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### Ernie Gomez

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# South Colton Oral History Project

## Interview Summary

**Interviewee:**

Ernie Gomez, Henry Vásquez

**Interviewer:**

Tom Rivera

**Interview Date:**

March 20, 2015

**Interview Location:**

Grand Terrace, CA

**Length:**

01:33:15

**Interview Summary completed by:**

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

**Description:**

Tom Rivera interviews Ernie Gomez along with Henry Vásquez, two men with roots in Colton. Gomez is asked to talk about his family, starting with his mother and her journey to the United States. His mother only went to school one day in her life after his grandmother saw her play at school but eventually did learn how to read, write, play piano, crochet, and cook. She was a woman who loved music and had a family of musicians. When his mother quit, Gomez eventually took over her role in playing for Father Valencia's church. After college, Gomez played instruments in the military and went back to continue his secondary education. Afterward, he taught choir in schools and joined a choir group as well. Henry Vásquez also talks about his history of learning and teaching music and of his family. Rivera asks Gomez if he realized South Colton was segregated in his youth, to which the latter tells memories of prejudice. The interview ends with the three men discussing the work that Gomez's mother did in craft, food, and other impacts as well as memories of having fun as a youth.

**Subject Topic:**

- Migration
- Education
- Family
- Music
- Strict Parenting
- The Catholic Faith
- Military Service
- Teaching
- Plays/Musicals
- Segregation/Racism
- Community
- Handiwork/Crocheting
- Gardening

- Entertainment

**Spatial Coverage:**

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Immaculate Conception Catholic Church	1106 N La Cadena Dr, Colton, CA 92324
San Salvadoro School	Colton, CA
Colton High School	777 W Valley Blvd, Colton, CA 92324
San Bernardino Valley College	701 S Mt Vernon Ave, San Bernardino, CA 92410
California State University, Los Angeles	5151 State University Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90032
Agua Mansa Pioneer Cemetery	2001 Agua Mansa Rd, Colton, CA 92324

**Temporal Coverage:**

1903 - 2015

**Key Events:**

- Gomez’s mother and her coming to the United States.
- She only went to school one day in her life but eventually learned to read, write, and play piano.
- Gomez’s parents eventually met while being in a band his mom was 19 and his dad 35 when they married.
- Gomez and Rivera talk about Gomez’s family and Gomez’s mother teaching others.
- his mother quit, Gomez eventually took.
- His mother quit playing music for the church so Gomez took the spot.
- Gomez joined the Marine Corps and used his skill there after college.
- Gomez behinds teaching choir and was also in some groups.
- Vasquez and his family being musically inclined and his past in teaching.
- Gomez and living in a segregated community.
- The best memory from living in South Colton.
- Handiwork and dabbling in craft and food.
- Celebrating Catholic festivities.
- Family buried in the Agua Mansa cemetery.
- Swimming in the canal as a youth.

**Key Organizations:**

- The United States Marine Corps
- William Hall Chorale
- Canto Bello Chorale

## Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:02:16 - 00:04:56	Gomez talks about how his mother only went to school one day in her life due to his grandmother's anger.
Digital Video	00:17:48 - 00:24:40	Gomez's mother quitting playing for the church after many years of it.
Digital Video	00:43:16 - 00:44:12	Gomez's mother having such an influence on South Colton that many continued to pursue that field.
Digital Video	01:05:31 - 01:09:24	Gomez recalls stories of segregation growing up.
Digital Video	01:09:25 - 01:11:06	Gomez's and Vásquez's best memory growing up in South Colton.

## 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 Tom Rivera, and welcome to our oral history project of South Colton. Today is Friday, March 20, 2015; and we are taping in Grand Terrace, California. And it's approximately 1:30 in the afternoon. Our guests this afternoon are Mr. Ernie Gomez -- Ernie, welcome this afternoon, and thank you very much for being with us this afternoon to talk about your mom and her influence that she had in -- and influenced the development of music in South Colton. And your nephew, Henry Vásquez, is also with us. Henry is also a musician, and Henry, thank you very much for being with us today. And Henry's one of our members of our committee on this soc-- South Colton Oral History Project. And behind the camera is Mr. Frank [00:01:00] Acosta, who's also part of our project, and our audience is Mr. Chuck...

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Vásquez.

TOM RIVERA: Vásquez, who is also related to Margarita Gomez; and also, Lily Rivera, my wife, is here with us this afternoon. And I'd like to start, Ernie -- let's start -- talk about -- give us a little background about your grandma. Where was she born, and when did she come to Colton?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, you're referring to my mother, right? I just got to --

TOM RIVERA: Oh, I am referring to your mother.

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, that's all right. All right, she was born in Mexico, Coahuila, and with her parents, crossed over to Texas; worked, I imagine, for South Pacific Railroad and came on the railroad train with her parents. She must've been around two when [00:02:00] she crossed over, and eventually, they wound up in Long Beach for a few months, and they came to Colton where they bought a house and

lived here -- permanently here in South Colton. Then about -- oh, eventually, she started going to school, of course, and I think I told you about this the last time and -  
- when I was talking to you. She started -- I think she was about the first grade, and  
--

TOM RIVERA: In the first grade, she must've been about maybe --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, gosh.

TOM RIVERA: -- five or six or seven?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I would say, yeah, four or five or six.

TOM RIVERA: And that was maybe in 1903 or '04?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Something like that, yeah. And anyway, that was the very first day of school, and then when my grandmother went to pick her up, she was out there playing with the rest of the kids like kids do. [00:03:00] And my mo-- my grandmother called her and said, "Come on over here! (inaudible) haciendo machetona!" (laughter) And anyway, from then on, she could no-- did not attend public schools because of that. Because she thought, [yeah, tomboy?] --

TOM RIVERA: Because of that incident in first grade?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, uh-huh, exactly. And I imagine -- my memory isn't that clear, but it must've been the first day of school and --

FRANK ACOSTA: Ernie?

TOM RIVERA: Well --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah?

FRANK ACOSTA: Do you know what school that was where that occurred?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Was there a San Salvadoro School?

FRANK ACOSTA: There was a San Salvadoro, and then there was also, maybe at that time, a McKinley?

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, it had to be San Salvadoro, yeah, because --

FRANK ACOSTA: Is that the one that's to the west of --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- they lived on -- what's that, Fifth Street?

FRANK ACOSTA: -- (inaudible)?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, she lived on Fifth Street.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Fifth Street.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Fifth Street. And so yeah, that -- she didn't attend school, so what did she do about an education? Well --

TOM RIVERA: Before we [00:04:00] leave that story --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, I'm sorry.

TOM RIVERA: -- what was your grandma's name?

ERNIE GOMEZ: (laughs) Oh, gosh. Juana.

TOM RIVERA: Juana?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Juana.

TOM RIVERA: And Grandpa?

ERNIE GOMEZ: [Lupé?] Luna. Yeah, they're Lunas.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: [Tomás?].

ERNIE GOMEZ: And of course, he was my uncle, and he was also a musician as -- we talked about it prior to this.

TOM RIVERA: So your mom -- because she was so active on the playground, Grandma says, "You ain't going back to school?"

ERNIE GOMEZ: (laughs) Exactly.

TOM RIVERA: And that was the first day and the last day that she was in school.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right. And eventually, there was this lady, Soledad; my mom used to call her [Cholé?]. Taught her how to read, mostly Spanish, and taught her how to play the piano, taught her how to crochet and cook. That's --

TOM RIVERA: How old was she when she started playing the piano?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, [00:05:00] gosh, I would imagine about eight or nine. I --

TOM RIVERA: Oh, still early years.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, yeah, she was young, and they wouldn't start her on piano right away. We had to learn how to do solfege, or in Italian, solfeggio. And you had to learn how -- solfeggio in order to know the time values and also the pitches, then you had to sing them. "Do mi so mi do," and that kind -- and be able to read the note, of course, and after she learned that, then they would start on the piano. And like I said, crochet and sewing and all of those -- what they used to regard as ladylike things that they used to have during that time, she learned. That was a proper thing. As far as my grandmother was concerned, [00:06:00] that's what she needed to be taught.

TOM RIVERA: And who owned the piano? Whose piano was this?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I imagine it was Cholé. And later on, my uncle, [Atanasio?], who was married to one of my sisters -- one of my mother's sister, she -- I mean he got a piano and bought it for her so she could use it. This was when she was still young, and she would practice on that. I don't know what happened to that piano. I remember it was a really big upright, but let me see. How far do you want me to get up the ladder? (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Well, go ahead. Let me -- well, before you do that, how are you and Henry related?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Henry is my nephew, yeah. His mom, of course, is Luce, and she was my sister, my oldest sister, [00:07:00] and -- who unfortunately has sadly passed away. How long ago was that, since --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: It's going to be 20 years next --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- nineteen ninety-four?



HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Nineteen ninety-six.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Ninety-six.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Next year, it'll be 20 years. It's 19 right now.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And she used to play the piano, and she loved to sing as well, so...

TOM RIVERA: Now, did your mom have any brothers and sisters?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah. Lupé Luna -- that's all I can remember.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: She had a sister named Cruz.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, Cruz, right.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: And another sister --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Cruz [Velasquez?].

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Do you remember the other sister's name, Chuck?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: I don't remember. Oh, Cuca also.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, yeah, Cuca, Tía Cuca. How --

TOM RIVERA: (Inaudible)

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- could I forget that? (laughs)

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Her -- I guess her real name was Refugio also, but Cuca --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, Refugia.

FRANK ACOSTA: Refugia or Maria de Refugio? [00:08:00] A lot of Refugio or Refugias were really --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Maria de...?

FRANK ACOSTA: Refugio?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: And then, Ernie, you, earlier, showed me her marriage license.

She -- your mom married at 19 years, and she married here in Colton, and she

married Refugio [Oulmas?]. And he was 35 years old, and your mom was 19, and that was quite an age span.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, it was, but we talked about Lupé, right? I don't know if he was the leader of the Filharmonico band that they had.

TOM RIVERA: The Filharmonico band was 1916.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Nineteen sixteen, right.

TOM RIVERA: Tell me about that band.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Like I say, I don't know that much about the band itself, but Lupé was in it, who is my mom's brother. [00:09:00] My mom wanted to play piano, so Lupé and my mom were in it, and my dad used to play trombone with that band. That's the way they met.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, that's the way they met, okay.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, they met, and -- she, the piano player; he, the trombone player, so...

TOM RIVERA: And they got married in 1919?

ERNIE GOMEZ: No --

TOM RIVERA: Seventeen.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- nineteen seventeen.

TOM RIVERA: Nineteen seventeen. And how many children did they have, Ernie?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, my, we were -- eight of us, eight.

TOM RIVERA: Who was the oldest?

ERNIE GOMEZ: The oldest was Luce; that's Henry's mom.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: And then Aunt Charlotte --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Aunt Charlotte.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- who's two years younger.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah. Horaria, Tony, my-- Tony Gomez, my -- the trumpet player, my brother. All right, then Gabriel, then -- oh, I forgot Horaria.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No, you didn't.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: You didn't.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, I said Horaria?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: You said [it, you did?].

ERNIE GOMEZ: Gabby, [00:10:00] then Raul, and then myself, and then Martha. That's eight of us that lived. There could've been up to about 15, but they didn't make it.

TOM RIVERA: And did all of you play or were musically --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Let me see.

TOM RIVERA: -- inclined or got...?

ERNIE GOMEZ: We had -- starting with Luce, she played piano and sang. Charlotte played a little bit of piano, and she sang a little bit too. And Horaria -- musically inclined, but --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: She never --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- never took anything.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: She didn't take up an instrument.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, nothing. And then Tony, of course, took up an instrument, played the trumpet; and Gabby liked music, but he never took up a musical instrument either. And then Raul, my brother, played saxophone, and he earned his bachelor's degree. [00:11:00] And he teaches -- as a matter of fact, teaches -- subbing sometimes over at --

TOM RIVERA: Still --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- Colton High School still, yeah. He's 82 years old, I think.

Seventy? He's going to be 82. And then Martha, who learned a little bit of piano,

but she mainly likes to sing, and she's been in a lot of the groups or church groups also that we -- I've had singing alto. So that's the whole family, eight --

TOM RIVERA: That's the whole family, musical family. Now, your mom -- how did she -- you mentioned that she took lessons from Soledad?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right.

TOM RIVERA: And then when did she start teaching pi-- kids from the neighborhood? When did she start teaching or giving piano lessons?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I can't give you any time period. I would imagine 2000 -- [00:12:00] I mean 1000 -- 1905, '06.

TOM RIVERA: Because --

ERNIE GOMEZ: I'm not sure about that time.

TOM RIVERA: Yes. There's a little girl, whose name -- Juana Rodriguez from the store, De Esperanza Store, and she remembers taking lessons when she was seven years old in 1920 from your mom, that she took lessons -- piano lessons from her and also voice lessons from her. And she was also very actively in the church, in the in the Fiestas Patrias, and participating as -- in the music, in the song -- whatever performance they had to do, so she rea-- she mentions your mom being her -- instrumental in teaching her how to play the piano and also sing.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And according to my mom, I -- she always used to tell me, well, she was the best student she ever had. Played piano beautifully [00:13:00] and had a beautiful voice, soprano voice, and could hit a high C easily in her prime when she was young. And then marriage came along and... (laughter) (Inaudible), eh?

TOM RIVERA: Raul [Rochin?] spoiled the whole thing, huh?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I won't mention his name. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Well, Raul Rochin -- he loved -- took her to Mexicali, and he --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, you heard about that, huh?

TOM RIVERA: Yes, I did. What about Dolores [Galvez?]? They had a little store around the corner from where your -- where you lived.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yes, on N Street.

TOM RIVERA: La Tiendita, I think, and Dolores also thinks very, very -- talked very highly about your mom and the lessons that she got from your mom.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she learned solfege from my mom and piano and basically, note reading, and she also had a good voice. And she was in a lot of high -- I guess high school [00:14:00] activities involving music, and I remember she went to Padua Hills --

TOM RIVERA: Padua Hills. She's --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she was in Padua Hills, and later on, she joined the choir that I started over -- right there at Immaculate Conception. And also later on, much later on, she joined the Canto Bello Chorale. She was a very good soprano.

TOM RIVERA: Tell me about the choir that you started, Ernie, because you were also very, very active in organizing music groups in Colton and also with the many churches that we had. Yeah, tell us about that.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I just remembered something else. It doesn't have anything to do with --

TOM RIVERA: Go ahead, yeah.

ERNIE GOMEZ: But it's just organizing. My first (laughs) experience organizing is -- you remember we used to have the Mexican American Club at Colton High School?

TOM RIVERA: At Colton High School.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, well, I was [00:15:00] vice-president, and Danny Muro was the president. And Eleanor Valdez was her name; she was program chairman.

She was in charge of the -- what was it called? Latin American -- every year, we put on a show. Do you remember that?

TOM RIVERA: Not -- when I came along, I don't thi-- I think that was defunct, yeah.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah? Well, anyway, Eleanor quit school for whatever reason, and there was nobody else to take care of it, so I organized it. And lo and behold, the things you have to do way ahead of time, and that's where I learned my first lesson: you organize, but you plan ahead to make sure everything turns out. Unfortunately, I didn't have the time when I knew, "Hey, I have to take over," (laughs) but [00:16:00] a good help at that time is we not only had people that were talented. But I also got my brother's band to play, Tony Gomez.

TOM RIVERA: Tony Gomez, okay.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and --

TOM RIVERA: What band was that? Was he -- The Latin Lads?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I think it was just a band that he held together before they got in with Sal Vasquez. And we -- he ca-- they came over -- their musicians came over for rehearsal, and they played part of the program, and some of the singers sang with the band. And I think Dolores Galves also came, and she performed for us. This was maybe around three or four years after she had graduated. She used to play castanets too and dance. I don't know if you knew that, but she's a good castanet player [00:17:00] too. Anyway, that was my first experience, and oh, boy. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: What year were you in school?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I was a senior, and Dan -- like I say, Dan Muro was the president, and Ada Sosa was treasurer or something like that. I can't remember

exactly. Anyway, we all were together. You remember Ada Sosa. [You remember her now?]?

TOM RIVERA: Yes, I do. We interviewed her also.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, (laughs) she was a really great person. Anyway, back to the question that you asked me.

TOM RIVERA: The question was tell us about your Canto Bella and some of the musical groups --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well --

TOM RIVERA: -- that you organized in the community.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I think in order to tell you that, I have to go back to when I was about 14 years old, I guess, where Father Valencia came over. And he wanted me to play, [00:18:00] and that's because my mom had quit. I think I told you about that story.

TOM RIVERA: Well, tell us that story.

ERNIE GOMEZ: My mom quit, and she said, "Padre, ya no quiero..."

TOM RIVERA: Well --

ERNIE GOMEZ: "Ya no puedo tocar.."

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, your mom was involved with the church for many years.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, many, many years. In the church on Fifth Street, for instance, she used to play for that church, San Salvadoro. And Henry was telling me that -- no, she didn't tell me the story, but Henry, maybe you can tell them.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Well --

ERNIE GOMEZ: You know.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- she was still very young, and the Spanish priest -- I think his name was Padre Esteban at that time -- used to come by in the morning. And he would call to her and tell her, "Margarina, Margarina, levántate. Ya es hora de ir a

la misa," or something. She -- he wanted her to play the -- whatever the -- I guess it was [00:19:00] a pump organ maybe that they had at that time?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I suppose so --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Because I don't think --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- or a piano maybe. (laughs)

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: They didn't have electricity in that area yet, so she would play, and that's the story of when she would go play at the old church on Fifth Street -- almost on the corner of Agua Mansa, Congress, and Fifth Street.

FRANK ACOSTA: Do you have any sense of when she started playing at that church? What age, if possible?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Did she tell you, by any chance?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I -- from what I could tell, it seemed like she was still very young, maybe 12 or so, but I don't know. Do you --

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, because that church --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Fourteen.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Fourteen?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: And what -- where -- there are stories about rain or shine, she would have to go walk down there, and in the wind.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Did she tell you too?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: I think my mom told me --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, I see.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: -- she had to be going do-- walking down to the church in the -- in windy conditions.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she never [00:20:00] mentioned a word of it, except that's -- when I played down in this little church, in the -- San Salvadore, that's about all she would -- but she wouldn't go into detail like she told you.



FRANK ACOSTA: And that church burned down in 1917.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Hmm, that's sad.

TOM RIVERA: So, Henry, she -- you mentioned Father -- [what's his name?]?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Father Esteban.

TOM RIVERA: Now, when did she start working with Father Valencia, in 1937 when Father Valencia came to Colton?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Whenever he came, right. I don't know. There were some other priests in between, but I only have a record -- Frank, do you remember anything? I think you've looked up the chronology of that.

FRANK ACOSTA: Right, but I don't remember.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: You don't remember? Okay.

TOM RIVERA: Well, but the thing is that your grandma, Henry, was involved with the church for many years while she was very, very young and provided services for the priests that [00:21:00] were at the church before Father Valencia.

FRANK ACOSTA: So she --

TOM RIVERA: And then when Father Valencia got to the church, qué pasó? She started working with Father Valencia?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she did.

TOM RIVERA: And for how long, Ernie?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Until about 1951, but don't forget she had [to age in?] the family. And every morning, she used to go -- it was a -- I think it was a ver-- seven o'clock mass in the morning. She used to have to walk over there. There was no car, no rides, so she had to walk over there, rain or shine, five days a week. And so after a while of doing -- from the time she was 12, 13, or 14, whatever she was at

that time up to 1951, she was just tired and raising eight children, and then also teaching piano lessons [00:22:00] to make a little bit more income.

FRANK ACOSTA: That would've been about 40 years -- approximately 40 years --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Forty years?

FRANK ACOSTA: -- that she played for San Salvador.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Wow.

TOM RIVERA: And then in the '50s -- in '51 when she said, "Ya estufas, no more," what did Father Valencia do, Henry? What did Father Valencia do when your grandma refused to provide any musical assistance?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Well, he would come and badger her, I guess, and...

TOM RIVERA: She would -- he would come to the house?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yes, and I guess, Uncle Ernie, you remember more about that part.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yes, I remember. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Tell us about that.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, she would open and say, "Buenos días, Padre. Cómo está?" "Muy bien." They'd exchange, and he'd say, ""Bueno, quiero que vengas, muchacha. Quiero que vengas a tocar!" She said, "Padre, yo ya le dije que ya no quiero tocar, ya me cansé!" [00:23:00] (laughter) Smash! That's the door closing, and they'd say -- and then he would say, "Buena, aquí me voy a quedar hasta me digas que sí." So he would sit out right there on the porch like that and wait for the whole thing, and of course, my mom never came out. I don't know how it came about exactly. Maybe she -- my mom suggested to the priest -- to Father Valencia that I could play and also sing, so that's the way I started. In 1951, I was a freshman in high school, so once again, I almost did the same thing that my mom used to do [getting out of school?].

TOM RIVERA: Oh, so you took over for your mom.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, uh-huh. At that time -- (laughs) well, I remember Father Valencia for confirmation and communion. Whenever he asked questions, especially for confirmation, he [00:24:00] would give each child a nickel for every question that -- they were preparing us for confirmation. And so -- but he paid me for playing and singing, so that's the way I got my Levi's and all that excess stuff that you need in high school. So I didn't have to -- and it's pretty lucky that way that I could earn myself through that.

TOM RIVERA: So your mom planned it that way that she was going to quit and have her son take over --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well --

TOM RIVERA: -- the operation.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- I think maybe she just got tired of having Father Valencia over. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: And was your mom -- let's see. Did she raise the family by herself?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yes, she did, although I remember there was a lady. I can't remember her name, but that -- when I was young, she used to come [00:25:00] and help my mom. I remember she used to do some pressing -- press clothes, sometimes cook. I don't remember. Probably Horaria or Charlotte remember who it was.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, your dad died in 1948?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Uh-huh.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: So from then on, Grandma was alone just raising the family by herself.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and she became just as strict, if not stricter than my dad.  
(laughter) Oh, wow, funny thing of -- oh, she used to pick up the broom if we came in late and boom, boom, boom! Of course, it didn't hurt us any, but yeah, that was kind of -- I remember it, and I have to laugh because here we are 15, 16, 17 years old and we -- you know how we used to hang around and come in late. She used to --

TOM RIVERA: [00:26:00] So she was a --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- pick up that broom...

TOM RIVERA: -- strong person that wanted --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, yeah, very, very strong-willed. Yeah, and she -- well, she didn't really encourage us to -- in education. To her, education was a commitment, and commitments, you hold up to. You carry them out, and that's the way she was. You have to be there at a certain time? Get up and be there.

TOM RIVERA: Be there.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and she had a little problem with one of my sisters, though. I won't say who. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: But -- and she was a tiny woman.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she was, around five one, I guess? Five and something?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No, I don't think she was even five. Four feet eight?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

TOM RIVERA: A tiny woman, really. She was a tiny woman.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And don't forget, as you get old -- [00:27:00] she lost quite a bit of height.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: [She did?].

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: That's true.

TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh. But anyway, she was a good disciplinarian and made sure that you -- all of you towed the line. Otherwise, you get a brooming spank. (laughter) Now, we started talking about your activities. You said you got your start with the church in taking over your mom's position and then also, you did something at the high school with a Mexican American play. And then after that, Ernie, you started many other singing groups.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, I -- it wasn't quite that way. There's a -- I went to Valley College for two years. That's from '55 to '57, and I was very out of it as far as -- [00:28:00] in a maturity level. And I didn't know what I wanted to do. I took up business and tried to be a MB-- what is it, the business...?

TOM RIVERA: MBA?

ERNIE GOMEZ: An MBA. And I didn't like it, so I changed to language, and there, I met Mr. Anton. Remember him?

TOM RIVERA: Roger?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, Roger Anton.

TOM RIVERA: Professor of Spanish.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, and so he was my teacher for four semesters the two years that I was there. And then like I said -- didn't know what I wanted to do, so I joined the Marine Corps where sure enough, they auditioned me and -- on the piano. And then they got me into the band, and for one month, I didn't have much to do as far as the piano was concerned. [00:29:00] They had me on cymbals and the bass drum because you can't carry a piano, of course. And then finally, the director called me into his office and said, "You'll -- Mis-- Ernie --" he didn't call me Ernie; he -- Gomez. He would just call me Gomez. "The general wants some glo-- a glockenspiel in the band." And so I said, "Oh, okay, I can do that," so he -- the band went on leave. January 1, they had to march in the parade, and then they

came back, and they went on leave for a month. And then they gave me all these marches -- about 110 marches, and I had to memorize them, so -- which I did, and that's what I did in the service for three years. And then I came back by that time -- oh, I [00:30:00] wrote and I arranged several things for the band. I learned how to arrange music for a band, and then when I came out, I took all the music -- basic music theory right there at Valley College under Mr. Baldwin. He was the teacher up there. I started taking a little bit more piano, and then I transferred over to Cal State. That's where we were roommates for one year, right?

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, you and I were roommates at Cal State, Los Angeles.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And Rex also; there was three of us. Thank God (laughs) for that.

TOM RIVERA: Ninety bucks a month, and each of us was paid 30.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and I was lucky enough also to get a job. Remember [Nell?], the music library? I used to work in the music library for about 20 hours a week, and [00:31:00] then I took maybe around three quarters of -- or courses. I should -- I didn't take a full schedule because there was a lot of -- piano thing. I had to practice enough to be able to play a recital, a one-hour recital, and -- which I did, and with another person. We both came -- got together, and he was the singer; I was the pianist, and I had -- I gave the piano recital. And after that, I got my master's degree, and I got a job teaching over at Pomona School District, and I taught choir most of the time. And then I taught a little bit of history and then math, but mostly history, so it was a fun time. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: And then you started your choir.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Ah, yeah. What happened is [00:32:00] when I was living in Alhambra, I said, "Well, here, I'm doing all this, and I kind of miss singing," because

I didn't want to lose it, so I joined a group in Los Angeles. It was called The William Hall Chorale. It's no longer there, but they were the -- what is the top car rental?

TOM RIVERA: Hertz?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Hertz.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Hertz?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Hertz.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, we were the Avis of the choir there, (laughs) and that's what our director always said. He used to say -- William Hall is a very good person. We performed in San Gabriel, and in the music center in Orange County, and Glendale. All over the Los Angeles area, and it was a task [00:33:00] because right around that time, I also had a church choir, and then I started the Canto Bello Chorale. So I had two choirs to do, and I used to sing with the William Hall Chorale.

TOM RIVERA: Tell me about the Canto Bello Choir.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay. It started when I was at Immaculate Conception. We had very good singers; about 25 singers, I guess. All of them could -- well, maybe around 90 percent of them could read music, so they could pick up music, and we would be able to sing it and practice and practice, and then perform a concert. We did that for the church, and then around two or three years later, something happened in the scheduling with the bishop, the -- and the diocese that we couldn't charge anymore. And we could -- all that money had to be turned into the church, so we had to call -- give ourselves a name. [00:34:00] And one of the choir members suggested Canto Bella Chorale or Canto Bello Chorale, Italian or Spanish, and so that's what we called ourselves. And we started our own account separate from the church. That was about 1980, 1981, and ever since then, we gave maybe about three concerts a year with -- two of them with orchestra, which is

-- and we had people supporting us. Frank Dominguez was one of our big supporters, and --

TOM RIVERA: And Frank Dominguez was the owner of...?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Vanir Corporation.

TOM RIVERA: Vanir Corporation, big construction company.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, exactly. Yeah, and he's very generous, and so it was a -  
- who was the owner of the meat market here in Colton?

TOM RIVERA: [Caney?].

FRANK ACOSTA: Caney.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Caney also [00:35:00] was. And the construction person?

TOM RIVERA: Matich.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Matich, so they used to support us at that time, Vanir and...

TOM RIVERA: Well, the fascinating thing about your Canto Bella Choir was most of your singers were from Colton. And again, talking about your mom's influence on people from Colton and also the area of music, can you remember any of these people that were in your choir, your Canto Bella Choir?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah. You remember Mar-- well, you probably don't know Margarita Spinoza. She was, I would say, maybe around five feet?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah.

ERNIE GOMEZ: A little lady, and very, very spry, enthusiastic about everything. And she used to have this really nice soprano voice. You don't expect that [00:36:00] from something -- somebody so little. You'd sing, "Happy birthday to --" no, she'd go "Happy birthday to you," and her --

TOM RIVERA: And she was from Colton?

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- soprano voice -- she was from Col-- well, actually, she was -- lived in San Bernardino right where Henry --



TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh. Well, it's --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Maybe a block away from where Henry used to live.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I think they -- were they a Colton family?

ERNIE GOMEZ: They were part of the -- yeah, I think they were.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Originally.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah. And -- but she used to attend that church, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: What about some of the other members? Who else did -- can you remember?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Remember Mr. [Amendola?]

TOM RIVERA: Yes, the principal.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and changed his name later to --

TOM RIVERA: The Unified School District.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- Mr. Amden, right. Him, uh-huh.

TOM RIVERA: Anybody else?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, God.

TOM RIVERA: I think --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Well, Aunt Martha was in it.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Martha.

TOM RIVERA: Your sister.

ERNIE GOMEZ: My sister, Luce, was in there.

TOM RIVERA: How about Dr. Garcia?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Chuck was in there for a short time too.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, Chuck was --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Chuck was in, and I don't know if you...

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No.

ERNIE GOMEZ: No?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I had --

ERNIE GOMEZ: But Chuck was.

FRANK ACOSTA: How about Tony Kelly?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: [00:37:00] Tony Kelly was there.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Tony Kelly. You remember Tony?

TOM RIVERA: Yes, yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, of course you remember Tony Kelly. Well, it's --

TOM RIVERA: Tony [Arandez?] Kelly.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, and --

TOM RIVERA: How about Dr. Garcia, Ernie Garcia?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yes, he was. Well, he wasn't in the church choir, but later on when we changed into the Canto Bello Chorale, he joined us. As a matter of fact, when we were presenting concerts at the church before we came to -- became Canto Bello Chorale, he joined us because we used to sing classical music. And as you know, he loves classical music.

TOM RIVERA: Yes, he lo-- he enjoys singing.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and -- yeah, he do-- and ever since then, he had been singing with me until age -- something happened to -- with his voice that he couldn't sing much, but we tried, so...

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. Anybody else that --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Wasn't [Mark Macaro?] maybe in the choir for -- or the...?

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, Mark, I -- [00:38:00] when we started, we had a little ensemble, and Mark, Martha's son, used to play trombone. And I used to -- I got maybe around four or five high school kids --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I think [Sarah Andon?] was of --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, Sarah Andon.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Was in the --

ERNIE GOMEZ: You remember Sarah?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Flute player?

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, a flute player.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And anyway, I got this little group from the high school, and they accompanied us. And they also played their own --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: But they didn't sing?

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, uh-uh.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No?

ERNIE GOMEZ: No.

TOM RIVERA: But the majority of your choir people were from Colton?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Most of them, yes. Some were from Rialto, and -- let me see -- San Bernardino. Later on, some other people from -- when we became the Canto Bello Chorale, some came from Redlands, San Bernardino, Fontano, Rialto, and Riverside. We were up to around 40 people at that time.

TOM RIVERA: And when was the last [00:39:00] time that you -- that Canto Bello performed? When did you break up or retired?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, (laughs) I retired in 1998, and then we had a series of different conductors. And finally, when the city of San Bernardino went bankrupt -- they're the ones that gave us a start at the beginning of each season because as you might know, a certain percentage of the houses they sell -- I think it's one percent -- they have to donate -- they have to give to the arts groups. And that's where we got a grant from the city, and so that would start us off in our first concert, and then we could also raise money on our own too. That was -- and then when

the city of San Bernardino went bankrupt, well, we went plummeting down  
[00:40:00] too. And it was, I think, last year that was our last concert?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, so recently, then?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, right.

FRANK ACOSTA: And what orchestras did you perform with or what other  
musical groups besides orchestras?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, we used to get members of the -- well, we used to call  
them The San Bernardino Symphony Ensemble, and then the union got to us and  
said, "No, you can't use their name, The San Bernardino Symphony." So we just  
called them Chamber Orchestra (laughs) on -- when we had to make fliers and  
advertise, they were The Chamber Orchestra. And I remember Stuart -- Conductor  
Stuart. Mr. Stuart was symphony director at that time when I was a [00:41:00]  
director of the Canto Bello Chorale, and we would sing the Hallu-- the -- Handel's  
*Messiah* with him or other pieces that he would invite us to. And then we joined  
together with Cal State and had concerts with them. I remember once, Stuart could  
not make it to one of the concerts that they were going to perform in Upland, so  
they -- I hadn't even seen the orchestra music to study it. And you have to know  
what you're doing, and they -- all of the sudden, they told me, "We're on three days  
before. Ernie, we'd like you to direct the orchestra for this concert." Oh, boy,  
(laughs) so there I was. The quickest way I could get acquainted with it is get a  
recording and follow the score and direct. [00:42:00] And then I was able to do it,  
but it was... (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: It was one of those --

ERNIE GOMEZ: I have not --

TOM RIVERA: -- things that you did not expect.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I am not an orchestra person. (laughs) I'm a choir person, but yeah, I had to direct orchestras. But that was only around twice a year, and that was it.

TOM RIVERA: And, Ernie, what are you doing now in the music area?

ERNIE GOMEZ: (laughs) I just retired in August, and I'm not doing hardly anything except working -- trying to get my house -- maybe to sell it one of these days if I ever get done with it. But I substituted -- well, I just last Sunday for the choir director who took my place over in Rancho Cucamonga. And then I'm going to -- maybe for two Saturdays, I'll be -- out of each month, I'll be [00:43:00] just playing and singing like the rest of them at Immaculate because I -- it's the weekends, and I want to have the liberty of going out and enjoying myself going to wherever. And --

TOM RIVERA: Well, this is one of the reasons why I wanted to get together with you, because your mom had a tremendous influence on people from Colton, South Colton, that went on and provided much music to not only the city of Colton and its -- and people that live here, but also they formed their own bands. And they were able to play outside the Colton area, but again, it seems that many of them were influenced by your mom's lessons in music, either piano or voice [00:44:00] or whatever. For example, when I look at the list of all these bands that we had, and we talk about 1916, your uncle, Lupé Luna, was involved with that.

(break in audio)

TOM RIVERA: Ernie, we left off when I was talking about -- mentioning that your mom had a tremendous influence in the music that was developed in South Colton back then. Your -- her brother, Ray Luna --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Lupé.

TOM RIVERA: Lupé Luna.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Lupé Luna, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: And then she married your dad, who was also a musician, and then she had children that she taught music to. And then all those children -- most of them with the oldest brother, Tony, played in various bands in South Colton. For example, I have a list of bands here. In 1940, he played for the Juan Rios Band, and Juan Rios was [00:45:00] one of the people that started the marching band in -- at the -- Wilson Junior High School in 1938, 1939. And your brother was part of the -- was one of the musicians that played during that time. And also, I have another one here: the -- in 1940 also, with the Arturo [Castellano?] Band, and playing the trumpet with the Arturo Castellano Band. And then in 1942, he played with Gabriel, Gabe Castorena, and they called themselves Gabriel's Swingers, and then 1948 with Dick Martinez with his band. And then in 1950, he played with the El [Macero?] Band, and later on, he -- in 1954, he started playing [00:46:00] with The Sal Vasquez Band, so your brothers and your sisters, again, were tre-- contributed tremendously to the -- I think to the foundation of what was built in Colton music. And --

ERNIE GOMEZ: You mentioned so many things right there that I -- at that time, of course, you don't think about this when you're young, all the influence that one person can make. But that was a great deal of effort that my mom put in and, in turn, affected her sons or daughters to be musical and go into the music world in one way or another, and yes, she did have a great deal of influence. And now, of course, I realize that now I'm older, yeah. [00:47:00] So yes, maybe Henry could add something to that.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Well, she was influential in my -- deciding to play the violin. I remember -- I think in fourth grade in San Bernardino, I had started with the E flat alto horn, and I didn't care for it. Well, for one thing, it was big and heavy to me.

When you look at an E flat alto horn now, they look tiny, but I was a small kid, so I didn't like carrying it back and forth. Anyway, I wanted to switch over to violin, and my mom and dad weren't very keen on that. And I remember talking to Grandma, and she said, "Yeah, but it's okay to play the violin." She said that her brother, Lupé, had played the violin in addition to other instruments, so I think [00:48:00] my grandmother's word was -- it made it okay. (laughter)

ERNIE GOMEZ: Superseded whatever your mom and dad said, huh?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, so I was able to start taking violin lessons. And actually, if you remember, Uncle Ernie, you used to take me to --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Your lessons, yeah.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- my lessons over in Rialto with my teacher, Gerald Christensen. He lived off of Foothill in back of -- I don't know if it was a restaurant or something that was called, I think, The Golden Bowl or something like that. Later on, it was taken over by something else, but I remember going to those lessons.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Didn't you have something also in Redlands, lessons? Some -- seems to me like I drove you towards that side.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I don't remember going --

ERNIE GOMEZ: That's --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- to any lessons in Redlands.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah. [Goltz?]. Did your -- was your teacher Goltz at [00:49:00] one time?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No. I di-- I remember him from other stuff, but...

TOM RIVERA: And, Henry, do you have any brothers or sisters?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah. They all, actually, are musical. My brother, Robert, is the most musical. He plays guitar and trumpet, but has been --

(break in audio)

TOM RIVERA: Henry, do you have any brothers and sisters that are also musically inclined?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Right, I was starting to tell you that they're all musicians in various ways. Robert is the most. He started a junior high band back -- probably when he was about an eighth grader, and it was called The Royalistics. And then later on, he progressed into a lot of different ones. I can't remember all of them. Probably the most popular one, when he was in the San Bernardino area, was Horns, Strings "N" Things.

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm, that was in the '70s.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, in the '70s. That was after [00:50:00] he got back from the Air Force, and then he worked in Los Angeles, so was doing stuff out there. He was in a band called The LA Times out there, but then in, I guess, maybe the 2000s, he teamed up with Ron Cabrera and Paul Robles, and they have a trio called The Traveling Homeboys. And they do parties, dances, various kinds of things. Sometimes they add other musicians. He will invite our other cousin, Danny Castro, and sometimes sits in to do the keyboards, and sometimes has other people sit in for other instruments, so...

TOM RIVERA: So most of your other family, your relatives or fam-- are musically [00:51:00] inclined.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah. Well, my sister, Margie, plays the piano and sings; plays the guitar also. And then my brother, David, plays a little bit of piano. He was in a band called The [Fastades?] back in, probably, the '70s, and he was the organ player for that, and then has played the guitar a little bit off and on with different church groups and things. Remember during the years that churches had guitar people come in and sing either folk songs, or in the Mexican choirs, they would do songs in Spanish, and he would help out doing that kind of stuff.



TOM RIVERA: And then besides the violin, Henry, you also play the flute.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, I --

TOM RIVERA: Can you tell us a little bit about that? You got involved with --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: In the '90s, I took up the Native American flute and [00:52:00] started learning a lot of different styles and added a lot of instruments, the Aztec-style clay flutes from Mexico, and then learning how to do some songs with rattle or drum. And I continue to do that to the present.

TOM RIVERA: And you're a retired school teacher. And did you have a music program at your -- in your class?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Well, it was normal for most elementary school teachers to teach singing, so I did that. And I used the piano that we had in the classroom and sometimes used a guitar or mandolin, depending on what kind of song it was we were learning. Frank Acosta had introduced me to some of [00:53:00] the Villancicos, the Spanish Christmas carols, so I remember that occasionally, we would do some of the Spanish Christmas carols. There's one called "Rin Rin" and "Campana Sobre Campana." I don't remember all of them, but we would do that.

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm. Now, I'm looking at the last per-- last band that I have here: 1954, the Bob Velasquez Band. And Bob Velasquez, I understand, is also your relative.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Cousin, I guess, to me.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Yes, to me.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yes, cousin.

TOM RIVERA: Cousin.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Cruz, I think, was probably, I believe, his grandmother. Cruz, which is my mom's sister --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Sister.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- and Cruz had Tomás Velasquez, remember? He used to have a service station right there on La Cadena and, of course, [00:54:00] got married through [Jessie?], and then they had Bobby. Bobby took lessons from my mom and then transferred over to Mrs. [Engle?] to -- remember Mrs. Engle?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Used to put on concerts right there at Colton Park and had two sons. I think both of them played trumpet, and my brother, Tony, and the Engles also used to play in a band, usually involved with the -- in the high school. And they used to play together at one time long ago, (laughs) and --

TOM RIVERA: So Bob Velasquez is related to the Gomez family?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, uh-huh.

TOM RIVERA: And then in his band, Henry, you had Tony Bustos, and he's also related to you. How is he -- Tony Bustos related to you?

ERNIE GOMEZ: That's a little -- maybe around three or four cousins removed, something like that. [00:55:00] And, oh, yeah, I've been trying -- I just remembered something else, but -- (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Go ahead.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- in talking to you, I forgot. It slipped my mind. What it was -- Bob Velasquez also -- I'll tell you, he could've really been a great pianist on con-- the concert level, and he even went over to Chicago School of Music, I believe. It was a conservatory, and for whatever reason -- I don't know -- he didn't -- he came back, and then he started his band, so that was a long time ago. On Lupé Luna -- back to Lupé Luna, Ramón Luna, of course, plays the guitar, and his [00:56:00] son, Ray Luna -- he was in a -- the head in the musical -- "If I were a rich man." What is that?

TOM RIVERA: *Fiddler on the Roof.*

ERNIE GOMEZ: *Fiddler on the Roof.*

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: That's Joe.

ERNIE GOMEZ: He was so good as --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: That was the other brother.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: That was Joe.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Joe Luna.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Joe?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Joe Luna.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, Joe Luna. Ray was -- Ray is the oldest, right?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: He --

ERNIE GOMEZ: No?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Oh, yeah.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I think Ray is the oldest.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Ray, and then Joe.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Joe, and then there's --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Then there's another one that --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Leonard, maybe?

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- I know, but...

FRANK ACOSTA: (inaudible).

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Ray took lessons from Grandma, I think, [or somebody?].

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, Ray took lessons from me. (laughs)

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Oh, from you?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah.

FRANK ACOSTA: And you [have something?] --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, and come to think of it, Chuck took lessons from me, and I just remembered you yesterday because I was working out in my yard. And I had

the radio blasting classical music, and lo and behold, they were playing -- I had him playing that. (laughs)

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: The (inaudible)?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right.

FRANK ACOSTA: Is there an Andy Luna?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Andy Luna? [00:57:00] Yeah, I think there is.

TOM RIVERA: Well, he's a --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I don't know.

TOM RIVERA: Another Luna family's --

ERNIE GOMEZ: He's a different --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Another Luna family?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Another Luna family.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, and he was a musician too at Rialto High School, but anyway, Bob Velasquez -- related to you folks too. And the other band member in the Bob Velasquez band was [Louie?] Hernandez.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, uh-huh. He --

TOM RIVERA: And he's also related to the Gomez family.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, he's -- he would be like Tony Bustos. Tony Bustos and Louie are cousins, but that would put us way -- fourth cousins or something like that. I --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Are they from the Guerrero side?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right --

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- from the Guerrero. And I don't remember exactly how close we are to the Guerreros, so that's why -- fourth cousins or fifth, something like that, but...

TOM RIVERA: But again, it's, again, the influence of the -- of Mama Gomez, [00:58:00] not only on the immediate family, but also extended family members.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, exactly, yeah. One other thing I wanted to mention is Robert used to live with us when he was, oh, one to two years old or something -- or maybe two to four years old for about two years. And at that time, The Sal Vasquez Band used to rehearse at -- in my mama's house, and Robert was there, so he would sit down right behind the band and he'd be -- (laughter)

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Dancing.

ERNIE GOMEZ: He was around three or four years old when we played, and he just -- I guess he liked the way the trumpet sounded. And he -- that's what he used to play, trumpet, and then he took up guitar and maybe other instruments or whatever --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Plays little bits of piano and other keyboard things.

ERNIE GOMEZ: So -- (laughs) but he [00:59:00] was in diapers and had -- I remember it. He had a little red erwin coat or sweater, and he used to be there. He had curly hair like this and... (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Now, did Tony, your oldest brother -- did he -- did any of his children go on and -- became also involved with music?

ERNIE GOMEZ: He -- Jean, Jeanie, and Steve, [Steven?]. Steve passed away maybe around five years ago, more?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: A little more.

ERNIE GOMEZ: More? Yeah, Steven used to play drums, and --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: He was in Combo Azul.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Uh-huh, with --

TOM RIVERA: He was with who, Henry?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Combo Azul --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: He was in Combo Azul.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- with Joe...

TOM RIVERA: Tell me about the -- Combo Azul.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: The Lunas were --

ERNIE GOMEZ: The Lunas -- they --

TOM RIVERA: The -- again, relatives or cousins, your cousins.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Joe and Ray were both in that. And was Leonard in it too?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: No, but Joe...

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, there were other people, [01:00:00] but he was the drummer for Combo Azul.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And then Jeanie --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Jeanie.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- used to play flute.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Flute.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Flute, piccolo --

ERNIE GOMEZ: She played with a group too. Was it Combo Azul?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I don't know. I don't remember her being in the band, but --

ERNIE GOMEZ: The one that Robert was in...

TOM RIVERA: Horns, Strings "N" Things?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Gosh, I don't -- what's the name of the girl that plays piano sometimes?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Angie?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Angie? No, no, no.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Prado.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Prado.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, Elaine?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Elaine, right. Doesn't she play a little bit of piano?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I don't know. I think she --

TOM RIVERA: She sings.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I thought she was --

ERNIE GOMEZ: She sings?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- a singer.

TOM RIVERA: She sings.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, then --

TOM RIVERA: Now, is she related to you?

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- Jeanie used to sing -- I mean play the flute with that group --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, she did, okay.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- that they had at that time.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I didn't know that. I remember she was in the Colton High band

--

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she was.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- because I went to one of their fantasias that they used to have, and she played the piccolo part in the -- [01:01:00] "Stars and Stripes."

TOM RIVERA: But your --

FRANK ACOSTA: Wasn't Anthony also in the band?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Anthony played -- what did he play, the trumpet for a while?

ERNIE GOMEZ: I don't know.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: But he didn't --

ERNIE GOMEZ: I don't recall.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- pursue it for very long.

FRANK ACOSTA: Just while he was in school?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, when he was in school. And as far as I know, [Susie?], Patty, and Arlene didn't learn anything that I remember at least.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And Raul's sons never picked any instrument up that I know of, right?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: As far as I know.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, Charlotte. Charlotte's son -- Charlotte, my sister -- her son, Danny, was a pianist and took from Mrs. Engle. And later on, she -- he, of course, attended the -- UCLA, and he got his doctorates from UCLA. And he is now head of the school of arts [01:02:00] in Los Angeles, which is right next to Cal State LA. It -- remember the theater is here, and you remember that -- how it was?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay. Up right next to it is that school.

TOM RIVERA: And it's a school for...?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Arts.

TOM RIVERA: For the arts?

ERNIE GOMEZ: School of -- Los Angeles School of Arts or something. It's got a -- I can't remember the exact title, but anyway, he's head of the music department there, and he's doing very well. I've seen him --

TOM RIVERA: And how is he related to you, Ernie?

ERNIE GOMEZ: He's my nephew. (laughs) All these things that we're remembering now --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: He's a Castro. Remember we talked about the guy that does the Colton web -- or what do you call the --

FRANK ACOSTA: Armando?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Armando, yeah. So Dan --

TOM RIVERA: What's his last name?



HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Castro, Armando Castro. Danny is a [01:03:00] first cousin to us, but he's also a first cousin to Armando.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Now, he used to play there at -- in the garage right with other -- a group of other people. What name was that?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, you mean that band? That was the one --

ERNIE GOMEZ: What band was that?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Ron's?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Rock bands.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: A rock band. What was the name of their group, Mandalay?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Mandalay Mestizo, and Steve was in that band too --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, yeah --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: -- my brother.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- Steve was in that band too. I forgot.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And Dan used to play.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: A bit.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Dan -- he --

FRANK ACOSTA: And he -- the first group -- the first name, first -- I think I can't remember the name, but --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: It's Mandalay Mestizo.

FRANK ACOSTA: Two later.

ERNIE GOMEZ: That was --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, Ro-- Chuck's brother, Ron, is a guitarist also, and he's in a new band now, isn't he, or something?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: No, he's with the Prados right now.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, he's with the Prados?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

ERNIE GOMEZ: It's not the other one that he was talking about, the one he first joined, the -- well, last year or two years ago?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Now that he retired, [01:04:00] he's moved to the Prado band that he joined.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, it's probably more stable.

TOM RIVERA: Now, are you related to the Prados?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No.

TOM RIVERA: Okay, because the Prado -- Zeke Prado was a dad and --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Gomez was -- what's the name of the lawyer?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Eloise?

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, no, no, in San Bernardino.

TOM RIVERA: Eloise?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Some -- no, no, she's -- he supports; it's a he. It's a brother of a Prado from the gal. What is the gal's name again?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Elaine?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Elaine.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Elaine? Okay.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: One of her brothers?

TOM RIVERA: David is a brother.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And then --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: David is her brother.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And the mother, Elaine's mother, used to sing in my church choir. And it -- [01:05:00] what is her name? I can't remember it right off, but her brother is -- used to work with the symphony and Symphony Americana as well. Gomez is his last name.

TOM RIVERA: Graciano?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Graciano! Right, Graciano. That's Elaine's uncle. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Everybody's related.

ERNIE GOMEZ: It's kind of interwoven.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: The whole world is related.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. Ernie, when you were growing up in Colton, were you aware that we were a segregated community, and that it was by de facto segregation that everybody said, "Well, that's the way it is," and everybody went along with it? Were you aware that there were things that happened politically or at school or socially, or during your high school years, that you would [01:06:00] feel that there's something different going on here?

ERNIE GOMEZ: You mean then or now?

TOM RIVERA: Then, back then.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Then? Oh, yeah --

TOM RIVERA: When you were growing up.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- I was very much aware. I was wondering, "Why do they send us over here?" And I had some friends of mine in the neighborhood -- I don't know if you remember Louie Flores and his sister, Mary Flores, but anyway, they used to go to Lincoln School. And --

TOM RIVERA: Which is the north side of Colton.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Uh-huh, and then we used to go to Garfield, you see. And I was wondering, "Well, why is that?" I -- nobody can tell me except they were -- that's the way.

TOM RIVERA: That's the way it is.

ERNIE GOMEZ: That's the way they go, and Rudy Ramos was the same way. He got to go to -- what [01:07:00] was the other school?

TOM RIVERA: Grant?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Grant School from -- yeah, Grant School, and he could -- they learned to speak English very, very well. And something like -- some of us over in South Colton -- we had an accent, but then these two friends of mine, Louie and Mary -- they used to make fun of me when I was -- (laughs) so I corrected everything. And so yeah, well, it was a lot easier for me to pick up English and speak with a -- try to speak without a accent.

TOM RIVERA: Besides language, any other things that you noticed during those years?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, yeah. One time, we went into -- you remember there used to be -- you remember where Brill's Shoe Store was?

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay. Right next to it, there was a soda fountain. Do you remember the soda fountain?

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm.

ERNIE GOMEZ: We stopped there -- we used to stop there and -- [01:08:00] to order soda or a float, a root beer float, and one time, we just sat there, and nobody would come and serve us. They were serving everybody else there.

TOM RIVERA: How old were you?

ERNIE GOMEZ: We were in high school, walking back from high school, so it must've been -- maybe I was a 10th grader or something. And finally, after a few -- 15, 20 minutes, I got up and -- "We have not been served." They said, "I'll be with you in a minute," and le-- but I -- that was very noticeable, or the fact -- do you remember -- and you probably remember this -- when they used to sit us on the left side of the theaters and Anglos on the right side? Yeah, we went through that, and the pool thing. I don't know. It's...

TOM RIVERA: So you did notice those differences of treating you?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, and [01:09:00] I was surprised that we -- I could get along with -- when we went to high school, there was a big jolt going from junior high school over to high school. Most of them were Anglo at that time, so -- but having said that --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: [Just one minute?].

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- we had a very, very good time, good music, good everything.

TOM RIVERA: Which really brings me to my last question, Ernie, and re-- what was the best thing that you remember about growing up in Colton? What was your best memory of growing up in Colton?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, I think it was the people and how helpful they were towards each other. I believe that's the way a community should be, and that's the way it was at that time. Ever since they knocked the buildings down in --

TOM RIVERA: The redevelopment.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- the city of Colton, well, things just [01:10:00] went to pot, but I remember that good part about the community spirit that they had.

TOM RIVERA: And you still live in Colton?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yes, I do. [Of all the things?], I came back (laughs) after living in Alhambra, and I came back to Colton.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. For you, Henry, what was the last that you remember? You're kind of a bordered little person. You lived on the border of Colton and San Bernardino. What is the best memory that you have?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Just basically the same thing. It's togetherness, family togetherness, and just respect for traditions. That's what I remember the most.

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm. Well, listen, thank you so much for this interview this afternoon. Maybe --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Thank you, Tom.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Thank you.

TOM RIVERA: My objective was to talk about your mom, and that your mom was really a cornerstone [01:11:00] for many of the music training and influence that we got here in South Colton, so thank you very much for being with us this afternoon.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, thank you.

(break in audio)

TOM RIVERA: We thought we were through with our interview this afternoon. However, after we shut down the camera, I was reminded that Margarita was quite a renaissance person because she was -- she dabbled in many, many things, and Henry, you bought -- you brought a piece of work from her. Now, what is this, Henry?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: This is a piano cover that she gave me when I bought my upright piano. And I invited her to come over, and she played the piano a little bit and liked it. And then when we got back to the house -- to her house at 10th and M, she said, "Quiero regalarte algo." I said, "Oh, okay." And she was looking through some drawers, and she brought [01:12:00] this out, and it's kind of like a runner that you put on the top. And it has -- the fringe is crocheted because that was one of the things that she did, and she did very beautiful crochet work.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, she would be making -- at that time, they were these little jackets made out of crochet -- what do you call them?

LILY RIVERA: A vest?

ERNIE GOMEZ: A vest. It was -- yeah, I guess it would be a vest.

FRANK ACOSTA: Should I get it?

ERNIE GOMEZ: And she made several of them and baby cl-- hat -- caps, and the rest of the vestments that they wore. She would make all of that, and then she

would also make this type of thing for churches, but she made something like this and big -- [01:13:00] a bit larger than these, and all the way around for a large table. She made around two or three of them. They may still have some of them over at Immaculate, and maybe San Salvador [doesn't anymore?].

TOM RIVERA: They must've used that as a cover for the altar?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Right, uh-huh, exactly.

TOM RIVERA: And then you sa-- you also mentioned that she was quite a cook.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, (laughs) tamales.

TOM RIVERA: Chuck, can you kind of enlighten us on that?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Well, I just remember all the tamale making on Christmas Eve and...

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, generally, they would get together maybe around three or four days before Christmas and make tamales. And of course, it was a community thing, and she would tell them what to do and how much of the mole to make, and wash the chiles [01:14:00] at -- all of this. She would give all of these directions --

TOM RIVERA: So it became a family tradition, then.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, it is.

TOM RIVERA: And I understand that you still continue that, Ernie.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, the --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, I actually --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: -- rosary and epiphany and...

ERNIE GOMEZ: Now, we have the Nacimiento that she started, and we -- that's what she used to do every Christmas. We used to go out to Highland and cut these branches, evergreen branches, and that was one day before the 24th, on the 23th, and put the Nacimiento together with these branches. Raul would make the frame,

and we would put up -- they would put up the branches, and then I would decorate the -- just put the -- all the statues on the -- and with a background. I still have one of the backgrounds, and that -- I use it. It's a -- just a big star and then kind of a night scene with Bethlehem.

TOM RIVERA: And tell me what you do to carry on that tradition at your house.

ERNIE GOMEZ: That's the [01:15:00] very same thing we did, only a little bit more -- well, larger than -- because we have so many in the family, I think I've had up to around 80 people at my house. The -- what we do -- we pray the rosary like we used to do and sing -- well, we used to sing Mexican hymns.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: And pray the rosary in Spanish originally.

ERNIE GOMEZ: In Spanish, exactly. And then I tried to do the same thing in Span-- when I did it over at my house after my mom had passed away, and nobody wanted to do it in Spanish, so we had to do everything in English from then on. And we used to sing, "Vamos castores, vamos. Vamos a Belen a ver en ese niño, la gloria de Belen, a ver en ese niño, la gloria de Belen." [01:16:00] That was one of the songs we used to sing, and now, I can't sing it because we know it -- "O Come, All Ye Faithful," the regular hymns that we do, Christmas music. But -- and then after that, we have the tamales, then we'd go off to mass for midnight mass, and that was what we did.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: And the things we remember as kids, right, Henry, is --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, that was not on Christmas Eve. That was January the sixth.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: The epiphany, mm-hmm.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, the epiphany, my Magi thing. And they used to call it La Ventana El Niño, and they would rock him back and forth. And my mom would say, "Toca al piano," and I would play the same thing we used this Christmas.



HENRY VÁSQUEZ: "A la Ru?"

ERNIE GOMEZ: "Ru, ru, ru --" very simple tune. "Duerméte chiquito, duermé niño [01:17:00]," and we sang it, yeah.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: My great-nephew participated in this epiphany -- in that, so it's kind of neat. He's only two --

ERNIE GOMEZ: It is, yeah.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: -- years old.

ERNIE GOMEZ: But he's a smart kid. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Chuck, what's the impression that the young people get when they attend the activity that Ernie has?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: I think they think about the tradition and, if their parents have taught them, that they went through this whole thing too, that it's something that's continuing.

TOM RIVERA: And so it's --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: It's a lot of fun.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, they become part of the family tradition, then?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Yes, mm-hmm.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. And somebody also mentioned that your mom and -- your grandma, Henry, was quite a gardener. That's --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, yeah, [01:18:00] both -- my mom learned it from my grandmother, but they kept prize roses. Usually, they would -- roses have to be grown in a certain place where they get enough sunlight. And then my grandmother had camellias that need a little more shade, and then she had the cannas, the -- we call them [berigos?] in Spanish.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Canna lilies, uh-huh.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: And then --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Sorry.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- geraniums. Oh yeah, a lot of different kinds of geraniums, the ones that are kind of ruffled and the plainer ones, but they come in pink, red, different colors of purple, lavender. Just very beautiful.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Amaryllises also.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, yeah, the amaryllises are big.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And at one time -- what do you call the lily that's white? They [01:19:00] used to use them for Christmas all the time.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, the --

LILY RIVERA: Calla lily?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: The calla lily?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Calla lily? Yeah, calla lilies, right, the white one.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, my mom had those, and Grandma had them. I was just thinking of another plant -- oh, the irises. Grandma had her irises in the backyard, and my mom found a place in her garden for irises, but my mom took it to kind of an exaggerated level, traveling all over the place. And I used to go with her once in a while. We would come to Loma Linda, and there was a place called The Valley's End Iris Garden with some guy named Mr. Angel that sold the irises there, and then we would go to Yucaipa. There was another place that sold irises or maybe amarillas. That was fun going all over the place, [01:20:00] but my mom had so many plants, and it was -- it became difficult later on when she was getting ill, so she wasn't able to maintain her garden anymore. And unfortunately, now almost all of them are gone, but through the influence of Grandma Gomez, that's where it all started. Oh, and even plants -- medicinal plants or med-- or plants that just smelled good, stuff like yerba buena and --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Lemon verbena.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Lemon verbena.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And ruta, that stinky plant, remember? Do you -- have you ever heard of that?

TOM RIVERA: Mm-mm.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: La ruta? Yeah, it's for ear problems.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Have you, Lily?

LILY RIVERA: Yeah, I have.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Ruta?

LILY RIVERA: Yes, mm-hmm.

ERNIE GOMEZ: For earaches, they used to stick them in your ears, and --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: And you're supposed to crumble --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- I don't know why they did that, but...

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- the leaf and stick it in your ear, and it's supposed to draw, I guess, moisture out of your ear so it helps you get over your ear problem.

[01:21:00]

ERNIE GOMEZ: But it draws a lot of flies. I remember that. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: And then you mentioned that even though your grandma retired, she was still active in music and going to various churches to pre-- to help out or give lessons or just help out with the services.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, that's right. I had forgotten -- she would take her little group that was a lot of family members, but some other friends like -- maybe Rosemary Colunga and Natalie Colunga. And we would go and sing "Las Mañanitas" very early in the morning on the day of the 12th of December for La Virgen de Guadalupe. Sometimes it was still dark. (laughs) It was -- and it was cold.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Sometimes Father Valencia wouldn't wake up in time, so we had to wait and wait. [01:22:00] Yeah, I remember Chuck and Father Ray Rosales -- remember Ray Rosales?

TOM RIVERA: Yes, he's also related to you.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah. They used to sing with my mom. It was all boys, wasn't it, that --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: It was, I think, Danny [Mercado?] also, and me and Ray Luna.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Ray Luna, so it was four of you.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, we used to go to two churches. Not in Colton, but...

TOM RIVERA: Well, what churches did they go to, Chuck?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Highgrove, it was up in Highgrove.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Highgrove.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I don't remember the name of --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I think it --

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- the church.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- was Our Lady of Guadalupe in Highgrove.

ERNIE GOMEZ: That's right, it was.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: And that might've been the same thing in Belltown in -- over there kind of...

ERNIE GOMEZ: That's west of -- West Riverside.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: West Riverside, yeah.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, it's a tiny little church.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Not too far away from Fairmount Park -- kind of north of Fairmount Park.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, with Father Cerezo.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, with Father Cerezo?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: She -- he got her out of retirement, I guess. [01:23:00] I don't know where they met, but probably the...

ERNIE GOMEZ: Well, I think they used to -- even when my mom was still with Father Valencia, I think my -- once in a while, Father Cerezo would call her to come for something special [a while?].

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Now, did he have a parish in Cucamonga maybe?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Rancho Cucamonga? Well, Cucamonga or --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: It wasn't back then.

ERNIE GOMEZ: It wasn't Rancho, no.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: It wasn't Rancho. It was just Cucamonga.

ERNIE GOMEZ: It was --

TOM RIVERA: Cucamonga.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It was surrounded by grapevines at that time a long time ago.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: It's probably not there anymore, I guess.

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, it's there.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, it's still there?

ERNIE GOMEZ: It's still there, yep, so it --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: But it's not surrounded by grapevines. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Houses now.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Houses?

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. Also, you mentioned that your mom's parents are -- were buried in Agua Mansa.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Agua Mansa, yeah.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, Tomás and Juana Luna, and then [01:24:00] Tía Cruz is buried there. And there's one other sister, but I don't remember her name.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I don't either.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: You can't remember it?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Maybe I'll ask Charlotte to-- if she remembers, but the thing is that due to a lot of vandalism that went on 40, 50 years ago, we lost track of where they're buried. I think someone said they knew where your grandmother was.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I know where Juana's is because the marker's -- a piece of the marker is still there now.

ERNIE GOMEZ: But it doesn't say her name.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, no, it --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Does it?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: -- says her name.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Juana?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: It says Juana Luna.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Juana Luna?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Yeah, and --

ERNIE GOMEZ: How about Grandfather?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: His is not -- his marker's gone, and I had heard from Gabby and Eleanor that it was right next to it, but then I heard more recently that his was a little [01:25:00] bit -- maybe five spaces away. Did you -- are you the one that told me that? No? Somebody told me that Tomás' grave is a little bit farther away.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I just wanted to know because I went over there, and I couldn't locate them.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: I can che-- yeah, in fact, I was going to make an appointment with you to go over that, and we've never done it.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, that's right. We talked about that, and one who would know is [Benini?] -- not Valdez. He lives at -- in Tía Cuca's house on Fifth Street.

He would remember except he now is in a wheelchair, I believe, and I don't know.

He's been ill.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: He can't get around?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, he can't get around anymore. I should've gotten him bef-- way before. I think he knew, and so did Johnny Valdez. [01:26:00] He would know --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: He would've known.

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- or known.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Now, on my dad's side of the family -- and I know this is not part of the interview, but I think four of his brothers and sisters are buried at Agua Mansa. His brother, Santiago, who was the first one born in the United States from his family, is buried there. The oldest sister, one who had died somewhere maybe around 1919 or '20, somewhere around there -- her name was Lupé, and she's buried there. Later on after she died, when another daughter was born, they named her Lupé also kind of maybe to replace the Lupé who had passed away. And there was another sister by the name [01:27:00] of Carolina that is buried there, and she only lived to be maybe about eight or something? Do you know, Chuck?

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Mm-hmm, she died --

ERNIE GOMEZ: So could you --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: -- (inaudible).

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- locate all of these? Were you able to?

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: No. My dad remembered where they were, but by the time that I was trying to find out, he said, "No, I don't remember anymore." And now -- he wasn't able to walk around very much anymore the last few years of his life, so we never did locate them, but they were more in the center part of the...

TOM RIVERA: Cemetery.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Graveyard, yeah, rather the -- Tomás and Juana Luna, and Tía Cruz, and the other one I can't remember. They're buried more in the northeastern section.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Very good.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, and there's one other sister: a baby, Esperanza, [01:28:00] that was my dad's very youngest sister that is also buried there, but there's no way of knowing exactly where. And then I don't remember -- when did they close the burials at Agua Mansa? Was it in the '30s or '40s?

FRANK ACOSTA: Nineteen sixty-three.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: Sixty-three.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, '63?

FRANK ACOSTA: I think it is.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Oh, okay. Well, I guess by then, a lot of people had already decided to be buried at Hermosa.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, my dad was buried --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: At Hermosa?

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- in Hermosa in 1948. I just remembered that -- you were talking about your dad. I don't know what funeral we went to, but it was your dad that had the rope and pail, and he lowered down to the séquia --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Really?

ERNIE GOMEZ: -- to get water, yeah.

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: At Agua Mansa?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: At Agua Mansa.

TOM RIVERA: Well, tell -- Ernie, tell about the séquia.

ERNIE GOMEZ: The séquia?



TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh. It was a little --

ERNIE GOMEZ: [01:29:00] The canal. It was a little canal that went right next to -- and it's still there --

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: But it's covered in --

ERNIE GOMEZ: It's covered, yeah, and we used to go down there and get water. And (laughs) you reminded me of another canal, the one over in Blue Mountain?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: There's a canal down there.

TOM RIVERA: [Champion?].

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, Cham-- okay, and we used to go swimming there. I'd go across Cooley Ranch, and I used to go with a friend of mine. Remember Jesse Rivera?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: And I -- [Falinca?], Phil Gonzalez.

TOM RIVERA: Phil Gonzalez.

ERNIE GOMEZ: We used to call him Falinca, and we used to cross through the Cooley Ranch. And once, they -- one time, they took shots at us because they thought we were stealing. We were just coming across their property to get to the canal, but we used to go swimming down there at one time, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: And the canal was open at that time.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, it was open.

TOM RIVERA: Beautiful [01:30:00] water, clean water.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, exactly. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Uh-huh. Cold, but very nice.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Oh, and you remember when we were ki-- young too -- remember the fountain they -- in -- when there used to be a Downtown Colton at the corner of Eighth Street and Valley? I think it was either at Citizens National Bank or Bank of America. There used to be a fountain there coming out of a spring, free flowing. That water was the best water we had, and it was not contaminated or in any -- like it is now. And they didn't put any Clorox whatever... (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: I don't remember that, Ernie. Exactly where was it located?

ERNIE GOMEZ: It was just a brick-built thing -- fountain, and then it had just continuous water flowing from the spring.

TOM RIVERA: It was located where?

ERNIE GOMEZ: At the corner of Valley and Eighth Street, which is La Cadena.

[01:31:00] It was on the north --

TOM RIVERA: Downtown Colton.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, right on -- northwest col-- corner.

FRANK ACOSTA: It's Eighth and I.

ERNIE GOMEZ: No, Eighth and Valley.

FRANK ACOSTA: I Street.

ERNIE GOMEZ: I Street.

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: At that time.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Exactly, at that time. I should've said I Street, right. You remember that?

TOM RIVERA: I don't remember the fountain, but you --

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay, you remember there used to be -- I guess it was Citizens. Anyway, there was two banks; one on each side. One was Bank of America, the other one was Citizens, and it was right on the corner. And you could

just go over there and drink water, yeah... And I should go on. Remember there's around two or three bars? Oh, yeah, I used to go play -- remember Linko's?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Okay. I used to -- after I got out of the service, I used to hang around with Jesse Rivera and Phil and others, and I used to go in there and play the piano. They used to have a piano bar, [01:32:00] and that was fun. (laughter)  
All these things, you're making me remember.

TOM RIVERA: Well, I was going to ask you what are -- what did you do to entertain yourselves, and that was one of the things that you did.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, that's it.

TOM RIVERA: Go swimming in the canal and also go play at Linko's.  
(laughter)

ERNIE GOMEZ: What else? You see, you don't expect these things that happen, so -- because we were just talking about playing in the church and then at concerts and stuff. But all of these things -- people grow up with these, and I was one of them. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Now, is there anything else that I missed?

ERNIE GOMEZ: Probably, I'm sure, but --

CHUCK VÁSQUEZ: But we are all missing it, so...

ERNIE GOMEZ: But I guess we're missing it up here. At least I am. (laughs)

HENRY VÁSQUEZ: Lily, did you have any other recollections?

TOM RIVERA: Well, again, thank you so much for [01:33:00] being with us this afternoon, and we thoroughly appreciate you taking time off to be with us and help us do some preservation of our history of Colton. Thank you.

ERNIE GOMEZ: Yeah, thank you, Tom, for inviting.

**End of Interview:**

[01:33:15]