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Oral History Project of Colton, CA. – 10/24/2014

Dr. Rivera: Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Tom Rivera, and welcome to our oral history project. Today is October the 24th, we're in the Pfau Library at Cal State San Bernardino, and it's approximately a little past one o'clock. Our guest this afternoon is Mr. Andrés García.

Andrés, thank you so much for being with us this afternoon; thoroughly appreciate you being with us, especially, you helping us with this oral history project of Colton. The purpose is to learn how it was growing up in South Colton during the 20s, 30s, 40s, and the 60s; and you're just a wonderful example of that.

Why don't we start, and let me ask you the first question.

Tell us about yourself, when were you born?

Mr. García: I was born 1923, November 30th, down south 5th Street in Colton.

Dr. Rivera: And you were part of the *el barrio la calle cinco*.

Mr. García: Exactly, yes.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah.

Mr. García: The poor area.

Dr. Rivera: Well you-know, all of Colton they'd seen was a poor area.

But, tell us a little bit about South [Colton] history because earlier today I heard you talking with Mr. Acosta, one of our committee members, and he mentioned *el barrio la católica*. Did you know anything about the barrio being named *la católica* back then?

Mr. García: Not really, no, but I think it's about the first Catholic Church that was down South 5th. As I understand, there was the first Catholic Church there; and then, after that for some time they had moved up to 'L' and 7th.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, 7th and 'L', you're absolutely right.

You mentioned that you were born *la calle cinco*, you mentioned way south near Fog Street, Congress Street?

Mr. García: Yes. If you proceeded down 5th you would come to Fog Street – that was the end of 5th, I believe there, at that point.

Dr. Rivera: Was Long's Dairy there when you were [there]?

Mr. García: Ah-yes, the Long's Dairy. They had several cows, they sold milk to the area there. I think they even delivered some for some time, which was good because it was healthy, and therefore, maybe I guess you could say, we were raised starting out right.

Dr. Rivera: Well, of course.

Tell me, did you have any neighbors? Do you have any friends that you played with while you were in the neighborhood? Do you remember any of those friends?

Mr. García: Yes. Right next to our house – to the north of our house [was the] Garcia family. The next house was [the] Vasquez family. Mr. Soltero and [his] wife, Manuela, and [their] children like: David, I believe was their first born, Jesus, Arturo, Manuel nicknamed Barney, and the youngest, Ramon, they called him Moné.

Dr. Rivera: (Speaking to Henry Vasquez who is off camera) So Henry, you're part of this family too?

Mr. H. Vasquez: (Off camera) Well, I'm out of that Vasquez family and so is Chuck.

Dr. Rivera: (Speaking to Chuck Vasquez who is off camera) You're the one that's responsible, eh?

Mr. C. Vasquez: He's living at that same house.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, Henry is living at the same house?

Mr. H. Vasquez: At (inaudible).

Dr. Rivera: It's a small world...

Who were your friends that you remember, Andrés – [who did] you pal around with, like while you were growing up? Do you remember any of the guys you were growing up with?

Mr. García: Yes. This memory doesn't work too well anymore.

Dr. Rivera: Well, let me rattle it a little bit.

I never saw it, but they tell me that there was a plunge in that area, the Caldera Plunge is what they tell me.

Mr. García: Juan Caldera built it, yes, down South 5th approaching Fog. Mostly Mexican people went there because it was in the south side of Colton.

Dr. Rivera: And they also tell me that he had a baseball field there.

Mr. García: Oh-yes, complete with a grandstand, and down below behind the grandstand was a dance hall. Remember Willie Rueda?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. García: [He was] a local vocalist, and there was dances there every weekend, I believe...

Dr. Rivera: That was Caldera Hall.

They also mentioned to me that they had a bullring there, do you remember that?

Mr. García: Oh-yes, but for only one day; and if I remember right, I helped build it, me and Barney Vasquez, Ramon, and others.

They didn't allow killing the bull.

Dr. Rivera: Uh-huh.

Mr. García: And still don't. Anyway, for one day just few a people came. I don't remember it being a big thing about it. So that was the end of [the] bullfights in South Colton.

Dr. Rivera: Now, you mentioned the plunge. Was there another plunge in Colton?

Mr. García: At the north end of town, yes, the Colton plunge. I forget the name of the streets, though.

Dr. Rivera: On La Cadeña, you said that you had to use the South Colton plunge Caldera?

Mr. García: Yes, mostly because we couldn't find transportation really to make it to the good place, so we settled for the Colton plunge [because] it was good, it was the biggie. Every Sunday people would gather there to watch those that could swim and dive. Those that made the headlines were Caldera's children: Betty [and] Martina because they could dive from the 30 foot platform; [and that was] considered a big deal.

Dr. Rivera: Do you remember any of your friends that you had at *la calle cinco*?

Mr. García: Yes. I don't recall their last names. Endelecio Mercado, and his brother, Trinidad...

Dr. Rivera: Now, did any of these friends of yours have nicknames?

Mr. García: Okay, my brother, Raúl, Raleigh [was his nickname], he was older than I; and then there was Daniél, the youngest boy who used to play in the street, kick-the-can, and stuff like that.

Dr. Rivera: You played in the street and you said, kick-the-can, what was that? You get a can and kicked it? Or use it as a ball?

Mr. García: Yes. Remember, [whatever] rules there were – the idea was to kick it around and see who could maybe kick it to the imaginary line at some point. That's how we spent our time because we were poor, we couldn't afford going to big-time baseball [games]. Although, Caldera had a ball field as part of the Caldera Entrapneurship; and I understand a Hollywood team the Browns – the Hollywood Browns used to play there, and some other teams.

Dr. Rivera: So the Caldera ballpark would attract good ball teams to come and play in South Colton.

Mr. García: Yes. I understand from [the] Los Angeles area, Myers Gordon Maltzburger...

Dr. Rivera: He was a Colton ball player, Maltzburger...

Mr. García: Gordon Maltzburger. After that we went up north and played with a team from San Francisco – that area there. He played good, he brought baseball to the area also – I can say that.

Dr. Rivera: Did you go to school there in South Colton?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Where did you go to school?

Mr. García: A little school down at the end of South Rancho that connects to Aqua Mansa. [It was] a little tiny school, a two room school. At one end was grades 1st through 3rd, at the end of the building was another 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th.

Dr. Rivera: Uh-huh. What was the name of the school?

Mr. García: San Salvador Elementary School.

Dr. Rivera: After San Salvador, did you go to Wilson Junior High School?

Mr. García: First of all, from San Salvador School... my teacher thought I was sharp, so I skipped 5th grade and I ended up in Roosevelt, I believe, [in the] 7th grade. Anyway, from there, they sent me to Wilson School down on 7th Street for the 8th grade. I graduated from there, and then I went to 9th grade in high school.

Dr. Rivera: What year was that that you went to high school?

Mr. García: Oh, I graduated from the 8th grade in 1938, I believe. I went up to 9th grade in high school in 1939. In the 40's, then, schooling was 9th grade, 10th, 11th, and through the 12th.

Dr. Rivera: So you graduated from Wilson in 1938?

Mr. García: I believe so, yes.

Dr. Rivera: It was a brand new school, I think it was just opened in 1937 or 1938. But then you went to Colton High School?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Did you graduate from Colton High School?

Mr. García: From the 12th grade, I would have graduated in 1943, except that it was wartime, so I was drafted before it got to June. I would have graduated in June of 1943. So, I went into the service.

Dr. Rivera: And you were in the Air Force?

Mr. García: I ended up in the Air Force, yes.

Dr. Rivera: Okay. Tell us a little bit of that experience in the Air Force. Where did you get your basic training?

Mr. García: Oh, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Dr. Rivera: Uh-huh.

Mr. García: Basic training [was done] by the ocean, by the sea, the shore. It was fun because it was calisthenics right on the sand – we were suffering.

(Laughter)

Mr. García: It was hard to take...

Dr. Rivera: Well, you got out of paradise, *la calle cinco*, and you went to another paradise.

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Were you overseas, or did you stay in Florida all that time?

Mr. García: After basic training in Florida, St. Petersburg, we came back later to take gunnery school, aerial-gunnery school. That was fun because there were these air planes they called a sock, a moving target, and we would fly parallel to them on our own airplane and shoot at it from a distance. And the sock had ink in it, and then your bullet, your shells would leave a mark on the sock. When it landed, they would count how many [color] reds you had. The other guys were shooting at it too, also. Anyway when they got on the ground they would count and tell you how you did.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, okay. But you mentioned that being in Florida, to you, it was the best thing since tortillas and frijoles?

Mr. García: Oh my goodness...

Dr. Rivera: Why did you say that? That it was a wonderful experience in Florida in comparison to 5th Street in Colton?

Mr. García: Different living, a little higher, maybe. No more tortillas and frijoles... but it was it was fun. But then you got to know other kids from Eastern California, from all over the country, different nationalities.

I remember, it was wintertime [when] we would go in formation out in the street and [have] roll call. Later, they gave you a little break and you'd go inside and wash up, change into your fatigues, and then they would march us out to maybe, I think, our first stop was lunch [I mean] breakfast first. It was very good breakfast, by the way, no more beans and tortillas...

Dr. Rivera: Let me ask you: Did you go overseas after basic training?

Mr. García: Yes, eventually, yes. After I went to gunnery school and ended up... Well, I guess you could say we flew around the world. (Inaudible) By this time you were a member of a crew: a pilot, co-pilot, engineer, and a radio operator, which was me. So we went around the world down to South America across the Atlantic Ocean, and ended up in Africa, and across Africa in route to our final destination or permanent base, which happened to be in Burma. We had our base there with about 14 or 15 C-47 airplanes, and I was the radio operator in one of them. Then we had the pilot, the co-pilot, engineer – and our job then was to drop supplies down to our troops on the ground in Burma.

Dr. Rivera: And how long were you in the Air Force? When did you get out of the Air Force?

Mr. García: In January 1946.

Dr. Rivera: So you spent 4 years with the Air Force?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Okay –

Mr. García: And that was the extent of my military time. I didn't stay in the service very long because I was discharged – it seems like right away. But two or three weeks later Norton was busy with repairing aircraft. The aircraft they repaired at that time were C-47's, which was exactly the one that I used to fly in the service. So I knew everything about that airplane, the C-47 – I could work every [piece of] equipment in it.

Dr. Rivera: And when you got out of the service, did you work at Norton?

Mr. García: Yes, at Norton. But I started out washing airplane parts at the wash rack. What a change from fighting one place and then to doing dishes, you might say, at [Norton]...

Dr. Rivera: So you started working at Norton in what year?

Mr. García: In 1946. January 1946.

Dr. Rivera: And you, eventually, worked on the planes—repairing the planes?

Mr. García: Not repairing, I was in radio shop, so I would install, tune and check out the different radios, the C-47 included. [I would] check the signal strength; it was fun because [we] used to call different air bases with our call sign 656, I remember. [We would ask:] how do you read my signal? And so on.

Dr. Rivera: When did you retire?

Mr. García: 1985.

Dr. Rivera: Okay, about 30 years ago?

Mr. García: Yes. And then it was back to civilian life.

Dr. Rivera: Being born and raised in Colton, your girlfriend was almost your neighbor?

Mr. García: Yeah.

Dr. Rivera: Tell me how did you meet Mary? What was her first name?

Mr. García: Avelina.

Dr. Rivera: You guys were almost neighbors?

Mr. García: We'd go out on walks with her sisters; and me and another friend of mine, who lived next door, I forget his name now, we would mix with them, play with them, dance at night – dancing in the streets. But I happened to be interested in this certain one... We ended up going out together for a long time. Gradually, we got serious that maybe, eventually, we would be ending up marrying and raising our own children.

Dr. Rivera: Now, when did you get married? What year did you get married?

Mr. García: October 12, 1947, I believe.

Dr. Rivera: Almost right after the year – after [you left] the Air Force.

Mr. García: Right.

Frank Acosta: (off camera): [What is] Avelina's maiden name?

Mr. García: Sanchez [was her maiden name].

Dr. Rivera: You got married in 1947. How many children did you have?

Mr. García: 5 altogether: 3 boys and 2 girls; 2 of which are present.

Dr. Rivera: 2 of them are here: Priscilla and Virginia.

Mr. García: No that's before... Oh, what's this? No that's right—right there. (He points at his daughters in the room).

(Laughter)

Mr. García: 3 boys: 1 is a mailman, 1 works for Kaiser, and 1 works for Beaumont Schools – and that would bring us to about this point.

Dr. Rivera: Now tell me, after you got married and raised your family, did you always live in Colton on 5th Street?

Mr. García: My goodness – oh yeah, when I retired we had a lot in Beaumont, and my wife and I had a house built there, which we took part in finishing it, actually. Because I did a little carpentry, I did a lot of roofing, painting, practically, I can say that we had a good part in...

Dr. Rivera: In building the house yourself.

Mr. García: Our own house, yes.

Dr. Rivera: Now, you said in Beaumont?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: How long did you live in Beaumont?

Mr. García: 14 years, I believe.

Dr. Rivera: And in Colton, you still have a house in Colton?

Mr. García: It's still there, yeah. We left it – I think Priscilla is there. I continued living in Beaumont with my wife, and I think I got a job there. I didn't have to, but just after we finished the house, by the way, I worked for the library [as a] volunteer, and then in the Banning Hospital for pay. Then I worked for Jack-in-the-Box. I didn't have to work there but because I had to go to work at 5 o'clock in the morning, I only put in about 5 months work and I said, this is not for me, I'm not getting up—I don't have to get up, so I quit.

Dr. Rivera: Well, was this after you retired from Norton?

Mr. García: Yeah, way after that—yes.

Dr. Rivera: Ok-ok, let me ask you about your Mom and Dad: where are they from?

Mr. García: They originally came from the state of Michoacán in Mexico. Their names were Correas García and my Mom's was Jesus Avalos.

Dr. Rivera: When did they come to Colton?

Mr. García: I would say around close to the 1920's...

I don't know how they ended up in the state of Illinois... They came across, first, in El Paso, I believe. Gradually, like I say, how they ended up in the state of Illinois I don't know.

Dr. Rivera: And then they came to Colton?

Mr. García: Gradually, they worked themselves back West. We had uncles in Colton, my *Tio* Filomero, before us they were already there. My *Tio* Filomero worked at the cement plant there. So my Dad had an easy time finding a job.

Dr. Rivera: So your Dad worked for the cement plant?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Did he retire from the cement plant, or was he injured?

Mr. García: No, he was injured in 1926, I believe in May. It seems like at work the conveyor belt [and] a chain broke and hit him in the head. As I remember, I was only two, about two and a half years old, I barely remember him. He tried to go home but they wouldn't let him, and I think he died there before he could be taken to a hospital.

Dr. Rivera: So you didn't have a father early [on]. Were you raised just by your Mom?

Mr. García: Yes. She happened to be a seamstress [who] learned the business in Mexico. So in Colton she would make dresses, alterations, and work for some of my teachers. They'd go to her, and since my Mom didn't know any English, the teachers would give me the measurements [for] the patterns, and I would interpret [this information to my Mom] so my Mom would work at making their dresses and alterations. The priests would also come to her needing alterations.

Dr. Rivera: The priest was Father Valencia?

Mr. García: At that time, I believe it was Father Valencia, yes. And he was quite a character, really.

Dr. Rivera: Why was he quite a character? Tell me about this character?

Mr. García: He drove like-a 1930, 1931 Ford Sedan. He would fill it full of kids, as many as he could get in the car – 3 or 4 kids. [He] would ride up and down the streets hollering and honking the horn, and just having fun. I remember that part.

Dr. Rivera: Now, you mentioned that your Mom did some work for the church – Father Valencia, some alterations and some tailoring?

Mr. García: Yes, tailoring, correct.

Dr. Rivera: Were you a very religious person growing up?

Mr. García: I believe so, my Mom used to take us [to church] every Sunday. By that time we were... I think there were 5 of us altogether by that time. Every Sunday we would walk because we didn't have a car, yet. [So,] we would walk to church every Sunday...

Dr. Rivera: Did you also attend the *Jamaicas*?

Mr. García: Oh-yes, all celebrations like that, especially, remember the time when they would hang Judas?

Dr. Rivera: During the Easter festivities, uh-huh.

Mr. García: The Easter festivities, yeah, they would hang they would hang Judas... (Inaudible) made of paper, painted black, it was fixed with firecrackers, yes. Then, Father Valencia would somehow... There was music there, and people wanted to get close up to the mono to touch it. It was hanging from a rope and somebody down on the ground would pull the rope. [There was] dancing and after a while... he would get up to the mono and light the fuse. The culmination of the celebration [was that] you would see Judas parts catching on fire, and pieces flying all over, and kids running to get maybe souvenirs of what's left.

Dr. Rivera: So the firecrackers would just explode Judas, and parts of the paper maché would blow all over the place, and everybody wanted a souvenir. Did you ever get a souvenir?

Mr. García: I don't believe so.

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about the baptism? Did you attend the baptism?

Mr. García: Yes. Well, I was baptized there when I was about 2 or 3 years old – a baby, anyway. My *Padrinos*, I think were Jesus and (inaudible).

Dr. Rivera: So you were baptized at San Salvador?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Okay. What about marriage, did you get married at San Salvador?

Mr. García: Yes. I believe it was on October 12th, 1947. My wife, Avelina, yes. My *Padrinos* were Ramona Mercado and Trinidad was her husband, I believe.

We were poor so we couldn't afford having a big celebration afterwards. So we kept it, in fact, at my house – we had a small gathering. My Mom would fix some [food] for the small number of those invited. We kept it very, very simple.

Dr. Rivera: The food that was served was it *molé* and *gallina*?

Mr. García: I believe so, yes.

Dr. Rivera: With *tortillas* or *frijoles*?

Mr. García: Yes...

Dr. Rivera: How about *arroz*, did they serve *arroz, tambien*?

Mr. García: Yes, but it didn't last long because we didn't have any music to speak of, so it was kind of just a small affair and that was the end of it.

Dr. Rivera: Well, but you're still here.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Tell me—let's go back to when you were growing up on La Calle Cinco, and talking about your friends. You mentioned you played kick-the-can, and I would imagine you also played *Canicas*?

Mr. García: *Canicas*, run-chipper-run, whatever that means...

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: What about swimming, did you guys swim? Besides the plunge, did you swim in La Secchia?

Mr. García: We went to the river, the Santa Ana River.

Dr. Rivera: Okay.

Mr. García: It was running through South Colton, and ended up in what they call the *Quadrito*. It was about chest height, the water would get up that high, and we would dive [in] from the sides and have a ball!

Dr. Rivera: So you and your gang would go to the *Quadrito*?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: What else did you do besides that? Did you guys play softball?

Mr. García: Yes, everybody formed or picked sides. [We had] a big softball, and [we played] in the street, I believe. We would hold up traffic sometimes... We had all kinds of fun. One thing that I remember, on the ground at the house we would draw characters, (inaudible) drawing *manitos* killing the other – characters...

Dr. Rivera: Well, talking about *manitos*, how about comic books?

Mr. García: I didn't buy too many comic books, but other guys would and they would loan them to us. I remember some like Marvel, and a hero, Superman, I believe at the time.

Dr. Rivera: Andrés, how about the radio? Because we didn't have TV back then, but how about the radio? Did you have a radio?

Mr. García: Yes, we had an old-time radio, I believe it was so noisy because the signal wouldn't pick up too well. There was a Mexican program there from San Bernardino, KHFM. I forgot the name of the man who was speaking – what do you call him?

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The announcer, yeah. In Spanish, *locutor*, yes, but I forgot his name—he's well known. Later, he became an insurance man...

Frank Acosta: (Off camera speaking). There was a radio announcer named Danny Landeros?

Mr. García: Danny Landeros from Redlands, yeah...

Dr. Rivera: Andrés, you said your Dad worked for Portland Cement, you worked at Norton, and your Mom did some tailoring for people in Colton. What else did people do to earn a living? Your friends or neighbors, where did they work?

Mr. García: Let me see now, during harvest times, many of us would go to places like Hemet...

Dr. Rivera: And pick *chabacon*?

Mr. García: And pick *chabacon*, yes. The ladies would do the cutting and the men would do the spreading of the fruit on trays and lay them out in the sun to cure, after running them through the sulfur – you have to cook them in sulfur first.

I remember I got to pick apricots, and cut them and spread them. My older brother, Manuel, would be out in the yard spreading the trays full of cut apricots in the sun to cure. Finally, gather them up and ship them off to the cannery in downtown Hemet.

Dr. Rivera: Besides Hemet, are there any other harvests that the family followed?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Que mas?

Mr. García: After the apricot season we would end up in La Puente. That would be the walnut harvest that would last about 2 or 3 weeks. Strong men would take a long stick with a hook at the end and shake the branches to drop the walnuts to the ground. Then we would gather [fruit] in buckets to cut the fruit. Maybe make a big pile of them and remove those that didn't come clean with little tools to clean the fruit, and put them in gunny sacks. [We would] fill the sacks up to a hundred pounds maybe, and put a little tag on them indicating that we had picked those and they were our numbers – so they would know where the pay would go.

Dr. Rivera: What about other fruit besides walnuts?

Mr. García: I got to pick a lot of grapefruit, grapes...

Dr. Rivera: Where were the grapes?

Mr. García: In Ontario, all along Highway 10 on both sides – a lot of grapes.

Dr. Rivera: The Guasti area?

Mr. García: Guasti, yes.

Dr. Rivera: Well you were busy...

You mentioned you were poor and were raised in the poor part of Colton. Then you went into service and there's a wonderful little picture of you. **(The camera pans over to his military picture)**. You were a handsome guy back then—well you're still a handsome guy, but you were handsomer back then, eh? That's a nice picture of you. When you left the service in 1946, you came back to Colton and you got a job at Norton.

Mr. García: Mmm-hmm.

Dr. Rivera: Do you remember people like you coming back after they left the service? Like, Angel Oliva and Pasqual Oliva, and some of those people that were kind-of in your age category – that they came back... They started having committees, like they would get involved in *Las Fiestas Patrias*. They would also get involved with Pete Luque, Sr. running for the council in Colton. So they got involved in politics. Tell us about that – you-know, lots of GI's came back and said we want to be part of American society now because we paid our dues.

Mr. García: I guess after coming from the service and going to school—and getting wise, maybe, they would join groups, political groups; and pretty soon they would run for political office. I think one of the first to run for office was Pasqual Oliva, I believe. [He] was the first mayor, if I remember right. Shortly after that more people became involved in trying to move ahead. Another man, Peter Luque, Sr., was running for office, I believe. Abe Beltran also got to be mayor.

Dr. Rivera: So do you think the soldiers coming back from their duties became more aware of being able to participate in the community?

Mr. García: Yes. Being a part of the city, and to take part in [contributing] in whatever they could to better our own people, which for a time, it was only the north—people in the north that were advancing, you might say. Over here (the south side), we were timid, maybe, afraid to make a move.

Dr. Rivera: But it made a difference because, you-know, in South Colton, we had the railroad track and we couldn't pass the railroad track.

How was it being raised in a segregated community where people that passed the railroad tracks, you-know, being entitled to just about everything, you-know, electric services, water services, sewer services, road services? Here in South Colton we were denied many of those services.

But, when folks like you came back from the service, they said well, we need to provide better services in South Colton.

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So how was it growing up in South Colton under those conditions?

Mr. García: Like I said, we were timid, we couldn't get enough nerve to try something to maybe start a business.

Dr. Rivera: So it was a little difficult then?

Mr. García: Very difficult, yes. Because you weren't allowed... You can't be a part of what makes the city run.

Dr. Rivera: So things changed after you guys came back from the service?

Mr. García: Gradually, yeah, for the good.

Dr. Rivera: Getting back to the barrio, you mentioned businesses; we had our own church in South Colton, we had our grocery stores in South Colton, we had our restaurants in South Colton. Let's see, we had the hardware store in Colton – we had all kinds of services in Colton, *verdad?*

Where did people do their shopping, Andres?

Mr. García: I think I remember that my Mom... We had a grocery store down on 6th and 'O'... The Negrete family had a grocery store, I believe, on 'N' Street. But before that there was a...

Dr. Rivera: Oh, Esperanza Market.

Mr. García: Esperanza Market. Yeah, and pretty soon Navarro also put up a grocery store on 'O' and 7th. And don't forget Martinez – Jeremiahs Martinez, the boxer, his Dad's name was... I can't remember.

Dr. Rivera: I know where you're talking about, Martinez, yeah, Martinez Bakery.

Mr. García: Si, yeah.

Dr. Rivera: So most of the people in South Colton did their shopping at these grocery stores?

Mr. García: Yes, I would say, yes – several of them.

Mary Morales there on 7th Street... After Mass people would stop by there and buy Mexican bread because it was brought to them ready-made. Mexican bread was always favored because it was fresh.

Dr. Rivera: Well, I remember Cervantes Market, and I remember Rodriguez Market.

Mr. García: Yes. Cervantes [was] a big family: Ralph, Tony, Carlos...

Dr. Rivera: They were also World War II veterans.

Mr. García: I believe so.

Dr. Rivera: And then, Ralph was the first one to buy a house in North Colton.

Mr. García: Ralph Cervantes?

Dr. Rivera: Si, yes. He had to go to court to win his case to buy the house in North Colton.

Let me ask you another subject, and [these are the kind of] things that I've never asked anybody—you're the first one I'm going to ask. During the prohibition, people said you couldn't buy liquor or beer or anything. Did we have distilleries, or people that made their own liquor in the barrio?

Mr. García: Yes. In our house.

(Laughter)

Mr. García: My *Tio's*, not my Mom, but her brother's. *Tio Filomeno*—whoops!

(Laughter)

Mr. García: *Tio* Alberto from Gardena, they would visit us often. Yeah, somehow I knew... We weren't allowed where they were doing their thing, but pretty soon you saw bottles of beer up on the shelves in the garage. [We were] being kind of timid or dumb -

- but we were afraid to ask. But this is how we learned that if you couldn't buy it, you could make it.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: So, a lot of families in South Colton did it, eh?

Mr. García: Yes, I would say.

One more thing that I remember, at our house we used to buy maybe a small piggy and feed it everything [that was] available, old stuff, leftovers; but when it [was] time to slaughter him, they would start feeding him corn. And then, about the time when the piggy was big and ready for slaughter, we would invite my *Tío* Gregorio from Los Alamitos and my *Tío* Alberto from Gardena to meet. I don't know how they did it because we didn't have no telephone, but by word of mouth somehow. They would write, I guess, to meet at our house in Colton. In the morning, early in the morning, they would get out in the backyard and start a fire, heat water, and build a flat bed of boards to lay the poor pig for slaughter. And then, they would gather – and I remember about 2 or 3 big men-*tíos* would hold the piggy down; and I remember them telling me: “you hold the feet with all your strength,” because I was a part of the party there. And then, they would either shoot it or kill it with a knife, and they would collect all the blood in a big pan, and my Mom would take it inside, and she knew how to prepare blood sausages. The skin was in a big laundry tub, [they] cut up the pig and made *chicharrones*. They'd start a fire and wash him, and by this time the neighborhood would know that there was meat because we all always ended up selling some of it. Somehow we got wrapping

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paper, and maybe a scale, and sell the meat by the pound – always leaving some for preparing different things in the kitchen. Pretty soon everything would be gone.

Nothing was wasted there. People from around the neighborhood would know about this and they would come and buy meat for a good price, fresh, the real thing –

Dr. Rivera: So, with that you would have a party, you would have Puerco con mole, you would have tamales?

Mr. García: Ah-yes, that followed, yes.

Dr. Rivera: So that was a big treat then?

Mr. García: It was slaughter time – once a year, it never failed. Go buy the piggy, small, feed it, and get it ready, and then slaughter it. And again, he goes [because it's] time to celebrate again.

Mr. Acosta (off camera): Was that for some special occasion?

Mr. García: No, I don't think we waited for a certain time of year – no. But it was when the piggy was at the right age, the right size. There was a time to do these things.

Dr. Rivera: Andres, we're talking about South Colton and North Colton. Did you ever go to the New Colton Theatre or the Hub Theatre?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Did you ever experience having to sit on one side of the theatre?

Mr. García: Oh yes, yes. The New Colton Theater right on what is now the drugstore Rexal? Maybe there was a theatre there?

Dr. Rivera: It's Hub City, yeah.

Mr. García: And the idea was, it was divided into three areas: the center area, [which] was the best view of the screen -- the center right? And then the sides, you would see it at an angle -- not very enjoyable, I guess. To see these pictures sideways or distorted... When it was a time to show the movie, they had to keep order because some of the people that wanted to sit in the center were not allowed. You're not brown, you're not Mexican...

Dr. Rivera: So the Mexicans were on one side?

Mr. García: On the sides, yes. The whites and other Mexicans that considered themselves... they passed, yeah. And I remember that when somebody would get out of order [and] wanted to move to a better place, there was Johnny Martinez, Jeremiahs, the boxer, Ramon Perez, his brother. But Jeremiahs mostly, he would keep order. He

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wouldn't allow just everybody to sit in the center. I think one day, I remember, I think, he had to hit somebody because he wouldn't follow orders. [Either] you [follow] orders or you didn't get in.

Dr. Rivera: So there was that control division of where people sat in theater?

Mr. García: Uh-huh.

Dr. Rivera: Also, Andres, I know that you have your daily calendar here, and your daughter's tell me that you're a very, very meticulous person in keeping track of everything that you do.

Mr. García: Pretty much.

Dr. Rivera: And you brought your calendar here – you have October the 23rd – I don't know what you have on October the 24th, but can you turn the page? Let's see what we have.

Mr. García: Today's the 24th. (He reads the page in his calendar) At 10 O'clock to Cal State with Dr. Tom Rivera.

Dr. Rivera: I am on there... So I understand that you're a very meticulous person – that you just write everything that you do on a daily basis, is that true?

Mr. García: Possibly, yes, if I remember.

Dr. Rivera: And also, Andres, your daughters tell me that you still stick to the old stoves. You use your old stoves, you don't replace them, and that you have wonderful results with all the old things that you have.

Mr. García: Make them last, in other words?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

You're not into cellphones?

Mr. García: No, but I have one, though -- but I hardly ever use it.

Dr. Rivera: The other thing that I notice about you is that you have an old copy of the annual; and that's the annual for the Wilson School?

Mr. García: Wilson School, yes.

Dr. Rivera: What does it say?

Mr. García: *Los Charritos*. Do you remember? No? It's before your time. Henry? Lily?

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I drew that on the cover: *Los Charritos*, a man holding a guitar standing, another man kneeling with guitar – like playing... and a lady there with *trenzas* down her side, a dancer.

Dr. Rivera: What year was this, Andres?

Mr. García: 1930's

Dr. Rivera: 1938?

Mr. García: I believe so, yeah.

Mr. Acosta (off camera): That was Wilson's first year.

Dr. Rivera: Oh-that was Wilson's first year?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Priscilla, you're gonna have to scan this and keep it – scan this and put it on a CD – you have to take care of this one.

You have another one, Andres, the "Crimson and Gold", and that was what?

Mr. García: 1943, I believe.

Dr. Rivera: *Como saber?*

Mr. García: 1942, it says there, but I think I have a 1943 at home...

Dr. Rivera: (Dr. Rivera asks Mr. García to hold the “Crimson and Gold” book up to the camera). Andres, you are 90 years old?

Mr. García: Yes, and fast approaching 91.

Dr. Rivera: When is your birthday?

Mr. García: November

Dr. Rivera: *O ya mero.* What date?

Mr. García: The 30th.

Dr. Rivera: The 30th?

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: *Ya mero.* We'll get those *guitaras para que te canten las mañanitas.*

Mr. García: That would be nice.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Anyway, Andres, as a lifelong person of Colton, did I miss anything that I should talk about, about your life and growing up in South Colton? Is there anything that I forgot?

Well let me ask you, if you look back on all those years, you were born and raised in Colton, you grew up on 5th Street, you met your wife around the corner—or [at the] next door neighbor's, you raised your kids in South Colton, you were a South Coltonite for all practical purposes. And let me ask you, what's the best thing about living in South Colton? As far as you're concerned, what was the best experience, the best thing, the thing that you remember most about growing up in South Colton?

Mr. García: I think that I had good parents... though, I didn't know my Dad, my Mom raised us, sent us to school, to church, and taught us to be good persons. Don't consider yourself superior to anybody else... Be yourself, try to help each other, and do your best.

Dr. Rivera: Is there anything else that I forgot?

Mr. García: Give me a clue.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: Oh-yes, go ahead Priscilla.

Priscilla Garcia (Mr. Garcia's daughter who is off camera): The current San Salvador Church, did you help build that Church?

Dr. Rivera: Oh, I forgot about San Salvador Church.

Mr. García: The present church where it stands right now on 7th and 'L', yes, that was quite a project. Father Luque was the priest there, and I believe that from the ground up we had Mr. Espartago Sosa...

Dr. Rivera: Espartago Sosa, who also lived on 5th Street.

Mr. García: *Sí*, he [or] they were surveyors. They surveyed the area where the church would be in the points... Every Saturday... I worked, but those that could -- they were their daily. And I think that Ray Gonzalez was the contractor, I think it was Ray Gonzalez.

Dr. Rivera: I understand that you took a film of the project while it was being constructed?

Mr. García: Oh-yes.

Dr. Rivera: Do you still have that?

Mr. García: I still have the film, though, it was very poorly. The camera didn't have features to focus properly. So it was very poor results, but I have much footage of the Colton Church going up. The foundation, the framing, the roofing, all the people enjoying, actually, and having a good time. They were present, like I said, on Saturdays, but they were there everyday.

Usually, it was Saturdays when I was there – people would take food prepared in pans, and ladies would work at old houses that were in back of the church. The ladies and wives would go there and prepare the food that was being brought in by many people -- in pans, and whatever. And when it was time to eat, (inaudible) [they] would ring the bell. Whatever it was – iron or something. [Someone would yell], “Chow time”! And we would go wash our hands and line up in the house where the serving lines were, get our plates, come out find a place to sit down and have a ball just talking and building. Father Luque had a saying: a labor of love [is] here you see – everybody helped the church.

Dr. Rivera: Well it was a big community project then?

Mr. García: That's what it was, yes.

Dr. Rivera: Frank was able to compile the list of people that contributed to the building of the church. (Turning to Mr. Acosta, who is off camera) And you came up with almost 500, Frank? 500 sponsors? The names on your list were about 400?

Mr. Acosta (off camera): It was a list compiled by the people who organized the dedication in 1976. And then, also, the consecration in 1980.

Mr. García: When the bishop came around?

Mr. Acosta (off camera): Yes. It was from the commemorative booklet celebrating the dedication. Mary Chavez scanned it.

Dr. Rivera: The first list that you gave me was about 400 people.

Mr. Acosta (off camera): Was it that many?

Dr. Rivera: Yes. So [it was] about 400 people that gave money to build the church; and there was another group of people that owned businesses that also gave an additional contribution. But it was built [and] it was completed in 1976, Frank?

Mr. Acosta (off camera): It was dedicated in 1976.

Mr. García: That's what I have in the film that I have – [in the] movie, yes, 1976 I called it; and then, a lot of scenes there were different stages of construction.

Dr. Rivera: How long did it take the project to build the church? About four years?

Mr. García: Probably that long.

Dr. Rivera: Well, you guys did a good job, you-know, being a community project and everybody pitching in; and like you said, everybody preparing the food and feeding all the workers. There were some people that worked part-time, others that worked full-time; and they were just dedicated. When they finished the project everybody was proud of their church.

Mr. García: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: And even now, it looks very, very nice. I'm glad you brought up the church, I completely forgot about that... Well, *mucho gracias*, thank you so much for being with us this afternoon for a little over an hour. We appreciate the information that you provided for us – it's exactly what we're looking for when we talk about growing up in South Colton. And I agree with you – it's a great place to be born in and to be raised in. So thank you very much.

Transcribed by Pat Ricé-Daniels, Library Services Specialist.