Dad, and myself [had]. I mean, we all got that ability [but], he's really got it. So he got into the trade, he excelled at it very fast, and got involved and just took a leadership role. Then he finds himself as the current president. Right now, he's still a little bit overwhelmed because he's only 34 years old; so, he's gotta grow into it a little bit...

Dr. Rivera: Well it's a good thing [he's got you] – his Father around.

Mr. Rodriguez: We talk a lot.

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Hernández: You-know, what he's saying about being smart – do you remember Ray Abril?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Hernández: You-know, Ray Abril, when he married Nellie? Nellie had gone to college in San Bernardino... Ray Abril couldn't read or write when he married her – she taught him.

Dr. Rivera: Where was Nellie from, Sam?

Mr. Hernández: San Bernardino.

Ray Abril, he worked at the PFE (Pacific Fruit Express), he was a very good carpenter, and he modeled more houses for Anglos in North Colton than anybody else. He was good, but he was self-taught. It's like everybody else—self-taught. He didn't go to an apprentice school, he learned it on the job... He was a super carpenter, I mean a finished carpenter. You-know, it's one thing to put up a board, but to do cabinet work and [the other stuff with it], you're either born with it or you're not.

Mr. Rodriguez: You-know, one thing if I could, you-know, about my Dad: when we would have those conversations... He'd have a conversation with my sister that was intended for her, and he'd have conversations with the boys intended for us. But what he would tell us is that when you get in that working market – there are certain things you have to be looking at; don't just get a job, get a job that has a future because one

day you will retire; so you have to be thinking about that. And the one word that he mentioned that I never got for years was: collective bargaining. He said, you need to go work somewhere where they have collective bargaining, where they're gonna take care of you, where they're gonna, you-know, represent you, and do things... Collective bargaining, okay. The next day, I'd forget, you-know, and I would go from job to job as a little kid or, you-know, right out of high school... It wasn't til I went to work for Southern California Edison that I realized: collective bargaining. So I've been a member of the IBEW, god, I think since 1972, which is a long time.

Now, that's what I tell my kids and that's why my entire family is a member of local 477. All of my sons, my son-in-laws – god, we're all in this; and there's a lot of us now in this trade. And I tell them all about the same story – about the 'collective bargaining' – come-on, collective bargaining!

Dr. Rivera: Well, you touched on something that I didn't have in my notes. Did your Grandfather belong to *Los Trabajadores Unidos*, or did he belong to the cement plant?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yes, yes, I believe they were organized under some collective bargaining agreement. I don't know what it was, but yes, he was a union member.

Dr. Rivera: He was a union person?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, and my Mom and Dad both were.

But I didn't understand the message for years, but you-know, when you're young it goes in one ear and out the other one – and I was one of those guys.

But I do get it now and I'm preaching that message to my children and grandchildren. I even have grandchildren in this trade now; so, they're all doing well.

Mr. Hernández: We don't realize the hardships like my Father and his Grandfather went through to come [to this country]. My Mother told me: to come to this great country not knowing the language, not knowing anybody, and not having anything, and making it.

Mr. Rodriguez: Another irony in the story I mentioned, [is] that my Grandfather and my *Tío* Steve are two generations apart, but they were both from Aguascalientes, [Mexico], and both came to Colton and married sisters.

Dr. Rivera: Well, it's good talking about your story. What else do you have over on the side?

Mr. Rodriguez: This is a book that's called "Recollections and Reflections", Volume 3, South Colton, and it's a photographic essay. A lot of our family is in this book, there's a ton of pictures in here, and the copyright date is 2001. I don't know where you can get a copy of this. Every time I take it to a family gathering, everybody wants to steal it – and I keep a close eye on it. I don't mind sharing it with the *familia*, you-know, because there's stuff in here they need to know. I have included a lot of pictures like, for example, that picture right there (he indicates to a picture in front of Mr. Hernández) is in here just to mark where the family is located throughout the book. There's a ton of history going way back; I don't even know or have the dates for some of these.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah. So it's a collection that was done by whom?

Mr. Rodriguez: I'm gonna read you some of the names here... By Joe Lucero, Rudy Oliva, Frank Sanchez, Rudolfo Serrano, and Bobby Vasquez.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, and they were all 7th Street guys?

Mr. Rodriguez: I believe so...

Mr. Hernández: Joe Lucero was a musician [who] played with Nick...

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, Bobby Vasquez was a musician also.

Mr. Hernández: Rudy went on to college...

Dr. Rivera: Well, he retired as a professor...

I call him regularly to tell him what I'm doing, and said: Pick on them, Tom, pick on them.

(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: I got involved, just within our own family through my Aunt Toni, I didn't know that my Aunt Toni had all these memories in her head about the *familia*, you-know. I was so intrigued with the stories that I couldn't get enough of it. And then, when we were doing hospice for her, I went over one day and she was writing on the back of the pictures – who was in the picture. So I started to write for her, and she had a mountain of pictures, and we would do like maybe 10 or 15 because every picture had a story, and they were amazing.

Dr. Rivera: So, what are you doing with that collection now, Fernando?

Mr. Rodriguez: I have it on a flash drive... And I have some on my laptop. I have a ton of these from the Rochín family, the Matíomaño, all the way back, I mean, we go back to my Grandma Nina, (as he points to the picture) that's my Grandma Nina right there, her mother was Mama Pílar.

Mr. Hernández: She's the one responsible for the whole thing.

(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, Mama Pílar in Indio – that's the Morales family in Indio. And before that – there was a lot of family right outside Chihuahua, Mexico in El Rancho la reina, there was a lot of family back there. Mama Pílar, my Great-great-grandmother married Pedro Lara. Pedro Lara's father had a brother whose son was Geronimo, the Indian...

Dr. Rivera: Geronimo, you're kidding?

Mr. Rodriguez: No, that's why a lot of times for our family reunion, I have it right here somewhere (He searches for the picture on the table). For our family reunion... (He shows Dr. Rivera a picture of Geronimo) we'll put this on the cover letter on the invitation... and everybody always asks about that. In here (he searches among other items), I have the family tree going back to that time. There's all these pictures – there's a ton of stuff in here. Yeah, that's just [stuff of] our family that I share with my kids. My kids will one day inherit all this that I have, I mean, somebody's got to get it...

Mr. Hernández: When we have our family gathering, who made that sheet of plywood with the picture...?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, it's on some plywood but it's on stainless steel. We got together and we decided we needed to do a pictorial of the family tree with all the faces associated with the names I have in this thing here (he points to his book). So we started doing that and it is huge. It takes several people to assemble it at the reunion, and then all the photographs are there of the different families just branching out. It is so big now that we've outgrown the tree, and we can't figure out how we are going to make this thing bigger? How are we gonna get this thing there, in the first place.

Mr. Hernández: Somebody had written on there: 'she was responsible' –

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, Mama Pílar, she was at the very bottom, and Pedro... It's branched out into something that's unbelievable—it's huge, and there's no more room, we've run out of room. Because the next generation, my grandkids and great-grandkids, now I have 4 great-grandkids, there's no room for them at the top, so we're trying to figure out...

Dr. Rivera: So you have to start an orchard...

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, something like that –

(Laughter)

Mr. Rodriguez: An orchard, that's a great idea, with several trees in it, I like that. Everybody bring their own tree.

Dr. Rivera: Fernando, you wrote a wonderful little description of the family, can you share the points that you put in your narrative?

Mr. Rodriguez: Well, you-know... originally this started because in Colton they wanted to do a book, which never got published, by the way, on historical locations in South Colton. So my Dad told me about it, he knows I like to just dabble in writing a little bit – so he said, you know what? We've got to get together and put something together about this store. So, we got together with Mariana and my Mom, my Dad, and Antonietta – at several different times in 1995. And I think Sammy was involved in some of the conversations. A lot of different people got involved, and it's like anything else, you start talking about the La Esperanza Market – and the stories just get like the family tree. The stories just take off, and all of a sudden like what I figured would maybe be a 2 hour sit down – the sun has already gone down, and I'm trying to organize my notes. That was the beauty of it, sitting there with the family and doing that. It was about the historical landmark and I thought, god, that La Esperanza Market and all the people [who] were involved; even the Santa Fe Railroad was part of the history because they stopped there before the underpass, the 'N' Street underpass, the train would stop there before pulling into the yard, the Santa Fe yards in San Bernardino. The engineers would get off and my *Tio* Steve would make them [sandwiches] – it was like "Subway" before "Subway". He would make them, I mean, whatever they wanted: a *sandwichito* – he would call it; and [they'd have] sodas, and they'd sit there and they'd have a conversation. My *Tio* Steve knew everybody by name.

Well, one of the guys, I mentioned his name in the story, [my *Tio* Steve] started to like Trini Leyva. Trini Leyva worked for my *Tio* Steve and my Aunt Marian. They eventually got married in the 1960s. You-know just to kind of tie in the railroad to the store too. I mean, everybody was a part of that market. Everybody was made to feel special there. And, you-know, it's a landmark right in the preface here – it's a landmark only in the imaginations of all the people that had an opportunity to visit the store, and experience: I call it the La Esperanza experience because there's nothing like it. You can't go anywhere now and experience that – nowhere. It was special.

Dr. Rivera: And you put it down on paper and I'm delighted that you shared it with me. And you also gave us a little summary of what your feelings were on that little story that you put together.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, it's a story that I've shared with all my kids, [and] they all have a copy of this.

I love to write. I write every morning, and they're the recipients.

Dr. Rivera: Um-hmm. Could we borrow it and put it in our...?

Mr. Rodriguez: This? Absolutely! I think you guys have a copy already. I gave you guys a copy... This is my original one here, I don't have any more at home—I've given them all away. But this one, yeah, you can make copies of this – if I can get it back...

Dr. Rivera: Well, I don't know how long we've taken for this interview, Sammy and Fernando, but it was wonderful, I thoroughly enjoyed it, eh? And thank you very much, both of you, Sammy and Fernando.

Mr. Hernández: You-know the good thing is, I can remember things that happened a long time ago, [but] I can't remember what I did yesterday.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: That's true. I can remember my teacher from the first day of school, Mrs. Pelts, and I can remember it like yesterday.

Mr. Rodriguez: And, you-know, really the time is insignificant, you-know, it's just a pleasure to sit here with all of you and share these stories—and thank you for asking questions and inviting us here. I mean, this has been a pleasure for us.

I asked Sammy, I said, hey Sam, I'm gonna go to Cal State San Bernardino, do you know Dr. Tom Rivera? [He said,] yeah. He said he wants to do an interview, do you want to go with me? He goes: yeah, yeah, when? What time? So here we are, and it's been good for us.

Sammy and I have a special relationship, obviously, we grew up kind of like my Grandfather and my *Tio* Steve – two different generations but, we're pretty, pretty close now.

Mr. Hernández: Do you remember the Visconté family?

Dr. Rivera: Visconté, *dondé vivien?* Where did they live?

Mr. Hernández: They lived over there off of 5th Street.

Señora Visconté was very active in the church with her husband. Her son Lawrence, was a pilot in the second war, he got killed in France. He was the first known Mexican to go to college. His sister, Virginia...

Dr. Rivera: From Colton?

Mr. Hernández: From Colton. His sister graduated from a university also.

Dr. Rivera: What was their last name?

Mr. Hernández: Visconté. (Inaudible) Visconté was the youngest brother. They had a brother named Arturo.

I remember I had the mumps, and I was home sick, and I remember they came to visit me right before [Lawrence] went into the service and he became a pilot and he got killed...

Dr. Rivera: And he was one of the first people from Colton, Mexican-American, to go to college. I have to look him up.

Mr. Hernández: His name was Lorenzo Visconté...

In those days, especially the women, they're lucky they got to junior high school. It was unknown for the women to... What do you need school for, you've got to get married...

Dr. Rivera: So, it was a different mentality, Sammy?

Mr. Hernández: That's the way it was.

Dr. Rivera: You had to grow up and go to work.

Mr. Hernández: That's exactly right.

Dr. Rivera: You had to grow up and go to work and maintain the family.

Mr. Hernández: Because you had to help. I mean, the family needed all the help they could [get]. They toughed it out...

I worked with [Lawrence's or Lorenzo's] nephew in Victorville. He told me that later on when the war ended, some French people contacted him, and they had found him and they had wrapped up all of [his uncle's] belongings in a silk scarf and kept it to send to him.

Dr. Rivera: Now, you have a picture here...

Mr. Rodriguez: Oh, that's my Grandfather, he's the one who built the store.

Mr. Hernández: He's dressed formally here.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah... Can we borrow it and scan it?

Mr. Rodriguez: Yes, that's why I pulled it out. That's one of the buildings that he built in the back of the property.

Mr. Hernández: He built everything that's there.

Dr. Rivera: Can you put his name on the back?

Mr. Hernández & Mr. Rodriguez: It's got his name on the back.

Dr. Rivera: Thank you.

Now, Fernando and Sam, is there anything else that I forgot to ask, or that you can recall that we can take advantage of the time that we have here.

Mr. Hernández: We lived in very close proximity to all of us. His Father lived backyard-to-backyard. They lived in the back part, so I could look out and see him. His uncle, his Father's brother, lived next door to us; our Grandmother lived across the street; the other end lived across the alley; and the next sister lived in the next house; and we all lived right there. There was never a shortage of kids to play with – we had a lot of kids to play with.

Dr. Rivera: Well you-know, South Colton is 1.3 square miles: from 3rd Street all the way to 12th Street, and then, from 'L' Street all the way to Congress. So it was a short 1.3 square miles of territory.

Mr. Rodriguez: You-know, just to jump on what Sammy said about living so close together, that's what I remember, and a comment just came to mind: "That it takes a village" – it was Hillary Clinton. But that's what we had back there in those days, because everybody was your mom, your *tias* were your moms and your *tios* were all watching you.

I told Sammy this story on the way here: we lived right next to the railroad tracks and I was at my Grandma's house and I used to love the trains. [Sometimes when] the train started moving, [I'd run] up the hill and I'd climb onto the ladder on the side of the boxcar, and I'd hold on with one foot like I was really brave – I was about 8 years old. I'd ride the boxcar just a few blocks down and then jump off. Well, [it was on] one of these days, I'm holding onto the ladder on the boxcar and the train is traveling, and my Aunt Marianna was the first car parked right there before the underpass. So by the time I got back to my Grandma's house, my Dad was already there – she told on me. But I guess that's part of growing up in that neighborhood, they all watched us...

Mr. Hernández: No matter where you went or what direction you went there was a train going by.

Mr. Rodriguez: Those were good times. *Familia* was, I mean, there was an abundance of family in front, to the left, to the right, it didn't matter it was always family; and kids playing – it was a ton of kids everywhere.

Mr. Hernández: Like I told him before... nobody had a watch. A certain train would go by and they'd know what time it was. [When] the Santa Fe blew the whistle they'd know what time it was.

Mr. Rodriguez: 5 o'clock.

Mr. Hernández: When the church rang the bell, they knew what time it was.

(Laughter)

Mr. Hernández: [When] the cement company blew their whistle, it was 3 o'clock.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yeah, young kids nowadays don't have that experience with that kind of freedom that we did back in those days. I mean, I don't think right now if my grandson rode his bicycle to Fairmont Park like I did, you-know, the parents would go crazy. I would ride my bike to Fairmont Park and just come home—I'd be by myself; and I'd tell my brother that it was no big deal... But it is now.

Mr. Hernández: The river was a playground, we called it a river...

Dr. Rivera: Oh, the Santa Ana River... that was a playground.

Mr. Hernández: That was a playground... We'd go down there and run around—sometimes a little bit of trickle of water, but not too much. And then, we used to go to the Sequia up on top of Jap Hill – we'd go swimming, it was open at the time. That was the hang out. That was entertainment.

Dr. Rivera: So we made due with the La Sequia, La Pila, La Pila...

Well again, thank you so much for being with us this morning, and we thoroughly had a wonderful [time]. We reminisced quite a bit about the early Colton, about family, and also some of the values that we got growing up in Colton as young kids. Thank you so much.

(Applause)

Mr. Hernández: You-know, I've talked to other people from San Bernardino, they lived in the neighborhood, and basically, they were in the same boat we were [in]. They did

the same things we did at Mount Vernon, it was no different. A different town but, they did the same things.

Dr. Rivera: Yes, and again, because, you-know, we were not permitted to do other things outside our little territory.

Mr. Hernández: And we didn't want to go anywhere else.

Dr. Rivera: And we had to make do with what we had.
Well thank you so much.

Mr. Rodriguez: Thank you guys – that was good.

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