

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

South Colton Oral History Project Collection

Special Collections & University Archives

3-6-2015

Eddie Cortez

CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Latin American History Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

CSUSB, "Eddie Cortez" (2015). *South Colton Oral History Project Collection*. 53.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history/53>

This Video is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections & University Archives at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in South Colton Oral History Project Collection by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

South Colton Oral History Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Eddie Cortez

Interviewer:

Tom Rivera

Interview Date:

March 6, 2015

Interview Location:

Unknown

Length:

01:39:00

Interview Summary completed by:

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:

Tom Rivera interviews Eddie Cortez, a man who has lived almost all of his life in Colton. In the interview, Cortez discusses his parents. His father and mother traveled to Colton from Texas in order to get work. The man then goes on to recollect his youth, such as being in grade school and seeing the army recruiters to then eventually joining the National Guard for a short time. That then led to his later job working in the fire department as the first Mexican-American hired there, where the connections to his military services remained. Subsequently, Cortez explains that after his time in the fire department and while in a paramedic program, more Mexican-Americans were hired in the department. He was happy to see the way things had changed and then recognized the danger he was in during his time as a paramedic. By the end of the interview, Cortez closes off by telling Rivera a final story during his time as a paramedic having to cuss in order to save someone's life.

Subject Topic:

- Add term (keyword bullet list; 6-8 total)
- The Mexican Revolution
- The Reserva's History
- Military Service/National Guard
- Working in a Fire Department
- Working as a Paramedic

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
El Paso	City in Texas

Garfield Elementary School	Colton, CA (Defunct Location)
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School	750 S 8th St, Colton, CA 92324
Colton High School	777 W Valley Blvd, Colton, CA 92324
La Reserva	Area in South Colton, CA
La Puente	City in Los Angeles County, CA

Temporal Coverage:

1899 - 2015

Key Events:

- Cortez's parents coming to Colton for work.
- Picking Citrus as a job.
- The Mexican Revolution impacting Cortez's parents.
- Working in a Cement Plant.
- Joining the National Guard as a Youth.
- Building a new Church for the South Colton community.
- Being the first Mexican American hired by the Fire Department in Colton
- Helping people as a paramedic.

Key Organizations:

- CalPortland Cement Plant in Colton
- National Guard of the United States
- The Colton Fire Department
- San Bernardino County's Paramedic Program
- Los Angeles County

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:03:13 - 00:05:56	Cortez recalls his father explaining the payrate that was given during the latter's youth.
Digital Video	00:22:20 - 00:27:11	Cortez tells his story of the army recruiters at the school.
Digital Video	00:27:12 - 00:34:19	Cortez's being the first Mexican American hired in that fire department and speaking Spanish.
Digital Video	00:51:56 - 00:54:39	Cortez's grandchildren and speaking Spanish being multiple generations in.

Digital Video	01:07:53 - 01:17:18	Building a new church for the benefit of the South Colton community and the related stories.
Digital Video	01:34:04 - 01:38:52	Cortez's recollection of saving someone's life and having to cuss in Spanish to do so.

Related Materials

Additional oral history interviews are available from the South Colton Oral History Project at CSUSB, <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/colton-history/>

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

TOM RIVERA: Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Tom Rivera, and welcome to our taping of our oral history of South Colton. Today's guest -- oh, before I introduce my guest, part of the committee is Mr. Frank Acosta, who is behind the camera, and over to the other side is Mr. Henry Vasquez, who is also part of our committee, and both of them have been working diligently to put this project together. And our guest this afternoon is Mr. Eddie Cortez, and, Eddie, welcome to our oral history project, and thank you for being with us this afternoon.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Thank you for inviting me.

TOM RIVERA: Truly appreciate you being here. And today is Friday, March 6, and it's approximately one o'clock in the afternoon. So, Eddie, why don't we just start with my first question? You're a lifelong resident of Colton?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yes, I am.

TOM RIVERA: [00:01:00] And when did you -- were you born in Colton, or were you born in some place else and came to Colton?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yes, I was born in San Bernardino Community Hospital December the twelfth, 1936. My mom was there for one day only. Next day, they shipped her home, and I've been there, in Colton, 78 years.

TOM RIVERA: And what is your mom's name? Your mom's name. What is your mom's name?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Maiden name?

TOM RIVERA: Well, yeah. Her first name and maiden name.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, her first name is [Ruth?].

TOM RIVERA: Ruth, okay.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Ruth. They used to call her [Cuca?]. Her name was [Floriano?], and then she married my dad, and it was Cortez.

TOM RIVERA: And what is -- what was your dad's name?

EDDIE CORTEZ: My dad was [Moreno?]. [Manuel?]. He went -- he didn't like Manuel. Manuel Moreno-Cortez.

TOM RIVERA: [00:02:00] Uh-huh. And had they always lived in Colton, or did they move to Colton from --?

EDDIE CORTEZ: In 1899, my dad was born in El Paso, Texas, [what he says?], and my mom was born there in 1906, in El Paso Texas. My dad said he came to Colton when he was 15 or 16. He wasn't too sure of that, and my mom wasn't too sure. She was the youngest of the family of three sisters that came.

TOM RIVERA: That was the early 1900s, then?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh. And why did they come to Colton, Eddie?

EDDIE CORTEZ: To look for work. Yeah, my dad -- well, I think my dad used to say that there was a time where there was a lot of fighting going on. Even Pancho Villa was still going on.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, ¿de veras? The Revolution during that period --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Pancho Villa was going on back in the early 1900s, [1904?]. So, [00:03:00] apparently, they could just cross the border whenever they felt like it.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, and I understand just by reading history that there were over a million Mexicans that crossed during that period of the Mexican Revolution. When they came -- when your dad came to Colton, did he find work?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, he came to Colton, and the only work he could find was (laughs) orange picker, and that's what he started. He started picking. He needed - he wanted money. He didn't need that money. So, he started going around,

working the citrus. Lemons, grapefruit, oranges, and everything. My mom came over, and she was a -- you might say a stay-home person. Then, she got married, and she went to school when she was younger. She went to -- I want to say Garfield. Garfield was still there, but I don't know. [00:04:00] But she went to elementary school in Colton, got as far as the fifth grade. My dad didn't go to school, so he went to work right away. They -- in the '20s, he met my mom and got married.

TOM RIVERA: And, while he was working the -- picking oranges, was he ever known as a cienero, that he would pick --

EDDIE CORTEZ: No. No.

TOM RIVERA: -- a hundred boxes a day?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No. No.

TOM RIVERA: No?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No.

TOM RIVERA: He was -- he didn't belong to that group?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No, he didn't belong to that group. (laughter) He didn't belong to that group. But, anyway, he would just -- he wasn't there too long. Then, the Colton cement plant, CalPortland cement plant, put out word that they were hiring, so my dad went and applied, and he got hired. He got hired.

TOM RIVERA: What year was that that he got hired?

EDDIE CORTEZ: That was in -- he said he was [00:05:00] 19, so that would have been 1920. (pause) Twenty? Nineteen--

TOM RIVERA: In that era. In that period.

EDDIE CORTEZ: In that era, yeah. And he got hired, and he was working for 19 cents an hour. And, when he used to tell us this, I said, "Nineteen?" He said, "Well, sure." Course, he'd tell me in Spanish. "Milk, leche, un cuarto, ocho centavos,

eight cents. Just add pan, seis." You could buy a piece of meat for 15 cents, a good steak. And he says, "And those that have cars, well, gas was 15 or 16 cents a gallon." He says, "So, 19 cents was pretty good." (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Good sal-- good.

EDDIE CORTEZ: I said, "Okay."

TOM RIVERA: And how long did he work for the cement plant?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Until [00:06:00] he passed away in '59. He went in there, I want to say 19--

TOM RIVERA: So, a good -- almost 40 years that he --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: -- worked at the cement plant, uh-huh.

EDDIE CORTEZ: I want to say that he started when he was -- if he was 19 when he... Anyhow, yeah, he worked there all the time.

TOM RIVERA: And where was your house located? Were you -- was it close to the cement plant?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Our house was located on L Street, just across the tracks from San Salvador Church. It was 300 block of West L. La Reserva, they used to call us. And --

TOM RIVERA: Do you know where the name came from, La Reserva?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Huh?

TOM RIVERA: Do you know where the name Reserva came from?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, there were a bunch of Indians. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: ¿Quién sabe? But --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Go ahead.

TOM RIVERA: I was going to say that it's the people that work for the railroad. They used to have [00:07:00] [section?] houses, and then the section houses were

located near the railroad, and each of the different section houses throughout the country, people would give it names. So, it was -- I'm assuming that there was a section house in that area, and the section house was named La Reserva. ¿Quién sabe? I don't know.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, we had two section houses. One was between M and N, right up there on the tracks, and the other one was between the alley that separates K and L Street. The alley that ran from 5th Street toward the railroad, there was another section house there. And, yeah, so, we had them all around.

TOM RIVERA: So, it could have been La Res-- that could have been the section house named La Reserva. But tell me, where did you live? When did you move to your present location? Was that part of your dad's property?

EDDIE CORTEZ: [00:08:00] Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Because you lived close to the cement plant.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, my dad bought that property back -- late '40s. And then, my dad told my mom, "Let's move up to that property up there." And we were going to take the house that we got there on L Street -- we're going to have it moved up there. And, in fact, we started breaking the porch. Man, to break that porch. He poured the concrete, and I knew it was going to be (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TOM RIVERA: So, it was strong stuff.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, I was a teenager, and I'm out there with a sledge, and I told him, "You know, we're never going to break this concrete." And it's got to be taken out so the trucks can come with their wood and pick the house up. So, at that time, they -- this is the late '40s, okay? At -- [00:09:00] no, wait a minute. This is in the '50s. Oh, God. No, let's go late '40s. They were thinking of making the I-10. I-10 was going to run all the way through Colton, and all the houses that were there

on J, between the railroad and J street, they were going to be auctioned off. So, my dad and my mom, they went over there, and they saw this house, and they started inquiring about it, and they said the house was only going to be worth -- I think she said they paid two thousand for the house. Something like that. And they told them, "But you got to get it out of here in two weeks. Otherwise, we're going to bulldoze everything." So, they said, "Okay." So, they bought the house, and, course, when they bought the house, there was a [00:10:00] lot of contractors there. "We can move your house. We -- where are you going?" My dad says, "See where we are? See where that truck's there? Right there, directly across (laughter) --

TOM RIVERA: Across the tracks.

EDDIE CORTEZ: -- across the tracks." But we had to go all the way to [Rancho?] and come back. See? Now, Rancho ran through from San Bernardino and ran all the way through, and the railroad charged so much to cross the tracks. So, my dad had come up with more money and paid it, and they took it over there. And, when we bought it, it used to be on a foundation. So, my dad knew this person. They hire-- he hired the person. Person came with his son, and, with a little doodads they use, they poured a foundation, an 18-inch foundation, 18 inches high. And, when the time came [00:11:00] to set it down, man, that thing was perfect. You figure, "Ay, qué saben de esto los mexicanos. [Bájale?] chueca." Man, that thing sat perfect. (laughs) I mean, you could line the bottom base of the house with that foundation. And, after that, it was just a two-bedroom house, and the reason that I said I liked it -- because we were going to live there. Then, right across the track was a high school.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, perfect for you.

EDDIE CORTEZ: And I was just going to be a freshman, and I went in in 1950. So, it was perfect for me.

TOM RIVERA: And then, you still live there, don't you?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: You still have property?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, that's -- I mean, we've done a lot of remodeling, but the property's still the same. The property is 75 by 150, and we're still there, and -- well, especially now, since my house burned down.

TOM RIVERA: Well, not only [00:12:00] did you have a good, easy route to Colton High School, but your dad would, I would imagine, also walk to work --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: -- because he was close enough to go to work.

EDDIE CORTEZ: He had a bike. He rode a bike, and he would just -- well, you saw where you picked me up from. There, he would come down through 3rd Street, and then hang a right and just -- all the way to the entrance to the cement plant and just go in. One straight shot.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. I've been told that that barrio was not La Reserva, but that was Beverly Hills. Is that true?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, up there? Yeah. Once you went up the hill -- we never got a name for it. La Reserva was down on the bottom, from 4th going toward 5th and the railroad tracks. And then, that expanded, I think, up to -- [00:13:00] I want to say N. No. N Street. I think -- N Street, then going south was the calle cinco, and that's what they knew. La cinco, calle cinco, La Reserva.

TOM RIVERA: So, your claim is La Reserva.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. (inaudible). In fact, (laughs) my neighbor across from where we live, his last name was [Carrillo?]. Carrillo or [Chavez?]. But he was the oldest person there. Big guy. I mean, not fat, but just big. Used to call him the

chief. And that's -- I never knew his first name, except his name was the chief. And --

TOM RIVERA: So, the name Reserva fit him.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, it fit him.

EDDIE CORTEZ: (laughs) It fit him perfect. [00:14:00] He was a chief.

TOM RIVERA: Beside going to Colton High School in 1950, where did you go to elementary school?

EDDIE CORTEZ: I started elementary school in Garfield, which now is part of Wilson. But Garfield used to be from 7th, go up maybe to the first building, where Wilson starts right now. But that was Garfield. We had the main building. Then, we had one, two, three, four bungalows inside, and...

TOM RIVERA: And you were a kindergartener or --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: -- first grader when you started?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No, no, I started as kinder. And then, from kinder -- I don't know if they were running out of room or I just knew my A B Cs better than anybody else, but the teacher, I remember [00:15:00] she says, "You're going to second grade."

TOM RIVERA: Oh, they moved you up a grade.

EDDIE CORTEZ: I go like, "Huh?" They said, "No first grade for this guy." So, they pushed me to second. And (inaudible) when I graduated from high school, I was 17. Everybody else was 18, 19, (laughter) and I was only 17. But, anyhow, they pushed me to second grade. After I finished fifth grade there at Garfield, then, a stone throw away, was Wilson.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, so you went to Wilson, to your high school.

EDDIE CORTEZ: I went to Wilson, yeah. I went to Wilson for my six, seven, eight, and I still liked it because I was still with -- what would you call it? (laughs) la raza, okay?

TOM RIVERA: The [pals?], yeah.

EDDIE CORTEZ: And then, my sister was already in high school, so, when I went to [00:16:00] high school, I felt like -- not lost, but nervous because here I am with some Hispanic kids and some Anglo kids, and we were not allowed to speak in Spanish. It was a taboo. So, we had to speak in English. When we spoke Spanish was when we were by ourselves, and when we looked around, nobody was looking, so we'd do it. But the first year, I just felt a little uncomfortable.

TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh, at high school, at --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: -- Colton High School.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Then, I started getting used to it. And then, you know how they pick on the freshmen, so (laughs) everybody was picking on freshman. So, after the first year, sophomore wasn't too bad. Junior wasn't bad. The best was senior because, by the time I hit senior, I had already completed all my requirements. Every one of them. And I remember [00:17:00] my teacher says, "Well, you completed all the requirements. You still got to take gym, though." I said, "Okay." Says, "What about the rest?" So, they told me -- they gave me a study hall period. Nothing to do but go sit down and go home. And then, I took crafts. (laughs) Took typing and took auto shop. And I forgot what the other class was, but it was all easy stuff.

TOM RIVERA: I was going to say you had it made your senior year.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Senior year, I had it made, really. I'm not kidding you. And, when I went to typing -- I liked typing because it was all the girls, and they

were all freshmen and sophomores, (laughs) and I was the only senior there. And, sometimes, I go like, "Ah."

TOM RIVERA: Well, was [Nelly?], your wife, your current wife, part of that group of girls that took typing with you?

EDDIE CORTEZ: [00:18:00] What do you mean? I -- Sometimes, I can't hear too well.

TOM RIVERA: Is there -- is that where you met Nelly?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No. No.

TOM RIVERA: How did you meet Nelly?

EDDIE CORTEZ: After I graduated. Way after I graduated. About two year, I think, after I graduated, I met Nelly. But she hung with a different group, and I hung with a different group. But, like I said, I got through, graduated, got my diploma. Went in -- right away, I went into cars. I went and looked for a job, and I got a job.

TOM RIVERA: Where were you working?

EDDIE CORTEZ: You know where [El Sarape Market?] is, there in South Colton?

TOM RIVERA: Remind me, Eddie.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Okay. Sarape Market is there on N and La Cadena. Okay? And the alley runs through there, and the alley runs -- Sombrero Market is there [00:19:00] also. Well, right next door used to be [Al's Beverage?]. That's where I got my first job. My dad used to go there to get his beer, and I would now with him sometimes because he was showing me how to drive. And he asked the men there -- he says, "You need any help? My boy here can sweep and everything." The guy looked at me and says, "I can use some help." Okay. Said, "Can you give change?" I said, "Yes." He checked me out there. He said -- he went and got bottle or something. He says, "Okay. How much is this?" And I looked at the price. Okay. And then, he paid me with a big bill, and I went and rang it up -- and the old

type. None of this to give change back. I just rang it up, [it came out?], started counting the change, went, counted it to him. Said, "Okay." Said, [00:20:00] "Put it back." Gave back my bill, (laughs) and I did, and he gave me a job. So, not only did I sweep, but I was like a clerk, stockboy, filled up the freezer with cold drinks. And I remember, one evening, I was there, and these two Hispanic men came in, and they were on their way to the Sombrero. Sombrero was very popular back then.

TOM RIVERA: And Sombrero was just a stone's throw from --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. It was just a (laughs) stone throw away. And so, it was Saturday, and they were having some sort of [shindig?]. These two men came in, and one of them wanted bottle of whiskey. Okay. Went and got the whiskey, and he looked at me like, (makes noise). Said, "How old are you, son?" I looked at him, and I didn't answer. I just looked at him, and then he told me in Spanish, "¿Qué edad tienes?" Told him, "Seventeen." "It's against the law for a youngster to be working behind a counter and selling liquor." I said, "Well, I don't know." He says, "I'm going to go look into this," and so on. And the other worker that was there was one of the old ones, [Mick?], came over and says, "Can I help you? Problem?" And the guy -- [he looked?] very official. I mean, [this is what got me?], you know? [Tú?] mexicano y otro mexicano. Anyway, he told Mick -- he says, "This guy's a minor. He should not be selling liquor behind the counter, this and that." Mick said, "Nothing wrong with that." He said, "Oh, there's a law," and Mick says, "I know the law. The law says they cannot open liquor [00:22:00] in here. He cannot sell open liquor, but he can sell --" Bottle was closed. Hasn't been broken open. "Well, I'm still going to look into it." I never heard from that again, but (laughter) made a big deal out of it. I still remember that, [the guy?]. I looked at him, and he goes, "Thanks, Mick."

TOM RIVERA: Now, let me ask you, you mentioned -- during that period, we had the military. Were you ever in the military?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No.

TOM RIVERA: Were you in the Army or any of those services?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No. Just for those six months that I told you. Just those six.

TOM RIVERA: Can you tell me the story again, Eddie? Because you mentioned that all the boys at the high school were hustled over to the gymnasium, and the recruiters were there, trying to get you guys to sign up for the services. Yeah, and then --

EDDIE CORTEZ: And then [Bobby Carrasco?], who's my compadre now, he was there, and he knew me. I knew him. So, we started talking, and he says, "Get over here." (laughs) I says -- [00:23:00] he had graduated year before me. I says, "What's up?" He says, "Sign here." I says, "Sign for what?" He said, "Don't go in the service because I don't think you're ready." So, he told me, "Join the National Guard. If you like it, then you can go into the service. If you don't, well, just finish your two years of National Guard reserve and get out." Said, "Okay." So, I did. I signed it, and that was in '54. Then, in '57 -- '57 or '58 -- they came up with this new law that you could go in and put six months active duty, and then come back and put in a remainder of six years in the reserve unit there in your hometown, and you didn't have to go away. Now, we found out later, [00:24:00] through people that I knew [there at the?] guard sergeants, the ones that came up with this were people that had money. Doctors, lawyers --

TOM RIVERA: Business.

EDDIE CORTEZ: -- people that were out there that didn't want Junior -- oh, man, Junior going to the service with all those people? No way. So, they got together with the politics, and they passed this law. I mean, actually passed it just for Junior.

But it was open. I mean, it wasn't -- it didn't stipulate that just Junior. It just says anybody that was 18 could go. So, I told my friend [Ray?]. I says, "What do you say? Let's go (laughs) check it out." He says, "Sure." We signed up, and, sure enough, they accepted us, gave us our tickets, and we went to Fort Ord, up there by Paso Robles, and we were there for about two months, taking our basic training. We came back, [00:25:00] spent two weeks at the house. Then, we got our orders and our tickets, plane tickets and everything, and got on a plane in Los Angeles and (makes noise). Fort Knox, Kentucky. Since Colton is an armored infantry division, we belonged to the 40th Armor. So, instead of -- over there, instead of running around in armored personnel vehicles following the tanks, we were in the tanks. They taught us and they trained us on how to ride the tanks, how to drive them, how to load them, how to shoot them. Everything. So, I was over there for the remained four months. And then, when that time was running out, company commander came and (laughs), very friendly from what he used to be when we first got there. He says, "Look, you already put in six months. Put in [00:26:00] another 18 months, and you're done. You can just go out, and you don't even have to belong to a National Guard reserve. Nothing." I looked at him and everything, and I thought to myself, no way. Uh-uh. I thought, no. I want to go home. I said, "I'm going home." He said -- I said, "Well, when I get home, if I still want to do it, I can still do it, right?" He says, "Oh, yeah." Okay. I got home, and (laughter) --

TOM RIVERA: I had to watch him.

EDDIE CORTEZ: [00:26:28], yeah. [When they?] reported back to the company commander at the guard, and he said, "You don't have to go. Just stay here."

Okay. But that was it. So, that did my military experience. I was not eligible for the draft. Well, there was a war, but I was not going to get drafted or anything. I have compiled with my requirement. So, [00:27:00] I just let it go at that.

TOM RIVERA: And how long were you in the Guard?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Seven and a half years all together. Together. So...

TOM RIVERA: Now, in '72, Eddie, '72, you start working for the fire department, the Colton Fire Department. How did you get that job? Because --

EDDIE CORTEZ: I got a call.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, go ahead.

EDDIE CORTEZ: (coughs) It's a dry cough.

TOM RIVERA: Well, your allergies are surfacing. Your allergies are surfacing.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Allergies, and then when I start talking a lot. Anyway, I used to work at this air conditioning place in Riverside, and, one day, the chief from [00:28:00] Colton Fire --

TOM RIVERA: What was his name?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Temby. Chief Ed Temby. The school board got him to come and give a talk at Wilson School, so he came. Not a lot of people there. And, at this time, where I was working, they were thinking of moving the plant to another state, so I figure I'm going to have to start looking for another job. I'm not going to leave California. So, anyhow, the chief gave his speech, "Da, da, da, da, da, da, da." And [Jesse Ibarra?], my comadre, and my wife, Nelly -- we were married at that time -- they were there. My comadre says, "I have a question." He says, "Yes?" Says, "Is there any Hispanics in the fire department?" (laughs) He goes, "No, there isn't." And he says, "Why not?"

TOM RIVERA: Who was this that asked the question, Eddie?

EDDIE CORTEZ: [00:29:00] Jessie Ibarra, my comadre. And he says, "Well --" Because they don't apply. Okay. And he said, "Well, have you made an attempt to go out there and recruit Hispanics?" He said, "Well, through the schools, we have," but they hadn't. But, anyhow, that's as far as it got. So, when I told Nelly that they

were going to be closing the plant, I was going to start looking for a job, she said, "You ever thought about the fire department?" I think somebody else told me about that, and I went to the library, and I took out some books, and I read all them, the [laws and engineering?] and stuff like that, and then went and applied in San Bernardino because San Bernardino put up a big article in the paper that they were going to be hiring. I went [00:30:00] and took the agility test and passed it. Push up, and sit ups, and everything. I passed it, and then I -- my height with my weight was okay. My age was okay. Then, I went and took the written test, and I didn't make it. I was supposed to get 70, and I got 68. (laughs) They call me and says, "You missed it my one question." "Oh, thanks. Can I take it again?" "No." So, I left it. Okay. So, then, when Nelly told me again about Temby, what he had stated or said at the meeting, I called him up. I says that I wanted to go talk to him, and he said, "Okay." So, I did. I went and talk to him, and --

(break in audio)

TOM RIVERA: Eddie, when we left off, you had an interview with a chief, Ed Temby. Would you tell us about [00:31:00] that interview that you had with him?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. I remember I went there, and he mentioned that I should apply, and I said, "Okay." So, I went ahead, and I filled out an application right there. See, right there, they had the applications. I didn't go -- I didn't have to go to city hall. Fire and police, their chiefs, they hired, and they fired. No city hall. So, I went home, and then, about a month or two months later, I got a call that one of the firemen had gotten hurt and was going to have to be going out on medical, and there was going to be an opening. So, I told Nelly, "I'm going." She says, "Okay." So, I went, and bought me a new suit, and (laughs) white tie, and everything because -- I mean, I never wore suits that long. [00:32:00] But, anyhow, I dressed up, played the part, went over there for when I was going to be interviewed for the

job application, you might say. So, as I walk in to the office, I didn't know -- I knew there was somebody sitting there to my right, and I heard him say, "Well, I'll be damned." And I turned around, and (laughs) it was my National Guard commander. He says, "Cortez." "Yeah." I told -- I didn't call him chief, then. I called him, "Yeah." He was -- what? Major? Major [Trimble?]. He said, "Well, I'll be (inaudible)." He cussed.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, the chief was the part of the --

EDDIE CORTEZ: He was part of the staff. So, anyhow, we're talking there, and, by this time, [00:33:00] he says, "What are you doing here?" So, I told him, "I got an interview with the chief for a opening." "Oh, hell." He got [up?], grabbed me, says, "Come on." (laughs) He took me to the chief's office and says, "Ed, I'll vouch for this guy. He was one of my sergeants at the National Guard, and da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da. He's a good man." And apparently they paid attention to him. He said, "Okay." So, chief sat me down anyway. [He had me?] -- I think one of the questions, he says, "Is it going to bother you being the first Hispanic in the fire department?" I said, "No, sir." "Is it going to bother you sleeping in the same dorm with an all-white fire department?" "No, sir." He says, "Well, will it bother your wife if [00:34:00] you have to go to work on her birthday, on your anniversary, or anything like that?" And I says, "No." Said, "Okay." He says, "Report back," and the following week, I started, just like that. I went in, and he took me down and got a uniform, got me my boots, and he took me around and introduced me to everybody.

TOM RIVERA: How many were -- how many firefighters did you have? Plus or minus.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, there was -- let's see. (pause) We had about 30, about 30 firemen. That's not including the chiefs. That's suppression. Anyway, introduced

me all the way around. I said, "Okay." So, then, he came back, and he went to this captain, [Frank Miller?]. [00:35:00] He says, "Frank, this is Ed Cortez. He's going to be your new firefighter." Captain Miller looked at him, said, "Okay, chief." He -- real nice captain. Turned around, shook my hand, and says, "Well, welcome to C shift." I said, "Okay, thank you." And I served there ever since. Everybody else was moving shift from A to B to C and everything, and --

TOM RIVERA: I don't know what shifts are Eddie.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Huh?

TOM RIVERA: Explain to me what shifts are.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Shift is a group of people you work with. Okay? We could belong to C shift. Another group belongs to B. Another group belongs to A. We go in in the morning at eight o'clock, and we relieve the shift that was there for 24 hours.

TOM RIVERA: Got it.

EDDIE CORTEZ: That shift takes off, and it's off for 24, and we're on for 24.

We're on from eight o'clock that morning -- say, like right [00:36:00] now, eight o'clock Friday morning to eight o'clock tomorrow morning. Then, the shift comes back and relieves us again. And then, they'll be off for about four days. Then, the other shift comes in, and they relieve them, and we keep going at a rotation where we put in -- we were putting in 52, 56 hours a week. But, I mean, everybody said, "Yeah, but you don't work all that time. You sleep there." Okay. Yeah, we sleep there. We eat there. We sleep there. We -- but we have to stay in the building. We have to stay in the area, or, whenever you guys need us, we go." So, that's the way it went. And we only had two stations, the one there on 10th and E and the one up there on Rancho and -- what's that? Citrus?

TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh. Yeah. [00:37:00] And the station on 10th Street, when was that built, Eddie?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Like I said, it had a plaque, '36. So, I just assume that's when they were built because it was made -- like I said, it was -- you can still see the lines of the slabs when they poured the concrete. But that's the old one. That's an old station, but I don't know how many earthquakes it withstood.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, it'll hold on forever. (laughs)

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh yeah. Yeah, just like Wilson.

TOM RIVERA: Like Wilson, built in the WPA era. They'll be there forever.

Now, Eddie, did you have any problems, and challenges with people that were --? Because you were the first Mexican that was ever hired by the fire department. Yeah, and that was 1972.

EDDIE CORTEZ: 1972.

TOM RIVERA: 1972. Well, [00:38:00] let me ask you, how old was the fire department? When was it established? Do you know? Late 1800s or --?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Late 1800s, yeah. Late 1800s because that was something we hardly ever looked up because it was -- who cares? We --

TOM RIVERA: It was not part of us.

EDDIE CORTEZ: No. It was not part of our training. Our training was now forward. Nothing to look back to. But that was -- it was in the late 1800s.

TOM RIVERA: So, almost 80, 90 years before the first Mexican was hired --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: -- by the fire department. Yeah. Did you have any challenges, problems with adjusting to the change?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Not really. Like I said, when you're there 24 -- I mean, you don't roll with the punches. You just go by what the captain says. [00:39:00]

Captain say, "I want you to do this, and I want you to do that, and I want you to do this." "Okay." And then, we go out and train, and, as long as I did my training and was studying because, at the end of the year, I was going to get what they call a rookie test, and they were going to put all sorts of questions at me about, about firefighting, about tactics, about strategies, about equipment on the engine, and I had to know everything. I had to know -- they would go and hit this compartment, say, "What's in this compartment?" And I would have to know everything down to the last drill bit. (laughs) But I passed it. I passed it and did okay, and, by that time, I had gotten to know most of the crew, most of the shift, and they were a good shift. I mean, they were a good shift. We got to kid around a lot. That was okay. And then --

TOM RIVERA: [00:40:00] So, you became part of the team.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. I became part of the team. I just went along with -- they wanted to to this, just do it.

TOM RIVERA: Now, being the first Mexican American in the fire department, obviously you set a good example for us as Mexicans. Were there other Mexicans that were hired after you?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yes. Yes. A few years after me. See, '72. In '76, when this paramedic program was going to come into San Bernardino County, and our chief wanted to be part of the program. So, the chief from Colton, and San Bernardino, and Loma Linda, [00:41:00] and Rialto got together. They went and talked to the head honcho at Loma Linda University Medical Center, Dr. Zirkle. Zirkle, yeah. And what he thought -- if he could train us, that we could train there at the hospital. And he was always -- you might say a fire buff. He wanted to be a fireman. Here, the top surgeon there (laughs) wanted to get out there, [no way messed up his hands?]. But, anyhow, he says, "Sure." So, they all got together and put together a

program, and they went into Los Angeles County, got all their material, got all the books that they use, the tactics they use, and so on. Came back, and they put the program together. And there was going to be three cycles. One A, B, and C cycle. [00:42:00] So -- and the first cycle, that was going to be three people from each fire department go, and, if they passed and came back, then they were going to send three more. If they passed and everything, then they were going to send three more, so every station would have a total of -- oh, six, twelve, whatever. Every department. So, said, "Okay." So, we went, and I liked it. We took all our study, our classroom study, at Loma Linda through nurses, doctors, everything. Once we got through that, we had to go into LA County and take our field, out in the field training with LA County firefighters, paramedics. And the first group that came back, I asked them, "How was it?" [00:43:00] Said, "Okay, but pay attention to what they tell you. I mean, they're strict because a life might depend on it. Pay attention to what they tell you, and be sure you know what you're going to do before you do it." So, I went over there, and they introduced me, and so on. So, they put me -- I had only been there about an hour, and they're showing me the equipment, everything, when we got a call. They looked at me, they said, "Da, da, da, da, da, da, medical [late?] call, engine 151, whatever we were." They looked at me and said, "Let's go." (laughs) I got all my gear, just threw it inside the squad, and we took off and did okay. Did okay. One of them that I think I impressed him was we went to this house in Glendora. [00:44:00] Beautiful house. We walked in, and there's this lady, and she's sitting there, I mean, with all her -- what would you call it? Robe with fur and everything, and -- I mean, it was [a ritzy?] place, and they told me, "Be careful, okay?" "Okay." So, we made contact with the hospital. Hospital said, "Okay, let's start an IV," and she heard that, and she goes, "Oh." And one of the paramedics looked at her and says, "What's the matter, Miss So-and-so?"

Says, "I don't like IVs because they can never find my veins." And he looked at her and said, "Don't worry. This guy's an expert." (laughter) I thought to myself, oh, thanks a lot, [John?]. So, I looked at her, looked at her, and she had a small vein, very small vein here. She had nothing here, nothing here, nothing. Very small vein. And I got what we used to call the butterfly [00:45:00] needle, and I figured, man, this is the smallest hole we got. And I said, "I hope I got it," and I pull on her skin, and I see that little -- I just see the little blue vein. I mean, I can see. I'm just going by the color, so I went in there, and I put it in there, and I see the blood come out on the syringe. And I stop, and she go, "Oh," and then John looked at her. "See? It's done. He got it." And she looked at me and said, "You got it?" "Yes, ma'am." So, they taped it to stay there so it wouldn't come out, and then we were on the way to the hospital. He said, "You did good. You did good," he says. "I could see her face as she was scared." I said, "I did too." (laughs) So, I did pretty good there.

TOM RIVERA: So, how long were you in the paramedics?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Six -- let's see. [00:46:00] Six years.

TOM RIVERA: Six years? And, Eddie, so, being the first Mexican American in the fire department, were you ever asked to make presentations representing the fire department?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We would go -- schools, mostly. The women's club. And then -- and we just spoke. We had to go as a team because we had to take the squad, and we would still be on duty, so we're explaining to the people, "We're going to start our presentation. We get a call, we're gone." And we told the principal, and we told the president of the women's club, and everything, and they said, "Okay." And, yeah, there were time's we'd be going and got it.

(makes noise)

TOM RIVERA: Were they surprised to see you --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: -- representing the fire department? What was their reaction?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Wilson was the one that was surprised when we came in.

TOM RIVERA: That's a Mexican school.

EDDIE CORTEZ: [00:47:00] Yeah. We came in to Woodrow Wilson, and we were going to talk about earthquakes. And the principal -- I forgot who it was -- introduced us, and this, and that, and I knew I was going to be asked, so I was prepared. So, this man raises his hand, and I looked at him. I said, "Yes?" Digo, "¿y sabes español?" Y, "Sí, señor. Lo puedo hablar. Lo puedo leer, pero no lo puedo escribir muy bien y lo sé bastante para ayudar a usted. ¿Qué [mandos?] tiene? A ver." "Bien! Bien." So, then, we started -- after that, they relaxed a little bit, so then, they started kidding me around. And then, they started going into (laughs) Spanish. [00:48:00] "What do we really need to have in case we have an earthquake? What do we need to prepare? What do we have to have boxed up, have whatever?" So, I told them, "Well, the important thing is water. We can go without food for a while, but not without water." I says, "And don't count on the pipe. [Hold up here?]. We have a good one, pipes are going to break. We're going to be pulling water through the dirt." I said, "So, be sure you have enough water."

TOM RIVERA: But you were kind of in the forefront, representing the fire department and exposing that we do have a Mexican American working for the fire department. Were you ever also asked to help recruit Mexican Americans to the fire department, or did you encourage people to apply?

EDDIE CORTEZ: No. They had a -- the training officer would do that if he knew he was going to need people. [00:49:00] And, by that time, they -- now, they say, if you're bilingual, you're Hispanic, or you habla español, then -- no. [It was just a word that?] if there was an opening, you apply. Didn't matter if you were Hispanic

or white. You applied, and, if you got a passing grade and everything and went through everything, you got the job. So, it was -- now, we got more. That's half and half -- no, not half and half.

TOM RIVERA: I was going to ask you, who was the next Mexican American that was hired by the fire department after you?

EDDIE CORTEZ: [Bob Mendez?]. He got hired because he was already a paramedic. No, he was becoming a paramedic, and they figured, well, instead of hiring somebody [00:50:00] as a fireman, sending him to school, that this guy --

TOM RIVERA: He already -- he has the training already. And who followed Bob Mendez?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Huh?

TOM RIVERA: Who followed Bob Mendez?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, you would ask me that one.

TOM RIVERA: Was that [John Rivera?]?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Probably John Rivera. John Rivera was pretty close. Yeah.

And, yeah, it was John Rivera, and he had already come back from Vietnam, so he went in there, and he liked it. He liked it.

TOM RIVERA: And how is it now, Eddie? How is the comp-- what is the ethnic composition of the fire department now? 19-- 2015?

EDDIE CORTEZ: You mean as far as Hispanics and whites?

TOM RIVERA: Yes. Or -- yeah.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, there's still more whites, and Hispanics are pretty close.

We got -- well, of course, now, we have four stations. When I went, we only had two. [00:51:00] We had two, and we had about 28, 30 firemen. Now, we have about 60, 60-some. And racial might be maybe 60 40. Sixty forty. But, now, you have to remember that, now, a lot of these Hispanics that are coming out don't

know too much Spanish. (laughs) Okay? They went to school, and they did this, and they even went to college, and so on, and a lot of it was in English. So, a lot of them smart. I mean, I'm not knocking them. They were smart dudes. But, yeah, they had the Hispanic surname, but they didn't speak it very well.

TOM RIVERA: Well, and then, you mentioned that, at schools, you weren't allowed to speak Spanish, and, [00:52:00] like in my case, I wanted my kids to be very proficient in English, so I guess my kids would not communicate in Spanish either because of my -- oh, training, and experience, and wanting them to be able to be competitive in every part or category of American society. Yeah.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, my first-born was a boy, Junior, Eddie Jr., and we spoke to him in Spanish since he was little, since he was a baby, and he picked it up. And my mom was -- my mom told me, "Well, maybe it'll hurt him when he goes to school." I said, "Mom, when I grew up, all I knew was Spanish. School taught me English. We'll let the school [00:53:00] teach him English. I'll teach him the Spanish." And, right now, he speaks -- he's bilingual, where my second-born, he understands it. Grandma, my mom, would talk to him in Spanish, and he understands it, but very broken, he'll speak Spanish, and he gets a kick out of it. My other two daughters, they can understand it, but they don't speak it.

TOM RIVERA: And I think that's true of many of the families that are in our contemporary group. I think that's --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. They -- and one of my daughters is a teacher for the Colton school district. She teaches over in Zimmerman in Bloomington, [00:54:00] and she says, when the parents come in there, some of them tell her this and that, and she -- what little Spanish that she knows, she'll let them know, talking. "I understand, but I don't speak it that well." And I told her, "Mija, why don't you speak it?" "Dad, have you ever seen my try to pronounce?" (laughter) And I said,

"Yes. Stick to English." She says, "Oh, I do murder when it comes to certain words." So...

TOM RIVERA: Getting back to the fire department, Eddie, you start working in '72, and when did you retire from the fire department?

EDDIE CORTEZ: When?

TOM RIVERA: When, uh-huh.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Okay. I retired in 1994 as a captain. I was a captain for [00:55:00] 10 years. I was a captain for 10 years, and I loved it. When there was an -- when the chief quit and they were going to upgrade everybody, they did offer me a chance to be what they would call a battalion chief, and I tried it for two weeks. It wasn't my bag. I mean -- because I had no crew. Okay? I was by myself. I had a car. I had all the uniforms. I was in charge of everybody, but I actually had no crew. So --

TOM RIVERA: So, you missed the gang. (laughs)

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Huh?

TOM RIVERA: You missed the gang.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. So, I went back, and I told the chief, "Thanks, but no thanks." He says, "Why not?" I said, "To be truthful, I like sitting in that engine, blowing the siren, (laughs) turning [00:56:00] the lights on, honking the horn." I said, "Then I go by, and everybody, 'Hey, Mr. Fireman! Mr. Fireman! Hey!'"

TOM RIVERA: And when did you retire, Eddie? When did you retire?

EDDIE CORTEZ: It was June the 19, 1994, after 23 -- 23, 24 years.

TOM RIVERA: And today is 2015, so you've been retired 21 years.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Come this June. Come June, it'll be 21 years.

TOM RIVERA: Now, you mentioned your family, Eddie. I didn't get around to your family. You and Nelly got married what year?

EDDIE CORTEZ: '58.

TOM RIVERA: In '58? And how many children do you have?

EDDIE CORTEZ: We got four.

TOM RIVERA: All boys, all girls, or --?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Two each. Two --

TOM RIVERA: Your oldest is Eddie Jr.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Two oldest are boys. The two youngest [00:57:00] are girls.

TOM RIVERA: And their names are...?

EDDIE CORTEZ: There's Eddie Jr., [Lawrence?], [Sharon?], [Sylvia?].

TOM RIVERA: Okay. And do you have any grandkids?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yes, we do. We've got [Marissa?] -- let me start counting. Got Marissa -- come on, think. [Kyle?], [Carla?], [Benito?]. (pause) What's the youngest's name? Oh, man. My son's going to kill me. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: We'll erase this part of the video.

EDDIE CORTEZ: I always call her mija, so --

TOM RIVERA: Oh, that's her name, mija.

EDDIE CORTEZ: I always call her -- [00:58:00] and then, when my son got married, his wife had two kids, which is [Sammy?] and -- oh, man. Don't ask me names.

TOM RIVERA: Well, let me talk about your granddaughter, then. We met her. We met her at [Denny's?]. She was working at Denny's.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, Carla.

TOM RIVERA: Carla, still working at Denny's, and I forget how old she was or whether she would go to Colton High School or one of the colleges. Was she at Colton High School?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Okay. Yeah. Yeah, we met her at Denny's. [She's been?] working there at Denny's for a few months. Yeah.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah, she's lucky in getting jobs. She is.

TOM RIVERA: Like the grandfather.

EDDIE CORTEZ: (laughs) My wife and her friend were there at Denny's. They had just finished their meal, and they were on the way to go pay, and my wife's [00:59:00] friend was telling her that her daughter was having problems getting a job, that she had gone over here, and over here, and over here, and nothing. And Mom says, "Well, I got my granddaughter also, but she hasn't gone around to apply, but she's going to." And the lady there that's getting the change and everything, finished, and she reached, and got this application, and gave it to my wife. Said, "Here, have your granddaughter fill that out." And I told my wife, "Well, what about your friend?" "She didn't give her one, and she didn't ask for one. But she gave me one, so..." She brought it to Carla. Carla filled it out. So, she told her and said, "You have to take it back certain day." And Mom look at Carla. "Carla, dress (laughs) appropriate." She did, man. She went in. She put on her black suit. She had black pants, a little black jacket. I can see her [01:00:00] now. Little white scarf here, and her gold medal, and her earrings. She combed herself real nice, and not because she's my granddaughter, but she's a pretty girl. She's a pretty girl.

TOM RIVERA: Well, because she's your granddaughter.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Huh?

TOM RIVERA: Because from good stock. (laughter)

EDDIE CORTEZ: Anyway, she went and took it back, and went up, and says, "My name is Carla, and I came to return this." The lady looked at her and says, "Come in the back." Took her in the back and talked to her, and she got a job.

TOM RIVERA: (laughs) No, we saw her, and she --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Just like that.

TOM RIVERA: She introduced herself, [said?], "I'm Nelly and Eddie Cortez's granddaughter." She did a very, very good job. Tell me about Nelly. Is Nelly also a Colton girl?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. She was born and raised in Colton, and attended all the schools in Colton, and attended La Verne College, attended Valley [01:01:00] College, and got her master at Cal State. And -- but, other than that, all her schooling was in Colton. In fact, she's a teacher in Colton -- or was. She (laughs) -
-

TOM RIVERA: She retired (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

EDDIE CORTEZ: She retired when I retired, but right now, where is she? In Colton.

TOM RIVERA: (laughs) She's substituting.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. They call her. "Nelly, we need help. Nelly."

TOM RIVERA: So, she's almost --

EDDIE CORTEZ: She looked at --

TOM RIVERA: She's almost working full time, then.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. So, she looked at me. I says, "Go." She said, "Do you mind?" I said, "No." I said, "Look. As far as I'm concerned, you're bulletproof. They call you. They want you at the school. Say, 'No.' They want you for this class? You can say, 'No.' They want you for this day? You can say, 'No.' And then, next week, they'll call you again. You pick your schools. You pick your grades. You pick your days. What [01:02:00] more do you want?" She said, "Right on." I said, "And they pay you for it."

TOM RIVERA: (laughs) And she gets away from you.

EDDIE CORTEZ: And she -- oh, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Let me ask you another question. You mentioned [to me?] that some of the activities -- you belonged to the club the Satans, the Satans club, okay? You were in high school when you belonged to the Satans club, and what did the club do for recreation? Did they have dances or they have -- did they go to the movies together? Did they meet as a club? Do you -- did you have an advisor?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, you see, the thing is that we form our group because we used to go and play basketball at the YMCA.

TOM RIVERA: Okay. In San Bernardino?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. There, on 5th. And everybody there had a club, so they asked us if we had one, so we formed one. But it's funny, and [01:03:00] I'll say it. If you were white, you had a club. If you were Mexican, you had a gang. Just that simple, really. And we stayed that way, and we didn't mind, but we were able to play basketball and use the YMCA. So, then, as we graduated, we still hung around together, but then, everybody started going out on dates with girls, and everybody did this, did that. So, pretty soon, it just faded away. Just faded away. But we would set up booths, sometimes, at the Fiestas to sell and make some money.

TOM RIVERA: There was a Fiestas Patrias on September 16.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, Fiestas Patrias. And we sold -- in fact, [Carlos Cervantes?] was one of our advisors, you might say.

TOM RIVERA: Advisor.

EDDIE CORTEZ: He told us to go and sell Mexican hot [01:04:00] dogs. I says, "What the heck is a Mexican hot dog?" Says, "Just get a wiener, and roll it in a tortilla, and deep fry it." (laughter) Okay. It sold. We had a little booth about that big, and we had a deep fryer, and we'd get a corn tortilla, put it on, get the

(inaudible), put it there, and you had a Mexican hot dog. Oh, God. That was funny.

And -- but --

TOM RIVERA: Did you put mustard on it, or (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, we had the mustard there. They could use mustard, and we had mustard, and I don't think we had radish, but we had mustard and ketchup. And they could use that.

TOM RIVERA: And who was your president?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, I was one president, and then it was Bob Carrasco. I think just us two. Just us two were the presidents. But [01:05:00] there was about 15 of us.

TOM RIVERA: That's a good size, good number.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

TOM RIVERA: And you had an advisor, you said?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Huh?

TOM RIVERA: You had an advisor?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, we had -- Carlos Cervantes was our advisor. And then --

TOM RIVERA: And Carlos was from the Cervantes grocery store?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, he used to live next door to the grocery store. And -- but we always -- if we needed anything and so on, and he was well known in the community, the Cervantes name. So, we go with him, and he'd back us up. He would back us up. But he told us, "Don't get into no trouble as far as gang activity." He'd drop us like a hot potato, and he would have. But he was good. He would -- we would get together, and we'd see him, and he said, "Well, we did pretty good at the Fiesta. We made so much dollars." And then, we -- I don't know if we got that to [01:06:00] help family around, help families around the area because, I mean, not everybody had money, and he knew who needed some and

who needed some. So, he would go and -- I mean, a buck's a buck. He would go and distribute some of the money around, and he asked us, "Do you mind?" Said, "No, that's what we did it for."

TOM RIVERA: And what year was this, when you were active? Was it the '50s?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, yeah. The '50s. '55, '56, '57 because, then, I got married in '58, and [that's east?]. And I forgot -- some of the young guys wanted to be in the group, and I gave my jacket to one of them. I said, "Here. You don't have to buy a jacket." "All right."

TOM RIVERA: What color were your jackets?

EDDIE CORTEZ: There were black [01:07:00] long ones with a white stripe here, like ball players, and we had a the Satan symbol. Just the face with the (laughs) horns and a grin on his face, I remember it. Used to get a kick out of that. My mom used to say, "You're the diablos? Da, da, da, da, da, da." And I thought to myself, "First, instead of calling us Satans, we were going to call us Sons of Satan. Dije, man, that would be all my mom need: hijo del diablo. (laughter) Good thing we dropped that hijos the "Son of," and just kept with Satans. [Hijo madre?].

TOM RIVERA: Besides Carlos, Carlos Cervantes, being your advisor, who were some of the leaders in Colton, the Mexican American leaders in Colton, Eddie, [01:08:00] that you remember?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Pete Luque.

TOM RIVERA: Pete Luque was a councilman --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Was a councilman.

TOM RIVERA: -- and he worked in the cement plant también?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Mm-hmm. And --

TOM RIVERA: And his son --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Became a priest.

TOM RIVERA: Pete Luque Jr. became a priest, and he was our parish priest here in Colton, San Salvador.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. San Salvador.

TOM RIVERA: And he built that church, the new church that we have now.

EDDIE CORTEZ: No, it wasn't him. It was through Father -- Father (inaudible)...
(pause) Not him. Father Luque, Father [Spino?], Father -- oh, he was from Ontario.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, it's the --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Guillen.

TOM RIVERA: Guillen. Father Guillen. Father Guillen

EDDIE CORTEZ: Father Guillen. First, he wanted us to remodel the old one because -- [01:09:00] especially the confessionary was [volatile?]. [John Valdez?], [Ernie Herreria?], any myself, we went. We bought lumber and everything, and we went over there. [Until?] we got out of work, we'd go over there, and (laughs) tore that down, and everything, started building the confessional, and the chair that Father [Valencia?] used to use, Father Guillen says, "That's the original chair that belonged to San Salvador. Leave it here. Okay?" And I remember I'm on the side of the confessionary, putting up a little -- like a curtain, and (laughs) John Valdez was sitting on the chair, and he looks, and he sees me. "A ver, échatela".

(laughter)

TOM RIVERA: That's what --

EDDIE CORTEZ: God, I started --

TOM RIVERA: -- Father Valencia would say, no?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, I started laughing, and he -- Ernie comes, says, [01:10:00] "What the hell's the matter with you two?" And I told him, "This is what John told me," and he -- we're cracking up. But that's how it -- "a ver, échatela", just

like Father would say. (laughter) Oh, but that was fun. Anyway, later on, it got to be that we needed a new church. That one, that was falling down, you might say. So, we got together. We got together. We notified the people, the parish, and everybody agreed. "Yeah, we need a new church." So, we said, "Okay, let's do it." I said, "First of all, let's tear this one down." And we would hold Sunday Mass at Woodrow Wilson lunch room. Yeah. Yeah, the lunch room, auditorium, whatever, while we did the other one. And, man, we hit that like [01:11:00] termites, man. We just went with hammer -- oh, remember the steeple it had?

TOM RIVERA: Sí, ajá.

EDDIE CORTEZ: The great big steeple. They said, "How the heck we're going to get that down without nobody hurting themselves?" So, I told my primo, Tony Guerrero. I says, "How can we get that down?" He says, "I'll knock it down for you." I says, "How?" Says, "When do you want it down?" Said, "Saturday." Okay. He was a foreman at the cement plant. He went and got this bulldozer that was probably as big as this room and had a bucket about that big, and he said, "I just need two cars -- one in front of me, and one in the back -- to come from the cement plant." I said, "Okay." So, we went, and I followed him down N, 7th Street, and he said, "Okay, everybody get back," and he had a cage on that thing, had his helmet, and he raised that boom, extended it out, and then go [01:12:00] (makes noise). (laughs) That thing went rolling down there, where the parking lot used to be. He says, "Anything else?" I said, "Well, since you're there, start hitting the walls." Man, he hit the walls, and everything was just caving in. Then, he went over there, to where the steeple was, and he just lowered the bucket on it, split it. He said, "Okay." Gracias. Said, "Okay, let's go take this thing back." We took it back to the cement plant, and he went and told a foreman that was there that day, he says, "The bucket is back." He said, "Okay, [Tony?]. Thanks." Then, we started building.

TOM RIVERA: And how long did the building process take, Eddie?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, God. [01:13:00] Then, I don't know what it took.

TOM RIVERA: Couple years?

EDDIE CORTEZ: At least. At least a couple of years because, like I said, every time we nail a nail, inspectors had to come and check it, especially since it was going to be a public meeting place. They had to make sure. But we had more help. We had -- you never knew how much construction these people in Colton knew. I mean, this guy was good at framing. This guy was good at plaster. That guy was good as pouring cement. This guy was electrician. Everybody had their [niche?].

TOM RIVERA: And everybody came in and contributed.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We had [Frank?]. Forgot his last name, but he was running it. He would come and say, [01:14:00] "Okay. Okay, we got the concrete pour. Okay. You can start framing." And we had -- he had the blueprints, and he would show them. "This is what the blueprints mean." And he would oversee everything. Do that, and then, after --

TOM RIVERA: Who was this person?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Frank [Campos?]. Frank Campos. He passed away. He was very ill. He was a smart man. He could have been an engineer because he drew the print for it. He drew everything for it, and we do everything. So, I come back, and he would already have finished raising the wall, the studs and everything. Then, I would go. Said, "Okay, start wiring." No, he [01:15:00] had everything going, and he kept it going. Then, pretty soon, when the people saw that we were not just somebody who was going to be there overnight and leave, they started cooking for us. Oh, God. (laughs) The food they used to make. The people would come in -- they would come in cars and had the ollas and paper plates, and -- so, we'd stop working, and we'd just sit there on the concrete right there on the altar

and start eating. We had all different kinds of food. And then, they -- and I think [Dolores Castorena?] organized a group, and she told them, "Do you mind if we organize this group?" They said, "No." She says, "Okay, because, sometimes, we have too much food. Sometimes, we don't have enough." So, she would get -- "Okay, you and you [01:16:00] for this day, and what do you want to make? Give me a list so I can make a menu. Okay. Now, you and you the other day." And she had that thing running, man. We were always eating. (laughter) So, that was nice. That was nice. We built, and there was no drinking when we were working, and Frank says that. He said, "Okay. After we finish, after we nail the last nail, then we can sit down and have a beer." Said, "But I don't want nobody getting hurt." We had -- there were too many electrical saws going, and table saws, and the works. [We had everything?]. So, said, "Okay." But it took us a while. But then, after we got it built, [guy?], the people were happy. People were happy. Father Guillen was happy, and we even brought back Father Luque to say a Mass. All the priests that we had had before came back and [01:17:00] said a Mass. So --

TOM RIVERA: [So, is it?] --

EDDIE CORTEZ: -- they were happy. We were happy.

TOM RIVERA: It was a wonderful community project, then.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. It was a community project. We were happy.

Took us a while, but (laughs) we got it done.

P1: Can I ask a question? You said Father Guillen. Was that Patrick?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Pat Guillen.

TOM RIVERA: Now, Eddie, we mentioned leaders of the community. We mentioned Pete Luque Sr. Any other leaders that we had in our community that you remember?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Pascual Oliva. He became a councilman also.

TOM RIVERA: And also the mayor of -- was he a pro tem mayor or a mayor?

EDDIE CORTEZ: I think he was pro. And then, mayor also, Frank Gonzales became mayor.

TOM RIVERA: Abe. [01:18:00] Abe Beltran.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Abe Beltran became mayor. And that's another man, person, that I have to give thanks for for helping me in the fire department. He was mayor then, in '72, and he would walk in there like he owned the place, the fire department, and --

TOM RIVERA: [No?] 'tá grandote, ¿verdad?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah, and Chief Temby wouldn't argue with him because, I mean, he's the mayor. That was his boss. And I remember this day. I been there on my duty to clean the kitchen. I'm cleaning the kitchen, and he walks in, and Chief Temby right with him and everything, and he says, "Oh, this is our new --" And he looked at me and says, "Oh, hi, Ed. How the hell are you?" I said, "Hey, Abe -- I mean Mayor. I'm sorry." "Oh, the hell with it." "No, you earned it. You're mayor." Then, we started talking, talking, and Temby saw that we were good friends. He didn't bug me too much [01:19:00] (laughter) after that.

TOM RIVERA: Eddie, one of the things that people say, that everybody in Colton is related. Everybody in Colton is re-- that's what I keep hearing from these interviews. Is that true?

EDDIE CORTEZ: The majority of people were related. The majority of people that were related lived in the same block, in the same area. I mean, kids that went to first grade or second grade could go to school and just come back and walk without nobody molesting them or anything because everybody -- "Oh mira, allí va el hijo de Cuca." "Oh mira." They knew. They knew the kids, and the kids knew them. So, I tell you that a lot of the guys used to say, "Oh, Mama, [01:20:00] am I

related to that girl?" "Sí mijo, es tu prima." "Aw." (laughter) (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

TOM RIVERA: So, there goes that romance, eh?

EDDIE CORTEZ: You got to clear before you even made a pass because, yeah, they were related. And my mom and dad knew how they were related by So-and-so, by So-and-so, by So-and-so, by So-and-so.

TOM RIVERA: By lineage, eh? By lineage, they could name everybody in the family.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Mom, dad, grandfather, tíos, primos.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, yeah. It was (laughs) -- but it was nice. It was nice. I -- like I said, I enjoyed Colton, and I still do.

TOM RIVERA: How has it changed, Eddie? How has Colton changed over the last [01:21:00] years that -- well, 78 years that you've been around?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Well, it hasn't changed too much as far as crime. I mean, we got crime, but not like the other cities. Okay? We don't have that many gangs, okay? The majority of the ones that were in gangs are now parents or grandparents themselves, and this new generation coming up, they are more into education, really. You talk to somebody, and, "(inaudible) So-and-so?" "Oh, he's going to college over here in So-and-so." "Good. Good." And then, my wife is that way. (laughs) She'll be going to a store to get something, and one of the workers would see her and say, "Miss Cortez, is that you?" [01:22:00] "Yes, [Julian?], it's me." "You remember my name?" "Yes. Hey, come here. Are you going to school?" "Oh, yes, Miss Cortez. I'm going to So-and-so." "You better." (laughs) I told Nelly, "Déjalos. You're not a teacher." Nelly said, "I still am their teacher, and they respect me for it." And, when she was at Wilson, still working, she had to go

and take a report to one of the parents. They would tell her that So-and-so has to have that report signed, and So-and-so -- said, "Okay, I'll take it." "Yeah, but who's going to go with you?" "I go by myself." And she'd go right into the projects, projects now, and she'd park, and --

TOM RIVERA: Oh, there on Pine Street?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Uh-huh, right there on -- what is that? Off of Pine, yeah.

Then, she says, "When I go in there, 'Miss Cortez, [hey?] Miss Cortez,' kids following me all the way --" (laughter) Outside her car, and she tell them, "Get out of the way. I'm going to run you over." [01:23:00] And then, she goes, "Where are you going? I'm going to go over there." So, one kid would take off running. Said, "Oh, So-and-so, Miss Cortez is here. She wants to see [Javier?]." (laughter) "(inaudible) I'd get up, and they already meet me at the door, and they invite me in. 'Pásale (inaudible)' No, no, no, no, I just came to do this." And she would tell the kids, "Keep an eye on my car. Don't let nobody mess with it." "They won't, Miss Cortez. We'll mess them up." (laughs) Okay. But that was it. And even I, when I was in the fire department, I used to drive the old engine in the parades, and one day, we're coming, and we had just -- we had not even started the parade. I was still parked there on 8th Street by Wilson School. And this -- one of the guy, the battalion chief that was on, comes driving up and says, "Get in. Let's go." [01:24:00] I said -- I didn't say where or anything. I said, "Okay," so I turned around, and the kids were there, already had kids that I was going to drive down the parade. And I told them, "I'll be back later, but do me a favor. Stay here. Don't let nobody mess with the engine." "Oh, we won't, Mr. Cortez." We went, and somebody -- there was a robbery or something. Somebody got shot, and, by the time I got back, the kids were still there. (laughter) The parade was over, but they knew us, and I say they knew us. And it's funny because, like I said, I was in the fire engine, and I

would be driving down, and, 'Hi, Mr. Fireman. Hey, Mr. Fireman. Hey.'" When I retired, I got into the senior citizen patrol with the police department, and (laughs) it wasn't the same. I'd be in the police car and go by, and I wave at the kids, and they look at me like, "Oh." [01:25:00] And I go (sighs). And, for the heck of it, I look in the mirror, and, yeah, they were (laughs) giving me a number one sign.

TOM RIVERA: They were waving with a middle finger? (laughs) So --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Because I was in a patrol car.

TOM RIVERA: The attitude towards the police --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yes. Yes. I would look in the mirror, and then -- and then, next day, I'd come in a engine, go by, "Hey, Mr. Fireman. Hey." But that was it. And I told that to the captain when I got back to the police station. He says, "Well, you're seeing the difference of two worlds." I said, "Yeah, I am." And then, that was true. But I liked it. I liked it.

TOM RIVERA: Well, my last question, Eddie, is what was the best memory or the best thing that you remember about living in Colton? Which, you still live in Colton. What is the best memory that you have?

EDDIE CORTEZ: [01:26:00] Friends, how we stuck together, how we -- you've seen the movie *The Sandlot*, right?

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm.

EDDIE CORTEZ: We had our own sandlot. Our own sandlot right there where L Street ran into the railroad tracks, and it was only one rail. Now, they got about seven or eight. So, all that property there was just empty, so we'd go out there, get the shovels and everything, and dig out all the weeds, tumbleweeds and everything, and we made a ball diamond. And, course, we didn't play hardball. It was softball. So, we played softball. And that's where we learned how to play. We couldn't come to Colton Park, La Paloma, because La Paloma had that park for them, and

we had no other park, so we made our own sandlot. Then, Mr. [Green?] was a teacher. [01:27:00] He put together softball league, and he told us. He says, "Get yourselves a team. We're going to play softball. We're going to seal it. We're going to form a league." Okay. So, he told us each to bring a white t-shirt. Okay. So -- and he had the stencil. He says, "What do you guys want to be?". Con la paloma. "We're the Yankees." "Okay." Put the stencil. Got the spray can. "What are you?" "We're the Dodgers." "Okay." And we had here, "Dodgers," and whatever, "Red Rox," or whatever team you chose, and we played. And I'll be a son of a gun, we won the league. (laughter) And my friend [Oscar Bejarano?], he was our pitcher. He -- we got the baseball. It said [C League?] champs. [01:28:00] Don't ask me the year. But we all signed it and gave it to him, and he kept it as a trophy. But -- and there was never any fighting among us. Like, "Okay, let's get together and go to the north side, and kick some butt." No. We come home from school and everything, and what are we going to do? Play marbles. And the streets were dirt, so we'd go and make a little hole, el hoyito. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Yes, I remember that.

EDDIE CORTEZ: El hoyito. And then, okay, next day, we -- "Let's play trompos." And we'd go to --

TOM RIVERA: Tops. Tops.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Tops. We'd go to Martinez Bakery, and he sold them. I think they were 10 cents each, so we buy one, and I didn't have to worry about string because my dad was working at a cement plant, and that's what they used to use [01:29:00] to sew some of the bags together. So, when the cone of the string got that small, they would take it off and put in a new because they didn't want to be sewing a bag and then run out halfway through, so they'd throw them. My dad would go in the afternoons, and pick them up, and trash them, bring them. We had

cuerdas. (laughs) We had all the string that we needed. The guy would come, "Eddie, [get them?]." Sure. And we were doing that. So, between softball, marbles, tops, flying kites, and then we play football, but not too much. It's too much running. But, other than that, that's what I miss the most. Okay? And that's what I used to tell my kids as they were growing up. "Go out and do something instead of sitting there and watching TV." Oh, God. [01:30:00] I says, "Get out there and do something." So, I signed them up for little league, both of them. I even signed up my girls. I told them, "You're going to go to Carl Rimbaugh and sign up." "Well, take us, Dad. Take us." No. Then, my little one says, "Oh, yeah, but if it was the boys, oh, you'd do it for the boys." I said, "Sylvia, (laughs) you -- let's go." So, I went and signed them up, and then -- who was the president of that league then? Anyway, he says, "You know what? We got the girls, but we need coaches." And I thought to myself, (laughs) oh. And, sure enough, I became a coach. But that's what I miss. Now, [early morning in?] this paper, I see all that shooting they had [01:31:00] over there in San Bernardino. Another one died. They shot four of them, and the fifth or fourth one died. And you don't hear that much [I've seen?] in Colton, and that's what I like, and that's why I'll stay here. And Nelly, Nelly's a runner, a walker. She goes out, and she walks all over Colton. And I said -- I says, "Getting dark." "Yes, I know." And off she goes, and then she comes back. I said, "Where were you?" "Oh, I stopped by at So-and-so and said hello." All right. Okay. But that's why I'll always live here, die here.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. I was going to ask you -- I forgot my train of thought, Eddie. Oh, no, I have it. No, I have it. Eddie, we've been going for a little over an hour now. We've covered many, many topics. [01:32:00] Is there anything that I forgot to ask you or is anything that you remember that you would like to share with us?

EDDIE CORTEZ: I would like to say something, and one of the questions that -- what is your first name? (laughs)

HENRY: [Henry?].

EDDIE CORTEZ: Henry asked. My older sister is buried in Agua Mansa. She was 10 years old. She got killed in an accident, and that's where we buried her, and she's still there.

HENRY: What's her name?

EDDIE CORTEZ: Huh?

HENRY: What was her name?

EDDIE CORTEZ: [Socorro?]. Socorro Cortez. And my dad took it hard, really hard because there were just three of us. Socorro, [Josephine?], and me. So, he took it pretty hard. So, sometimes, he would -- we had a little old Model T, and he says, "Come on." [01:33:00] So, we'd go, and we'd take some buckets, y la sequia, and, you know, get some water. You know, allí, la sequia that runs right by the cemetery, the canal. We'd go over there, and we'd pour water, and he planted some flowers, and we'd go at least twice a week. And she had a beautiful grave. Put a beautiful stone. Course, the stone is not there anymore. They said the vandals went through there and started breaking them up. But, yeah, I do have a sister there.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. Well, thank you for that question, Henry. I completely forgot about it.

HENRY: I had already also. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: And thank you for reminding us, Eddie.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, yes.

TOM RIVERA: And also thank you for being with us this afternoon.

Thoroughly enjoyed our conversation this afternoon.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Oh, thank you. Sorry about the cough and everything, but --

TOM RIVERA: No, those things happen, and we have to take care of us, so we have to take care of each other. [01:34:00] So, no, you did a wonderful job, and thank you very much.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Let me say one thing real quick. I'm taking my paramedic training in Los Angeles. We got a call to go to La Puente. There's a park there, and it was in the evening. Here we go, and we got there, and it's totally Hispanic.

Okay? And the police are trying to get in there, but they wouldn't let them get in.

The vagos, the [vacos?], the members, whatever. And we get there, and I get the

paramedic equipment, and I'm going through there, and I'm trying to get through

there, and these people are -- "Ah, nobody's going to get through here. This and

that. Da, da, da, da." Finally -- I don't know, it just came over me, [01:35:00] and,

in Spanish, I said, "Con una..." They look at me. I says, en español, "quítase del

camino. Tienen que (inaudible) a ese animal. Pues se va a morir como un animal

si no le ayudo. Y traigo aquí el equipo para ayudarle. ¿Pero usted es pendejo y no

me dejan?" Y al otro dije, "¿Señora, usted es la mamá? Y podría decirles a todos

pendejos que se hagan a un lado. Si no, ese muchacho se va a morir." But she

didn't have to say it, man. When I got back, our captain said, "Man, that thing

opened up like the [Ritz?]." (laughter) Well, anyway, I started two IVs on him

because he lost a lot of blood. He had been stabbed. So, anyway, took him to the

hospital. On the way back, we were in the squad. The other two paramedics were

with me. They says, "What the heck did you say? (laughs) Man, they moved

back." I said, [01:36:00] "Well, that's hard to translate into English because I used a

lot of bad words." (laughter) They said, "Well, I'm glad you were with us, then." He

says, "Because we were able to get him out of there at the end of this and got

home." Well, next morning, when I got off shift, I went to the hospital. Still had my

uniform. I got there, and I went, and I went to the emergency room, and I introduced myself, said, "So-and-so. Last night, we brought in this guy with stabs." Says, "Wanted to find out how he's doing." The nurse there says, "You want to go up?" Said, "Sure." So, he told me where to go, so I went. As I go up, I'm going by this waiting room, and I turned, and there's a whole family (laughs) there. And I thought, "Oh, they're going to beat the hell out of me." But, no, I said "Hello," and I went to the room where he was there, and he was conscious. [01:37:00] He was conscious to breathe and everything. And I asked him in English, "You doing okay?" So, then, I told him what had happened, and he said -- he just smiled, said, "Okay." I says, "Have you seen anybody already?" Said, "You want to see your mom?" So, I said, "Okay," so I got out, went over to the waiting room, and I says -- I saw the woman. I recognized her. In Spanish, said, "dispense, Señora." "¿Sí?". Dije, "yo creo que estaba allá anoche. El que le [ayudó] a su hijo". "Ay, no sabemos--". Le dije, "está bien. Ahorita, justo lo miré y está bien. Está despierto y quiere mirar a usted." "¡Ay! ¿De veras?". "Sí. Venga. Sígame." So, I took her. Dije, "pero más [prognósticos?] cinco minutos." "¡Ay! ¿Sí?". So, I took her. I stayed there. Of course, she cried all the (laughs) time we were there. Anyway, the nurse came and said, "Okay, that's enough. Too much for him." So, I brought her back. I brought her back, and I took [01:38:00] her to a waiting room and sat her down, and she told everybody in Spanish, "está bien. Este joven aquí le salvó la vida a mi hijo." "He saved my son's life, and nobody better hurt him." I said (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). (laughter) I feel like they're going to be waiting for me when I get outside of the hospital. No. And then, a couple of them got up and shook my hand. "Gracias." I got up, and then, when I got home, I told Nelly, and Nelly says, "What?" I said, "Man, right in the middle of La Puente, I start cussing out this guy,

(laughs) [person I thought of then?]. I'm dead meat." But no. I remember that all the time. Oh, God. But it was [blessed?].

TOM RIVERA: Well, when you do something good for somebody, there's some reciprocal response.

EDDIE CORTEZ: Yeah. Yeah. No, no, they did. They did.

TOM RIVERA: Well, Eddie, thank you so much for --

EDDIE CORTEZ: Okay, Tom.

TOM RIVERA: -- being with us this afternoon. Thank you so much. We truly appreciate it. Thank you. [01:39:00]

End of Interview:
[01:39:00]