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### Esther Hernandez Ramos

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**Colton Oral History Interview – 10/31/14**

**Dr. Rivera:** Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Tom Rivera, and we're here at the Pfau Library at Cal State San Bernardino – and it's approximately 1 o'clock in the afternoon. We're in room 4005, and our crew this afternoon is Mr. Frank Acosta – and he's behind the camera. Our guest this afternoon is Mrs. Esther Hernandez Ramos.

Esther, welcome and thank you very much for volunteering to be with our project this afternoon. The project is trying to get an oral history of people [who] lived in South Colton, and record some of the experiences that they had while they were growing up in South Colton. So, welcome and thank you very much for being with us.

First of all, your Grandma was quite a person.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yes.

**Dr. Rivera:** She had *Tortilleria* on South 7th Street. Can you tell us a little bit about your Grandma and her *tortilleria*?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, my Grandmother was born in Jorochoes, Guanajuato in 1887; and she married my Grandfather, Cruz, and they lived around the same area. They married in 1907 and came down to the United States on a train—paid a penny to get on the train, and they landed up in Arizona. I don't know where my father was born in Arizona or in Mexico, or if he came when he was little, or what, but he was born in 1907. My *Tia* Melinda was born in 1911 in Arizona, my *Tia* Luz in Arizona.

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**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** What was your Grandmother's name?

**Mrs. Ramos:** My Grandmother's name was Dolores Venegas Hernandez, and my Grandfather is Cruz Hernandez. My Grandfather was an orphan, and his aunt treated him very badly, so he decided to get married and they decided they wanted to come to a better life. So they came to Arizona and he worked there for a number of years. Then, in 1914 they came to Colton, and they had a little stand where they sold tortillas [and] tacos.

**Dr. Rivera:** And in Colton...

**Mrs. Ramos:** 253 South 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, so they had the little stand that they started on 7<sup>th</sup> Street?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, 253 South 7<sup>th</sup> Street... yeah, the same place the *tortilleria* was, uh-huh. First, they had a little stand; and then, in the early 40's they built a *tortilleria*.

**Dr. Rivera:** What did they sell at the stand?

**Mrs. Ramos:** At the stand they sold tortillas, tacos, sodas, tamales on Saturdays.

**Dr. Rivera:** So Grandma was an entrepreneur from the get-go – a business person.

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yes, she made, before they had the *tortilleria*, she made anything to sell like dried jerky. And she also, in the 20's, she used to make brew.

**Dr. Rivera:** During prohibition that was very popular.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, she learned how to make beer from her mother, and she knew how to make, I guess, hard liquor too, and they sold it – my *Tio* Beto sold it too.

**(Laughter)**

Some policemen had [come] me around looking and they arrested my Grandfather, and it was in the Colton Courier [newspaper], and my Aunt Delores never forgot and she said, what an embarrassment. But they had to make their money anyway they could.

**Dr. Rivera:** But, you-know, the distilling was popular back then.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, during that time, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, because there was the prohibition -- you weren't allowed to do it; so everybody made their own beer.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah I know. And so she worked very hard, and she was a wonderful woman. She fed all the people that came to her door asking for handouts: the tramps,

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and she even fed Father Valencia. Father Valencia used to come and eat everyday with my Grandmother.

**Dr. Rivera:** What did you serve Father Valencia?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, he had his own thing that he ate everyday – [like] cereal, he'd put everything in one bowl: milk and the *camotes* and everything in there, or whatever. If he ate egg or weenies, he'd just put it all in one bowl and ate it like that.

He was always eating and walking back to the house, you-know, my Grandmother prepared it and he'd walk back to the house to eat. But for many years, as long as he was there, he ate at my Grandmother's.

We also cleaned the church and closed it up at night.

**Dr. Rivera:** Your Grandma was very religious?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. We went to Mass every morning, I and all my sisters and my cousins [were the] bell ringers of San Salvador. We rang the bell every morning for Mass, every night for rosary, or when there was gonna be a baptism, you-know, we went out there and the Father told us when there was gonna be baptisms because they threw the *bola* (coins).

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

**Mrs. Ramos:** Uh, 7, 8, 9 years old around that area, around that time.

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**Dr. Rivera:** You couldn't be an altar girl back then.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, no-no-no, my brother's, my cousin's, my Uncle Tony, everybody was altar boys, but we couldn't—women couldn't do that. We *ofrecer flores* in the month of May for the Blessed Mother; and I was even 14 years and embarrassed to go; but Father Valencia made me *puente vestido blanco*, and come and *ofrecer flores* – so that's what we did.

**Dr. Rivera:** Offering flowers to the Virgin?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, on the month of May.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now, tell me about your Grandmother, how did she start the store?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Ah, like I said, she had a little stand; and then, they decided in the early 40's they had enough money to build – and all the family helped build the *tortilleria* with just a long thing with a counter in the front and things to put the *comales* and stuff in...

**Dr. Rivera:** And that was on 7th Street?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 7<sup>th</sup> Street, uh-huh. The same place they were at – that's where they lived all their life; she opened it in the 40's. When she died in 1966 my Aunt Delores closed it. Then, that was the end of the *tortilleria*.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Who helped make the tortillas?

**Mrs. Ramos:** My Aunt Luz, my *Tia* Melinda, my Grandmother made the corn and my cousin Mary, and a lot of the ladies. One of the Garcia ladies, and another one – a Chavez lady, and one from San Bernardino used to work there to make the tortillas. My Mother and my Dad and Chepa made the flour tortillas, and we all helped in making menudo: cutting it up and cleaning everything for the Saturday and Sunday – tamales and menudo.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many *ollas* of menudo did you make?

**Mrs. Ramos:** My Grandmother made big pots, big ones like that (she motions her hands) too because she sold the menudo, and then of course, we all ate there, so. We made a lot of tamales.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they pay you for cutting the menudo?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** How much were you paid?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, if I cut the menudo and cleaned the *hojas* and the *chiles*, my Grandmother gave us 25 cents each.

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**Dr. Rivera:** So you cut the menudo, cleaned the *hojas*, and you cleaned the *hojas* for what?

**Mrs. Ramos:** For the tamales, and the *chilies* for the tamales. So, we got paid 25 cents, and if we did a lot of extra work we got 50 [cents]; so that was a lot of money during that time.

On Sundays, she said when she knew that everybody had gone to Mass, she lined us up and she said, okay you went to Mass: 50 cents, 50 cents to every one of her grandchildren. And then, my Uncle Tony used to be in charge of us when we used to go to the New Colton Theatre, then to the Hub City. We went from one movie to the other. But she gave us 50 cents for attending church, so that's how come we went to Mass every Sunday. And then, we went with her during the week – but we were little and we enjoyed it – and it was my Grandmother, an entrepreneur that taught us everything we know about, you-know, helping people, and just our religion. She taught me how to pray the rosary, and to this day we still have our family pray [to] the rosary every Wednesday.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you work every day at the *tortilleria*?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, just Saturdays and Sundays because I wrapped the tortillas and I handled the cash register on Saturdays and Sundays. During the week I just didn't work, I just did my work for school.



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**Dr. Rivera:** Was it a big successful business on Saturday and Sunday?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, a lot of people. But like I said my Grandmother gave most of her money away: half of it went to the church, and the other half for the family and friends, and stuff. She always gave people money and tortillas.

**Dr. Rivera:** In the store, you had the entrance?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, they had the entrance, and then there was the counter and the cash register, and where we wrapped the tortillas and gave them to the people.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then the room after that?

**Mrs. Ramos:** The room after that was a long, long room with a big, humongous *comal* for the tortillas, and then they had 4 of the *metates* where they did the *masa* and the tortillas.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did your Grandma live there?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, they lived in the back. We had the house on the side, my Mom and Dad lived in the house on the side; my *Tia* Lola, lived with her children; and my *Tia* Chepa lived with her son because my uncle Jess was in the service, and Tony lived in

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there. I don't know how we had so many things in that little... when I passed by, there's [that] little area, and I said: how did we have the house, the *tortilleria*, the chicken coop, the shower in back, and then, two little houses, you-know, where my Grandmother and Grandfather lived? Sometimes there was about seventeen people living with my Grandmother.

**Dr. Rivera:** Wow, that's a lot of people.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, because my Dad and my Mom lived there and they had seven children; so, that's nine of us right there.

But we all worked and enjoyed...

And when I was a teenager, I wanted to make more money so I went to the fields to work.

**Dr. Rivera:** The fields were what?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Picking grapes, boysenberries, strawberries, and tomatoes. The worst ones was potatoes and onions. The onions [made our] nose [bleed] from the smell of the onions; and then, the potatoes – I couldn't walk for three days because you have to pick them, you-know, with a belt. You have a belt with hooks you put on it for the sack, and then you stooped over picking potatoes on the ground.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now, how did you get to the fields?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, Don Chencho was a man who charged us 50 cents to take us to pick grapes...

**Dr. Rivera:** Was he a contractor?

**Mrs. Ramos:** I guess he got paid by a contractor, but he charged us 50 cents to take us, you-know, and take us on a truck. So we went to all the places that they picked.

**Dr. Rivera:** So, Don Chencho would pick you up early in the morning?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 5 o'clock in the morning.

**Dr. Rivera:** ...And take you to the vineyards?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, the vineyards or to the fields, wherever we were working – and then he brought us back home about 1 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** How old were you when you were with the pickers?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 13 to 16.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did all the kids in the neighborhood...?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** They didn't want to; I took them because they wanted to earn money, and I took a couple of my friends. We were going to the tomatoes, [and] they saw all these green big things... and they didn't want to get near them – they said, “*gusanos, gusanos*”, the green *gusanos*, and they didn't want to get near them. My cousins, I took them all and they didn't want to go. The only one that was a good worker [was], Martha, my sister. Oooh! She worked hard, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Martha was in my kindergarten class, yeah.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, she was a hard worker, always wanted to make money – so I took her to the fields with me.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh-huh, and you did that for how many years?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, 3, 4 years. Because [I] earned money to buy my clothes for school.

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

**Mrs. Ramos:** I went to Garfield from I think it was 1st grade to 5th grade; and then 6th to 8th at Wilson. I graduated in 1948, and then I went to high school, and graduated in 1952 – Colton High School.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Let's get back to Garfield Elementary School. You mentioned that you were a *bocona*?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-well-yeah, because they told us not to speak in Spanish; and I didn't listen I spoke in Spanish all the time. So my teachers would get me by the ear and take me to the bathroom, wash my mouth out with soap – and [they] said: “don't you speak like that again – you have to speak English only.” And so I said, oh. And then I went home cuz my lips got all swollen, and my Grandmother said, well, don't speak in Spanish then, you have to learn English. But don't forget your language you have to [speak] it at home. So, at home I spoke Spanish to her, read her *La Opiñión*, and wrote letters to her parents and people in Mexico. So that's how come I learned how to speak Spanish and still keep my language.

**Dr. Rivera:** When was the last time you had your mouth washed?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-God! When I was in the 7th grade, I think.

**(Laughter)**

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah-yeah. They used to hit us with a ruler too on the hand: [and tell us,] don't speak like that, don't say those words. And I was wondering: why can't we speak our language, that's our language, you-know, why is it bad to speak our language? So, it was pretty bad. And then when I got to high school, I never realized we were

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segregated until I got to high school and I saw all these Anglos. They said: “Hi little Mexican girl from across the tracks” – that's what they called us.

**Dr. Rivera:** They would say that?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, and I have my annual and I hardly ever read it until recently; I opened it up and I was looking at it and I said: how come I never noticed that they wrote to the little Mexican girl across the tracks.

**Dr. Rivera:** And the tracks was the dividing line.

**Mrs. Ramos:** The dividing line—and we used to go when we were little, maybe I was about 8, 9, 10 years old, we used to go down into the north side because they gave out big candy bars.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, tonight is Halloween...

**Mrs. Ramos:** I know, and I remembered that today; and we used to go down on the other side – and then they said, “no, you go back to your side you can't be on this side.” And they'd called the police, and the police just escorted us to go back to our side.

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

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**Mrs. Ramos:** I was 8, 9, 10 when we used to go trick-or-treating.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh-huh. So you'd go trick-or-treating on the north-end passed the railroad tracks?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then they would sic the cops on you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, and then I used to go to the New Colton Theater. We'd have to sit on the left side, and they'd check that we were sitting on the left side. We had to sit on the left side because the Anglos sat on the right side.

**Dr. Rivera:** But you mentioned that because of your friends – they had green eyes...

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, my friend Alice – she had blue eyes and blond hair, and we used to pass – we went into the plunge because we were not allowed until Thursday to go to the plunge because we were Mexicans. So we used to pass and we used to go any day because...

**Dr. Rivera:** You passed because you were light skinned?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, light skinned – yeah, exactly. So we used to...

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**Dr. Rivera:** So you fooled them?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, yeah because we spoke English by that time, you-know, we were going to the plunge, so they let us in. But on Friday they cleaned the plunge so that's how come they let us go in.

**Dr. Rivera:** How much was the admissions back then?

**Mrs. Ramos:** About 10 cents – not bad. Because it was 10 cents that we used to pay at the theaters too; popcorn 5 cents, sodas, and so on... We had quite a bit going on from one place to the other enjoying Sundays.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you-know, you mentioned your 2 friends and you. Esther, were the boys chasing you during that period?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, we used to throw rocks... like my sister, Martha, all the time –  
**(Laughter)**

**Mrs. Ramos:** So no, because we were just friends that hung around; and we, like I said, we played together and went to rosary together. At night we didn't have television during that time, so my dad had a big radio and we used to sit down—all the kids sitting down listening to the Lone Ranger, the Green Hornet, Inner Sanctum, and Father Knows Best. We used to sit there and we used to imagine in our minds, you-know. I think that's what's lacking with kids today because they can't imagine... and



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we used to imagine [about] everything [that] was happening; and in Inner Sanctum, you-know, when that creaky door [sounded].

**Dr. Rivera:** Yes.

**Mrs. Ramos:** So, we had a lot of fun growing up.

I remember during the war of 1945, 1946 – [the] air raids; and we used to have to cover all the windows and turn off all the lights until the siren went off. [Food] rations and all that stuff growing up.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you-know, there was rationing during the war, do you remember rationing?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, we had stamps and we couldn't buy things that we needed until we got our stamp and it was time for us to buy, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** What products [were scheduled]?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mostly sugar and margarine. We used to have to mix our own margarine with that coloring on it—and stuff... We didn't have toilet paper, and all those things were rationed.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you do remember those [days]?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Getting back to the 3 of you, you-know, boys were always trying to get your attention?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Sometimes we used to have a fight with them, throwing rocks and fight with them, and stuff like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they write notes to you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. I know that when I was growing up and I was in the 8th grade, I was the only girl that got 3 boxes of candy from 3 different boys, and the girls were all mad.

**(Laughter)** Roman

**Dr. Rivera:** What about Valentines?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Valentines, I got Valentines all the time; and I got little music boxes and things like that when I was in the eighth grade.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well you were quite a popular person.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, the thing is that we used to go to the beach [in the] summers, the Negretes had an army truck, and they charged us 50 cents.

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**Dr. Rivera:** The Negretes, tell me about them?

**Mrs. Ramos:** The Negretes had this store down where Aguilera used to have the store – on 'N' Street before they built that underpass.

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

**Mrs. Ramos:** They had the store right there, Aguilera store, they took over the store and the Negretes lived there.

**Dr. Rivera:** What was the name of the person?

**Mrs. Ramos:** I don't remember them, I just remember the ones that went in my class: Ralph and Albert Negrete.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, they played guitar and they were good singers.

**Mrs. Ramos:** And [their] sister was a singer in bands.

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

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**Mrs. Ramos:** So, they used to handle that little store there, and they used to take us to the beaches, you-know, Venice Beach and Long Beach and all those places for 50 cents.

**Dr. Rivera:** In the big truck?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Uh-huh, all of us in the big truck.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many would fit?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-God, about 20-25 kids.

**Dr. Rivera:** It was a good party?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, yeah. So we used to go to the beaches with the Negretes in the army truck.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you-know, back then you know we didn't have the freeways.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-no, and then they didn't have to be in a seatbelt or things like that.

**Dr. Rivera:** We didn't have seatbelts, *tampoco, verdad?* And you didn't have to be covered or anything like that.

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**Mrs. Ramos:** No-no. We used to go...

**Dr. Rivera:** So you leave Colton, La Cadena, and then Riverside?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Rivera:** You could go through all the signals in Riverside, Magnolia, and Corona.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mm-hmm. Corona Del Mar – I remember all the beaches that we went to when we young.

And then, there was an incident that happened when I used to get really sunburned and get blotches in my face; so they buried me in the sand and I just had a hat, and I was buried in the sand – and the boys were playing volleyball and they kept stumbling over me. And then, Albert [said], what is this *pulga* doing here? So that's how come they named me *pulga*.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, your nickname was *pulga* – flea.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, that's what they called me because he said I look like a sand flea laying there in the sand.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well tell me who are the people that went to the beach with you? Can you name some of the people?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, Vera Rosas, Ellis Menchos, Esther Beltran, Stella Beltran, Carmen Negrete, the Negretes, and Alice Benostro. Mostly all the young people that hung around together when we went to the beaches.

**Dr. Rivera:** All together?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, all together. We used to have a lot of fun at the beach.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, so that was when you were an 8th grader?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Uh-huh.

**Dr. Rivera:** That must have been what?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 1948

**Dr. Rivera:** '48?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mm-hmm.

**Dr. Rivera:** Let me ask you... you said your tortilla store was on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and back then, Esther, there was a lot of activity...

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, 7<sup>th</sup> Street was jumping! It had 3 bars, the Sombrero, it had 3 liquor stores, little restaurants, Martinez Bakery, my Grandmother's store, and the Morales Store across the street—it's still there.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did they have the pool hall?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, they had the pool hall over there near the Bolero, or what is it across the street?

**Dr. Rivera:** On 7<sup>th</sup> and 'N' Street.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, and I remember a lot of things that happened there, a lot of killings right next door to us – it was a set up.

**Dr. Rivera:** They had the dances I hear, *verdad?*  
So every weekend was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Jumping, jumping, jumping. And then, everybody fighting, I remember I saw two people died on 7th Street, and it was awful – because my Mother made me go look for my Dad because my Dad was always in the bars. I hated going there, but I said that's why I saw this man [had] got killed there – he was laying there when I got there and it was awful.

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**Dr. Rivera:** The *tortilleria* was there. Next to the *tortilleria* was the Martinez Market, Martinez Bakery. Then, you cross the street and there was Tuckers Grocery.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Tuckers, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Next to Tucker's was Calderas Market.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Then there was a little restaurant before the hair cutting shop...

**Dr. Rivera:** Cruz, the barber shop.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, the barber shop, and the little restaurant there before the other bar...

**Dr. Rivera:** The Bolero was there on the corner.

Do you remember the (inaudible)?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, I don't remember that one but I know that there was a lot of different ones where my Father used to go in; so, that's where I had to go.

**Dr. Rivera:** What was the name of that, Henry?



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**Mr. Acosta & Mr. Vásquez (off camera):** (Inaudible...)

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, they said that the Bolero was on the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and 'N' Street, in that area.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah-well, there was a lot of stuff on 'N' Street, too, and 'O' Street at the time. So I remember some of them, but most of them that I didn't go into I don't remember.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then you had the Navarro Store, on the corner of 'O' and 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Mrs. Ramos:** The Navarro, sí, um-hmm.

**Dr. Rivera:** And then you go down 7<sup>th</sup> and you have the hardware, Muratalla's Hardware, uh-huh.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Muratalla's Hardware, yeah. And Perez Gasoline Station.

**Dr. Rivera:** Chayo Perez Gasoline Station. So anyway, 7<sup>th</sup> Street was quite a place, *verdad?*

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night it was jumping – a lot of things happening around that area.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were in the middle of all this?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. But we were busy cutting up the things for the next day, you-know, for that the tamales and the menudo – so we used to hear everything that happened in the bar – it spilled out over in the street.

**Dr. Rivera:** Across [from] the store is where the Olivas lived. Tell me about the Olivas? You had, *esté como se llama?* Angie? Angie Oliva was the oldest, I think?

**Mrs. Ramos:** uh-huh, Angel. Yeah, I remember Manuel, Angel, and Rudy, [but] I don't remember the oldest one. I was thinking that I remember some of them, but they always lived across the street. I didn't know them personally, but just by talking to them, you-know, when I saw them on the street. And Stella, their sister Stella.

**Dr. Rivera:** You said your Grandma made you go to church?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** You were related to Father Luque Jr., and Father Luque was quite a kid, *verdad?*

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah. Everybody said, how can he become a priest if he's a dancer? Well, what does dancing have to do with becoming a priest, you-know, if you like dancing? Because he was a character: he used to put on shows for us when we were little; and he used to dance and sing all the time; and tell us stories when we were little. He used to put on shows, like I said. He loved doing that when he was young. And he was an altar boy, and of course, he liked that and I guess he got the calling to become a priest.

**Dr. Rivera:** But in high school he was one of the cheerleaders...

**Mrs. Ramos:** The cheerleaders in high school, uh-huh, yeah. He loved doing all those things. I said: you should have gone into show business.

**(Laughter)**

**Dr. Rivera:** He went to Valley College.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, he went to Valley College, and then he went to the seminary.

**Dr. Rivera:** Now, where was the seminary?

**Mrs. Ramos:** In San Diego.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Oh, he went to San Diego for the seminary. And he was ordained?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Do you remember what year he was ordained? Was it in the 60s?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 62, I think, I'm not sure it was 62.

**Dr. Rivera:** And we were lucky to have him come back to Colton.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, in 69 he came back to Colton...

**Dr. Rivera:** ... to be the priest at San Salvador.

**Mrs. Ramos:** And he was there for about 9 almost 10 years.

**Dr. Rivera:** And he saw the need to buy and build a new church, *verdad?*

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, yeah, because when Father Valencia died there had been a lot of money that Father Valencia was sending to the bishop to keep for the San Salvador Church.

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**Dr. Rivera:** That's in San Diego?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, in San Diego... Before it was just Father Luque, he went to the bishop in San Diego [and] made appointments to talk to him about the possibility of building a new church because there was a need for a new church. He went for months and months, every day that he made an appointment he was sitting there and the bishop never saw him. They told him: "oh, he's busy, he's busy" – for months and months he went through the same thing. So, he decided that he was gonna take matters into his own hands and build a church without the bishops permission, and he did.

**Dr. Rivera:** So he did not get permission from the diocese of San Diego?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, no...

**Dr. Rivera:** But he tried.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, he tried [for] months and months, probably even a year or two to get an audience with the bishop because he had to find that money that was missing. And he found the money that the Father Valencia had said that the people had donated for years and years. He got all the people together, and all the people, the

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parishioners, and other people came to do all the work, they did all the labor, all the work.

**Dr. Rivera:** But when did he decide? He got tired of...

**Mrs. Ramos:** In 1972, I think he decided that we should build a new church. So, he started doing all those things in 1972.

**Dr. Rivera:** In 1972 – and he rallied the South Colton community.

**Mrs. Ramos:** The community got together, and people that knew how to do electricity, and plumbing, and things like that – they got together and they built the church.

**Dr. Rivera:** I know my Dad did a lot of cement work for the church.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, a lot of people donated their time, and the women of the church also made food for the workers. They got together we made barbecues, fiestas, cake sales – everything to raise money for the church.

**Dr. Rivera:** Where did he have services while this was going on?

**Mrs. Ramos:** He went, I think, to Wilson School, McKinley School, at different schools he held masses on Sunday.

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**Dr. Rivera:** According to that booklet that you have there, let me see that booklet on the church – that one, that one that you have in your hand in front of you. (She reaches for the booklets and places them in front of them on the table).

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, this is the booklet when they did the dedication of the church, March 14, 1976.

**Dr. Rivera:** March 14, 1976 – there's a list of all the donors.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, there's the donors, people that donated their time, and the merchants that donated things.

**Dr. Rivera:** When I looked at that list, Esther, I counted over 400 people.

**Mrs. Ramos:** And there was a lot of them that weren't there, yet they donated anonymously, and things like that. But they had a lot of people donations and workers.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah. Also, in building the church who was the architect, do you know?

**Mrs. Ramos:** The name is here, all the information is here about the architecture, and who was instrumental in... (She turns the pages in the booklet). It has [information]

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about the church, the first church, churches that were built. (She shows him the name of the architect in the booklet). This is the name of the architect person that did it.

**Dr. Rivera:** From Long Beach – Bernard Conkley from Long Beach.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Uh-huh, and then people donated money to build them the windows, you-know, the windows... Every family donated a certain amount to put in a window for their family.

**Dr. Rivera:** What was the theme of the windows, do you know?

**Mrs. Ramos:** It had some kind of, what do you call it?

**Dr. Rivera:** According to that booklet...

**Mrs. Ramos:** The stained glass windows they had, yeah...

**Dr. Rivera:** According to that booklet that the theme...

**Mrs. Ramos:** They put 14 of them.

**Dr. Rivera:** ...That the theme was our culture, our Indian culture...



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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, the Aztec and *La Virgin De Guadalupe* – he had the altar with the Aztec culture, but they removed it, they didn't want it so they removed it from the church.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it took a good 4 years to build the church?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** And he did it without the permission...

**Mrs. Ramos:** Without the permission of the bishop. But then, the bishop wrote him and told him that well, he was glad he had built a church, after all.

**Dr. Rivera:** *No lo regañó?*

**Mrs. Ramos:** No.

**Dr. Rivera:** They didn't scold him?

**Mrs. Ramos:** They got mad at first, but then they realized that the people were together and they were building it, so what could they do?

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**Dr. Rivera:** Did he ever get his money back from the...?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, they found some of the money for the supplies and stuff, but I don't know how much money, you-know, he got, or what was missing, or how much it cost at the end, I don't know.

**Dr. Rivera:** Esther, the other thing is [we have a] brand-new church, a beautiful church, when did they start playing Mariachi music at the church? Do you remember? And, was Father Luque aware or did he get permission to have Mariachis at the church?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, I think he got it when they had the dedication that's when that happened, and he also had dancers, and stuff. I think you have to get permission, but I'm not sure if he got the permission to do it, but he wanted to put some of our culture into mass.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh-huh. So he got mariachis to play at the services?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, not all the services, just certain special occasions.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Also, there was a period when I was a little boy, I went to church and I couldn't understand that mass, Esther, I don't know what they were talking about: it was Latin.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, Latin. Well, we just went to church and that is what was it. But then, when they decided to say it, you-know, not omit the Latin, a lot of people were upset. But now you understand what's happening with all the things that are happening in the altar and things you understand. So, I'm glad they went into Spanish and English.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay-okay, so, do you remember when that took place?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, I don't remember exactly, but it was quite a number of years back.

**Dr. Rivera:** And even now, Esther, who are the people that go to church now, there at San Salvador?

**Mrs. Ramos:** There are not very many of the old people – just certain ones; and there's a lot of new people I don't know. A lot of people from Mexico and South America that I don't know, but they go there and they have services. I think the people go more to the Spanish ones because they have a need, you-know, they have to 2 or 3 masses in Spanish and only one in English.

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**Dr. Rivera:** So, it's changed quite a bit over the last several years?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** The English mass is what time?

**Mrs. Ramos:** I go at 10 because that's when the English mass. The other one is at 8 and 12 – for the Spanish. They also hold one on Saturdays at 6 because they need 3 masses in Spanish.

**Dr. Rivera:** Ah, okay. So they have them Saturday's also?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah-yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** It's really changed hasn't it?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, it's changed a lot. We have the priests that are there they came from Guatemala. They look so young, you-know, the little priests they look like little teenage kids. They're pretty good. They give a homily with Spanish and with all their heart because that's their main language – and they're trying to learn English. They have a hard time in English.

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**Dr. Rivera:** So there's very few people that help build the church that are attending the church now?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, most of them are passed away, and a lot of them I don't know if they're able to come because a lot of them are sick.

**Dr. Rivera:** Do they still have Jamaicas?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, they have church fiestas - they just had one in September... but it's not like the old fiestas used to be... to raise money, I don't know where that money goes for or whatever, I don't know.

**Dr. Rivera:** But they still have some fundraisers?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, once a year.

**Dr. Rivera:** Talking about fundraisers, tell me about *Las Fiestas Patrias*?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, *Las Fiestas Patrias*, I remember my Uncle Pete and Tula Padilla, and all those people involved in – I don't know. [There was] the queen – and they had to sell these many tickets; and to become a queen...

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**Dr. Rivera:** So the person who sold the most tickets was the queen?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, was the queen, yeah.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Each of the girls were sponsored by a different civic group.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, yeah, and they sold tickets and – whoever got the most... And then, Tula Padilla used to have the kids say little verses in Spanish about the colors of the flag and the Mexican flag and stuff. She had a little group and she taught all the kids to say things at the 16th of September.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** (inaudible).

**Mrs. Ramos:** They used to have them over there at the patio on 'O' Street – as you go to Wilson School – that little area right there, and then they held them over there where the new market is – the Sombrero Market on 'N' Street.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Did they use both locations...?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, if wherever they did it... And then, they also did it [in] the parking lot where Sombrero is – they used to hold the fiestas there. Wherever they could have a space to do the fiestas.

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One thing [that I] remember about Father Valencia [is that] he was a character. When he did Judas for Easter, they made a big giant man with [fireworks] all inside, and he used to dance him around – and dancing and hanging him by a rope, and then, he used to light it up. We had *quema de judas*.

**Dr. Rivera:** Every Easter the Burning of Judas?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah. Yeah, I remember those things. During Lent he used to wash the feet of all the 12 Apostles, and he used to do all the rituals like that – like old times – and I remember all of that. The *Siete Palabras* and all that he'd put on the show.

**Dr. Rivera:** What's *Siete Palabras*?

**Mrs. Ramos:** When Jesus was dying on the cross, you-know, what he said before he died and things like that – and he used to present this little thing like a little show with what was happening between... Now they have it sometimes, they have like people coming and they take the cross and the man – he goes all around for the Stations of the Cross, [he'd] stop at every house and do the Stations of the Cross.

**Dr. Rivera:** So he would do that?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah. Some of the people still do it nowadays. I went [to] this last one they just had it in the altar – they just put up [a] sheet and they did the thing in the

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back, like the shadows – you could see the shadows of what they were doing up there. They were crucifying Jesus.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it was quite a production?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah...

**Dr. Rivera:** Father Valencia had a little (inaudible) a little branch.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, the little...

**(Laughter)**

**Dr. Rivera:** The little branch – and we would taunt him [while] trying to get close to Judas, and he would chase us.

**Mrs. Ramos:** He would chase us with a little... I remember that.

There was also an incident I remember, because we used to go to the *Guadalupeana* for catechism, and then it was getting too small to have it, so we used to have all the classes in the barn. There was a barn next to the San Salvador Church, and we used to sit there in benches and do whatever we had to do for learning First Communion and Confirmation. I remember it was during the Confirmation, I think it was in 1946 or 47, I'm not sure – that I made my Confirmation, and he had everybody [there], and he



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asked [a] question for everybody: “How do you get to heaven?” Then he asked one person: “How do you get to heaven?” And she said, by keeping the commandments.

[He said:] “Wrong.” (Inaudible)

### (Laughter)

**Mrs. Ramos:** He had us all lining up, everybody, cuz I don't know what the answer he wanted. And then, he asked me, he said: “How do you get to heaven?” I said: by loving God, loving each other, and obeying the commandments... He said: “*incate! 4-F*”. It was awful, we were all crying, and I went home crying.

My Grandfather, who was such a quiet man, I hardly ever knew my Grandfather was around. He used to make the (inaudible) *tamales* and do the *masa*, you-know, grind the *masa* up for my Grandmother. He saw me crying, he said: *Que tienes?* And I said, *El Padre dijo no va hacer mi confirmacion*. [My Grandfather said:] *Porque?* I said, *dijo que yo era 4-F y si que es...* He called my Aunt Delores to explain what a 4-F was, and my Aunt Delores told him what it was. So then he said: *porque te dijo*, and then he said: *Delores en cuando venga el padre por su comida de leche hay que hablar con el (inaudible)*.

He was always a quiet person, so I was so amazed that he would talk to the priest and say: *porque no va ser mi nieta la confirmacion*. [Father Valencia]: (inaudible) 4-F. [My Grandfather said:] *oh no, hijo mire, hay que este catholico mismo se la dio (inaudible)*. Then, he called my Aunt Delores to ask me every question in the catechism book, and I answered every question right. He said: *todas las palabras quien (inaudible), todas los questionitos ya sabe*. Then [the Father said:] okay, *ya no eres 4-F*.

### (Laughter)

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**Dr. Rivera:** What is 4-F?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 4-F was when, you-know, you went into the service and you didn't qualify because you had some kind of thing that you couldn't go into the service – that was the 4-F. That was during the war. He said everybody was crying 4-F's and then, (inaudible). I mean, he was a character, so we had that experience and I said it was really amazing all the things that happened to all of the 4-F's – we still made our confirmation.

**Dr. Rivera:** I do remember him saying: *incate, incate* (kneel).

**Mrs. Ramos:** *incate* 4-F.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned Pete Luque Sr., Pete juniors' father, he was also quite a person, *verdad?*

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, well he was involved in a lot of organizations: the Lions Club, the Socialistas...

**Dr. Rivera:** He was president of the Lions Club back in 1952. He was the first Mexican that belonged to the Lions Club and was president of the Lions Club.

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**Mrs. Ramos:** He was always going to different clubs and different meetings, and stuff like that with Manuel Padilla, and some other people that I didn't know. But he was always involved – and he was one of the first ones to start working at the cement plant. So, my Father got to work at the cement plant because of my uncle. But he was involved and always telling us to run for queens. I said, no I don't want to go sell tickets.

**Dr. Rivera:** You didn't...?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, I didn't want to. My sister Clara did, but I didn't.

**Dr. Rivera:** And Clara was the baby of the family?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, the baby of the family.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Do you remember what year she ran for queen?

**Dr. Rivera:** Must have been in the 60's, *que no?*

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah-well, I'm 7 years older than Clara, so she's about 73 right now.

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**Dr. Rivera:** It was in the 60's.

Well, getting back to Pete, you-know, he was very active with Manuel Padilla, Tony Garcia, and Angel Oliva, and with Pasqual Oliva. [He was] very community oriented; he tried to get people to run for office; and he tried to get people to participate in Fiestas Patrias. So anyway, he worked for the cement plant.

When did he start running for office? Or, how did he get appointed to be a councilman?

**Mrs. Ramos:** I think it was when somebody was going to finish and didn't want to run again, or something is when he got to go in there. I don't remember if it was in the 50's.

**Dr. Rivera:** I think Johnny Martinez, Jeremiahs, the boxer, had been a councilman for 3 years, from 1948 to 51, or so, and he didn't want to finish his term. So he recommended that Pete be appointed on the Council, and Pete accepted. From then on, he was quite active in Colton business, *verdad?*

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, yeah, he was always involved in something, or other. He was always in meetings, I remember.

**Dr. Rivera:** And even now, they named a center at Veteran's Park after him – the Pete Luque Senior Center.

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** How is he related to you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** He married my Aunt Melinda, my Father's sister. Because, like I said, my *Tia* Melinda and my *Tio* Pete – they got married. Then, Jess Luque married my *Tia* Lola, who was my Father's sister. My *Tia* Chepa married Jesus, my Father's brother – so, 3 Luque's married 3 Hernandez'.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh that's how it happened – that's how you were related.

*Pregunta*, how did you meet your husband?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, my husband, I met him at a party. He was ready to go into the service when I met him – so he went into the service.

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

**Mrs. Ramos:** Uh, 1952, 51 or 52, I don't remember exactly when he went into the service. But he was a military man who served 33 years in the military.

**Dr. Rivera:** So it was a career for him?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** A career, yeah, he was in the reserves, you-know, after he got out he was in the reserves, and he was always going TDY (temporary duty yonder – an acronym of military slang) someplace to Germany, to Puerto Rico, and he went for the Panama invasions, he was one of the interrogators in the Panama invasion.

**Dr. Rivera:** Prior to meeting your husband, you said that the dancers were just great.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh great. The big band era is beautiful.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell us about the big band era, the bands that came to the area.

**Mrs. Ramos:** They came to [the] Urbita Ballroom, later called Valley Ballroom, and the Swing Auditorium in downtown San Bernardino. That's where they held all this – I saw all the big bands there: Harry James, Duke Ellington...

**Dr. Rivera:** This auditorium is now where the library is in San Bernardino.

Urbita, where was Urbita?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Urbita was where the Inland Center is.

**Dr. Rivera:** Okay.

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Later, it was called Valley Ballroom, but it was Urbita when I went there.

**Dr. Rivera:** Which bands were there?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, Harry James, Gene Krupa, and every big band name I saw when I was young. And they only charged about \$2 or \$3 dollars to go, it was pretty good.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you had a wonderful time enjoying the big bands?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you were a good swing dancer?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, I love swing dancing when I was young. But I never danced after I got married.

**Dr. Rivera:** So after you met your husband, got married, and he was in the service, did you ever have any children?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, I had 4 children: Gloria, Arthur, Regina, and Eric. Gloria died in 2011, and Arthur died in 2013. Regina is just the one that I have here because my son, Eric, has been in prison for many years.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Getting back to the dancing and the big bands, who were your partners, your girl partners that went to those dances?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, my cousin, Rosa...

**Dr. Rivera:** Rosa who is married to Tommy?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, Tommy Castorena. My sisters, cousins, we all went to the dances.

**Dr. Rivera:** There were good times, yeah?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, good times, yeah. I went with my aunts, my cousins, and friends that could go. Sometimes [their family/parents would] let them go, and sometimes they didn't.

**Dr. Rivera:** Yeah, who would drive there?

**Mrs. Ramos:** We would go on the bus or in a taxi.

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



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**Mrs. Ramos:** Because my cousin, Maria, she worked making tortillas, so she had more money so sometimes we [took] a taxi.

**Dr. Rivera:** A taxi from Colton to Urbita or ...?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Or to [the Swing Auditorium], yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** You guys were adventurous.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned Tommy Castorena, the Castorena Family, and you mentioned that your Dad was a football player?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, I think he came out in the Colton's annual 1925-1926, and it mentions him and the Castorena's who used to play for Colton High. He was a good pitcher so they have a little write-up on him during that time.

**Dr. Rivera:** So he played for Colton High School?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, he played for Colton High School. Then, when he got married to my Mother, he used to play in Orange County in La Habra. He used to play for the Juveniles when Chu Flores was one of the ones that went into the big leagues. They

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played all together with my *Tío* Rufino Gonzales, and my Uncle John (inaudible) they all used to play in the Juveniles.

**Dr. Rivera:** So they were very active?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Active in playing baseball.

**Dr. Rivera:** Was that on Sundays?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Saturdays or Sundays – they used to play, yeah. There's a big write-up in Orange County about the two Flores' that he used to go pick oranges [with] – my Dad was a lemon and orange picker. They were most of the ones that played in the [baseball] leagues.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Did you see them play? Where?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, [when] I was a little girl in La Habra. But he didn't make it into the big leagues because...

**Dr. Rivera:** You-know it's interesting that you mentioned [they were] citrus pickers.

**Mrs. Ramos:** They were mostly the ones that were involved playing ball. That's why I mentioned that book that's out there that [lists] the baseball players of Orange County

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-- I don't know if it has anything to do with Chu Flores because I have a big write-up on Chu Flores and the people that worked and played ball during that time. I have a big page from La Habra News [that] they wrote up.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned that your Dad had a collection of uniforms?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Not my Dad, my husband. He had a team in the 60s, late 60s, and Arthur donated... I don't know if he donated or gave it to Graciano...

**Dr. Rivera:** Graciano Gomez' newspapers...

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah – because my husband had a team during that time and they said that they wanted to know if there were any Mexicans playing in teams. My husband had a team but I don't know if they were [into] athletics or something, I don't remember the name. He had a banner and the roster for the people that played: Anglos and Blacks and Mexicans played in his team, so I don't know. I never was involved with that part, but he had a team.

**Dr. Rivera:** So he was very active with his team?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Talking about baseball, did you ever go to the Caldera swimming pool?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, yeah-yeah, when we couldn't go down that way during, you-know, when we wanted to go on a Sunday or a Saturday we used to go to Calderas to the Plunge.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was close to the house, right?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, Congress and 5th Street.

**Dr. Rivera:** 5<sup>th</sup> and Fog, or someplace?

**Mrs. Ramos:** The reason we used to go to the plants because all the boys went to the *Quadrito*, and the *Sequia*, and all that stuff, to go swimming and we went a couple of times but we screamed because there was a lot of lizards. So we wanted to go to the plunge instead.

**Dr. Rivera:** *El Quadrito* – that's where all the guys went?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah. I don't know, it was a little square someplace. What did they call it?

**Dr. Rivera:** *Los Cuninos*, Cunino Beach. So you went to Cunino Beach y te *asustadas*?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, the lizards, there were a lot of lizards, so we were afraid of the lizards. We jumped out of there.

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was that.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mm-hmm, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Did you see any of the baseball [games] that were played in Caldera?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, not there just to the Mercuries [games]... cuz my Uncle Pete was an announcer at the Mercuries [games] and we used to go, you-know, when they played ball we used to go.

**Dr. Rivera:** Oh that's right, Pete Luque Sr. was the announcer for the baseball games.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, the Mercuries. Then, my Uncle Tony played for the Mercuries too, later on, so yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was Tony [who]?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Tony Hernandez.

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**Dr. Rivera:** He's also a Colton High School graduate.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. My Uncle Tony was a good baseball [player]. He was the only one that had four stripes on his thing because he was good at all the sports he played. I remember all the girls – we took the sweaters for our cousins or our brothers, and I took my Uncle Tony's and he's the only one that had four stripes.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Letterman sweaters.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, Letterman sweaters, yep.

**Dr. Rivera: (To Frank Acosta)** Four stripes were what, Frank, four-year letterman?

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** No, it was [for] 4 sports.

**Mrs. Ramos:** It was four sports that he majored in: he played football, baseball, basketball, and track.

**Dr. Rivera:** That was pretty good. Well, you-know, your little brother John was also...  
*Como se llama?* Your little brother, I forgot his name, or your cousin?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Which one?

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**Dr. Rivera:** He just lost his wife.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, Raymond, my brother, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Raymond. He was good also in sports.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, and his son Raymond Jr. used to play football for Colton High, he was really good until he got sick, so. But that's pretty good...

**Dr. Rivera:** So were busy?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** You lived on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, you went dancing with the big bands... You picked all kinds of fruit...

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, I had a lot of fun. I got a lot of experience.

**Dr. Rivera:** You went to *Los Cuninos*. You were popular in high school.

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Not in high school, [but] in junior high. [In] high school we got lost with all the, you-know, there was a lot of Anglos that had all the clubs and stuff. We only belong to the Pan-American Club.

**Dr. Rivera:** Tell me about the Pan-American Club?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, we had our meetings, and we put on a show, dancing, or whatever we did.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Who was your sponsor?

**Mrs. Ramos:** I think Miss Pasquera.

**Dr. Rivera:** The Spanish teacher?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, yeah. That's the only club I belonged to in high school. But I was a good shorthand writer, I was the best one in school.

**Dr. Rivera:** Were you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, I got awards, and I still have them for writing 120 words a minute in Gregg shorthand. And I devised my own Spanish shorthand – I can write



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shorthand when I'm sitting down watching TV, I'm writing in Spanish the shorthand – just so I won't forget.

**Dr. Rivera:** Esther, you're doing a history of your family? Tell us about that?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, I'm writing about my family because I saw the similarity between my Mother's family and my Grandmother's family. They all were entrepreneurs, and they came and they established their own stores, their own things. I want my children to know about their background, where they came from, [and] all the things that happened, and why they did this and why they did something else. [Also], why they became successful, in the first place, because they were very hardworking. I'm writing [about] both: the Guzman Family and the Hernandez Family.

**Dr. Rivera:** How far are you along on your project?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Almost through.

**Dr. Rivera:** Wonderful.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Have you gathered pictures to go with your stories?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mm-hmm yeah, I'm putting pictures [with the stories] – and like I was telling, Lily, that I remember the day I was born, so I wrote a little thing on the day I

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was born: what I felt when I was being born and stuff, and Arthur said I was crazy because nobody knows that.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, you experienced being in the womb, tell us about that?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, I experienced something... I don't know, I remember that I was in this dark place and I don't know if it was a dream or [if] it was something I remembered, I don't know. I remember I was in this dark place and I used to hear noises all the time, and [I'd] move around just like I was in a dream. Then, I felt one time that I was being pushed-pushed little, little-by-little out. Then, I felt on the top of my head I felt cold and I guess that's when I was born. I remember falling into the arms of this lady which was a midwife that was helping my Mother deliver me in the bedroom. I remember this old lady, and I don't know if she was Dominican or if she was Black because she had curly hair, she was dark, [she] had big earrings, she had an apron that had little chilies on it, and she smelled like smoke. She cut my umbilical cord, wrapped me up in a pink blanket, and gave [me] to my Mother. I remember all the surroundings in the room: I remember the bed, and the bedspread being folded on one side, my Mother under the sheets. I remember my Great-grandmother, my Grandmother, and somebody else, Flora, one of my Mother's friends, they were all in the room when I was born. I remember the chest of drawers, the little jar with peacock feathers, little knickknacks that my Mother had, like a little chicken that you put little trinkets in. I remember all those things and I don't know... I remember being born in the blue house that belonged to my Great-grandmother, Manuela. Because there

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were 6 houses on the lot – and my Father and Mother lived in the blue house – and I remember being born there in the blue house. But I don't know if it's just a dream or if it's something that I experienced, I don't know. But I remember every detail in there [when I was born].

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** There's some evidence that especially girls can preserve memories from their very early childhood. I know that my sister has surprised my father with being able to describe in detail places that he never would have expected her to remember...

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, those are my memories. I also had a memory in the same house which is not very well, you-know, to tell about it because – I was about 8 or 9 months, a little girl, and my Father was drunk and he came in [because] my Mother was gonna leave him because they had an argument. He got mad so he got a knife and he told my Mother he was gonna stab me. I remember my Grandfather, my Grandmother, my Great-grandmother, and my Uncle John... I don't know, because I was born after my Uncle Issac – [but] I saw him with his little *pitcharitas* and a little sweater with stripes on it, and they were trying to take me away from my Dad, and my Father wouldn't let me go. So then, my Mother got *azucar* from the table and threw it at him, and hit him right here (she points to her forehead). So he staggered and threw the knife, and my Uncle Issac was biting my Dad on the leg – and then, they took me. [Anyway,] I have those memories but I don't know how I would remember that because I wasn't there, I mean, I wasn't old enough to remember all that. But I do remember a lot of things.

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**Dr. Rivera:** I'll be darned.

**Mrs. Ramos:** I have a lot of stories to write, you-know, from La Habra.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well I'm delighted that you started.

We talked about meeting your husband, eh? He was from San Bernardino?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** And you were married; and then, after the kids grew up, you decided [to go] back to school, you volunteered...

**Mrs. Ramos:** ...I went back to school, I volunteered in the schools because I wanted to keep an eye on Eric because he was a troublemaker, and so I went to keep an eye on him and I volunteered...

**Dr. Rivera:** Was it elementary school?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Elementary school, Grant School, and Paul J. Rogers. Then, I got a job as a teacher's aide at Paul J. Rogers. Me and Josie Hernandez were going to Valley College at the time, studying sociology and psychology. So, I graduated in '76 from Valley College, and I got the opportunity to go into the Saber Program.

**Dr. Rivera:** The Saber Program from La Verne?

**Mrs. Ramos:** La Verne University – so, we used to go every day, 4 to 10, every day to La Verne.

**Dr. Rivera:** Monday through Friday?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Monday through Friday, and sometimes even on Saturdays when we had special projects to do.

**Dr. Rivera:** 4:00p.m. to 10:00 p.m.?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Mm-hmm. So I graduated from La Verne in 1978.

**Dr. Rivera:** How many students participated in the project?

**Mrs. Ramos:** 100 started in the project, and 80-some graduated from the project.

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**Dr. Rivera:** That's a good retention rate.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yes. They were going to write a thing about it – they interviewed us, but I never found out from La Verne what they did with the information of why the program was so successful...

**Dr. Rivera:** So, mostly people that participated in the program were kind of like you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** Homemakers...

**Mrs. Ramos:** Homemakers, married, moms, their children were grown and a lot of them, you-know, like Connie Cabrera, she was in my group. She was a little bit older than us, but she made it and went to school. We all struggled, but I think the success rate on this program was that we were all together. We talked about our problems, we talked about school problems, and projects. We got together and had coffee and discussions. We had a lot of fun, and we were very, very close, and we helped each other.

**Dr. Rivera:** So a good support group?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, I think that was it.

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**Dr. Rivera:** Did the students have support from their husbands?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No. Had a lot of divorces.

**Dr. Rivera:** *Porque no?*

**Mrs. Ramos:** Because the husbands were jealous; and they said they needed to dedicate their time to their children, staying at home, and cleaning...

I had a hard time with my husband too because he said, no – I had to stay home with the kids, [and] I was too old. I said, no, I'm going to do something for myself, so I persevered and I had a lot of problems trying to become a teacher. I had problems at home, you-know, but I persevered and I finally got it.

**Dr. Rivera:** So the Mexican culture kicked in with [the males]?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, the males, a lot of [the wives] had to drop out because their husbands didn't want them to be going to school. But a lot of them became master teachers. Some of them became principals. So a lot of it was very successful because we wanted something. I think [when] we got the opportunity we said we'll go for it – and we'll do it – and we have to do it, we have to stay in it.

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**Dr. Rivera:** But, you-know, I'm not surprised, Esther, because even now when we have our new students that are coming in from Mexico, especially, they still hang on to the culture – that they don't want their girls to participate in activities that would get them away from the home.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Where did you end up teaching?

**Mrs. Ramos:** My first year I did Crestmore [Elementary School]. Then, I went to a junior high for 3 or 4 years. I remember how it was at junior high when they had 6th graders up there. I went to Alice Birney [Elementary School] and I was there for 10 years. I went to [Walter] Zimmerman [Elementary School] for my last 5 [years]. So, I had a very, very good time teaching, especially, I enjoyed Zimmerman because I taught kindergarten and first grade, and I got to get them when they were very young.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you had fun with those grade levels?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yes, I loved it. And I didn't want to retire because I thought – I'm not gonna retire until I'm 70. So I was 67 at the time I retired, only because my husband had left me his money, you-know, and it was building too much interest in paying for the government – I said no, I better retire. That's why I retired. But I wanted to stay on longer.



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**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** As a teacher, when you were teaching elementary grades, did you ever include anything cultural as part of your teaching?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah, all the time. Because I always had the children that spoke Spanish – we did Spanish and English in my classroom all the time – so they became bilingual. But I really enjoyed teaching.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** And you also saw the district, like so many districts, start to pull away from bilingual education?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, and I said: Why? If it's successful, you-know, a lot of my children they learned how to write and read English and Spanish, both languages from the kindergarten [to] first grade. It was fantastic what I saw through their growth in both languages.

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was a good and wonderful experience for you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. Until this day, I miss it, you-know. I said: what am I gonna do? But I taught my great-grandchildren before they went to school – so they would be prepared.

**Mr. Acosta (off camera):** Are they doing well?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, one of them, Jared, is coming here to Cal State [University, San Bernardino] – one my great-grandchildren.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, he's following his Grandma's footsteps.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Well, I hope so cuz I emphasize, you-know, the only one that went back to school when she was older was Gloria, my oldest. She got her A.A. (Associate Arts), and she was working on her B.A., but she passed away. But she's the only one that followed through. Because [with] all of them, I keep telling them, you need an education, you need this to be successful. They think it's too hard.

**Dr. Rivera:** Life is hard, right?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** *Como dice el dicho la vida es dura, pero mas duro el que la aguanta.*

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah.

**(Laughter)**

**Dr. Rivera:** Life is hard, but the person [who] bares with it is much tougher.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah.

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**Dr. Rivera:** I was gonna ask you: you said that when you went to Colton High School that the Anglo girls would say to Mexican girls... go back to where you come from?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, they used to write in my annual, or tell me: "Oh the cute little Mexican girl from across the tracks." And I never paid attention to it until I'm older, now. I said [to myself]: why did they write that to me? Because like I said, I loved high school, you-know, I don't know how anybody can say they don't like [high school]. Because it's either work in the fields or go to high school. So I'd rather go to high school and do something. I remember with this one teacher – that I think maybe that's why I became a teacher because she was Mrs. Serrano, but her name was Miss Wiese. She was my English teacher and she married Serrano.

**Dr. Rivera:** She married Tirso Serrano.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. She was the one that told me, you-know, you should go to college, you have a great mind, [and] you should use that great mind to go to college. I said well, I'll think about it but my parents don't have any money, so. But she put the seed in Mrs. Humphrey from elementary school because when I was going to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Mrs. French was my teacher in the 6th grade, and I was a correspondent, and all that. But one day she asked me to go to the front [of the] room to read, and I couldn't go because of some incident that happened to me. I said, I can't, and so she got really angry and she said, you stay after school and I'll talk to

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you. So I stayed and I told her the reason I didn't want to go up there, and she said: I don't care if you're dying, if you're bleeding, or whatever, whenever I tell you to come up, you come up. Then, she moved me into the low 6 with Miss Humphrey, and Miss Humphrey just couldn't understand why she had moved me from her high class to the low 6. She said: What am I gonna do with you? So, she gave me an IQ test and I tested high, and so she went to Mrs. French and told Mrs. French – [that I] shouldn't be in [her] classroom because all the ones that are in [her] classroom they need remedial, you-know, things. So I became a teacher's aide in [Mrs. Humphrey's] room. She had some books that I asked her if I could borrow them. I was 12 years old in the 6th grade and I was reading Homer, The Iliad, Ulysses, and all the travels in Greek mythology. I got involved and I loved that so, I started with that – and I loved reading after that. I read every day and I got books from the library – and anything I could get my hands on. And that's how I think I became a teacher because I was an aide right there helping all the kids learn something in that classroom.

Then, Mrs. French said: oh, you can come back to my classroom now if you want to. But I refused, I just stayed in the little class and I worked with the kids there, and I liked it.

**Dr. Rivera:** So you were also a teacher's [aide]...?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, I enjoyed Mrs. Humphrey. She told me you're a very good student, you shouldn't be in this class. I don't know why Mrs. French put you here. But I enjoyed [it]. She told me, make sure that when you get older you do something with your life. So Mrs. Humphrey and Miss Wiese were the ones that helped me. Because I remember what they told me: you need to go to school and, you-know, use that mind.

**Dr. Rivera:** Uh-huh. Esther, you mentioned the little cute girl [who came] from South Colton. Were there any other incidents when you went downtown Colton?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah. When we went to, you-know, like to town, they used to look at us and they followed us when we went into a store – they follow us all the time. I don't know if they were afraid we were gonna steal, or [if] we didn't have any money, or what, I don't know. Then, when we went to the New Colton Theatre, Mr. Meyers made us sit on the left side, and if we got to the right side, they escorted us out of the movies, or back to the place and stay there.

I remember, my Dad, when I was, I think, maybe about... and I don't know why I remember things when I was really little, [but when I was] 2 or 3 years old he took me to a restaurant downtown in Colton. I don't remember where it was, but I know that we walked downtown and we went to a restaurant, and he told me look at this – and there was a big sign on the outside that said: “No Mexicans and dogs allowed.” And I remember that...

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**Dr. Rivera:** And you were only 3 years old?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Yeah, [I was] 2 or 3 when I saw that sign, and I always had it in my mind. When I got older, I told my friend, Helen Abril, about it, and she said: oh no, Esther, you're wrong I never saw it. I never heard that about that you're wrong. So, one time when I went to the Wilson School picnic I saw the paper there, and I said this is the thing that I remember, it was there – it was in the Colton Courier that they had that sign that was in one of the restaurants. So I remembered that we were segregated and they didn't want us on the north side.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about the candy store and the soda shop, or any of those places?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, Hunters. We had money but we had to go through a window they had if we wanted to buy candy. We had to buy it through the window – we couldn't go into Hunters. Until when I was, I think, a senior in high school, then we could go into Hunters... But when we were younger we couldn't go [into the store], we had to buy our items through the window.

**Dr. Rivera:** What about clothing and things like that?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, clothing: they used to have a lot of shops downtown. They had, well, Helmans, Willits, (inaudible), JCPenney, Adele's, and other little stores there that had clothing and shoes. I used to buy all my shoes at Brills and Willits, and things like that. But I had, like I said, I had money when I worked in the fields. I always used to save \$50 - \$60 dollars, and I had that in my pocket to go buy things.

**Dr. Rivera:** And there was no problem with the stores?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, no, not at the stores because [when] you had money, you paid.

**Dr. Rivera:** So green is just kind of a good ticket for admissions?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah. But I had a lot of fun growing up with, especially, my Grandmother who was there for all of us, all the family, all the cousins.

**Dr. Rivera:** So she was a good support foundation?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah.

**Dr. Rivera:** A good foundation, a cornerstone for the whole family?

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**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh-yeah. She made me read in Spanish, like I said, [reading] La Opíñión to her every day. Then, I used to write letters to her family in Mexico because she didn't know how to write and read. So I used to do it for her and she said, make sure you never forget your language.

**Dr. Rivera:** You mentioned Miss Wiese: she married Tirso Serrano?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Um-hmm.

**Dr. Rivera:** [There was] a story that I heard, Esther, was that Miss Weiss was the assistant superintendent?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Dean of girls.

**Dr. Rivera:** Dean of girls; and that one meeting that she had with the gringo girls, the Anglo girls – that she told them you better stay away from those Mexican boys because otherwise you will get in trouble.

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, I never remember her saying anything [like that] cuz I know she was really great for all, especially the children who wanted to learn. The Mexican children that put an interest into their studies – she was really wonderful. She was the one that told me to go to college, and she said you need to further your mind.



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When I was a senior, I used to do shorthand in my junior and senior year, and like I said, Mrs. Cobb was a shorthand teacher. She had me transcribing and doing all this; and she gave me all these awards: [the] Newberry awards they had for shorthand writing...

On Success Day, she made me be the teacher for the juniors and seniors in shorthand – so I taught shorthand when I was a senior for that day. I remember wearing this blue dress, my high heels, and my nylons, and stuff – I went upstairs... and I fell down and I tore all my nylons. I had to have one more class, and it was a senior class that I went [to teach]. I was so embarrassed, I just took off my nylons, and said, I'm gonna just go like this into the room; and I taught the juniors and seniors shorthand.

**Dr. Rivera:** Ah, very good, very good. So you did like high school?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh, I loved it because I worked in the fields, so I know what it is to work in fields, and break your back doing those kind of things. I said no, I'd rather get an education, and I loved going to school.

**Dr. Rivera:** Esther, you mentioned some of the people that you ran into at the school that were teachers, who were some of your heroes as you were growing up?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Like I said, Miss Wiese was one of mine because she always gave me books to read, extra books and stuff; and she told me to read these books – you'll like them. I remember she gave me “Ramona” – [it was] the first book I read about

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“Ramona” from, I think it had to do with the Indians around the area because I think I read something about it being in Aqua Mansa [somewhere]. That’s what “Ramona” was based on or something...

**Dr. Rivera:** So that was one of your heroes. [Were] there any others?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Like I said, there were not a lot of them. [They] just tolerated you.

**Dr. Rivera:** Your Grandmother was one of your heroes.

**Mrs. Ramos:** Oh yeah, well, at home my Grandmother, and my Great-grandmother -- we used to call her, *Telesflores Segovia*. She never [used] her married name:

Guzman, she always said: “*Yo soy Telesflores Segovia.*” So, she's my hero because [for a] 4 foot 11 woman – she was the one that was the basis of all that we had. She had the money to build the homes because she had the perseverance...

When they went mining, they found gold in different places. My Grandfather, Validiano, used to go with this man, and they used to put gold in a little bag. My Grandmother used to take a little every day and put it in her little handkerchief... And if it hadn't been for her keeping that money – because Anglos came and stole the money for the gold nuggets from them, and they took them all – and my Grandmother just had that [gold she saved in her handkerchief]. So they bought land in Rose Hills, then she bought two cows; and she sold milk to the *Campo Colorado* in La Habra. She sold milk and cheese and butter to the people. There was a community of lots of people from

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different places. There was *la francesita*, they came from France, and a lot of people who came from other areas of the country. They lived on the *Campo Colorado*, which was like a project for the city. All the houses were red, there were three streets with red houses.

She made money selling her milk; and they planted everything they had. They had chickens, pigs, goats, the cows, and everything. I never went to a store to buy fruit because there were fruit trees all over. We had everything, vegetables planted, everything.

My Grandfather established a pool home; and he also built with my Great-grandfather. They built a big building where they put showers, individual showers and bathrooms. The people that didn't have inside plumbing, they used to come and pay 20 cents to take a shower, and that's how they made their money.

**Dr. Rivera:** And this was in La Habra?

**Mrs. Ramos:** La Habra, uh-huh.

But both families were very instrumental in doing their own all the time. Doing different things to earn money.

**Dr. Rivera:** Where did they find the gold?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Uh, I don't know where they went, but they were very young before they had my Grandfather [join them]... [With] all that money my Grandmother saved, they

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bought land in Rose Hills, and then, they sold it and they bought land in La Habra. But it was because of her.

She worked also in the chili factory where they paid them with gold nuggets. So she had money to start her things that she wanted to do in life.

My Grandfather was also working in the schools. He was a janitor for the schools in La Habra.

But there's a similarity between (inaudible) and Hernandez because they both had the priests eating at their homes. Like my Grandmother and my Grandfather had Fathers Stapleton and Piccadell, and all those priests [at their home] because I always remember both of my families [being] very Catholic oriented – they always attended church.

That's why I'm writing about both of these two great people that were from my life.

**Dr. Rivera:** I was gonna ask you, you-know, it's been a little over an hour that we've been talking; is there anything that I forgot to ask you?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, I think we touched [on] everything that was on the paper here.

**Dr. Rivera:** Frank or Henry, did I forget anything?

**Mrs. Ramos:** We talked about [when I was young], the church, leaders, I think we talked about almost everything. Except number 8 [on this list]: is there anything else? I already told you about La Habra.

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**Dr. Rivera:** The last thing is: what was the best thing about living in Colton?

**Mrs. Ramos:** Family. To me, [it was] my family because we grew up – all cousins were, you-know, like Gloria, my cousin Gloria Castillo and all of us we were all together. Connie and Rosa, and monsignor, we all lived together. Monsignor lived on 'L' Street but they came to my Grandmother's house all the time, so. But [being] family oriented and going to church is the basis of... Because to this day we still meet once a week to say Rosary, the whole family that can go.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well Esther, thank you very much for sharing your life with us. It was very, very interesting and commend you for working on your family book – and I think it's just coming along fine.

Are you sure that I didn't forget anything?

**Mrs. Ramos:** No, I don't think so. Because I told you all about my Grandmother, Grandparents, *Tortilleria*, about the tortilla factory, and about myself, my birthplace, and experiences – and when I was young, and all that stuff. I think we covered most everything.

**Dr. Rivera:** Well, thank you very much – thank you.

(Applause)

Transcribed by Pat Ricé-Daniels, Library Services Specialist