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Sammy Hernandez and Fernando Rodriguez

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South Colton Oral History Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Fernando Rodriguez, Sammy Hernandez

Interviewer:

Tom Rivera, Cesar Caballero

Interview Date:

September 18, 2014

Interview Location:

San Bernardino, CA

Length:

01:35:31

Interview Summary completed by:

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:

In this interview, Tom Rivera with some aid from Cesar Caballero, interviews two men with origins in Colton. The two men, Sammy Hernandez and Fernando Rodriguez are from different generations but have become close friends. Rodriguez begins the interview with some family history with Hernandez adding comments. Hernandez then talks about the store that was originally run by his family. Both men also discuss the times of picking oranges, the trouble of living in poverty and running stores in a low-income community. Rivera asks the men about the lives that they had at the time of the interview, to which they explain the family loss and the then-current family reunions. The interview ends with Rodriguez and Hernandez talking about the jobs they had in their lives and more memories they had as children in South Colton.

Subject Topic:

- Businesses
- Family
- Community Strength
- School
- World War II & The Korean War
- Segregation/Racism
- Local Sports Teams
- The Church

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
John M. Pfau Library	5500 University Pkwy, San Bernardino, CA 92407

Aguascalientes	City/State In Mexico
La Esperanza Market	Colton, CA (Defunct Location)
The Martinez Bakery	Corner of 7th and M Street in Colton, CA (Defunct Location)
Smith Packing House	San Bernardino, CA (Defunct Location)
Ulysses Grant Elementary School	550 W Olive St, Colton, CA 92324
Roosevelt Junior High	Colton, CA (Defunct Location)
Colton High School	777 W Valley Blvd, Colton, CA 92324
Caldera Plunge	Colton, CA (Defunct Location)

Temporal Coverage:

Add date span (what years talked about)

1896 - 2014

Key Events:

- The history of both families and their connections.
- Running a store in a low-income neighborhood.
- Drafting South Colton men for World War II and the Korean War.
- Working in construction and electrical work.
- Keeping alive family history through reunions and discussions.
- Playing outside then versus current day.

Key Organizations:

- Portland Cement Plan
- Pan American Club
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
- South California Edison
- Los Trabajadores Unidos/The Unions

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:00:54 - 00:03:51	Rodriguez's grandfather's journey to the United States and eventually opening his own business.
Digital Video	00:18:19 - 00:19:38	The focus on the store, even during a church day and how it focused around community needs.

Digital Video	00:24:39 - 00:29:17	Making deliveries to houses, seeing poverty, and how Rodriguez's grandfather created community bathrooms.
Digital Video	00:38:25 - 00:40:17	Entertainment in the barrio of South Colton in earlier times.
Digital Video	01:16:56 - 01:26:22	Rodriguez and explaining the book "Recollections and Reflections, Volume Three, South Colton" and talking about memories with family.

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 morning, I'm Dr. Tom Rivera. It's September 18, 2014 and it's approximately 9:30 this morning. With us this morning, we have the dean of the Pfau Library Mr. Cesar Caballero. Cesar, welcome.

CESAR CABALLERO: Thank you.

TOM RIVERA: Thank you very much for being with us. Our guests today are Mr. Fernando Rodriguez. Fernando, welcome to our interview this morning.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Good morning.

TOM RIVERA: It's good to have you here. Also, we're delighted to have Sammy Hernandez.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Thank you.

TOM RIVERA: Sammy is Fernando's cousin, and they were gracious enough to be with us this morning after I called Fernando and said, "Fernando, would you do us a big favor and interview with us because we'd like to talk about the businesses in Colton?" Your grandfather was one of the few people that had a business in Colton. He started [00:01:00] the grocery store in the early 1900s. Can you tell us about your grandfather? Where was he from and when did he come to Colton?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: He was from Aguascalientes, Mexico.

TOM RIVERA: Y ¿cómo se llamaba? Sorry, ¿cómo se --?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Victor Rodriguez. I don't think he had a middle name, just Victor Rodriguez. He came here prior to the turn of the century. He married my grandmother, Manuela Ramirez. About three years later after they were married, they had enough money to buy a piece of property and that's where

they decided to build the store.

TOM RIVERA: Where was he born in Mexico?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Aguascalientes.

TOM RIVERA: Aguascalientes?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

TOM RIVERA: What year? Do you remember or do you know?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: No, I don't. He came here when he was 11 years old, him and his uncle.

TOM RIVERA: What year was that?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I don't know the exact year, but it was --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He was born in 1896.

TOM RIVERA: Eighteen ninety-six?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: [00:02:00] Eighteen eighty-six.

TOM RIVERA: Eighteen eighty-six.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: That's correct because I visited the tombstone.
That is correct, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: So he came here in the late 1890s.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Eighty nineties.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, he was 11.

TOM RIVERA: Why did he come to Colton?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Actually, he and his uncle first came to Highland, California where they settled with some family, the Ramos family. And then later on he got a job at the Colton Portland Cement plant, so he moved over closer to the job. I guess that's when he met my grandmother.

TOM RIVERA: So he had moved to Colton and worked for the cement plant.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: He worked there for 45 years.

TOM RIVERA: And he met your grandmother. While he was working at the Portland Cement plant, he got the idea of starting the grocery store?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I think that idea had been in his head, had been a dream of his way before the Colton Portland Cement plant. [00:03:00] I think that's one of the reasons why he migrated here in the first place. He had those visions, like many people do. It became a reality because of his persistence.

TOM RIVERA: Well, you said he bought a piece of property. Is that where he built his store?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: That's exactly where he built the store, right on the corner of Sixth and O Street adjacent to the Santa Fe railroad tracks.

TOM RIVERA: Did he start from the foundation on up and put up the walls and everything?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: (laughs) He built it block by block by hand with the familia because the familia was all centrally located right there. Like Sammy mentioned earlier, my great-grandmother had 10 kids and they had their children so there was abundant help right there. Like it was in the old days, the familia was so close that whenever anybody wanted to do something the family pitched in. That's how the store got started.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: His grandfather never went to school. He could build anything. There was nothing he couldn't do. [00:04:00] Carpentry, plumbing, electrical, he did it all, everything. I don't know how he did it.

TOM RIVERA: Self-taught.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: No schooling but he was just one of these -- every place he ever built had a basement, and he dug it by hand.

CESAR CABALLERO: Really? Wow, amazing.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: After the store got going -- and actually, this

became later when the Enciso family came into the picture and then my Tia Juanita and Tio Cuco Rochin were involved in the store also. He started to build little apartments on the property. Again, he built everything from scratch. He started to get tenants there on the different rental units. Eventually, he finished off the house where he and my grandma lived at the very back of the property. He was a very sharp guy, very business-minded, and he'd just keep [00:05:00] helping people. People needed things, and that's what he did. He helped people. That was his main concern.

TOM RIVERA: How did he help them?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Well, when people were migrating in pursuit of their dreams, the railroad tracks became a highway, if you will, and they would come on the railroad cars. The train would stop there before it went into the yard in San Bernardino, so they would get off the cars. My grandfather saw them and he related to their journey, and so he would feed them. He would talk to them. He would put them to work and feed them, give them a little bit of money if they needed money. He was always helping them. It became a fact to those people that were on that journey that there was a place. That place became Esperanza Market.

TOM RIVERA: Is this where the name Esperanza comes from?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: No, actually the name [00:06:00] Esperanza -- that was the very first name of the store. But as it turns out, it relates because it means hope. And that's exactly what they did for, I would say, thousands of people over the years that stopped there for a little sandwich or a glass of water.

CESAR CABALLERO: And they were coming from different places?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Different places. I'd say most of them -- the ones I saw were, I'm going to say, Latino because all I heard was Spanish. I was a little kid. But all the conversations were in Spanish, so I'm just saying they were

Mexicans just like us, in search of their dreams as well.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: When his grandfather married his grandmother, he was already a settled man. He had built his own house, had a job. In other words, he wasn't 20 years old. He was already focused on what he wanted. He was 26 years old. He was 11 years older than his grandmother, but [00:07:00] he was settled. He had a job. He had a house. What else could you do? He had a job.

TOM RIVERA: Well, you mentioned, Sammy, that he had a job. Who ran the store, Fernando?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Well, during the day, my grandmother would run the store and take care of the kids simultaneously. And then when my grandfather came home from work, he would run the store in the evening and my grandmother would go in the back. She'd make dinner for the kids and do the things that families do. When the kids got older, it got a little bit tougher for my grandmother to take care of the kids because now the kids aren't -- I mean, they're all over the place. It was harder to run the store. And at the same time, the Depression was showing its face. It made it difficult for them to run the business. My grandfather didn't want to leave the security of the cement plant because [00:08:00] that was a job.

CESAR CABALLERO: Regular pay.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Regular pay, a regular paycheck. They had a decision to make, and that's where the Enciso family comes in. They made a deal and they ran the store. I think they leased the store to them for a couple of years until they left there. I forget what year it was. They stayed for a couple years. After that, my Tia Juanita came in and my Tio Rochin, Refugio Rochin. They ran the store, I think, until 1938. In 1938, they left to go to Oceanside, California to open their own market. At that time, that's where Estevan and Mariana come into the picture.

TOM RIVERA: Going back to your grandpa and his family, how many kids did he have?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: First of all, there was Juanita. She was nicknamed La Reina because she was the queen, not only at the house there but also of many [00:09:00] of the fiestas they had in the barrio. She was the entertainer in the community, so everyone knew her. Everyone knew her as La Reina. After La Reina was -- let me go back a little bit. She had five kids. Then there was Manuel, my Tio Manuel. Later on when he grew older, he would make deliveries also. Go to LA, pick up merchandise not only for my grandfather and Rochin and Juanita but also for my Tio Steve. He started a business in the produce. Eventually when he got older, he came back to Colton and settled. He opened up R&O Mexican Food Products right there on La Cadena right close to the original property. And he had eight children. After him was my [00:10:00] dad, Victor. Victor married my mom, Carmen. There were four of us. Then there was Antonio. Antonio died at a very young age. He was eight years old. And the last one was Antonietta.

CESAR CABALLERO: Is R&O still functional?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: No. My uncle passed away. When he passed away, so did the R&O business.

TOM RIVERA: You mentioned Juanita. Her son wrote a wonderful story about her.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, it's beautiful.

TOM RIVERA: Beautiful story that he wrote about her.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: (inaudible).

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. You mentioned that she was known as La Princesa. She could sing and dance and entertain people at the Fiestas Patrias, and she took

music lessons from Mrs. Margarita Gomez.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, she did.

TOM RIVERA: She took lessons from Mrs. Margarita Gomez. We have one of her family members, one of her grandsons here, Henry Vasquez. I think Margarita was [00:11:00] one of the people that was a cornerstone for many of the people that took music in Colton.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, yes, she was. She gave lessons in her house. She must've given so many lessons because the teclas were all worn off. The ivory was worn off. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, and then she also did a lot of work for the Catholic Church.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: And then the older boy played. What was his name? Tony? He played trumpet.

CESAR CABALLERO: Oh, really?

TOM RIVERA: Tony played trumpet, yeah. They were all musicians. The family was all musicians.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Musical family.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Very, very musically inclined.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: After my Tio Rochin and Juanita opened the market, they also opened a restaurant. It was called the Acapulco Restaurant. It was right on Pacific Coast Highway in Oceanside. That became a very popular place. She would play the piano during the dinner set and sing and just entertain the people during dinner.

TOM RIVERA: Getting back to the early years when she was maybe 15 or 16, she [00:12:00] went to Redlands. And there was this young man, Refugio Rochin, that saw her, and lo and behold, se enamoraron. They couldn't stay away from

each other, so she eloped. How did she -- Sammy, go ahead and continue your story about Juanita.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My mother told me that she matured very young. When she was 12, 13 years old, she was already a grown woman. The other girls stayed like little girls but she was very light complected and very beautiful. And being the first [grandson?], her father doted on her, [dressed her very nice?]. he had a job. When they eloped, they wound up in -- where did they go? Mexicali or something.

TOM RIVERA: Tell us how she eloped that night. Fernando, you mentioned that she pretended --

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I don't know the story of when [00:13:00] she eloped. I just know that they were in -- was it Brawley?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Brawley.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: They had the store in Brawley that my Tio Refugio Rochin started. That's where they stayed. They didn't dare come home because my grandfather was not too happy at all with Refugio's moves. Eventually, he talked Refugio Rochin -- this is when the transition took place from the Enciso family to the Rochin family at the market. But he talked him into coming home, that everything was taken care of, everything would be fine and dandy, don't worry about a thing.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He lied.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, he lied (laughter) because when he came home, he had him arrested. Refugio Rochin spent a little time in jail. And then my grandmother got the better edge of that argument there, so he came home [00:14:00] to roost and everything was forgiven. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, that was -- we have a copy of that story with our collection of things that we're doing for this project. But that was a wonderful little

story. It's a great story.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: It was.

TOM RIVERA: I was going to ask you. In running the store, did he give credit to his customers?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's all it was, a credit store.

TOM RIVERA: Tell us about that, Sammy.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, everybody bought for the day. Nobody had an icebox. They bought whatever they were going to eat that day. They bought it that day because there was no refrigeration. My dad started people he knew, people he knew. The people, in those days, when they got married and had family, they didn't move away. They moved down the street or across the alley. Nobody could go anywhere. We had people trading at the store, family for family. What were they going to do? They couldn't go anywhere. Nobody had a car, so you're pretty [00:15:00] locked into the neighborhood. You walked everywhere. There was no bus service in our part of town. The only bus service was on the other side of town. So when you went somewhere, you walked. Everything was in walking distance. You walked to the cement plant. You walked to the PFE. If you worked at Santa Fe, you walked downtown, got the trolley, and went to work. There was no transportation, bicycle or walk.

TOM RIVERA: Or if you picked oranges, they would pick you up at the corner.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: People think that picking oranges is a menial job, but it's like any other thing. There was a gentleman in our hometown called Tiofilo Hernandez, and he was probably the best orange picker. He picked with two -- see, oranges are not pulled off the tree. They have to be cut. They have to be trimmed because otherwise the stem -- if you pull the stem out, it'll rot from there. If you cut too much stem, it'll pick the next ones. He was a guy they called him [El Cienero?].

He could -- [00:16:00] before the day was over, he already had 100 boxes when the rest of the guys had 20. He was that good.

TOM RIVERA: What was his name?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Tiofilo. He was related to his grandfather.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Hernandez.

TOM RIVERA: Hernandez.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He was a distant relation to his grandfather. They came about the same time. But he was great [with it?]. The average guy goes on a ladder and holds on with one hand. Not him. He had terrific balance. The ladders you use for picking oranges are not that heavy because you hurt the tree. But he could (makes cutting sound) Le decían El Cienero.

TOM RIVERA: ¿El Cienero? Sammy, your mom and dad took over the store. When did they take over the store?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: In 1938. My mother and father both worked for Donaciano Martinez at a bakery. They both worked for him. My mother worked for them and the girls used to take care of me. We lived on the same street. When my dad opened his store, [00:17:00] my dad and my mother ran it and I used to go stay with my grandmother across the street.

TOM RIVERA: Now, across the street is what street?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: O Street. Right there I'd stay with my grandmother. And then when it'd get late at night -- they didn't close the store until after dark -- I wouldn't go home. I'd stay with my grandmother.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: The Martinez Market was also family run. Lupe Martinez was -- that was my tia. She was one of Bernadina's daughters, my grandma's sister. She married Donaciano and they opened a store of their own, and that's -- everybody worked for Donaciano at one time or another.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, one of her son's was Nick Martinez, a musician in town.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, the musician, okay.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That was his son, Nick. Albert was a musician also but he didn't pursue it like Nick did. Nick went into songwriting and he'd do arrangements. There's not a club in the Valley that he didn't play at.

TOM RIVERA: And he played during the '30s and '40s?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: When he was in high school, they already had a band when they were in high school. [00:18:00] Nick and Albert were born in the same calendar year. They weren't twins, but they were born in 1920, both of them. They grew up together.

TOM RIVERA: The Martinez Bakery was on the corner of Seventh and M Street?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Seventh and M Street, correct.

TOM RIVERA: The northwest corner?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah.

TOM RIVERA: And you were all related.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, we were all related. It was pretty common for us to get out of church on Sunday with Padre Valencia and then go get some pan dulce at the bakery. And then we'd go to my Tio Steve at Esperanza Market. On Sundays, it was more of a social event there. Very little shopping was done. There was more yacking, la tijera I guess you could say, everybody talking about one another. Everybody knew each other in the store, which made it unique. I think that's what made the store special. You mentioned credit or you asked a question about credit. My Tio Steve, I think, started that. He understood [00:19:00] how difficult it was for young families to put food on the table, pay the bills, and just

do the basic necessities of life. And so he extended credit, I think, to everybody that came into the store. I don't remember ever hearing any discussion about issues about somebody not paying or having to go knock on somebody's door to collect a debt. I think people just respected the fact that my Tio Steve and my Aunt Mariana were able to do that for them, and really it was a blessing to the whole neighborhood that that was made available to them.

TOM RIVERA: Now, Mariana is your mom.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: She's my tia.

TOM RIVERA: Your tia.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: She was his grandmother's sister.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, okay.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: My grandmother was the oldest, and Mariana was the youngest girl. She would be the 9th in line of those 10 kids. My Tio Pete was the youngest one.

TOM RIVERA: [00:20:00] Okay, okay. And, Sammy, running the store, we talked about credit. What made the store a popular store where people would go there?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My dad.

TOM RIVERA: Tell me about your dad.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My father?

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. Steve, Estevan.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I never heard him say anything bad about anybody. He was just a people person. Like I say, he never went to school. He could figure out mathematical problems. I don't know how he did it. He'd make numbers here and make a number in the corner. I'd say, "How'd you do it?" "I don't know, but that's the answer," just good. And then business wise, he was very smart business wise.

He could figure out things in his head. My uncle that owned the bakery, Donaciano -- remember in the old days, they had the adding machine like (makes sound). He could add up a column of numbers before you could punch them in. And he never went to school, but he was that good. [00:21:00] You know the old (makes sound).

TOM RIVERA: Well, your father, Estevan, made the best sangre.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Longaniza is what he called it.

TOM RIVERA: What do you call it?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Longaniza.

TOM RIVERA: It was the best. It was great. I used to go there to get my pot of sangre. What other products made him famous for that he provided for the customers?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, it's all what you put in it. He didn't want to tell anybody what he put in it. That was his. He ordered the chili from some guy who came from New Mexico. He couldn't get it here. He tried all kinds until he found something he liked. He used garlic, but he wouldn't buy garlic. He'd buy garlic but he had one of the hired help peel the garlic. She hated to do it because she -- but it had to be fresh garlic. He didn't use powder, and just the way he made it.

TOM RIVERA: What about [00:22:00] the other products, the meat products, the bologna?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The bologna, well, in those days, I remember going to the packing house. There was a packing house close to where the Orange Show is, Smith Packing House. We'd go there. I was little. We'd go there and we'd go in the packing house and we'd look at them. See, when cattle is slaughtered, they put jackets on them. It's a canvas jacket they put on them, put them in the cooler, and that's why they all look alike. But when they're going to be sold, they bring them out and the grader comes in and grades them because they're all hanging there,

hundreds of them. We'd go in there, and my dad would say, "I'll take that one," and then go look, "Take that one." He would pick them. He would pick which ones he wanted. They'd cut it in half, we'd load on the truck, and we'd take it to the store. We'd buy a whole pig. It'd be cut in half right down the middle, throw him in the truck. That's the way it was.

TOM RIVERA: You mentioned that your dad sold ice also. Tell us about the sign that he had in the front store in front of the window, [00:23:00] how much ice --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: No, no, that was the iceman.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, tell us about the iceman.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They had a sign that said "ice" on it. It was square. At the very top it had "25, 50, 75, 100." So, however you turned it and hung it in your window, the iceman knew how much ice he wanted so he wouldn't have to make two trips. He'd bring the ice, put it in your wooden icebox that they had there, and then you had ice.

TOM RIVERA: This was for the customers?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: For the customers. The iceman came once a day. Every day he came. And then my aunt bought the first gas Servel in the whole neighborhood.

TOM RIVERA: The first what?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Servel. Remember the Servel?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: The refrigerator.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The iceboxes that were gas operated. Remember the Servel icebox? She had the only one in the neighborhood, icebox. We used to run over there and she'd make us Kool-Aid in ice cubes and give them to us. But nobody had an icebox.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, one of the selling points of the Servel

icebox is that there were no moving [00:24:00] parts. That was a big selling point. I'd like to mention something also about the product at the market. There's some products that sometimes can't be bought and sold, and that's what La Esperanza was famous for. You can't -- I get emotional even thinking about it. You can't sell love. You can't sell respect. You can't buy it. But it was there, and that's what made this place what it was.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Like I was telling him before that we lived -- there was a door between the store and where we lived. My dad would close the store eight, nine o'clock. We'd be sitting in the kitchen eating and bang, bang, bang. They'd bang on the back door, "No tenemos [leche?]." "Oh, okay," my dad would open the store. (laughter) And then they'd, "Oh, no tenemos lunch meat," to my dad.

[00:25:00] Because, like I say, they couldn't keep anything overnight. The houses didn't have no air conditioning, no refrigerators or nothing.

TOM RIVERA: It was a 24/7 operation.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, yeah, they'd beat on the door in the back because they knew where we lived, "We need ice. We need milk."

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: The other thing that they were famous for, I think, is my Tio Steve would have a nickname for everybody that came to the store. He was famous for it. He even had his own nickname. It was El Pilon. I mentioned it in the story. He was proud of that. One story that I remember the most was of Mr. Shockley. The Shockley family lived in Colton also. They had a ranch there right across from Third Street where the cement plant is now. Mr. Shockley had a hunchback so he was doubled over most of the time looking at the ground wherever he walked. My Tio Steve called him [El Maromero?] because it looked like he was always going to throw maroma when he came around. De ahí viene El Maromero. But that was [00:26:00] a term of endearment. He wasn't making fun of him. It was

a term of endearment. But that's the kind of names that my Tio Steve would apply to most of the people that came into the store. Some of them I can't even repeat, but everybody had a name. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Everybody had a [certain name?], eh? Also, Fernando, in your pictures that you have of the store, the front part of the store, there's a picture there of -- you mentioned that your dad would provide home service and take --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, we'd close the store and we'd do deliveries.

TOM RIVERA: Tell us about some of the deliveries that you did. You mentioned that you went to houses, at that time -- this was in the late '30s -- that did not have floors. They had dirt floors.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: There was a family called Perez. Jeremias Perez, remember him?

TOM RIVERA: The boxer.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He lived right there on the corner of Congress, and it was a two-story [00:27:00] house. I was about in high school then. They'd buy flour, 100 pounds, and it was a two-story house. I had to go up these stairs. I hated to carry the flour up there. We called it a periquera. In fact, they had a [parrot?]. But that's where they lived, right next to the Colungas.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, yes, okay.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Right there on la esquina. That was where Chayo had a gas station, then Jeremias. And then the two boys went to school with me, Boxie and Sammy. They were there. Jeremias went to school with my mother. He was the same age as my mother. But they had a big two-story house. I had to carry a sack of flour up the stairs.

TOM RIVERA: And then some of the other houses that you made deliveries to.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: There were a lot of houses that had no hot water, had

water but no hot water. They didn't have sewers. They had a toilet in the alley.

And the water from the sink would drain out into the yard for the plants. [00:28:00]

They didn't have anything else. That was it.

TOM RIVERA: Poor neighborhood then?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: His grandfather built two community toilets. One had a toilet, and one had a shower and a toilet. It was there for everybody. It was free water, hot water. On Saturdays and Sundays, there were people we didn't even know bringing their kids to give them a shower.

TOM RIVERA: Where was this located, Sammy?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Right there --

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Behind the store, right adjacent to my grandmother and grandfather's house.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He had put a little water heater on the side, and you had to build a fire under it to heat the water. People we didn't know, he would -- everybody was welcome.

TOM RIVERA: It was a community shower then?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, it was.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, it was the first one. I think it was the first indoor plumbing in South Colton. Nobody had anything like that. I remember, as a kid, walking into the shower and I was amazed that it was inside. It had walls. And then the overhead shower, you could stand under it and just --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: And hot water all you wanted. You never ran out.

[00:29:00] Like I said, there was people that we didn't know. They'd bring their kids and shower them down. And then it was a toilet on the side because -- let's face it, it was a different life. It was different. [Quate Savriles?], you probably heard of him?

TOM RIVERA: The baseball players.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They lived across the tracks. I used to go over there and we'd play ball.

TOM RIVERA: Across the tracks?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: On Walnut Street or Maple Street.

TOM RIVERA: Maple Street, okay.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, one of the things we had to do, first of all, was move the outside toilet because they didn't have any inside plumbing. So, we'd do -
-

TOM RIVERA: So you had to move the johns and bury it --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: We'd have to dig a new hole. And (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) we'd dig a new one. It was like a little toolshed. We'd move the toolshed, put it over the new hole, and go get dirt and fill in the old hole. That was one of (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TOM RIVERA: So the infrastructure in South Colton was not there, like sewers?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, like my mother says, there was gas and electricity but the people did not have the money to bring [00:30:00] it in. We didn't get a telephone until I was in high school. We had a phone in the store, but we didn't have a phone because it wasn't there.

TOM RIVERA: When did the old store burn down?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: It was 1976 when it burnt down. That was a pretty sad day. I remember the phone call vividly. It was pretty sad, people and family crying and people rushing down. There's nothing you could do. The store was already burnt down. It was just all that history got wiped out in a very short period of time. My Tio Steve, he wasn't buying any part of that. It didn't take him

long to, I guess, get with the Navarro family one block away because the Navarro store was sitting there idle.

TOM RIVERA: On the corner of Seventh and O Street?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Seventh and O Street, one block down. My Tio Steve moved there, and they opened the store again. [00:31:00] They were closed on Sundays and they were only open half day on Saturdays. But still the same community, they just went a block over and business continued. It was a successful business even at that location for years until my Tio Steve retired in 1989. I think everybody that's still around remembers that time. It was pretty sad because the store went idle. It's just like a car breaking down and it's just parked there and nothing's going on with it. But everybody knows what happened, that car when it was a brand new Chevy or whatever it was, all the things, all the fun, the stories. It was kind of like that. I still have those stories about going to visit my Tio Steve. Of course, he's always offered me something to eat. I don't look like I'm hungry. [00:32:00] They always offered -- my Tio Steve always wanted to make me a sandwich or soda or something. They were that gracious all the time.

TOM RIVERA: Going back to the old store when your grandfather ran the store and also when your dad ran the store. Were they part of the Chamber of Commerce or any of those --?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My dad was not political. They were after him many times for the City Council because there was a bunch of guys -- do you remember Jesus Llamas?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He was very political, the councilman.

TOM RIVERA: He was also a business guy.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah. Pete Luque was a councilman.

TOM RIVERA: Right.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: And there were a lot of guys that were into that. My dad didn't want no part of it. He just wasn't that way.

TOM RIVERA: What about Fiestas Patrias?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He worked for that. Going back on the toilets, I'm going to tell you something that I told him. His father is eight years older than me. One day -- I don't know how it happened -- [00:33:00] I was in the backyard and I had a tomato, a tomato in my hand. His father came out of the house with a white shirt and I threw it at him and I hit him. He caught me, took me in the toilet, and stuck my head in the toilet. (laughter) He picked me up, stuck me in the toilet, and then turned me loose. I'll never forget that day.

TOM RIVERA: Did it teach you a lesson?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, I didn't know what he was going to do. He got me, and I said, "Oh, he's going to hit me." No, he just grabbed me and dunked my head in the toilet and then turned me loose.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I don't think my grandfather was involved in the Chamber of Commerce or anything like that either. He believed in family, and that was the organization that he was associated with.

TOM RIVERA: Was the Chamber of Commerce in Colton open to anybody from South Colton?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I don't know. I don't know that.

TOM RIVERA: I don't know either. I don't know. What about Las Fiestas Patrias? You said that they [were active?].

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That was a South Colton thing.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: They participated. Anything in the community, yeah, they were involved.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: [00:34:00] That was a community effort.

TOM RIVERA: Did they sponsor the queens or the --?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Well, yeah, because Juanita was always involved and Antonietta. And also from the Martinez family there was [Sara?], Carmelita.

TOM RIVERA: Now, who is Antonietta?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Kelley or Hernandez. She was the youngest daughter.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, tell us about her.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Antonietta Kelley or Antonietta Hernandez was born to my Tia Amelia, and it was Amelia Hernandez. Back in those days, Amelia and her husband, that's when they would go pick -- just follow the pisca, whatever -- peaches, cotton, oranges, whatever it was. That's how they lived. She was the third daughter born. They were going to go on another trip, and she was pretty sick. My Uncle Manuel, he was Antonietta's nino. He argued with my tia and said, "No, I'm the godfather [00:35:00] and I'm not going to let you take her because she's not feeling well. When you come back, then you can come and get her." Well, that trip turned into a year and a half. By the time she came back, Antonietta was maybe two years old. She didn't want to go back. She cried all the time. So my grandfather said, "You know what? She's going to stay with us." She became the baby sister.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I could never figure out how her brother was a Rodriguez and she was a Hernandez. She kept her name Hernandez, and I could never figure it out. I said, "How come [Victor?] has Rodriguez and Antonietta has Hernandez?" They said, "Well, they're not really brothers and sisters." But I thought they were brothers and sisters.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: But to my Tia Juanita and my Tio Manuel and my dad, that was their sister. My grandfather, he treated her like that was - like my Tia Juanita, boy, he treated [Aunt Toni?] like a queen too. You talked about the fiestas and being involved with the fiestas. Well, the Martinez Bakery [00:36:00] was also involved because Carmelita Martinez, she was a queen many times, as well as Celia. The kids were always involved. Our family was always involved. I don't know how many Easter Sundays we'd go to the church after mass and Father Valencia would hang Judas up there. I just remember it looked, to me, like the whole place was family to me. I know it wasn't, but there were so many of us. Those were just great times. Anything that happened in that community La Esperanza, the Martinez Bakery, and the family were part of it. The fiestas -- I think Frank mentioned about when did they start doing the fiestas at the [patio?], I think. We were involved in that too in some way or another. We had great times growing up there.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Antonietta [00:37:00] was very unusual for a Mexican because she was very smart and she was very -- not aggressive but -- in other words, if somebody said no, "No, no. I'm going to do what I want to do." She took classes in school that weren't open to everybody. They had to be selected. She took journalism [when she got into journalism?]. She took public speaking. Mexican people don't like public speaking, but she did. She had all her credits in her senior year. Well, the rule is you have to be in school all day. You can't go home because that's -- they gave her a job in the attendance office. Fifty years later she retired from the school district.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, she was the secretary of the superintendent for many years.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's right. She put all her work in the school district,

and she started when she was a senior at the school in the attendance office. She could have been anything she wanted. She was smart. She was a really sharp woman. [00:38:00] But the way things were at the time -- what happened to Toni was she was so dedicated to his grandmother that she didn't want to leave her. She didn't want to leave. My mother and father offered to sponsor her to college, to go to college. She said, "I'd like to but I can't leave my mother." She couldn't.

TOM RIVERA: Tight family, a very tight family.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: She was so grateful for the life she had given her, she said, "I can't do it."

TOM RIVERA: Let me ask you about entertainment in the barrio, Sammy.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Dances.

TOM RIVERA: When you were growing up and you were a teenager and --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The weekend dances.

TOM RIVERA: Tell me about those dances.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: There was a family called -- I forget. Juan Rios? He played violin.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, Juan Rios, yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He had a thing that at the end of the dance, he would play a solo for his wife. His wife would be sitting like this waiting, and he would go in front of her and play just for her. All the women [thought?] how touching [00:39:00] he played for her only. That's the way it was.

TOM RIVERA: The dances, what year was this, Sammy? In the '40s?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Mother and father running the store, they couldn't stay real late because when people went to the dance, se madrugaban. My mother and father said, "We can't stay. We've got to work in the morning." They'd go to dances, which was about the only entertainment they had. My mother said when

she was young that was the only entertainment there was. That was it.

TOM RIVERA: Where were the dances held?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: At a [salon?], there was a salon on the corner of L Street and Seventh. It's gone now. It was a two-story place with a salon. There was one where the Valley Ballroom is. It was another salon they called the Pickering, I believe it was. It was a lagoon that was a lake. At one time there was a lake there with little canoes. [00:40:00] But they said that --

TOM RIVERA: Where Inland Center is now?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah. See, all that was under water during the flood of '37. It flooded everything. It washed it away. But that -- [Manuel said?] that was it. Everybody looked forward for the weekend because nobody worked and you had someplace to go.

TOM RIVERA: What about you when you were in high school? Were you at Colton High School?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I went to Colton High School.

TOM RIVERA: What years were those?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, here's the thing. My mother and father didn't send me to the local school. They bussed me across town to Grant School. Do you know where Grant School was?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, at Grant School there was David Gasca, Ruben Aguilera, his sister, Rosie de la Rosa, me, and [a Ramos?]. There was only about 10 of us Mexicanos in the school. Later on -- did you ever know the Carrascos?

TOM RIVERA: Si.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Did you know their mother?

TOM RIVERA: [00:41:00] No.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Carmen Carrasco was another liberated woman. They didn't want the Mexicans at Grant School. She went up to the superintendent and said, "My kids are here, and they're going to stay here. You can't do that." You couldn't just arbitrarily throw the kids out. So, I wound up at the Grant School, and then I wound up at Roosevelt. I didn't wind up at Wilson, just the way it happened. In those days, if you didn't live in the district -- I didn't know anything about it. I knew nothing about school. When they took me to school, I couldn't go home. I didn't know where I was. I'd never been to that part of town. I wound up at Grant School. They only had four rooms and six grades. I had the same teachers my mother had had in that same school. Twenty years later the same -- in those days, the teachers didn't get married. They were all single women. They never -- once they [00:42:00] got into teaching, they died there. That was it.

TOM RIVERA: When did you start at Colton High School?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I started in 1947.

TOM RIVERA: You said '47?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Forty-seven.

TOM RIVERA: And you mentioned that you --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: See, Colton was a four-year high school. Ninth grade was in high school. In San Bernardino, ninth grade was in junior high. But we had a four-year high school. Consequently, being a four-year school, we had a lot of kids so they put us in with the big schools. Like San Bernardino that only had three grades but the biggest grade was the freshman. We (inaudible).

TOM RIVERA: Did you play any of the sports?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, I played baseball. Quate played on the same team I did. I played -- there was a gentleman in San Bernardino called Chuy Mendoza.

TOM RIVERA: Yes, I remember him.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I played ball against him.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, first baseman.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He was a pitcher too. In fact, I remember [00:43:00] Mitla's Café had a baseball team that was a big family of peloteros. They were all peloteros. All of them played ball, a great big family that played for Mitla's. That's how I got to know most of these guys, through the sports. But in those days, it was different than it is now. There was no trouble in the neighborhood. Not like now. They'd go to the park and behave themselves.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: You know, Sammy started high school in 1947. I was born in 1947. Sorry Sam. (laughter) We're like twins. But I went to Woodrow Wilson Elementary School. Mr. Harris was the principal and my Aunt Toni was the secretary even back then. I went through school, all the elementary school years. I went to Colton Junior High, which is now Colton Middle School, I believe. They were the falcons then. I don't think they're the falcons --

TOM RIVERA: They're still the falcons.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Oh, they're still the falcons?

TOM RIVERA: [00:44:00] Frank, are they still the falcons?

FRANK ACOSTA: Yeah.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: And I was a Colton Yellow Jacket. I graduated in 1965. I played football and baseball at the high school.

TOM RIVERA: I was going to ask you, Sammy. You were -- in '53, they had the *Brown v. Board of Education* where they --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I wasn't here. I was overseas.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, but that was the national legislation where they integrated the schools. For entertainment purposes, what did the teenagers that

were in high school, the Chicanos do if they couldn't cross the railroad tracks?

What did you guys --?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They mostly hung by themselves. We had -- do you remember the Caldera Plunge?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That was ours.

TOM RIVERA: Well, I don't remember that but I've heard about it.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That was ours. It was a cold water plunge, and it was cold. But that was ours, [Cal Plunge?]. Like on a day like this, we spent the day there. [00:45:00] We had the highest diving board in the Valley, a 10 meter platform at 33 feet. If you went off of there, you were grown up. You were somebody.

There was a guy named Chito de la Rosa, he would dive off of that thing. He was the best diver. And another guy Ricky Castorena.

TOM RIVERA: Yes, my neighbor.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They're the ones that would dive off the very top. We'd just watch. (laughs)

TOM RIVERA: Besides the Caldera, what about dances?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They had dances there, but to this day I don't dance. I never have. I wasn't interested. At school, we used to have dances in the gym. They called them sock hops. They used to have them. I went but just to pass the time.

TOM RIVERA: What about in high school? They said that they had the Mexican American Club --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They did.

TOM RIVERA: -- that had a Pan American --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Antonietta was very prominent in that club, Antonietta.

By the time Toni got to [00:46:00] school, it was a little bit different. Antonietta was -
- no se hacía para atrás. In other words, if she thought she was right, she was
right. She wouldn't back off. She wouldn't back off from anybody.

TOM RIVERA: Who were your pals, Sammy, during the high school years?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My parents?

TOM RIVERA: Your pals, your friends.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The first guy I met at school was Ruben Garcia. He sat
in front of me. I never saw him before in my life because we didn't live there. Him
and his sister were in the same class. David Gasca, the two Ramos boys were
there with me.

TOM RIVERA: The Ramos boys, Mike or --?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: No, Louie and -- they were related to the Gascas. They
were cousins. They lived on Third Street. And a kid named Bobby Aguilera was a
son of the Aguileras. He moved to San Bernardino. But they went to school there.
They were a year ahead of me. Those are the first [00:47:00] ones I met.

TOM RIVERA: What about Ernie Garcia? Was he in your class?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He didn't go to Grant School. He went to Wilson.

TOM RIVERA: No but in high school I'm talking about.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Oh, yeah, he went to high school. He ran track. He was
a cross-country and a miler; very, very good.

TOM RIVERA: And you said you were a baseballer.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he wasn't.

TOM RIVERA: What position did you play in baseball?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I played outfield.

TOM RIVERA: And your batting average was?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: (inaudible).

TOM RIVERA: Say 500. (laughter) Nobody will remember.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: No, [just the truth?]. But Ernie was a very good track man. Dotti and her sister -- she had a sister named [Marti?] that was in my grade, and Dotti was a little bit older. But they were an item already in school. They were already -- Ernie and this girl already in school. The [Anglo?] didn't take too good to it. They didn't like it.

TOM RIVERA: Talking about that, we mentioned 1953. You were in the Korean conflict. How did [00:48:00] World War II and Korea affect the life in Colton?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They took everybody. They were waiting for them to get out of school. They lowered the draft age. In 1943, they lowered the draft age from 21 to 18. They came out and got all the ones that were left. They took him right off the bat barely out of high school. They took his father. His father graduated from high school at 16. They got him as soon as he turned 18. They come and got him. But there was nobody left. They were taking -- my dad was born in 1907. And there was a guy he grew up with, they took him because he couldn't prove how old he was. He came from Mexico with no records, and they look, "Oh, him." He was already in his thirties. My uncle was in his thirties, no family. They took him. He was born the same year as my dad so he was already 35 when they drafted him.

TOM RIVERA: So as long as your body temperature was 98.6, [00:49:00] vamanos. Let's just do it. But I was referring more to when you came back, was there a different attitude of the people that served in the service of World War II and Korea? That I paid my dues, therefore I need to buy a house in North Colton or have a job?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: No, what happened was when my tour of duty was over in Korea, some of the guys that had come back already told me -- they wrote me a

letter that said, "They're opening up Twentynine Palms. It's terrible." They said, "They're going to send you there. If you can find a way to go someplace else, go there." So, I stayed another year in Japan and I didn't come back until January of '54. When I came home, I came home by myself. I didn't come home with a group. They flew me to San Francisco. I just came home. Some of the kids that came, went overseas together and came back together. But I came home by myself. I didn't want to go to Twentynine Palms.

TOM RIVERA: I was referring more [00:50:00] that people that served in the service feeling that they paid their dues, therefore you cannot treat me like a second-class citizen, and I deserve --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My cousin, [Nechi?], they sent him to Jacksonville, Florida, and he's on the train coming back. On the train, he went through Texas. He wanted to go on the club car, and they wouldn't let him. He was in the Navy uniform. Mexican, no way. Until they got out of Texas and into New Mexico, [then he could?]. It was that way. There was a place in Colton called the Hunter's Sweet Shop. It was a combination drugstore, fountain, and everything. Now, I don't know this for a fact. My mother told me. If you wanted service, you had to go around the side and there was a window there. You'd go to the window and they would give you what you wanted, and you carried it out. You couldn't go in. [00:51:00] It was understood. In other words, nobody tried to go in because they knew that you couldn't go in. It was unwritten. But they had a window. They wouldn't deny you service, but you went on the side and they gave it to you.

TOM RIVERA: And that's the way it was and everybody accepted that.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's it. They accepted it. It was better than no ice cream.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I remember my dad -- I mean, I was a little kid,

but I remember him and my mom talking about the VA -- of course, I didn't know what it was -- and about veteran's benefits and about going to school and things that he could do. I just remember the conversations. I really had no idea what they were doing, but he did take advantage of that. He went back to the Valley College and he got his AA degree. I remember vividly him talking about the VA loan and the very first house we moved to in North Rancho [00:52:00] in 1959. But I remember him using his VA to do that. So, I know that he took advantage of those things, and he was really proud of his service. He did take advantage of that. I didn't get it the whole time he was doing it because I wasn't there. I was still a knucklehead kid. But I know that those things you put on your collar, I know he had those. He had so much memorabilia from the military. You could tell that there was some pride.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: His father was one of the last classes at Randolph Field -- I think that's where it was -- where cadets were being trained for pilot training when they did away with it in 1943. He was in the -- he was smart. They transferred him to the Air Force, and he didn't finish because they cancelled the classes. But had it gone any longer, [00:53:00] he probably would have become a pilot. He was very smart, very affluent, and he had a way with people also. He was another one that asserted himself. He didn't back down.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, he was a lot like my grandfather. My grandfather used his imagination to see something and actually build it. My dad was exactly the same way. He could imagine things and go out in the backyard and make something out of absolutely nothing. Even a ping-pong table that he built for us just to have something to do, he built that and it ended up being the centerpiece for the entire neighborhood for all the kids during the summer. We would actually have tournaments there. But the rule was when my dad came home from work, there was peace. Everybody had to go. My dad wanted to sit down and relax at

the dinner table. That's another thing if I could. Dinner, very special at the house, could not speak English. He would put everything in front of him and you had to ask [00:54:00] for the plate, for the tenedor, servilleta. Everything you had to ask for. And then if he asked you a question, you better not respond with a yes or no answer. It had to be conversation in Spanish. Our dinner hour was spent like that. I remember thinking I was going to outsmart my dad. I don't want to do this, my thinking. So I told my dad, "I'm not hungry. I'm not going to eat." "Oh, good. You can just sit there and talk with us anyway," in Spanish he would tell me. I did that one time. After that, I ate. (laughter)

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: You know, you asked me about how things were in town. There was still a lot of prejudice, especially in jobs. There was this gentleman named Beto Rueda.

TOM RIVERA: Yes, I remember Beto.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Beto worked at the cement company. Beto Rueda was one of the few guys that had a car. He had a '38 Ford. His brother had the identical car. They didn't buy it [00:55:00] new, but it was a nice car. Beto Rueda went to Valley College at night to study diesel mechanics. It took him a long time. He took the test and he passed it. They promoted him to diesel mechanic. The other workers said, "We ain't dressing with him and we ain't working with him." The foreman said, "Well, your union set the rules. He passed the test, finished the top of the class. He's going to work. You guys can dress here or you can dress outside or shower outside, but he's staying."

TOM RIVERA: What year was that, Sammy?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That was right after the war.

TOM RIVERA: When they were making the transition.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They just -- they didn't want -- you were a threat to their

job is what you were, and they didn't want you there. They said, "We ain't dressing with him and we ain't working --" fine, you go do what you want to do. [00:56:00] It was that way. Everybody was a laborer.

TOM RIVERA: It was hard to get promoted from laborer.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, they didn't assert themselves. The Mexicans had, at that time, that attitude of I'm here, don't make any waves. We're going to leave things as they are. But his father and Antonietta were not that way. They were headstrong. They pushed.

TOM RIVERA: Sammy, you also mentioned about a person that had worked for the city as a street sweeper.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Colunga.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, tell me about his situation.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Colunga -- in fact, his --

TOM RIVERA: What was his first name?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Doroteo.

TOM RIVERA: Doroteo Colunga.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: In fact, they named the grandson Doroteo also. He was one of the first ones in Colton, and he got a job with the city. He cleaned the streets, but he didn't have a truck. He had a wagon and a shovel and a broom. [00:57:00] He had worked for quite a few years, and then somebody decided to say, "Hey, he's not even a citizen. Why is he working for the city? He's going to have to go." They got together and they let him keep his job. They did him a favor and let him keep working. But the wagon is at the museum in Colton. His grandsons got the shovel. And you can see it is his shovel.

TOM RIVERA: It was quite an issue. It had to go before the City Council.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, it did.

TOM RIVERA: And the City Council voted that he would keep his job. What was the vote? It was two to three or three to two, something like that?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, it was very close.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. So that was one of the, I guess, victories that we --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, it was.

TOM RIVERA: -- as Mexicans were able to say that we got that one.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: It was many, many years before we got a Mexican fireman in Colton. In fact, there was a saying as one of the [Gamachos?] said, "You might have a mayor --" Oliva was mayor at the time. "You may have a mayor, but you'll never have a fire [00:58:00] captain." That's the way it was.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, and that was -- Pascual Oliva was the mayor.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, he was.

TOM RIVERA: What year was that Sammy? Do you remember?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I don't remember.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I think that was in the '60s because Duane was my age. That's Pascual's son. And I remember hanging out at their house during high school and Pasqual was the mayor in the '60s.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: In fact, the older brother is still alive. Angel, he's 95 or 96 and he's still alive.

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, I tried to get him to interview with us, but his grandson told me that he is not healthy enough to do so.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Talk to Rudy if you want to. Rudy Oliva will talk to you.

TOM RIVERA: Rudy was one of our first people that we interviewed.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Rudy stopped to see me the other day, and he told me that -- he said, "Angel is still the same." When the father passed away -- [00:59:00] their father died before Stella was born. Augustine quit school and supported the

whole [group?] by himself. He became the boss of the house.

TOM RIVERA: And it was a large family.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: It was. Augustine was the same age as the boys, but he -- he didn't get married until all the boys had grown up, all of them. Dijo mi tía, "Ya no hacen hombres como este hombre." Pointed at Augustine and said, "Éste es un hombre," which was true. Who's going to give up their --? He was 17, 18 years old, give up his whole life that he had ahead of him to take care of his family.

TOM RIVERA: Now, Sammy, tell me about you. We've been talking a little bit about history, family history; a little bit about -- before we get into that, you mentioned the first fireman in Colton. When did we get our first Mexican American fireman in Colton?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I forget his name. What was his name? He went to college and came out and took the test. I can't --

TOM RIVERA: Was it [01:00:00] Eddie --

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Cortez.

TOM RIVERA: -- Cortez?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I remember Eddie Cortez.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, I think it was. I was an only child for nine years. My brother didn't come along until 1942, so I basically spent most of my time with my grandmother. My father and mother were busy in the store. I got to go a lot of places where they went. I went to Los Angeles sometimes on a holiday, and my dad always had a car. He bought a brand new pickup in 1938, and I went with him when he bought it. In 1941, we bought a new car. Nobody had a new car but we had one. I remember going to Los Angeles. We'd go to the Orpheum Theatre to see a matinee or a stage show, and they showed a movie. In fact, at that movie I saw the first Mexican movie I ever seen called *Maria Candelaria*. I saw the very

famous [01:01:00] Mexican movie. Do you remember that? Dolores del Rio was in that movie. It was the first Mexican movie I had ever seen. I got to go to a lot of restaurants. I'd get bored. My mother and father and uncle, they'd go eat and they'd spend all day at the restaurant. I'd go in the car and go to sleep. (laughter) [I was very young?].

TOM RIVERA: What about after the war? Where did you work after the war, (inaudible) [Korea?]?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I went to the service, and then I come back and I went to work for the phone company. That's what I did in the service. They sent me to teletype school when I went in the Marine Corps, and I got out and was kind of interested in it. I made an application at Kaiser. But at Kaiser, to get a job there you had to go there. The first day they gave you a piece of paper, "Come back tomorrow. Come back next week." Then the next day, they gave you -- you fill in the paper, "Come back next week." Then they give you a thing, a test. Then they, "Come back again." So in other words, you can't get hired the same day. It takes about a week of going back and forth. People get tired. [01:02:00] I got tired of going back and forth, so I got a job with the phone company and I stayed with them. A lot of the guys went to work for Kaiser. Pio Carreon, he was smart. He was one smart Mexican. They made him a millwright foreman after about four years there. They sent him to Chaffey College on a crash course on blueprint reading.

TOM RIVERA: ¿Cómo se llamaba?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Porfirio Carreon.

TOM RIVERA: Okay, oh, yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: His brother played --

TOM RIVERA: Is Camilo.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Camilo, that was his brother.

TOM RIVERA: Well, let me change the subject a little bit. We were talking about entertainment a few minutes ago. Prior to the interview, you mentioned that part of the entertainment was baseball. Tell us about the baseball.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The Colton Cement plant had a team. And there was a guy that went to school with my mother, Gordon Maltzberger. Gordon Maltzberger was the CIF player of the year in 1941, I believe. He went to play with the White Sox and he played with Hollywood. [01:03:00] His son went to school, I remember.

TOM RIVERA: His son was in my class, yeah, Billy.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he looked just like his father, glasses and the whole thing. But the cement plant had a team. Santa Fe had a team. And they had this Black guy; big, tall, skinny, Black guy. His last name was Morris, and they nicknamed him Santa Fe Morris. He pitched for years. He must've been 60 years old and he still played. There was a lot of commercial teams. Redlands had a team. On Sundays, everybody was there. Everybody would go to the ballgame. It was cheap. It didn't cost anything.

TOM RIVERA: What about Colton? Did they have their team?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Colton had the Mercuries. They came in after the war. Albert Martinez, which is Nick's brother; (inaudible), Ralph Martinez. Remember Ralph Martinez?

TOM RIVERA: Ralph and his brother, uh-huh.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Theo Duarte, one of the Rosales --

TOM RIVERA: [Beto?]?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Gilberto, [01:04:00] and Mike Mercado.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: The Abril brothers played for --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah but they were later on. And then Tony Garcia, he played. He was a very good player.

TOM RIVERA: Tony lived almost across the street from your store.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, he lived up the street. [Chayomano?] was his brother. Chayomano, his real name was David. There was David, Gail, [Tala and Sherry?]. That's the muchachas. El padre era [Ross?] Garcia. He was a carpenter.

TOM RIVERA: So baseball was big in Colton?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: It was. It was a big thing.

TOM RIVERA: What about the Berdoo team? You mentioned Mitla's.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Mitla's had a good team. The [Peloteros?] was a big family. They all played. They played at the park. It's up north of Mount Vernon. There's a park up there, and that's where they played at.

TOM RIVERA: Was it the corner of Mount Vernon and Seventh Street where the Placita is now?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Farther up. [01:05:00] But they had a very good -- and then [Prop Room?] had a team. It was a softball team called the Generals. They had a team. It was a big thing. They were sponsored by local -- and then there was a team in Bloomington called the Cedar Lumber Company, and they had a really good team. They all played each other. But it was --

TOM RIVERA: It was Sunday entertainment.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Sunday entertainment.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Family entertainment.

TOM RIVERA: You mentioned you worked for the telephone company, and you retired from the telephone company?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I started with General, then I went to Victorville. It became Interstate. And then that company changed to Contel, then it changed to Verizon, and I wound up with General again. All the big companies eat the little

ones. That's the way it is now. That's the way business is now. And pretty soon there won't be no telephone company because of the cell phone. That's what I tell people. If you see a telephone, you better take a picture of it because it's going to be gone. (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Well, people don't remember the rotary phones that [01:06:00] we used to have.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's what I told the kids the other day, "You see that thing? You put your finger in the hole and you dial." "Really?" (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: Well, what about -- did you have family?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: My first wife, I had -- in fact, one of them looks just like my mother in the picture that he has. She's the spitting image of my mother. I don't know what it is. Because, like I told you, my family is split in two halves. They are Ramirez, which was the first group, and the last three are Gonzalez. We're very different. His side, his father -- that is my girl. That's Pete. He hasn't changed, lo mismo. That's Amelia.

TOM RIVERA: Frank, we're going to have to scan these, eh? And then put them as part of the -- [01:07:00] into the interview.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They should tell you how things were in those days. My grandmother had kids from 1897 to 1920. That's a long time.

TOM RIVERA: Twenty-some years, yeah.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Well, when Pete was born, my grandma was already in her forties. She couldn't breastfeed Pete. Pete was [an infant?]. His older sister breastfed Nick, Baker, and him because that's the way things were done. My grandmother, she was already in her forties.

TOM RIVERA: So, Sammy, what are you doing now?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Nothing. I lost my wife almost three years ago,

Parkinson's. I live by myself.

TOM RIVERA: Where do you live?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I live in Jess Ranch there in Victorville. It's a gated community. We had a nice house before. It got too big. We couldn't take care of it. So, all I do is pay the rent, pay the lease, and they do everything. They mow the lawn. [01:08:00] I don't do anything. I just get up, eat.

TOM RIVERA: Well, I'm delighted that you're able to do that because we lucked out with you today.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: In fact, you know what I got? When I was taking care of my mother, my dad had just bought a '93 Honda. Guess where it's at? I got it, a '93. At 21 years old, I'm still driving it.

TOM RIVERA: Your mom was a very good friend of my mom's. You said you took care of your mom. How long did you take care of your mom?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: All in total, she was on dialysis for about five years, the last five years of her life. I used to live in Victorville, and I would come down Monday morning and I would take her to a session on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And then on Friday night, Estelita, my cousin, would come and spend the weekend with my mother and looked after her. And then I would come back the following Monday and stay the week. That's what I did.

TOM RIVERA: And, you know, Fernando, [01:09:00] you mentioned Sundays after church. Your mom was very involved with the church.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yes, she was. That's a thing that used to make me mad. I'd come back on Monday and I'd go in the garage and get the car, and the mirror was crooked and the seat was all the way forward. I said, "Have you been driving?" "Oh, I only went to church with the ladies. I'm the only one that's got a driver's license now." "I don't want you driving anymore." (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: That's true. She was a taxi for all of them.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah. The seat was all the way forward and the mirror was crooked. I said, "I know you've been driving." (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: (inaudible), ¿verdad?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Her license expired, you know. She said, "Oh, my license is expired. I don't know if they're going to get me one." So, I go visit her. She comes out the kitchen door and she's waving it in her hand. She's got it, "Three more years." (laughter)

TOM RIVERA: But anyway, that was a good group of ladies that got together and [01:10:00] did their thing, not only for the church but they got together and had lunch. Fernando, what about you and your family?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: My own children?

TOM RIVERA: Yeah.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I'm on my second marriage. I had Julie, Jennifer, and Victor. And then my wife now, she's got three kids. We're all pretty close. We have six kids collectively. Pretty much it's the family unit that I thought that we could have that took a long time to actually put together by just getting together.

TOM RIVERA: But you're retired also from --

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I'm retired but I still teach.

TOM RIVERA: -- several places.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I'm retired from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. I retired in 2002.

TOM RIVERA: And you were president?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I retired as the president of the local union. I retired from here, Cal State, where I [01:11:00] worked maintenance in the electrical department for Fred Roybal. Fred was my boss. I'm still teaching. This is my last

year. I'm teaching for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for their apprenticeship program. I've been doing this -- I've been involved in the electrical industry since I graduated from the Valley College. I went to work for an electrical wholesale house, Southern California Edison. And then I went to work in construction, which is something that suited me best. I had a great job with Edison, but it wasn't what I wanted. And then when I got into construction, it was something I could do with my hands and use my brain at the same time and take on those responsibilities of building the Union Hall. I was the general foreman when we built the Union Hall right on this campus here. It was a pleasure to take on those [01:12:00] responsibilities and a pleasure to become the president eventually.

TOM RIVERA: How many members did you have?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: About 900, currently it's about 1,000. The irony of this whole thing is that my son is now the president.

TOM RIVERA: Your son is now the president of the Brotherhood?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: He is now -- yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Nepotism, huh? (laughter)

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: No, he worked for it. I never wanted him to do that. I wanted him to go to college because he had the brains, but he also had the mechanical aptitude that my grandfather and my dad and myself -- I mean, we all got that ability. He's really got it. So, he got into the trade. He excelled at it very fast and got involved and just took a leadership role, and then he finds himself as the current president. Right now, he's still a little bit overwhelmed because he's only 34 years old, so he's got to grow into it a little bit.

TOM RIVERA: Well, it's a good thing father is around. [01:13:00]

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: We talk a lot.

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: You know, what he's saying about being smart, do you remember Ray Abril?

TOM RIVERA: Yes.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Ray Abril when he married Nellie, Nellie had gone to college in San Bernardino. She had been to college. Ray Abril couldn't read or write when he married her. She taught him. Ray Abril --

TOM RIVERA: Where was Nellie from, Sam?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: San Bernardino. Ray Abril was a very -- he worked at PFE. He was a very good carpenter. He remodeled more houses for Anglos in North Colton than anybody else. He was good, but he was self-taught. Just like everybody else, self-taught. He didn't go to apprentice school. He learned it on the job. He was a super carpenter, I mean a finished carpenter. It's one thing to put up a board. But to do cabinet work and stuff, it's stuff that you're either born with it or you're not.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: One thing [01:14:00] if I could about my dad.

When we would have those conversations with -- he'd have a conversation with my sister that was intended for her, and conversations with the boys intended for us. But what he would tell us is that when you get in that working market, there's certain things you have to be looking at. Don't just get a job. Get a job that has a future because one day you will retire, so you have to be thinking about that. The one thing that he -- the word that he mentioned that I never got for years was collective bargaining. He said, "You need to go work somewhere where they have collective bargaining, where they're going to take care of you, where they're going to represent you and do things. Collective bargaining." And, okay, the next day I'd forget. I would go from job to job as a little kid, or right out of high school. It wasn't until I went to work for Southern California Edison that I realized, "Oh, collective

[01:15:00] bargaining.” I’ve been a member of the IBEW, God, I think since 1972, which is a long time. Now that’s what I tell my kids. That’s why my entire family is a member of Local 477. My son, my sons-in-law, God, we’re all in this. There’s a lot of us now in this trade. I tell them all about the same story about the collective bargaining. Come on, collective bargaining, [same message?].

TOM RIVERA: Well, you touched on something that I didn’t have on my notes. But was your grandfather -- did he belong to Los Trabajadores Unidos, or did he belong to the union at the cement plant?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He had to at the cement plant.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: At the cement plant, yes. Yes, I believe they were organized under some collective bargaining agreement. I don’t know what it was. But, yes, he was a union member there.

TOM RIVERA: He was a union person?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, [01:16:00] and my mom and dad both were. But I didn’t understand the message for years about the -- you know how when you’re young it goes in one ear and out the other one. I was one of those guys. (laughs) But I do get it now and I’m preaching that message to my children and grandchildren. I even have grandchildren in this trade now. They’re all doing well.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: We don’t realize the hardships like my father and his grandfather went through -- my mother told me -- to come to this strange country, not knowing the language, not knowing anybody, and not having anything, and making it.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Another irony in the story I mentioned that my grandfather and my Tio Steve. That’s two generations apart but they were both from Aguascalientes, both came to Colton and married sisters.

TOM RIVERA: Well, talking about your story, [01:17:00] what else do you have over on the side?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: This is a book that was -- it's called *Recollections and Reflections, Volume Three, South Colton*. It's a photographic essay. A lot of our family is in this book. There's a ton of pictures in here. Copyright date is 2001. I don't know where you can get a copy of this. Every time I take it to a family gathering, everybody wants to steal it. I keep a close eye on it. I don't mind sharing it with the familia because they need -- there's stuff in here they need to know. I have included a lot of pictures -- for example, that picture right there -- in here just to mark where the family is located throughout the book. There's a ton of history going way back. I don't even know -- I don't have the dates for some of these.

TOM RIVERA: So it's a collection that was done by whom?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I'm going to [01:18:00] read you the names here. I have them right here. By Joe Lucero, Rudy Oliva, Frank Sanchez, Rodolfo Serrano, and Bobby Vasquez.

TOM RIVERA: Okay. And they were all Seventh Street guys?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Yeah, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I believe so.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: In fact, Joe Lucero was a musician that played with Nick. He's a trumpet -- sax --

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, and Bobby Vasquez was a musician also.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: And then Rudy went on to -- he went to college. He became --

TOM RIVERA: Well, he retired as a professor, professor (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Fresno.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He was living in Tehachapi, I believe.

TOM RIVERA: I call him regularly and tell him what I'm doing, and he says, "Pick on them, Tom. Pick on them." (laughter)

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I got involved with this, just in our own family, through my Aunt Toni. I didn't know that my Aunt Toni had all these memories in her head [01:19:00] about the familia. And then I was so intrigued with the stories that I couldn't get enough of it. And then when we were doing hospice for her, I went over one day and she was writing on the back of the pictures who was in the picture. So, I started to write for her, and she had a mountain of pictures. We would do maybe 10 or 15 because every picture had a story. They were amazing.

TOM RIVERA: What are you doing with that collection now, Fernando?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: I have it on a -- I'm not a computer guy, but it's called a flash drive. I've got it even -- so I can remind myself [that?] you've got to plug it in. And I have some on my laptop. I have a ton of these from the Rochin family, my Tio Manuel, all the way back. [01:20:00] We go back to my Grandma Nina. That's my Grandma Nina right there. Her mother was Mama Pilar.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: She's the one responsible for the whole thing. (laughs)

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, Mama Pilar in Indio -- that's the Morales family in Indio. Before that, there was a lot of family right outside Chihuahua, Mexico in El Rancho Lareno. There was a lot of family back [then?]. My Mama Pilar, my great-great-grandmother, married Pedro Lara. Pedro Lara's father had a brother whose son was Geronimo, the Indian.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Geronimo.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Geronimo, yeah.

TOM RIVERA: Geronimo, you're kidding?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: No. That's why a lot of times for our family reunion -- I have it right here somewhere. For our family reunion --

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: [I took out my shirt?].

TOM RIVERA: [01:21:00] I'll be damned.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. We'll put this as the cover letter on the invitation, and everybody always asks about that. In here, I have the family tree going back to that time. Look at all these pictures. There's a ton of stuff in here.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, wow.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. It's just our family that I share with. My kids will one day inherit all this that I have. I mean, somebody's got to get it. Pass it on, [the source?].

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: When we have a family gathering -- remember, who made that sheet of plywood with the picture?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, it's on some plywood but it's on stainless steel. We got together and we decided we needed to do a pictorial of the family tree with all the faces associated with the names I have on this thing here. We started doing that, and it is huge. This thing, it takes [01:22:00] several people to assemble it at the reunion. And then all the photographs are there of the different families just branching out. It is so big now that we've outgrown the tree. We can't figure out, how are we going to make this thing bigger? How are we going to get this thing there, in the first place?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: And there's a little arrow pointing to the -- somebody had written on it, "She was responsible."

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, Mama Pilar, she was at the very bottom and Pedro. It's branched out into something that's unbelievable. It's huge. There's no more room. We've run out of room because the next generation, my grandkids and great-grandkids -- now I have four great-grandkids. There's no room for them at the top, so we're trying to figure out what we're going to do.

TOM RIVERA: So you have to start an orchard.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, something like that.

TOM RIVERA: The family tree growing into a big orchard. (laughter)

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, an orchard. That's a great idea. With several trees in it, I like that. Everybody bring their own tree.

TOM RIVERA: Fernando, [01:23:00] you wrote a wonderful little description of the family. Can you just -- maybe not read, or you can read it, but can you share the points that you put in your narrative?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Well, I got together -- originally, this started because in Colton they wanted to do a book, which never got published by the way, on historical locations in South Colton. My dad told me about it. He knows I like to dabble in writing a little bit. So he said, "You know what? We've got to get together and put something together about the store." We got together with Mariana, my mom, my dad, Antonietta several different times in 1995. I think Sammy was involved in some of the conversations. A lot of different people got involved. And it's like anything else, you start talking about La Esperanza Market and the stories [01:24:00] just get like the family tree. The stories just take off. All of a sudden what I figured may be a two-hour sit-down, the sun has already gone down and I'm trying to organize my notes. That was the beauty of it, sitting there with the family doing that. It was about the historical landmark. And I thought, God, that La Esperanza Market and all the people that were involved. Even the Santa Fe Railroad was part of the history because they stopped there before the underpass, the N Street underpass. The train would stop there before pulling into the yard, the Santa Fe yards in San Bernardino. The engineers would get off and my Tio Steve would make them -- it was like Subway before Subway. He would make them whatever they wanted, a [sandwichito?] he would call it. And the soda and they'd

sit there and they'd have conversation. [01:25:00] My Tio Steve knew everybody by name. Well, one of the guys -- I mentioned his name in the story -- started to like Trini Leyva. Trini Leyva worked for my Tio Steve and my Aunt Mariana. They eventually got married in the 1960s, you know, just to kind of tie in the railroad to the store too. Everybody was a part of that market. Everybody was made to feel special there. It's a landmark right in the preface here. It's a landmark only in the imaginations of all the people that had an opportunity to visit the store and experience -- I call it the La Esperanza experience because there's nothing like it. You can't go anywhere now and experience that, nowhere. It was special.

TOM RIVERA: You put it down on paper, and I'm delighted that you shared it with me and also [01:26:00] gave us a little summary of what your feelings were that you put on that little story that you put together.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, it's a story that I've shared with all my kids. They all have a copy of this. I love to write. I write every morning, and they're the recipients.

TOM RIVERA: Mm-hmm, could we borrow it and put it in our --?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: This? Absolutely. I think you guys have a copy already. I gave you guys a copy. This is my original one here. I don't have any more at home. I've given them all away. But this one, yeah, you can make copies of this if I can get it back, or copies of anything really.

TOM RIVERA: Well, I don't know how long we've taken for this interview, Sammy and Fernando, but it was wonderful. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you very much, both of you, Sammy and Fernando.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The good thing is I can remember things that happened a long time ago. I can't remember what I did yesterday. [01:27:00] (laughter) It's true. I can remember my teacher the first day of school, Mrs. [Pelts?], and I can't

remember yesterday. What did I do yesterday?

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: And really the time is insignificant. It's just a pleasure to sit here with all of you and share these stories. Thank you for asking questions and inviting us here. This has been a pleasure for us. I asked Sammy, I said, "Hey, Sam. I'm going to go to Cal State San Bernardino. Do you know Dr. Tom Rivera?" "Oh, yeah." I said, "He wants to do an interview. Do you want to go with me?" He goes, "Yeah, yeah. When? What time?" So, here we are, and it's been good for us. Sammy and I have a special relationship. Obviously, we grew up kind of like my grandfather and my Tio Steve. Two different generations but we're pretty, pretty close now.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Do you remember the Visconte family?

TOM RIVERA: Visconte? ¿Dónde vivían? Where did they live?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: They [01:28:00] lived over there off of Fifth Street.

Senora Visconte was very active in the church with her husband. Her son, Lawrence, was a pilot in the Second War. He got killed in France. He was the first known Mexican to go to college. His sister, Virginia --

TOM RIVERA: From Colton?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: From Colton. His sister graduated from a university also. Nobody went -- (inaudible) high school.

TOM RIVERA: What was their last name?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Visconte.

TOM RIVERA: With a *b* or a *v*?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: [Dave?] Visconte was the youngest brother. He had a brother named Arturo. I remember I had the mumps and I was home sick, and they came to visit me. It was right before he went in the service, and he became a pilot and he got killed.

TOM RIVERA: And he was one of the first people from Colton, Mexican American, to go to college? I'll have to look him up.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: To go to college, yeah. His name was Lorenzo Visconte. [01:29:00] In those days, especially the women, they're lucky they got to junior high school. It was unknown for the women to -- it was only, "What do you need school for? You've got to get married."

TOM RIVERA: So, it was a different mentality, Sammy?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's the way it was.

TOM RIVERA: You had to grow up and go to work.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's exactly right.

TOM RIVERA: You had to grow up and go to work and maintain the family.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Because you had to help. The family needed all the help they could have. They toughed it out and went to a university. I worked with his nephew in Victorville. He told me that later on when the war ended, some French people contacted him. They had found him and they had wrapped up all his belongings in a silk scarf and kept it and sent it to him. [01:30:00]

TOM RIVERA: Now, you have a picture here.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: That's my grandfather, Don Victor. He's the one who built the store.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He dressed formally here. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TOM RIVERA: Yeah. Can we borrow it and scan it? I'll give it back to you.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yes, that's why I pulled it out. That's one of the buildings that he built in the back of the property.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: He built everything that's there.

TOM RIVERA: Can you put his name on the back?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: It's got his name on the back.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: It's got his name on the back.

TOM RIVERA: Thank you. Now, Fernando and Sam, anything else that I forgot to ask or that you can recall that we can take advantage of the time that we have here?

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Except that we lived in very close proximity to all of us. His father lived backyard to backyard. They lived in the back part, so I could look out and see him. His uncle, his father's brother, lived next door to us. Our grandmother lived across the street. The other end lived [01:31:00] across the alley. And the next sister lived in the next house. An uncle lived -- we all lived right there. There was never a shortage of kids to play with. We had a lot of kids to play with.

TOM RIVERA: Well, you know, South Colton is 1.3 square miles.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Really?

TOM RIVERA: Yeah, from 3rd Street all the way to 12th Street, and then from -- is it L? L Street all the way to Congress, so it was a short 1.3 square miles of territory.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Just to jump on what Sammy said about living so close together, that's what I remember. A comment just came to mind that, "It takes a village." I think it was Hillary Clinton, but it might've been somebody else. I don't know. But that's what we had back there in those days because everybody was your mom. Your tias were your mom and your tios were all watching you. I told Sammy this story on the way here. We lived right next to the railroad tracks. I was at my grandma's house, [01:32:00] and I used to love the trains. And then the train started moving, so I'd run up the hill and I'd climb on the ladder on the side of the boxcar. I'd hold on with one foot like I was really brave. I was about eight years

old. I'd ride the boxcar just a few blocks down and then jump off. Well, one of these days, I'm holding on to the ladder on the boxcar and the train is traveling. My Aunt Mariana was the first car parked right there before the underpass. So, by the time I got back to my grandma's house, my dad was already there. She told on me. But I guess that's part of growing up in that neighborhood. They all watched us.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: You couldn't go anywhere in Colton without stopping for a train. No matter which direction you went, there was a -- there was no grade crossing. They were all flags. No matter where you went, direction you went, there was a train going by.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Those were good times. Familia was -- there was an abundance of family [01:33:00] in front, to the left, to the right. It didn't matter. It was always family. Kids playing, there was a ton of kids everywhere.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: Like I told him before, nobody had a watch. A certain train would go by and they'd know what time it was. The Santa Fe blew the whistle, they'd know what time it was.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Five o'clock.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The church rang the bell, they knew what time it was. (laughter) That was it. Todos (inaudible), the cement company blew their whistle, it was three o'clock.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. Young kids nowadays don't have that experience with that kind of freedom that we did back in those days. I don't think -- I mean, right now if my grandson rode his bicycle to Fairmont Park like I did, the parents would go crazy. I would ride my bike to Fairmont Park and just come home. I'd be by myself, and I'd tell my brother, "Oh, yeah. It was [01:34:00] no big deal." But it is now.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: The river was a playground. We called it a river.

TOM RIVERA: Oh, the Santa Ana River. That was a playground.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That was a playground. You'd go down there -- I don't know why we went down there, but we went down there and run around, sometimes a little bit of trickle of water but not too much. And then we used to go to the [sequia?] up on top of Jap Hill and go swimming. It was open at the time. That was the hang out. That was entertainment.

TOM RIVERA: So, we made due with the La Sequia, La Pila, La Pilita, and everything else. Los cuninos. Well, listen, again, thank you so much for being with us this morning. We thoroughly had a wonderful -- we reminisced quite a bit about the early Colton, about family, and also some of the values that we got growing up in Colton as young kids. Thank you so much. (applause) [01:35:00]

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: I've talked to other people from San Bernardino. They lived in the neighborhood, and basically they were in the same boat we were. They did the same things we did at Mount Vernon. It was no different. A different town but they did the same things.

TOM RIVERA: Yes, and, again, because we were not permitted to do other things outside our little territory.

SAMMY HERNANDEZ: That's it. And we didn't want to go anywhere else.

TOM RIVERA: We had to make do with what we had. Well, thank you so much.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ: Thank you guys. That was good.

End of Interview:
[01:35:31]