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Oral History Project of Colton, CA – 1/11/15

Dr. Rivera: Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Tom Rivera and welcome to our project in the oral history of South Colton; and today we're at [the] home of Mr. and Mrs. Mel Salazar – Lucy, Mel thank you so much.

Mr. Salazar: You're welcome.

Dr. Rivera: Thank you so much for letting us use your house this afternoon.

Today is Sunday, January the 11th, and it's approximately 2:30 in the afternoon. Again, thank you for letting us use your house. Mel you're so generous because of some of the episodes that you've gone through recently – and you're able to be with us this afternoon, so thank you very much.

Now, the last time we got together was January the 7th, at that time we interviewed at Cal State San Bernardino and we talked about your Mom, and your Mom being one of the original softball players in this area in the Inland Empire.

Mr. Salazar: The Mercury Señoritas, yeah.

Dr. Rivera: What year was that?

Mr. Salazar: They started playing in 1938-39. When my Mom got married she [went back to] playing ball again because my Dad passed away in 1945. So she continued playing for the San Bernardino team which was girls from different leagues [and] different cities with the Cherokees – and she played about 3 years with them. By that time, she already had my brother and myself.

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Dr. Rivera: Then your first project was to make notice and note in history that your Mom was very involved in the development of softball in the area, and you started a project for her to nominate her into the Hall of Fame, exalted.

Mr. Salazar: Her and the whole team.

Dr. Rivera: What was the result of your efforts to do that?

Mr. Salazar: Well, I got her in, they voted her in, it was unanimous – there was about 6 Park Commissioners that selected them, and there [were] about 6 entries. But last year... they allowed 4 winners so that was great; but her team got a unanimous vote – so I was happy about that and proud for my Mom.

Dr. Rivera: Where is the recognition place in Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Well, last year it was at the Council Chambers, but this year with my other project that I just finished, they had it there at Gonzalez Center.

Dr. Rivera: That's in Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Both in Colton, yeah.

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Dr. Rivera: You-know, when we talked last time you mentioned that you were getting ready to do a different project. That project was to look at Colton history and identify some of the old-time baseball players from the area. What did you find out?

[Wait] before we do that let me go back, I should have mentioned this before, but why is this project important to you?

Mr. Salazar: It's important because I had found out that including my Mom's team and the team that that got nominated this year, and next year, a lot of people never heard of my Mom's team. I mean, the people that are 90 years old or their late 80's they heard about them, but the ones I'm working here a lot of them didn't because their sons and daughters are in their 90's – of this team that I just got in. People didn't even know they played ball – so it's important to me and to Colton that these families know what their dads and their brothers did. The biggest motivation [is] that they know and they don't forget. So, when these people die, when my Mom passes, when I pass, my kids and my grandkids can go to the City Hall or Gonzales Center and see: Oh, look who's there – I didn't know they played ball.

Dr. Rivera: Or [that they're] related to them.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Rivera: So you try to preserve that piece of history that has been missing all these years in the history books of Colton.

Mr. Salazar: Exactly, exactly.

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Dr. Rivera: Now tell me, what did you find out in the research that you're doing on the old-timers and their contribution to baseball in Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Did you want me to go ahead and read this right now?

Dr. Rivera: Would you like to read it?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, I'd like to read it – it maybe 3 - 4 minutes something like that. But it will explain and give you a lot of answers to questions.

Dr. Rivera: And you presented this...

Mr. Salazar: This is the same – this is what I read, and I think this is a big part when you're presenting for any of the teams or Ken Hubbs or Camilo Carreon – you have to have a good presentation, and give them a lot of answers and information. Because I worked hard I went to the library and the microfilm, my eyes were bulging out of my head by the time I got... But I did it in a year's time, so I was able to do that and I got a lot of information.

But let me start with the late great Central's Cubs baseball team. We here in Colton don't realize how much baseball history we have, and have had in the past. Well I'm here to let you know and open your eyes and hearts to the history you don't know about this team. In about 7 or 8 years it will be a hundred years that this team, the Central's Cubs, were all young men who ate, slept, [and] lived baseball. The earliest I have found through a microfilm that they were playing where it was in late 1921-22, 7 more years that's a hundred years and they were already playing ball.

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They were formed and put together by the late Juan Caldera. Mr. Caldera not only formed the team but also built a baseball field for the team, which was Cubs Park – they called it... Like in 1924, it was located on the corner of Rancho and Congress in South Colton. But across the street was Agua Mansa – so same street that's just what the cutoff name was. Mr. Caldera also built the swimming pool for the public about a block away from the baseball field on 5th Street. He was an entrepreneur in the early 20s, he and his brother Aristeo were the first manager and assistant manager of the team when it first got started. The park was named Cubs Park, but was also known as *El Corralón*, which meant the Corral, which I didn't know because my Spanish isn't that great.

Dr. Rivera: We understand...

Mr. Salazar: On this team in the early years of the 20s to early years of the 30s there were 4 brothers who were all outstanding players who played together for many years. Their names were from the oldest to the youngest: Porfirio, Arturo, Theo, and Sal Castorena. These 4 were the bulk of the team. They even played with other teams in the area when they weren't playing with their main Cubs team. They played with teams all over Southern California and parts of Mexico, like Mexicali.

I have also through my research found the team played with or against the late great Gordon Maltzburger who's in the Hall of Fame. George Castor... these are all Colton boys. Who's in the hall? Future major leaguers, lefty Faulkner, James, I read about him and then I read in thing where he was an ex-major league—so you're talking about 3 major league ball players that either played against or for these teams with the Cubs.

This shows you how good these players were; some of them could have been major leaguers if they were allowed. But we all know how things were done during those days – and I'm including the Negro Leagues and what they did to them, and how many would have made the majors but they [had] already [gotten] too old. A few of them made it like, Satchel Paige, and Jackie Robinson was a young guy; but there was Josh Gibson who was the best, he hit more home runs than Babe Ruth did.

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The other team members who were just as good was a young man whose name was Milton Noriega.

Dr. Rivera: The owner of the Sombrero Café.

Mr. Salazar: The owner, and he built it. There was a Sombrero Café and dance hall back in the early 30s.

Another great player was Theo Duarte not Teyo, Teyo was his son.

Dr. Rivera: What was his position?

Mr. Salazar: I would have to [look it up] but I have it here.

Dr. Rivera: Oh, that's okay.

Mr. Salazar: [Again,] another great player was Theo Duarte, who played many years with a team. His son, Teyo Duarte, went on and played with the original Colton Mercury baseball team that played for so many years.

Other players were Ambrosio Gonzalez and his brother Joe Gonzalez, who I found kind of late in my looking and finding teams.

Dr. Rivera: Going back to Teyo Duarte, did he marry Porfirio Castorena's daughter?
Carolina?

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Mr. Salazar: Exactly. So, here are 2 fathers who: 1 had a son and 1 had a daughter, and they got married.

Teyo became a great player.

Dr. Rivera: He was a 3rd baseman.

Mr. Salazar: I think so. And through that marriage, he's got a grandson who was signed by the Giants, and I'll have his name here later on somewhere... but he was signed, but he was a pitcher but messed up his arm and that was it. But he played for about 6 years – he didn't make the majors.

Dr. Rivera: What was his name?

Mr. Salazar: David Kinowski – that was a tongue twister for me... So like I said, that bloodline just went on from the Castorena's and Duarte's, and then the Duarte to his grandson.

Dr. Rivera: So, I would imagine that baseball was not only a sport but also it was a way for people to get together, socialize, party, and then be able to meet you-know sons and daughters of the players.

Mr. Salazar: Fellowshiping -- that's great and that's part of life.

Of course, there was Ambrosio Gonzalez and his brother Joe Gonzalez. I still haven't found any of their family [background]. I have my cousin, who is Carolyn Lujan, married Tony Gonzalez who's related to them and he's going to give me some information if

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there's any family besides himself. But if we couldn't find any I had for him to show up at the induction.

There was also Andres Negrete who I haven't got a lot of information about him, and I know there's a lot of Negrete's in Colton -- but that's my project now: to find the families so they'll be there during the induction.

There was Juan Hernandez [who] was Louie Hernandez' father...

Dr. Rivera: Also related to Henry, who is across the table from us.

Mr. Salazar: Also of course, he had a [sons] Louie and Pete. [Pete] lives here on Citrus, and I already talked to them. Juan Hernandez worked for the City for a long time. I'm not sure if he was always there or if he worked someplace else before.

There was also Caetano Calderia whose son Chon Calderia played on the 1954 Little League World Series team with Ken Williams and Ken Hubbs and all those guys. They're in the hall also.

Dr. Rivera: The little league team that went to Williamsport is also in the Hall of Fame?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, and the 1956 team... they went to Williamsport.

Dr. Rivera: Were there any Latinos on that team? Chon and who else?

Mr. Salazar: I think there was another one but I can't recall...

Oh yeah, Danny Carrasco, how could I forget him -- yeah, yeah. Those are the only two that I know. Danny graduated a year after me and Chon graduated in 1960 with me. But

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I think there was another one but... because he moved out of town at an early age and I didn't know him.

I think that's what put Colton on the map because they got national coverage you-know.

There was Manuel Gaitán who also played for the central cup team, and I think his son Manuel {Sandy} went to school with you.

Dr. Rivera: He graduated with me from high school.

Tell me about Manuel Gaitán, I had no idea that he was a ballplayer.

Mr. Salazar: Well, Manuel {Sandy}, his son, was always [telling me], you know my dad played for this-and-that, he was signed by the Giants, [he] never got to play. But he kept telling me about him, and I said, well come and see the pictures I have... but during that book that Cal State made they have a picture of him. So, I did my homework and he did play with the Centrals... the New York Giants.

Dr. Rivera: Why did he decide not to go to the major league?

Mr. Salazar: The story with him is that he was engaged, he was going to get married, and I guess he had to choose between the two, and mama won.

(Laughter)

Dr. Rivera: They do it all the time.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, yeah. But we'll never know how [or] what would have happened. But just to get recruited is a great thing anyway.

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Dr. Rivera: What year was that that Manuel got recruited?

Mr. Salazar: I think that was in probably the 30's sometime.

Dr. Rivera: In the 30's? That's a wonderful surprise I had no idea. And their story, their Romeo and Juliet story...

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, yeah, Sandy would know that – his son.

The other team members who were just as good [was] a young man whose name... oh I already did that. Manuel Gaitán decided not to join and stayed in Colton to marry his future wife.

There was another player I found whose name was Juan Rivas, and he had a little store. Do you remember the bridge that crossed over to go to Wilson or Garfield?

Dr. Rivera: Yes.

Mr. Salazar: Right at the bottom, not on the Wilson side but on this side, there was a little store – and in the mornings we'd go and wake him up...

Dr. Rivera: On the corner of 7th and Maple?

Mr. Salazar: Yes, Juan Rivas. Now, it's funny because his daughter, Mary Rivas, was on my Mom's team.

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Dr. Rivera: So, the tradition continued.

Mr. Salazar: It's in the blood.

Juan Rivas also had a brother -- I never found out his first name, it was E. Rivas... it was his brother that also played. As it turns out, Juan was the father of Mary Rivas who played on the same team with my Mom, the Mercuries Señoritas, who were just inducted last year. As a footnote, I want to say that Porfirios' daughter, which I think we already ran over, Mary Duarte's son, and boy, like I say, boy what a bloodline that was. Teyo's grandson, David Kinowski, signed with the San Francisco Giants, and played 8 years in the minors. He was later injured and could no longer play ball.

Hopefully, I have given you all on this panel enough history of the team that should not be forgotten. They played in the early history of the game of baseball they were as good or maybe even better than the great Gordon Maltzburger and George Castor who played many, many years in the majors than they did. James Lefty Faulkner was another one who played the majors that played with the Central's Cubs team, he was a pitcher. They were all from Colton.

The Cubs contributed so much to the sport they loved, the people who saw them play were very lucky. They will never make the Baseball Hall of Fame, I'm talking about the Major League Hall of Fame, but only you can put them in the Colton Hall of Fame. Let us not forget, these young men did not play for money, but for the love of the game. Thank you. That was my presentation and they were selected, unanimously.

(Hands clapping)

I was proud of that because there was only 2 picked this year, and they were 1 of the 2. So, I'm 2 for 2 right now...

My next project will probably be getting the Colton Mercuries [into the Hall of Fame] next year, and hopefully they'll get in. I'm sure they will; I've done my homework; and if they don't, the thing about the Hall of Fame [is] if you don't make it this year you can try

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again. We were lucky that they chose 4, but this year was just 2. So, it kind of narrows that down to it's a lot harder to make it.

Dr. Rivera: Let me go back to some of the players that you mentioned (inaudible) in your research. The Castorena brothers, you had 3 Castorena brothers?

Mr. Salazar: 4, there was Porfirio, Arturo, Theo, and Sal.

Dr. Rivera: Where did they work? Do you know where they worked?

Mr. Salazar: I just found out because they played on some teams for the cement plant, so I'm thinking that's where Sal and Arturo played. Theo, I never found out where he worked, or Porfirio. I would have to ask Tommy Castorena. But most likely it could have been the PFE or the or the cement plant.

Dr. Rivera: I guess possibly the cement plant because Sal lived close to the cement plant, and I think Porfirio would bicycle himself to the cement plant, he was our neighbor.

But, when did they have time to play ball? Or was it just a big determination that they were gonna play?

Mr. Salazar: Well these guys played not just for a couple of teams, they were playing all over, they played with the cement plant. Theo and Sal played for a team from Santa Fe. I have a couple of pictures of them... and so did Teyo Duarte, [he] played on one of those teams from Santa Fe. So, like I say, as I told you before that these guys they just played once a week, they played as many days as they could after work, or whatever,

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or between seasons from the Cubs they would go [to] Mexicali [and] played against Mexicali, and I've got a picture here where – I think it's Sal who had a Mexicali uniform. So they also played with the teams over there. They also played Japanese and Chinese teams back in the 20s and 30s because a lot of your Japanese and Chinese would come over here and play against teams over here.

Dr. Rivera: That's the other question I want to ask you. Who did they play? You mentioned teams from all over the place, and by all over the place you mean Riverside, San Bernardino?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, they had a lot of... there was teams and even Cervantes, I think, had a team... But they did have a have a lot of Anglo teams that they played against, and sometimes they would have an Anglo playing with them. But there [were] teams from LA (Los Angeles) and probably San Bernardino that they played against because I imagine there was probably a lot of teams during that time.

Dr. Rivera: Well... were they ever able to play in North Colton against the Anglo team? Or did they just play against the Mexican teams from the different communities?

Mr. Salazar: I think it was mainly the Mexicans because you know they weren't allowed to play in some of these Anglo teams because they were Mexicans.

Dr. Rivera: They couldn't play in North Colton?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, and if the Anglos didn't want to play with them, they probably didn't want to play against them. But that happened in the Negro Leagues too, you-know.

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Dr. Rivera: The other question that I had, which is out of curiosity, is did they all go to Colton High School? Because I know that Maltzburger was a big star from high school, but what about our Mexican-American players, did they attend Colton High School?

Mr. Salazar: The only ones I know for sure were Theo Castorena and Sal; and I have pictures of them sitting next to [the guy] who was the principal for Colton.

Dr. Rivera: McIntosh.

Mr. Salazar: McIntosh was their coach and you ought to see him in the pictures, he's a young McIntosh, unbelievable. Sal would have graduated in 1929 and I think Theo graduated a year or two before that – but I have pictures of them. As far as the older Castorena's, they might have only gone to 6th grade or 8th grade like a lot of people did. In big families, they had to work and help with the family – and that happened a lot during that time.

Theo Duarte, I would have to find out where he worked, and all that.

Dr. Rivera: So, mainly you would assume it was the Portland Cement Plant?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah.

Dr. Rivera: Or the PFE?

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Mr. Salazar: Or they could have just been construction workers, you-know, because they were like skilled laborers.

Dr. Rivera: You mentioned or you raised some articles of some of the players from Orange County, many of them were orange pickers.

Mr. Salazar: True.

Dr. Rivera: And we had a lot...

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, I remember as a kid the truck would honk early in the morning, they'd pick them up and take them, and then come back later in the day. Yeah, and that's their main job. I remember hearing where if you were a *cienero*, one who could pick a hundred boxes a day...

Dr. Rivera: *Cienero*.

Mr. Salazar: *Cienero*.

Dr. Rivera: *Cienero* is somebody who could pick a hundred boxes a day.

Mr. Salazar: Oh, and a lot of them were the old guys. The ones who had done it for years and years.

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Dr. Rivera: I would imagine some of these players were some of those *cieneros* that we're talking about.

Mr. Salazar: Exactly—exactly. Especially if they didn't work at the cement plant, or other places.

Dr. Rivera: Mel, did they have any sponsors, you-know, because...

Mr. Salazar: The only sponsors were the Calderas because he was the entrepreneur – he was the banker because he had the money.

Now with the cement plant, some of them played with the cement plant while there was a cement plant, or Santa Fe sponsors.

Dr. Rivera: Santa Fe Railroad?

Mr. Salazar: Yes.

Dr. Rivera: Now the cement plant, did they have a ball field? Did they have a ball field at the bottom of the...

Mr. Salazar: I heard they did on Rancho. I never saw it or I just heard about it, but they had their own ball field.

Dr. Rivera: What about when you mentioned that after work and playing and then just having what they do at home, did they have large families?

Mr. Salazar: Most of them did, in fact, I have a picture in one of the Colton books... You know Bobby Vasquez...? [They had a] band and 3 or 4 of the Castorena brothers played in the band too.

Dr. Rivera: They were also *musicos* – they played in a band.

Mr. Salazar: Exactly. So, what can I say they kept busy... You see this is things people didn't know about them. So hopefully with what I'm doing here they'll know and not forget – because how can you go through life... I know their families will never forget. But we shouldn't forget, we should remember what they did, you-know, that's my motivation. Not only for my Mom's team or this team because the Mercuries is what I'm gonna be working on next. All those people are 90 or over, these were the sons of the original team.

Dr. Rivera: Tell me about your next project?

Mr. Salazar: Well, my next project is gonna be... I was gonna do it this year but I said no I'll wait till next year to nominate -- their called the Mercuries men's team, and they started in 1939 and played for 3, 4 years before the war started; and then, they continued again back in 1946, I think...

Dr. Rivera: After the war.

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Mr. Salazar: They continued playing, of course, a lot of them got too old, but that continued to probably into the 70s or maybe early 80s. You-know, the Mercury team had a lot of ball players, but what I'm going for in this project is the originals...

Dr. Rivera: The originals were the 40s through?

Mr. Salazar: 30s through the 40s, and maybe up to the 50s, but mainly the 40s. A lot of them continued to play, there was Ray Martinez, Ralph Martinez, there was oodles of them... And most people now that are like today remember them because there were some still young enough to remember, but a lot of them don't even know about the Cubs or the Centrals.

Dr. Rivera: I didn't know anything about them but my heroes were the Mercuries. Ralph Martinez was a catcher...

Mr. Salazar: His brother, Simon, was a pitcher.

Dr. Rivera: First baseman was Art Miguel; second baseman was... Mejia?

Mr. Salazar: Oh yeah, they got the 2 pitchers from Highgrove, I forget their names right offhand, but I have their names.

Dr. Rivera: Third baseman was Teyo Duarte?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, they had a good team.

Dr. Rivera: They had a great team.

Mr. Salazar: I found out too that there was a junior Mercury team. I never knew that – in the early years; and then, after they broke up some of them became [members] the big team. But I got a lot of information, I got a lot of names and their positions; so, when I make my presentation next year it'll all be there.

Lucy Salazar (off camera): What role did the players have in the community? Were they celebrated, were they role models, were they entertainment for the community? Were they fundraising for the community?

Mr. Salazar: A lot of that I don't know but I'm thinking – you can go to any city in Orange County or Cucamonga, every Sunday after church there was a game to be played. They played for nothing, or maybe a keg of beer, or whatever, but even the Mercuries did that you-know. They played for fun, and people looked up to them because that was their entertainment, there was no TV. If you wanted some (inaudible) you couldn't even see a major league ball player, you could hear about it in radio but that was it. They loved baseball then – the people loved it... Sometimes even at night if it was getting dark they'd park their cars and turn on their lights – that's what I heard. But I think it was just a big thing and that's what the community loved about them. Even though it may be a lot more related to the players, but where are you gonna go? There was no little league, there was no pony league, there was no colt league, there was no girls league, or soccer or anything like that.

Dr. Rivera: They were regulated to stay in South Colton.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, yeah, that's sad. I have my own feelings about my country—this is my country and I love my country, but we did a lot, and when I say 'we' – I'm saying we did a lot of bad. From the British coming, to us taking over the American Indians, putting the Japanese-Americans into concentration camps -- they didn't do it to the German-Americans or the Italian-Americans who were fighting. I've heard stories that they used to have a lot of Italian POWs here and they'd take them to town and feed them at restaurants. But if you'd do that to a Black guy that just came from the service and lost an arm or lost a leg, they weren't allowed. That is a tragedy, you-know, and the Blacks, what can you say about them—they were slaves. And to this day, they still have a lot of problems, and I know they have a lot of hurt. They can't use it as an excuse but it is true what was done to them.

With a lot of Mexicanos, there was a lot done to them in Texas and [here in California]; and look at all the great men John F. Kennedy: shot and killed; Robert Kennedy: shot and killed; Martin Luther King: shot and killed; and they were all peaceful men. [Cesar] Chavez, he wasn't killed but he went through that fasting [and] almost died because he believed what he was doing... I look at them now and I think they're better off now than they were before – but it didn't have to be that way, but because of... I get emotional when I think about it.

Dr. Rivera: But, you-know, that's the way it was... de facto segregation and that's the way it was. Nobody was able to complain about it, but you couldn't do anything about it because that's the way it was – and you had to accept that for what it was, back then. But I think our baseball players, growing up and being acculturated into the system were able to look at what was available and get together... They had 4 teams.

Mr. Salazar: If I can't play on that team we'll make our own team.

Dr. Rivera: Right. They would kind of answer to the call of being self-sufficient.

Mr. Salazar: Exactly.

Dr. Rivera: Where they would have to do what they had to do with the resources that were available to them, and still be able to participate in society, either as an athlete or as a worker in one of the occupations that was available to them.

But, Mel, in baseball you have to have equipment, you have to have uniforms, you have to have a field, and how were they able to get those resources to be able to participate in their sport?

Mr. Salazar: Well, that's where their sponsors come in; and I'm sure Juan Caldera had some money because he's the one who probably [bought] everything. [He] built the field, and [would] buy the balls, and the bats, and [he would even] buy the shoes. He was their main source, and I'm sure during those games they would sell beer, or sell whatever, so he may get some of that money back.

Dr. Rivera: So there were concession stands?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah.

Dr. Rivera: They probably made some money...

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Mr. Salazar: Yeah, but he was making money... he also had a bullring, he had a cantina there, you-know, plus the plant. So money was coming in for him...

Dr. Rivera: It is also my understanding that downtown, you-know, on 7th Street he had a *Carniceria* – he had a store there, and was able to maintain that store; and then, from there was able to do the project on South 5th Street.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, yeah. He had a lot of land there, evidently, he must've owned from 5th Street to Rancho, all that area right there.

Dr. Rivera: What about the other stores on 7th Street, like the bakery?

Mr. Salazar: Martinez Bakery... I know one of the sons of the owners they called him Baker Martinez. He had a brother named Nick Martinez who played in a band. But Baker was a great ballplayer, he went to Colton High back in the 30s – and he's still alive. He's 95, 96 years old, he lives up in Sacramento because I know his nephew, Nick Martinez, Jr., and he's the one [who] fills me in sometimes that he doesn't come over here anymore, he can't drive. But those are the only... I remember there was a lot of stores there: Tucker's and Martinez, and I lived off near 5th Street where they had Bocanegra's Market; they had Cervantes Market on La Cadena...

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, Navarro's – what about west of Navarro's on 'O' Street?

Lucy Salazar (off camera): Esperanza.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, yeah, he had that store for a long time.

Dr. Rivera: So no knowledge of whether they contributed to the sponsorship of the team.

Mr. Salazar: No, no.

Dr. Rivera: So they just did it because they wanted to do then?

Mr. Salazar: One way or another they played probably with no uniforms, if they had to, you-know. I can remember back then kids would go barefoot to school.

Dr. Rivera: I was gonna ask you, when did they play their games? Would they play them on Saturday, Sunday?

Mr. Salazar: Saturday, Sunday...

Dr. Rivera: At night, or the daytime?

Mr. Salazar: No, there was no night ball. I know later on South Colton Park – when the Mercuries played they brought in lights but that was way after. So, it was probably all day after church, you-know. But they played other places, other fields, but I don't think they had lights then. Even the major leagues didn't have lights. I think the first ones were the Cubs way back when – but that's it. So they struggled, but they played ball.

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Dr. Rivera: Mel, looking at the set of questions that I have about baseball, did I miss anything?

No, I think I did a good job.

Now, tell me about you, Mel? You're a graduate of Colton High School.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, I graduated in 60.

Dr. Rivera: While you were at Colton High School you were a star athlete. What was your sport?

Mr. Salazar: Well, I ran cross-country and track for 2 years because I had lived in San Leandro up north for 2 years, my freshman/sophomore year; and then came back to Colton. I got started with track over there in my sophomore year; so when I came here Gabe Castorena, Jr. was mister big in cross country – I mean, he was beating everybody. So, the first coach I had said: well Mel, do you want to go for JV or varsity? [I said,] I'm a junior already why do I want to go for JV? I want to go for varsity. They had the tryouts and I took second. I was still behind Gabe – and mainly he was the guy that I could never beat. My coach used to tell me: just keep trying... and try to catch up with him; and that's what I did. When I went to CIF (California Interscholastic Federation) in my junior year, I think I came in 19th but he came in 25th. So, I beat him, which was a more important meet. And in track, I was a miler. My first year, I had never run that before, I took 3rd in CBL (Citrus Belt League); and Gabe, he dropped out of the track field... and I don't want to judge or say anything but [for] some people—if you're not number one you give up. But he's the one who kept me going and getting me stronger like my coach said. So, the next year, [in] cross-country, well that year he took 2nd and I took 3rd in cross-country. My last year, cross-country, again, he took 1st and I

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took 2nd. I took 10th in CIF and he took 19th – but if I would have been that in reverse I would have gotten the gold medal at CBL.

Dr. Rivera: When did you graduate from Colton High School?

Mr. Salazar: 1960. So, going into my track season, I just won about everything I could. I broke the school record, which was 15 years long. John Cherry, who was in CIF, he went to state at one time – I think his record was 431, I did it at 426.5. So, I was happy with that; and then, we went to the preliminaries the next week, I took 1st [and] went to the semifinals [that] next week [where] I took 1st. But going to the finals, I was running against the big boys, the guys that were running 420, 423; and I'll always remember my last race [when] I took 5th, and they only gave 5 medals. They didn't have small schools, medium schools, and then the big schools... and, no, I was running against guys from San Diego, all over – it was Southern California. There was a sophomore sensation who wound up winning and I think he was a 420 miler; and the guy that came in 2nd was from Torrance—he was right behind him. The 3rd guy was a Chicano, Gurulé... and I remember in cross-country this guy was one of the best guys, and he was winning all the time. Because you go 4 times in the mile – going into the last turn, he was in 3rd place at that point and I was passing him. All I could hear him saying, which I should have done in retrospect, he was saying: “oh God, no God, oh God, no God.” You know who won it for him? Well he didn't take 2nd, he took 3rd... Because I never had a kick, in my strategy when I ran I ran it all, I gave it a hundred percent. If I have a kick that means I didn't do my full race – I had too much energy, so I gave it all in my race and in all my races. Well, [during the race I thought], at least I got 4th I still have a medal – when I said that in my mind, the guy from Mira Costa passed me, Murphy; and I remember all these guys being cross-country and you get to go them – and these guys were great runners. I mean, they did a lot better in cross-country than I did; and I'm here running against these guys. So, I said [to myself], I got 5th, then I prayed: dear Lord don't let anybody pass me anymore. Because I would have lost out... I took 5th [place].

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Dr. Rivera: You came in 5th, and you graduated from Colton High School.

Now, tell me about the story that your Mom told you about being a barber.

Mr. Salazar: Oh-well that happened before we got married – I was 18, she was 15.

Dr. Rivera: Now, she is Lucy.

Mr. Salazar: Lucy Chavez, yeah. She's related to the Carreon family here in Colton who were baseballers. Camilo and Camilo's son also played major league ball.

Dr. Rivera: And Porfirio.

Mr. Salazar: But I'm talking about major league – yeah, Porfirio played ball too. I don't know too much if he played ball or not because there was another brother, Neto, Ernie.

Dr. Rivera: So your Mom said?

Mr. Salazar: Well (inaudible). We had to get married, and you-know back then...

It seems like kids now they get pregnant and the guy just takes off and makes 5 more someplace else.

Dr. Rivera: But your Mom was more responsible and said...

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Mr. Salazar: I was responsible, I knew what I had to do – even at 18. [My mother said:] “Well *mijo*, why don't you try.” Because I had an uncle that was in barber college. [She said,] why don't you try Barbery? So, she's the one that said it, and because my Dad died during the war, they paid for my schooling – so that was a blessing. I was able to raise my 4 daughters, and buy this house with a lot of the money that my Mom saved that she didn't have to save.

Dr. Rivera: When did you start your barber shop?

Mr. Salazar: Well... it wasn't mine at the beginning it was Charlie's Barber Shop, and he used to do everybody there: Ken Hubbs and Mayor Mel Fuchs, and a lot of important people.

I started with him in 1962, and in 1974 he sold it, he retired and from there on until 2012 he sold it to me.

To bring in my Mom again, I didn't have the \$1500 dollars to buy the shop. My Mom, she loaned me [the money] and I paid her back in a year.

Dr. Rivera: So you had the barbershop for how many years?

Mr. Salazar: Well, from the time I started there to 2012 I was there 50 years; maybe I didn't own it for 50 years but I was there 50 years. How many people stay at their job for 50 years?

Dr. Rivera: Then you retired when?

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Mr. Salazar: At the end of 2012 I found out I had 2 blocked arteries, and they couldn't work on them, no stints, no open-heart surgery. So I said to myself, this is a wake-up call. I said, in retrospect, this is my call; and I look back now... because I'm into the church right now, I'm not a Catholic anymore but I'm a Christian, I believe in Jesus Christ, as we all do. I told people later on, I think that was my call – God said, like with Peter: leave, just leave your boat, and that was my boat. So I left, and He said, I'll take care of you.

I'm going through a lot of stuff now, I got through my... I'm doing okay with my clogged arteries. Then later, I found out I had cancer in my stomach; got rid of that; then they found some spots in my lungs. I went to get a CAT scan, and they said the things shrunk, and it was too small to give it a biopsy. So they said well, tomorrow I'm going for another CAT scan to see if it's hopefully gone; if not, I do what I got to do.

Like I tell people now, I've lost about 45 - 50 pounds.

Dr. Rivera: I know because I saw you a year ago.

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, people said, oh Mel you're looking good. This is probably the weight I should be but my arms are flabby and I got more skin... But like I tell people especially in church, I tell them, you know what, I'm living here and I'm not eating like I should, and I'm losing a lot of weight, but I'm getting fat with Jesus Christ – with the word – and they understand because we're supposed to take the word from Jesus Christ, but we're all supposed to give it back. You know the old saying it's better to give than receive, well no, it's better to receive from Jesus Christ, and then you give back – that's my philosophy.

Dr. Rivera: Then you mentioned your family, how many daughters do you have?

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Mr. Salazar: I've got 4 daughters, [their ages are:] 50, 51, 49, and 47. I said, [in] 3 more years all my daughters will be 50 and over.

Dr. Rivera: Grandkids?

Mr. Salazar: I got 10 grand kids, and we've got 10 great-grandkids. We just had our 10th one...

Dr. Rivera: Congratulations, that's wonderful, Lucy!

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, and I tell everybody: I don't have money in the bank; I've never made a lot of money; but, God got me through this, and my *riquezas* are my kids.

Dr. Rivera: Your wonderful contribution is not only to your family but also to the community.

Mel, the other thing is we've gone through almost an hour that we started interview today. Are there any things that I missed, Mel, or any stories that you would like to share with us that we didn't mention in our interview today? Or maybe I could ask you, what was the best thing that you got out of doing your research on the old-timers in Colton?

Mr. Salazar: You-know, I didn't know any of this... maybe Sal I might have met years and years ago, but I just remembered him when he was bald, and a big guy – *gordito*. But after doing this I know them... and I'm just so proud that I could get them in [the Hall of Fame], proud for their families, and there's probably a lot of families that don't even

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know what I've done – that's why a lot of the families of Ambrósio Gonzales and Joe Gonzales... I'm gonna have to find out through more research so I can get them to be there at the induction in April. So that's a done deal, they made it; and probably a lot of their family don't know that their great-great-grandparents played ball – and that's my satisfaction, that's why it's important to me, and I think it's important to the community, and everybody in South Colton – that they know that they've got a lot of history there -- a lot of history of baseball history. More so than football or basketball, it's baseball [and] those are the roots. [It's] not just here in San Bernardino there were hundreds of teams in Santa Ana and Cucamonga... but there were so many. They've had the same thing as we did, she's got a *comadre* who lives in Kansas, and every year they have a get-together with all the old-timers, ballplayers, Latino ballplayers. They have a fiesta and they come from all over and they have their tournament. So it wasn't just here it's all over. I imagine Texas must have had oodles... because...

Dr. Rivera: You know the Carrasco's are from Texas?

Mr. Salazar: Yeah, El Paso, I guess. You know Felix Gomez?

Dr. Rivera: Oh yes. The father worked for Squires Lumber, and all the brothers were baseball players.

Mr. Salazar: Right. Willie Gomez, yeah.

Dr. Rivera: Yeah, Robert, Bobby Carrasco married into that family.

Mr. Salazar: Right. So there's a lot of baseball in that family, you-know. Yeah, I know Bobby very well, yeah – him and Pete. Pete and Danny – great, great people.

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Dr. Rivera: Well your other projects seems to be something that we should get together again, like we did today... and talk about your research and what you came up with, and some of the things [and] some of the stories that you will be able to tell us about the players, and also some of the team activities.

Mr. Salazar: Right.

Dr. Rivera: So looking forward to that Mel.

Your contribution is a tremendous legacy to the City of Colton, and I think it's long been overdue, and I congratulate you for doing this only for the City but also for our community – our Mexican-American community, so thank you very much, Mel. Can we give you a round of applause? – (They are clapping)

Mr. Salazar: Thank you.

Dr. Rivera: You're welcome.

Mr. Salazar: I still have strong feelings... I don't know if there's any other ball teams that I'm gonna be able to [research] because I think this will be my last one. I know the guy at the museum, Mike Murphy, has been wanting me to go to help [them] because they don't have a lot of help there. So I could do that in the future: just greet people there. What's the new council woman's name?

Dr. Rivera: Zamora Horeen

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Mr. Salazar: She (inaudible) wanted me to join a commission of some sort of history, or something, but I couldn't give her an answer because right now I'm going through a lot [and] I don't want to commit myself to [anything]; and if I can't give it my full [attention] then I don't even want to get started.

Dr. Rivera: Well, with these two interviews that we've had: the women of baseball, and now these the old-timers baseball, you have given it [your] all...

Mr. Salazar: If I had started when I was younger...

Dr. Rivera: That's what I say... [but] it's never too late.

Well, thank you so much, Mel.

Mr. Salazar: Thank you, God bless.

Frank Acosta: A quick question: What was the name of your barbershop, and how did it get that?

Mr. Salazar: Los Hairmanos, not hermanos, like a lot of people would say: *Como que?* Oh, hairmanos. Back in 1978, my brother came in with me, Al Salazar, and he came in as a partner. He said, well we want to change the name because at that point it was Mel's Barbershop. Because after Charlie's Barbershop... it was Mel's, and then with him coming in he's the one who picked that name: Los Hairmanos – because of the hair and it's a barbershop.

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: If it would have been a hamburger stand, no way you could use hair...

(Laughter)

Mr. Salazar: So it fit in and it's an unusual name, and it's catchy – once people see: oh it's Hairmanos... but it fit and even after he left. Because he was only there, I'm gonna say, from 1978 to 1985 because he went into Corrections after that – but I kept the same name. So that's how that name [came about]. A lot of people don't know that...

I've been blessed with in a lot of years, hopefully a lot more, and now that I got into the church, you-know, that's why I say: it makes me young because I don't know a lot, I'm not the type of guy that says: John 8:12, I'm not that type of guy, yet. I may never get there, but I love reading the Bible, I love reading the scriptures, and that's what's keeping me going -- that's what's keeping me fed... [My pastor said:] “You can't just be reading and taking it all in, you've got to release, you've got to empty it out.” What he means by that is what you learn, you disciple.

Dr. Rivera: Well you did a good job today, thank you.

Mr. Salazar: I'm glad I put that in with you guys because I always... if the door is open I'm gonna go in there – I'm gonna disciple.

Transcribed by Pat Ricé-Daniels, Library Services Specialist