

## Voces Breaks New Ground

In January 2015, a UT graduate student sat across from a 92-year-old woman who served in the little-known Benito Juarez Squadron of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. It had taken the student over a year to track down Mercedes Vallejo Flores. And had it not been for that interview – conducted for the Voces Oral History Project, and part of the student’s dissertation research – the story of the Benito Juarez Squadron would have been forever lost.

This is why the Voces Oral History Project was created and why it is still urgently needed: to uncover important and untold stories about the U.S. Latino experience. This project was established in 1999 to address the prevailing lack of a Latino perspective in the U.S. historical narrative, initially about World War II. The project has recorded interviews with nearly 1,000 Latino veterans and civilians of the WWII, Korean and Vietnam war periods. It has also digitized thousands of photographs of interview subjects.

Recently, it launched a new collection on political and civic engagement, focused on the 1975 Voting Rights Act expansion and extension. Again, we’re discovering essential and untold stories. Voces has interviewed some of the key people responsible for this legislation, which include several lawyers and many others who demanded greater political involvement. We were astounded to learn that some of those men and women had never shared their stories. Looking at this in a positive light, we’re on the ground floor of important groundbreaking research. We only wish we had the resources to record or facilitate more of these crucial interviews.



Photo by Tina Pamintuan

Gabriel Perez records as Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez interviews Rosie Castro.

At the “Latinos, the Voting Rights Act and Political Engagement” conference, scheduled for Nov. 12 and 13, 2015, we will publicly recognize some of the men and women who helped pass the 1975 Voting Rights Act extension and expansion.

Without interviews such as ours, the world may never know of the very heroic efforts made by people who have received so little attention. It is our great privilege to celebrate the many people who have given so much so that U.S. Latinos might participate more fully in their country.

Photo by Christina Murrey



Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

### A Note from the Project Director

Our important work isn’t done – and we need your help to make sure the project continues to gather key interviews and to maintain and preserve them. Along the way, we’re creating new ways of sharing them.

We’re still interviewing veterans and civilians of the WWII, Korean War and Vietnam War periods – and we’ve added a political and civic engagement collection as well. All along, we’re discovering perspectives that otherwise would have been lost. Our goal will never change: to create primary source interviews that can be used to include Latinos in our country’s historical narrative.

As resources permit, we are putting entire interviews online, making them accessible from any place in the world – something we’ve hoped to do for years now. This is just one of many opportunities to share our interviews with the world! It really is a wonderful time for oral history

and for telling the Latino story.

But in the meantime, we’re thinking far ahead – guaranteeing the continuity and preservation of our project’s work for the generations to come. In the coming months, we’ll be building an endowment and we need your help. We’re asking you to step up and help us – we can take the Voces Oral History Project to heights we can only dream of now. *See the back page for details.*

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# WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOCES: Q&A with Angela Bonilla



**Q:** When were you involved in the Project?

I was involved with Voces my first year at UT, which was 2014-2015. I was a little freshman coming in to UT, and it was a good experience.

**Q:** What did you do at Voces?

I was one of two work-study students. I really enjoyed it, and I gained some journalism experience through it. I wrote some stories, I did an interview, and I worked on the database. I also did indexes for the subject interviews.

**Q:** What did you learn during your time with the Project?

I learned how to conduct interviews and how to write stories as a freshman. I didn't have any journalism experience coming into college, so I am glad I learned through the project. Another thing I learned is that it's important to have the details about the subject – you have to fact check it to make sure it's correct.

**Q:** What are you doing now?

I am now a second-year journalism student and I now volunteer with Voces. I am hoping to double major in public relations. I also write for ORANGE Magazine, an online student publication.

## WWII COLLECTION



**Lita De Los Santos**

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

Like millions of American women, Lita De Los Santos spent 1942-45 writing letters, worrying, and praying. She prayed that her eight brothers would return from some of the bloodiest battlefields in the world.

De Los Santos and her mother Angelita Guajardo, who at the time lived in Eastland County, Texas, relied on the family radio and weekly newsreels to keep up with the latest updates from the war; occasional mail from their loved ones kept their hope alive.

One day in the summer of 1944, the women received a telegram saying that Charlie, one of the De Los Santos brothers, had been killed on Omaha Beach in the invasion of Normandy.

Other telegrams came, each one shedding light on a brother's whereabouts: in Europe, Ernie was a prisoner of war in Germany, and Cano and Ray were wounded; in the Pacific, Jesse and Pete faced injury and sickness, respectively. For Nick and Al, no news was good news.

After the war, the seven surviving De Los Santos brothers came back to Texas.

"Seven boys (returned) home as seven men," De Los Santos said. "Some were not wounded, but they came home with horrible, horrible memories."

They didn't stay home long, however, each embarking on his own search for opportunity.

In 1945, an 18-year-old Lita De Los Santos married Alejandro Santos of Laredo, Texas, another returning veteran. The couple had six children, one of whom served in the Navy during the Vietnam War.

*Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on Feb. 20, 2008.*



**Carmen Garcia-Rosado**

Interview by Manuel Aviles-Santiago

In 1944, while WWII was still raging thousands of miles from Puerto Rico, Carmen García-Rosado read a newspaper story that said that the U.S. Army was recruiting women from the island to serve with the Women's Army Corps.

Against her mother's wishes, she enlisted and was one of 200 women selected for an all-Puerto Rican WAC unit.

García-Rosado went through basic training at Fort Oglethorpe, in Georgia, and was assigned to Company 6, 2nd Battalion, 21st Regiment of the WACs. After an initial appointment as a nurse, she became a mail clerk at the New York Port of Embarkation. She inspected letters to search for military secrets, which she would turn in to her supervisors.

García-Rosado finished her service and returned to Puerto Rico on Jan. 6, 1946. Back home, she became aware of the prejudice that military women faced when trying to return to civilian life and became an activist for the rights of Puerto Rican women veterans.

Through the years, she wrote to Puerto Rico and U.S. political leaders, asking them to acknowledge the status of Puerto Rican women veterans and to expedite the distribution of undelivered benefits checks.

In 2006, García-Rosado published a book about the experiences of Puerto Rican military women during World War II, a task she considers to be the greatest tribute to the women she served with.

"It was a great honor for us to serve the American nation," Garcia-Rosado wrote in Spanish in a 2015 e-mail to Voces.

*Interviewed in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Feb. 11, 2011.*



**Johnnie Gonzalez**

Interview by Tella Garcia

Born in the small city of Florence, Kansas, Johnnie Gonzalez grew up with three brothers and two sisters. He enlisted in the U.S. Army on Nov. 3, 1942, at age 19, and was sent to basic training in Fort Riley, Kansas.

His unit consisted mostly of Anglo-American men and only about five Mexican-American men that he can remember. “We were on a big ship where you just see blue water as far as you can see; there was never a sense of racism. ... We were more like one big, happy family,” Gonzalez said of his unit’s voyage to India.

Gonzalez was stationed primarily in

**“There was never a sense of racism. ... We were more like one big, happy family.”**

-Johnnie Gonzalez

India, where he ate, slept and fought off the Japanese enemy. He found out that war could be gut-wrenching: Once, he had to eat worms to satisfy his hunger.

Gonzalez was in Burma when he found out the war had ended. He was discharged with the rank of private first class and returned home to his family.

Today he resides in Wichita, Kansas, and still enjoys everything local that he knew growing up – going to the same restaurants and listening to the same music.

“I’m 88 years old and the doctor tells me I got another 10 years on me. ... I don’t know if that’s true, but I don’t think much into it because I am still just glad to be alive,” Gonzalez said.

*Interviewed in Wichita, Kansas, on June 15, 2010.*



**John Hernandez**

Interview by Nikki Cruz Jones

John Hernandez attributed his successes in life to a belief in hard work and perseverance. The child of Mexican immigrants, he went on to be a decorated World War II veteran, successful businessman and dedicated father.

He was born to Miguel Hernandez and Ruth Sanchez in Los Angeles on Oct. 20, 1915. His parents had 14 children, although only three lived past infancy, including John.

Hernandez quit high school to work to help his family. He had a stint with the Civilian Conservation Corps and later worked at an upholstery business. In 1939, he opened a liquor store with his father.

He was drafted by the Army in 1942; he served in the Army Air Forces as a side-gunner on a B-26 Medium Bomber.

One day, after he and his crew had destroyed an Italian railroad station to cut off German transportation, German forces attacked and damaged his plane. Hernandez managed to parachute into a farm outside the city of Viterbo without being hit by enemy fire, but he broke his ankle on landing and was captured. He spent 14 grueling months at a German POW camp named Stalag II-B.

Upon returning to the U.S., Hernandez found that his father had recently died, so he took over the family’s liquor store.

In 1954, he married Beatriz Becerra. The couple had eight children, all of whom went to college. While Hernandez took pride in his children’s education, what he cherished most were the values he passed on from his parents.

“My folks didn’t have any money. They didn’t have an education,” Hernandez said. “But sometimes you don’t need an education. What you need more is a desire to better yourself and not have nobody feel sorry for you.”

*Interviewed in Whittier, California, on Oct. 16, 2005.*



**Genaro V. Lopez**

Interview by Genaro Lopez

Genaro V. Lopez says World War II “made a man” out of him.

Born on April 8, 1925, Lopez was working for an automotive parts distributor in his native Brownsville, Texas, when he entered the Army Air Force on May 20, 1943. He did basic training at Fort Hood, Texas, and was sent to North Africa as a member of the 708th Air Material Squadron.

Lopez says his unit was eventually taken to Normandy Beach by gliders and dropped off with the 82nd Airborne Division.

He recalled the struggles that he and his fellow soldiers went through in Normandy, where a close friend of his was killed, and in the Rhineland.

Lopez himself was wounded during the Siege of Bastogne. A German soldier’s bullet hit him in the knee, but he was able to shoot back.

“I kept watching where I thought the bullet came, saw a helmet and shot right between the eyes. I killed that son of a bitch,” Lopez remembered.

Lopez, who was honorably discharged at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, on March 12, 1946, received the Bronze Star and the WWII Victory Medal, among other accolades.

While he did not immediately receive a Purple Heart in recognition of the injuries he sustained in battle, his son Genaro Lopez wrote in an email to Voces that the family had contacted U.S. Rep. Filemon Vela Jr., D-Texas, to request the award.

After the war, Lopez married Carmen Coronado in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Brownsville. The couple had four sons and four daughters.

*Interviewed in Weslaco, Texas, on Aug. 25, 2012.*



**Lupe Loya**

Interview by Alcano Alvarado

Guadalupe “Lupe” Loya Jr. was working at a Civilian Conservation Corps in Wyoming when he was drafted into World War II. He traveled to meet with recruiting officers in San Antonio.

“I can’t read and write as good as you guys,” Loya responded, since he had gone to school only through the third grade. “They told me I’d be fine as long as I could shoot a rifle.”

After completing basic training in Virginia and returning to his native Beeville, Texas, to spend time with his family, Loya left for the Pacific Theater in 1943.

When Loya’s ship reached the Philippines, Allied forces had already done substantial damage to Japanese fleets in the Pacific, and he never took part in battle. Still, he learned how to do a number of jobs while at sea – from mess hall cook to watch duty at the highest point on the ship.

By the time of his May 6, 1946, discharge from Texas’ Camp Wallace as a seaman second class, Loya had traveled all through the Pacific and seen the end of World War II.

Back in Beeville, Loya drove dump trucks for a company that served the city government; he was later hired as garbage collector for the city itself. He was also employed as a street worker, fixing and patching roads. Eventually, he became superintendent of the garbage and street departments of the City of Beeville, and occupied that position until his retirement.

Thirty years of work with the city provided money to support his wife, Julia Guerrero, and their four children, Loya said.

*Interviewed in Beeville, Texas, on Jan. 10, 2009.*



**Juan Martinez**

Tribute

Juan Lugo Martinez was born on April 20, 1919 in Cuero, Texas, a town about 75 miles southeast of San Antonio. He was the son of Luis Martinez, a railroad worker, and Delfina Lugo.

Martinez attended school up to fourth grade and then began working to support his family, who eventually settled in Crystal City, Texas.

Martinez was working on his car one morning when he heard on the radio that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

“He was in disbelief and quickly was ready to do what he had to do,” daughter Yolanda Guerra wrote in a tribute provided to Voces.

Martinez entered active service at Fort Sam Houston, near San Antonio, on Dec. 10, 1941. On Dec. 21, he was sent to Camp Roberts, in California, to start basic training.

According to his discharge records, Martinez served for three years in Alaska as an infantry gunner. His regiment was tasked with guarding an airfield on the route to Siberia.

He returned to the mainland United States on Oct. 25, and was discharged on Nov. 3, 1945, at Fort McClellan, in Alabama, with the rank of private first class.

Martinez returned to Crystal City and married Lilia Perez, a secretary with Del Monte, on May 7, 1947. They had three children: Juan Luis, Jose Indalecio and Yolanda.

For 25 years, Martinez worked at the Coca-Cola Bottling Co. as a route salesman. He was actively involved in the Crystal City American Legion Post 396.

In 1998, Martinez and his wife sold their house in Crystal City and moved to Seguin, Texas to be closer to their grandchildren.

Juan Martinez passed away in Seguin on Feb. 7, 1999.

*Based on information provided by Yolanda Guerra, Mr. Martinez’s daughter.*



**Trinidad Martinez**

Interview by Erica Martinez

Trinidad Martinez endured years of incredible hardship as a prisoner of war and survived the infamous Bataan Death March, a feat he attributes to the grueling training he received upon joining the military.

Martinez was born on Dec. 24, 1917, in Mercedes, Texas (about 40 miles northwest of Brownsville). Growing up, he worked in the fields with his father and his siblings, and later worked delivering produce to San Antonio.

Martinez was inducted into the Army on April 8, 1941. At basic training in Galveston, Texas, officers worked him for days virtually without pause. This test of his endurance would prove invaluable.

He was assigned to the New Mexico National Guard, which became the 200th Coast Artillery Regiment. The unit was deployed to defend air bases in the Philippines.

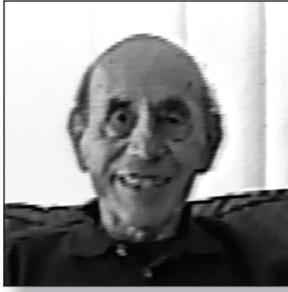
Japanese forces invaded the archipelago on Dec. 8, 1941, mere hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The battle raged for five months until U.S. forces surrendered in April 1942. Captured soldiers were forced to march continually for days on end without food or water. Those who stumbled or paused risked being beaten or killed on the spot.

Survivors of the march toiled in prisoner camps for months before being taken to Japan on crowded “hell ships.” Martinez was one of 1,700 American POWs who landed on the Japanese coast in late December 1942 aboard the Nagato Maru.

As American forces advanced in the Philippines in October of 1944, U.S. soldiers prepared for rescue, and on Oct. 12, 1945, Martinez returned to the States.

For his service, the government awarded him an Army Good Conduct medal, World War II Victory medal and Prisoner of War medal, among other accolades.

*Interviewed in San Antonio on Aug. 4, 2009.*



## Val Martinez

Interview by William G. Luna

Nothing prepared Val Martinez for the icy night on which he landed in Marseilles, France, with the 103rd Infantry Division to prepare for combat in World War II.

Martinez would spend months as a tank commander, advancing across Central Europe. But the first night, he said, was the coldest.

Born in Kansas, Martinez grew up in East Chicago, Ind., from the age of 5. After his mother died, he supported the family by working with his father in a steel mill.

In 1942, he married Carolina. Six months later, he was drafted into military service.

He went to intelligence training school to learn the skills he would later use on the battlefield. His unit spent more than nine months in Europe before it was sent home for a short break. Luckily, the war ended before Martinez's break was over.

He was discharged Nov. 9, 1945, at the rank of sergeant. For his service, Martinez earned an EAME Theater Campaign Medal with three Bronze Campaign Stars, American Theater Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal and WWII Victory Medal.

Back to civilian life, he attended Indiana University at Bloomington. After graduating, he joined the Chicago school system where, in 1970, he became the first administrator of its bilingual program. Martinez worked for the Chicago Independent School District for 37 years.

He said he taught the importance of diversity to the hundreds of students and teachers he worked with.

"If people in our society do not have social contact with other ethnic groups, then we're not going to have harmony," he said.

*Interviewed in Chicago on Oct. 21, 2002.\**



## Mike Morado

Interview by Valerie Martinez

While he sat in his foxhole, 23-year-old Mike Morado was scared and cold, and wondering if he would survive World War II or even make it to his 24th birthday.

"I was up at the mountains, looking up at the sky, and I remember my mother had said that there was a God somewhere. And I thought maybe he was there, and I said, 'If you're there, I want to go home. That would be so nice,' and I made a desperate promise that I would spend the rest of my life doing volunteer work," Morado said.

After making it back to the United States safely, he fulfilled his promise. For decades, the veteran took part in a variety of civic organizations; he also contributed to the creation of IMAGE, which stands for Incorporated Mexican American Government Employees.

Morado was born in Dodge City, Kansas, on April 12, 1921. He was the third out of five children for Juan Morado and Rosa Rivera, both of whom hailed from the town of Romita, Guanajuato, in central Mexico.

After WWII broke out, Morado was drafted into the Army in November 1942. He underwent training in Camp Claiborne, in Louisiana, and Camp Howze, in Texas, before being deployed to the European Theater as part of Company K, 410th Regiment, 103th Infantry Division.

When the war was over, he, like many of his fellow veterans, had a difficult time re-adjusting to civilian life. Overcome with guilt over what he experienced during WWII, he endured two years of alcohol abuse before turning his life around and becoming involved in his community.

*Interviewed in Kansas City, Kansas, on June 17, 2010.*



## Henry Oyama

Interview by Taylor Peterson

Having grown up in a Spanish-speaking Japanese-American family in Tucson, Arizona, Henry "Hank" Oyama went on to be a tireless supporter of bilingual education for American children.

Oyama was raised by his mother, Mary Matsushima, who was of Japanese descent but grew up in Mexico and spoke mainly Spanish. His father died before he was born. When Oyama was 15, his family was sent to an internment camp for Japanese Americans near Poston, Arizona (about 173 miles west of Phoenix).

Oyama was drafted into the military at 18 and did counterintelligence work in the Panama Canal Zone. When his service was up in 1947, he used the GI Bill to enroll at the University of Arizona, where he majored in education.

After college, he taught history at Pueblo High School in Tucson. There, he met the woman who would go on to be his first wife, Mary Anne Jordan. After being denied their marriage license due to a state law that forbade interracial marriage, the couple fought back and had it overturned by the courts in 1959.

Oyama was among a group of Pueblo High educators who taught honors-level reading and writing to Spanish speakers; these programs were also implemented at Pima Community College. He was also one of the authors of *The Invisible Minority*, a report about the need for change in the education of U.S. Hispanics that inspired the first bilingual education law in the country.

"What we want are strong Americans who can speak both languages with equal facility in the military, government, business and the private sector. We want them to be proud of their culture," Oyama said.

*Interviewed in Tucson, Arizona, on Aug. 17, 2010.*



**Carlos Peña**

Interview by Rick Leal

Carlos Peña was 17 when he was drafted into the Army on Dec. 7, 1943, and assigned to the 24th Infantry Division. After receiving training in heavy artillery at Camp Shelby in Mississippi and jungle training in California, he boarded a boat for New Guinea with 5,000 other men.

The boat landed at Leyte in the Philippines the day after the island was invaded. The Japanese were bombing the island, and Peña was assigned to a 12-foot-long gun on wheels for shooting over the mountains.

“The Japanese were coming from both sides,” Peña recalled. “They were firing on the beach. The beach was littered with Japanese. I was assigned to the outfit protecting the artillery.” Although the Japanese were driven away, Peña spent Christmas on the island.

The day the war was over, Peña awoke with abdominal pains. His appendix had burst, and he received an emergency appendectomy aboard a naval ship. After his recuperation, he was assigned the task of confiscating weapons from Japanese civilians. Peña traveled door to door, taking the weapons of families.

Back home from the war, Peña married Ofelia Rodriguez and had one son, John. He worked for L.T. Boswell Ford and sold auto parts for 55 years. He said he never missed a day at work and was never late. He later received a Bronze Star for his action in the liberation of the Philippines.

Peña, 79 at the time of this interview, still had a rifle and a saber he had confiscated during the war.

*Interviewed in San Benito, Texas on March 14, 2004.\**



**Delphino Peña**

Interview by Domingo Marquez

On his 20th birthday, Delphino Peña was drafted into World War II as a soldier fighting the Japanese.

His unit captured Leyte Island and Samoa and was then sent to Luzon in the Philippines to liberate more than 3,700 Allied prisoners of war, including survivors of the Bataan Death March, being held at Santo Tomas University. A pilot flew over the campus in advance and secretly dropped a note to let prisoners know help was on its way. The note read: “Roll out the barrel, Santa Claus is coming to town; Monday or Tuesday.”

“But we got in there on Saturday and surprised everybody!” Peña said.

Army tanks plowed through the wall surrounding the university.

Peña was still in the Philippines when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in Japan. Along the way, he contracted malaria, so after the war ended, he returned to the United States on a hospital ship, and was treated stateside at several hospitals.

Peña received the Bronze Star with a Liberation Ribbon for being one of the Philippine liberators, an Infantry Combat Badge, a Pacific Campaign Medal with eight battle stars, and the medal he was happiest to receive: his Discharge Button.

Three years after the war ended, Peña married Matilda Garcia Peña. The couple had two children, Vivian Ann Peña and Noe Orlando Peña. At the time of his interview, Peña and his family were residing in Houston, where he volunteered as an honorary pallbearer at military funerals.

*Interviewed in Houston on Aug. 16, 2001.\**



**John Ramirez**

Interview by Megan Jones

John Corona Ramirez said he and his family did not experience much economic hardship when he was growing up in Topeka, Kansas, during the Great Depression. He did recall, however, that his family often went without new clothing.

“Just wear what you have. That’s all,” Ramirez said, recalling how he dealt with the tough economic times.

Ramirez expressed a similar stoicism as he remembered what he did to help the family during hard times.

According to his discharge documents, Ramirez was born in Silao, Guanajuato, in central Mexico, on June 12, 1920. He had two brothers, Ted and Cecil, and one younger sister, Antonia. He and his siblings were born in Mexico.

Ramirez spoke both Spanish and English but only spoke Spanish at home.

His mother, Everista Ramirez, worked as a housewife. Ramirez’s father, Forlan Ramirez, worked for the Santa Fe Railway.

Ramirez attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Elementary School, in Topeka, for eight years. He played basketball and softball.

Ramirez was drafted into the U.S. Army during World War II. He was assigned to the 21st Infantry Division. On March 20, 1944, he departed for the Pacific Theater, involved in campaigns in New Guinea and the Philippines.

Ramirez received a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star; a Good Conduct Medal; and other accolades.

Upon his return to the United States, Ramirez returned to his hometown in Topeka, Kansas. Ramirez and his wife, Concepcion Torrez Ramirez had one son, Louis H. Ramirez, who later joined the Army and served during the Vietnam War.

*Interviewed in Topeka, Kansas, on June 16, 2010.*



**Frank Segura**

Interview by Brenda Sendejo

A wall in the Austin, Texas, home that Frank Segura shares with his wife, Alice Salinas Segura, is adorned with the medals he earned during his Army service from June 13, 1943, to Oct. 25, 1945. Among them is the Purple Heart, given to all the soldiers who were wounded, injured or killed in combat.

Segura said he does not remember how he got wounded. But fellow Timberwolf (104th Infantry Division member) Nick Antonacol said in a statement that Segura was knocked unconscious by a German shell in early 1945 while on patrol with his platoon on the Rhine River in Koln, Germany. "His face had burns and blisters, and he remained unconscious for some time ... When he returned to our squad, at a later date, I remember him complaining about his back, and both of us experienced ringing in our ears periodically," Antonacol wrote.

Segura's condition has since been diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Since his time in the Army, Segura said he has had trouble sleeping. "For a while, my bad dreams were about WWII. A lot of my buddies that I saw, they got killed. I had to leave 'em, you know. They had to stay there," said Segura.

PTSD has been recognized as a clinical condition only since 1980. Research on Vietnam veterans indicates ethnic minorities suffer a higher incidence of PTSD than Anglos.

Segura is half Mexican-American and half Lakota Sioux.

After being discharged, Segura returned to Austin and to his wife, Alice, whom he'd married shortly before going off to war. Still together, they've raised 10 children.

*Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on Oct. 28, 2005.\**



**Elena Tafoya**

Interview by Brian Lucero

New Mexico's Santa Rita is the oldest active mine in Southwest United States and one of the world's largest open-pit mines. Once, however, Santa Rita was also a bustling town – where Elena Escobar Tafoya was born almost a century ago, in 1916.

Elena lived in a small house with her parents, Timoteo Padilla and Cruz Maldonado Padilla, along with six brothers and seven sisters. Life was tough and the entire family worked to survive, led by a strict but loving mother.

"I don't know how my mother did it, but we did," Elena said.

The family moved to Hanover, where Elena met Raymundo Tafoya, who would become her husband. They eloped when she was 25. A week after their nuptials, the Tafoyas started living in a house owned by the Empire Zinc Mining Co., where Raymundo worked.

The Pearl Harbor attack happened months after their wedding, and the United States entered World War II. Raymundo was called to enlist in the military but didn't pass the entrance. Many other mine laborers weren't so lucky, however, and the mines began employing women to deal with the shortage of workers. Tafoya, however, was too young, so she took care of her family and worked in the community.

In the 1950s, the mines were segregated, and pay was often lower for workers of color. A group of miners, mostly Latinos, went on strike to protest. But the mining company used strike breakers to continue production, driving a painful wedge into many families.

"My husband and his cousin were very close, good friends, and he was a scab [strike breaker] and my husband was not, so they didn't talk to us anymore," Tafoya said. "[But] now we're good friends again."

*Interviewed in Hanover, New Mexico, on July 15, 2004.\**



**Tomas Treviño**

Interview by Paul Jaure

Fear set in when Tomas Mata Treviño received a draft letter from the U.S. Army two months after registering. He had never left his native Beeville, Texas.

He recalled that about 40 other local residents were called to duty at the same time.

"We were scared but there was nothing we could do. ... At that point, two or three had been killed in the war from Beeville," Treviño said.

The Army took Treviño to Fort Lewis, near Tacoma, Washington, for basic training, and then to Camp Stoneman, the Pacific Theatre replacement center, near Pittsburg, California.

Even though the war was over, the soldiers abroad still had plenty of work, so the military sent Treviño to Japan on a medical ship. After reaching Japan, he helped retrieve soldiers wounded in battle and others who had been prisoners of war. Later on, he was transferred to transportation services.

Being far from family was the most difficult aspect of military life, said Treviño, who grew up in Beeville as one of seven children of Onesimo Treviño and Francisca Mata.

Treviño was discharged from the Army on Dec. 19, 1946. Upon returning to Beeville, he went back to work at the Keller Hotel, where he had started working at age 14, when he dropped out of school to help his family.

There, he met his wife, Maria Eva Vargas Ebro, with whom he had seven children. In later years, he worked as a trash collector for the City of Beeville for 17 years, until he suffered a heart attack that he said left him unable to work, adding that his military benefits helped him with his health expenses.

*Interviewed in Beeville, Texas, on Jan. 10, 2009.\**

# CONGRATULATIONS, Richard Candelaria!



Congratulations to Col. Richard G. Candelaria and his fellow American Fighter Aces, who were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington, D.C., on May 20, 2015. The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest honor Congress can award a civilian.

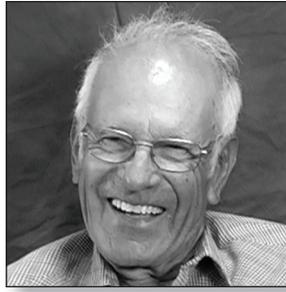
To be dubbed an Ace (in WWII), a military pilot must be credited with destroying five or more enemy aircraft during aerial combat. Mr. Candelaria is credited with six aerial victories as a fighter pilot for the U.S. Army Air Force 435th Fighter Squadron of the 479th Fighter Group during World War II. Mr. Candelaria is also a charter member of the American Fighter Aces Association. Mario and Dee Barrera interviewed Mr. Candelaria for the Voces Oral History Project in 2003.

To read the story based on his recorded interview, visit [vocesoralhistoryproject.org](http://vocesoralhistoryproject.org).



Photos courtesy of the Candelaria family.

## WWII COLLECTION



### Armando Vasquez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Armando Vasquez's decision to go to high school led him far beyond the warm, dry weather of his native West Texas.

Upon finishing eighth grade in the small community of Casa Piedra, Texas, Vasquez went to Marfa to attend high school, leaving his family's ranch. There, he developed an ambition to become a Marine.

"The reason I volunteered to become a Marine was because I liked the uniform. I loved the uniform," said Vasquez. He traveled to Fort Bliss, near El Paso, to sign up.

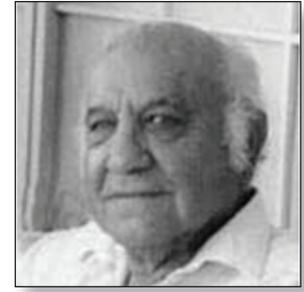
After taking his physical, Vasquez's hope of becoming a Marine was quickly dashed when a sergeant decided to enlist him in the Army instead.

He was sent to Fort Knox, in Kentucky, where he was trained as a troop replacement, and was later deployed to Le Havre, France. Much to his delight, Vasquez was soon assigned to the 737th Tank Battalion. An assistant driver, he manned the .30-caliber machine gun on an M4 Sherman tank.

Toward the end of WWII, Vasquez returned to the U.S. and was discharged on Nov. 11, 1945. Back in Marfa, he took up work as a mechanic in a Chevrolet dealership and married Josephine Velasco, with whom he had three children.

In 1950, he left for central Mexico, where he worked as cattle inspector for two years. He saved enough to return to Marfa, buy a house and open his own garage. After gradually growing his business under Chevron, he was able to buy it and ran it for 38 years until 1997, when he sold it and retired to his ranch in Casa Piedra.

*Interviewed in Marfa, Texas, on Aug. 18, 2012.*



### William Wood

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

William Wood was "born in space," a reference to the town of Santa Rita in New Mexico that has since been reduced to an open pit mine.

He grew up in a bilingual household and did odd jobs to work his way through grade school before joining the local mine at 15. Some of his clearest recollections were of the 105-degree heat and discrimination.

Stumbling upon a magazine photo of a U.S. naval officer in his dress whites made him realize where he really wanted to be. "I looked at myself," he said. "All full of dirt, hard hat and lamp... I think I'll join the Navy." Before leaving for boot camp, he made himself a promise: "When I get back, I'll defecate on the mine."

Wood received electronic and aviation training to prepare him for Fleet Airwing-11, where he followed German submarines up and down the Atlantic coast during WWII. The same training later helped him build a career for himself in Southern California, working with employers such as Honeywell, American Can Co. and Western Electric.

Wood married Bernice Moore and had two sons, Michael and Billy Wood. He retired at 60 and returned to New Mexico but didn't forget the promise he had made to himself. He filled up a bag with dried dog turds and, flying over Santa Rita, dropped it into the copper pit he had worked in as a teenager, watching it fall into the center of the mine.

"It was symbolic," he said. "Gringos didn't believe there were smart Chicanos."

*Interviewed in Arenas Valley, New Mexico, on July 15, 2004.\**

# KOREAN WAR COLLECTION



## Fernando Del Rio

Interview by Avery Bradshaw

Fernando Del Rio remembered when his two older brothers returned home after serving in World War II. A high school student at the time, he was among the many Americans who joined the Armed Forces after the war ended.

He was told that the Navy did not need men at the time, so he went to work at Hughes Aircraft Co. as a mechanic. When North Korea invaded South Korea in September 1950, however, he was called for basic training in Seattle.

During his first assignment in Japan, Del Rio spent 11 hours a day on a plane with three other men, dropping sensors to identify suspicious boats or submarines. He completed 17 combat missions but never once fired a weapon.

After his assignment ended, Del Rio returned to Seattle to continue his mechanical career. Eventually, he was called to serve again, and left for Korea in March 1952. He was stationed on the USS Princeton aircraft carrier, where he fueled and de-fueled planes. He was finally discharged in October 1952, as petty officer third class.

Back in the States, Del Rio used his GI Bill benefits to attend UCLA and graduated in 1957 with a degree in international relations. He later went to graduate school at the American Institute for Foreign Trade (now Thunderbird School of Global Management), in Arizona.

Del Rio made a career in communications. He worked as a reporter and presenter for KCAL-TV and as a director of communications at the Southern California Association of Governments, among other jobs in the industry. He later opened his own business: a public relations company named DOME Enterprises.

*Mr. Del Rio was interviewed in Los Angeles on June 9, 2010.\**



## Ramon Reyes

Interview by Dale Nulik

Ramon Reyes grew up in Wellington, Kansas, where he described life as quiet and simple. In his youth, he played high school sports, and helped his father and siblings tend to the family garden.

His routine was broken only when he was drafted by the U.S. Army. He left for basic training at Fort Riley, in Kansas, on Oct. 21, 1952. Preparing for deployment during the wintertime turned out to be good preparation for what he would experience in Korea.

Reyes was wounded by shrapnel on June 14, 1953, while trying to protect a group of wounded soldiers from enemy fire.

"I didn't even know I was wounded," Reyes said. "Not until someone told me." He had been struck in the back of the head by shrapnel and was bleeding.

After recovering from his injuries, Reyes returned to serving with his unit. He was still in Korea when the fighting stopped on July 27, 1953.

Reyes returned to Kansas and was honorably discharged in October 1954; soon after, he enlisted in the Army Reserves.

Back in civilian life, Reyes spent a year working at a meatpacking plant, until he got a job with the post office in Wellington. He worked there until his retirement in 1992.

Reyes married Maria Perez, with whom he had six children; the couple divorced in 1986.

After his retirement, Reyes served as the commander for many veterans organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Wellington and the Military Order of the Purple Heart in Wichita, Kansas. He was also honored twice by the GI Forum.

*Interviewed in Wichita, Kansas, on June 15, 2010.*

# CONGRATULATIONS, Ramón Galindo!

Photo courtesy of the Galindo family



Ramón Galindo and grandson Jason Caballero at the Texas Association of Magicians convention.

Ramón Galindo of Austin, was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Texas Association of Magicians in September 2015, only the latest in many awards he has received for his magician skills. In 1991, he was on the cover of *The International Conjurors' Magazine*.

Mr. Galindo began performing magic as a child, learning from his own father, who was an amateur magician. "He would giggle and laugh and just looked like he had so much enjoyment out of it," Galindo said.

Galindo has long been recognized for his magician skills — and has received many trophies for his magic. He has traveled to conferences throughout the world, and has received much recognition.

When his two daughters were growing up, they were his assistants in magic tricks and later, his grandchildren joined him.

Mr. Galindo was in the U.S. Army and served in Europe with the 571st Anti-Aircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion, and was part of the Battle of the Bulge and the Rhine River Battle, in March of 1945. He was interviewed on September 27, 2000, by Martamaria McGonagle.



**Richard Manriquez**

Interview by Jordan Haeger

Richard Manriquez served one tour in Vietnam, and he came back a changed man. An auto mechanic turned body collector, he witnessed things that haunted him the rest of his life.

The draft interrupted Manriquez's career at the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. He was on his way to managing his own store in his native Houston when he was called to serve.

Manriquez was flown to Saigon and then bused to Long Binh, a base about 60 miles outside of Saigon. He was assigned to the 326th Medical Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division.

Since he had worked in body shops, Manriquez had the responsibility of fixing military vehicles at nearby Bien Hoa Air Base. However, three months after the Tet Offensive there was a high number of casualties, and Manriquez's job shifted from repairing vehicles to collecting wounded soldiers and the bodies of the dead.

Manriquez was discharged in May of 1969. Ninety days after returning to Houston, he married Olivia Rodriguez, with whom he had two children. With the help of the GI Bill, Manriquez earned an associate's degree in sociology, and eventually opened his own body shop in 1980. All the while, he suffered the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In 2011, Manriquez said he was accused of pointing a pistol at his wife. He said he doesn't remember the incident, but the event estranged him from his family. Pushed by fellow veterans to seek help, his condition was later diagnosed as PTSD by a VA psychiatrist.

In spite of the emotional scars left by the war, Manriquez said he does not regret his experience in Vietnam. He said he considered himself to be a patriot and was proud to have served his country.

*Interviewed on April 9, 2011, in Houston.*



**Nestor Rodriguez**

Interview by Ben Wermund

Social pressure after a broken engagement pushed Nestor Rodriguez to quit college and enlist in the Army in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War.

While going through basic training in Fort Bliss, near El Paso, Texas, Rodriguez worried about being sent to the battlefield and regretted enlisting. However, his academic prowess took him on a different path.

Rodriguez, typically a straight-A student, achieved good scores in aptitude tests and was offered a spot at West Point. He ended up declining the offer because he didn't want to make a career out of the military.

Instead, he underwent engineering and airborne training in Missouri and Georgia, respectively, and was eventually assigned to a nuclear missile site near Fairbanks, Alaska. There, he maintained missiles for 18 months, until the site was closed and he returned to his native Corpus Christi, Texas.

Rodriguez resumed his studies. He went to Del Mar College and then transferred to Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas (now Texas A&M-Kingsville), where he obtained dual degrees in political science and sociology in 1973. The following year, he added a master's in sociology from the same institution.

He worked several months as a manpower planner for the City of Corpus Christi but was dissatisfied with clerical duties. When a former professor invited Rodriguez to become an instructor at Texas A&I, he did not think twice.

Rodriguez taught at Texas A&I for a year and half, before leaving to Austin in 1976 to pursue a doctorate in sociology from the University of Texas. He went on to specialize in migration research, a topic he continued to work on during 26 years of research and teaching at the University of Houston.

In 2008, he was hired by the University of Texas, where as of 2015 he continues to teach in the Department of Sociology.

*Interviewed in Austin on April 29, 2011.*



**Placido Salazar**

Interview by Lena Price

Placido Salazar had a choice. He could have gone into the bunker, where he would be sheltered from the mortar attack raging outside his base in Bien Hoa, Vietnam, in 1965. Or he could rescue his commander and a fellow soldier, both of whom lay injured and sedated in a mobile sleeping facility.

Salazar didn't have time to think about his decision. He rushed to the men, threw an arm of 6-foot-5-inch Col. William Forehand over his shoulder and hauled him to the bunker safely. He wasn't as lucky when he went back for Lt. Col. Jack Carr.

"One of the rounds landed real close to me," Salazar said. "It knocked me off my feet and I landed on my head."

At the time he thought he had gotten away only with a cut in his hand, but Salazar broke one of his vertebrae in the impact. He suffered from headaches and pain to his spinal cord for decades as a result of the injury.

After returning to the U.S. after his Vietnam tour and a stint in Thailand, Salazar continued his service with the Air Force at Randolph Air Force Base, in San Antonio; Hickam AFB in Honolulu, Hawaii; and Kelly AFB, also in San Antonio. He retired in 1976.

In the following years, Salazar turned to entertainment, hosting radio and television shows and performing as a singer. He also became involved as an activist in a variety of civic organizations.

More than four decades after his heroic actions in Vietnam, Salazar received his Purple Heart and Bronze Star on Feb. 15, 2013.

*Interviewed in Castroville, Texas, on Nov. 6, 2010.*

# POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COLLECTION



**Adolfo Alvarez**

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez  
and Jacob Martella

Adolfo Alvarez, from Pearsall, Texas, had survived nine months along the 38th Parallel, holding the line against the North Koreans. “I said to myself if I make it back ... I’m going to do something constructive so that this would not be in vain,” Alvarez said.

By “something constructive,” he meant working to improve the lives of his fellow Mexican Americans. It wasn’t easy though: He soon realized he needed financial independence before he could immerse himself in politics. So in 1973, he opened A&A Auto Parts in Pearsall and ran a very successful business.

Alvarez was born to Genaro Alvarez and Dominga Ybarra on May 27, 1931, in Harlingen, Texas, and grew up in “horrendous” conditions. In 1956, he married Guadalupe Morales in Harlingen. The couple went on to have nine children. His political activism began in the 1970s with the Raza Unida Party, which boosted the political power of Mexican Americans in Texas. Alvarez said that because of the RUP, Mexican Americans had opportunities for improvement.

Although the RUP didn’t survive long, Alvarez remained politically active for close to two decades. By the time he retired from public service in 1994, he had served as a county commissioner in Frio County and had been the first Hispanic to run for the state Democratic executive committee.

His family is carrying on the baton. His son Alberto was elected mayor of Pearsall in 2014 while Rick was appointed city manager.

He hopes future generations will continue to be politically active. “That’s where things are made, and that’s where things are changed,” Alvarez said.

*Interviewed in Pearsall on Feb. 28, 2015, and March 29, 2015.*



**Adrienne Cervantez**

Interview by Doug Waters

Adrienne Cervantez was born on Aug. 6, 1967, to Arnold and Carolyn Garcia. Her mother was elected to the school board and became its president, serving for four years. Her father was elected to the city council before being voted mayor in 1974.

Despite her young age, Adrienne played a very public role in their campaigns. “I understood why my parents were taking me to all these places, but I still didn’t like it,” Cervantez said. “I don’t like politics because of everything I had to go through as a child.”

Still, Cervantez said she felt privileged to have parents who were so influential in the community. “I was able to see a group of people come together and work very hard in order to help improve the ways our schools and community were run,” she said.

On May 20, 1989, she married Roberto Cervantez. The couple had a son, Robert Anthony, on Sept. 8, 1991, but they divorced two years later.

Cervantez graduated from Dilley High School in 1985 and from San Antonio Junior College in 2000. “As a single parent working full time, I was only able to take six to nine hours a semester,” she said. She graduated from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio in 2002 with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a specialization in special education.

She worked at the Texas Migrant Council as a teacher in the Head Start program and later joined the Northside Independent School District a special-education teacher.

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*



**Carolyn Garcia**

Interview by Alexandra Cannon

Carolyn Garcia’s father once told her to speak up for the oppressed who were too afraid to speak for themselves. The philosophy became her guiding light: The daughter of housing contractor Eustaquio “Taqito” Contreras and grocery store cashier Rosa Rosales-Contreras went on to serve on the school board of Dilley, Texas, for three years.

Garcia was born on Oct. 5, 1941, in Campbellton, Texas, 76 miles east of Dilley. While helping her second husband, Arnold Garcia, run his family restaurant, she became a community figure for Mexican Americans in Dilley, a deeply divided town. The segregation was evident even in elementary school.

“I figured the only way I’m going to make any changes is I need to get in there myself,” Garcia said.

Despite the odds, Garcia and two other Mexican Americans won election to the school board in 1976, and Garcia went on to be elected the board president. She wasted no time making changes she felt were long overdue, replacing the Anglo superintendent/coach with a Mexican-American superintendent, and hiring more Hispanic teachers and even a Mexican-American band director.

She recalls that Anglos continued to make trouble for her. The lowest point was when a woman slapped Garcia’s face during a school board meeting. She was forced to bring in the U.S. Marshals, police, the sheriff and even FBI agents to maintain order, but she succeeded in pushing through the changes she wanted.

Now 73, Garcia serves as regional director for a federally funded program that provides day care for children whose parents work in the fields.

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*

# POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COLLECTION



**José Angel Gutierrez**

Interview by Mario Nicolás  
Castro-Villarreal

José Angel Gutierrez, one of the most prominent Mexican-American political leaders to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, was born in 1944 in Crystal City, Texas. His life reflects the challenges of resisting an oppressive system of power, while also learning to understand and subvert it.

“In the ’60s and all the way to 1994, Texas remained a one-party dictatorship controlled by the Democratic Party,” Gutierrez said. “Fear, economic repression, income inequality, low levels of education, lack of jobs and migrant status” were among the biggest challenges for the community.

In 1967, Gutierrez, then a student at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, became one of five founders of the Mexican American Youth Organization, dedicated to the community’s political empowerment. MAYO began a series of passionate internal debates that led to the creation of the Raza Unida Party in 1970.

Thanks to a cohesive local structure, RUP candidates won 15 offices in the Winter Garden area including Zavala County that year. For the first time since the end of the U.S.-Mexico war in 1848, Mexican Americans in Texas were able to control their political destiny.

But the success didn’t last long. Leaders of the party came under surveillance by various government agencies and faced what they believed to be bogus charges that undercut their political legitimacy. It also served to feed the media perception of RUP as a party made up of “drug pushers” and “communists.”

Gutierrez said he believes the future of Chicano activism lies with new immigrants because they show “the loss of fear, ... self-determination, legacy of struggle.”

*Interviewed in Arlington, Texas, on March 20, 2015.*



**Albert Kauffman**

Interview by Amayeli Arnal-Reveles

Albert “Al” Kauffman, whose work as a lawyer helped Mexican Americans win vital battles leading up to and following the 1975 Voting Rights Act, was born on July 4, 1948, in Galveston, Texas. “When I was in high school [we witnessed] the most violent parts of the civil rights movement, at least in the South – the Selma March, the Bridge, the 1964 Civil Rights Act,” he said. “That sort of formed my beliefs about the civil rights movement.”

He started getting involved himself while studying at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later at University of Texas in Austin. In 1974, he joined the nonprofit Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund as an attorney and became a crucial part of the team working on voting rights cases.

“There were very few attorneys, so we were assigned a lot of cases,” Kauffman said. “My first cases were voting rights cases in 1974-75. That’s really how I got involved in the Voting Rights Act when it was applied to Texas in 1975.”

He worked closely with leaders of the Raza Unida Party, which fought for Mexican- American civil rights. “I thought they were very active and very smart and very strong, and I was very impressed by them,” he said.

Kauffman looks back at those early years with fondness and remains proud of his own role in entrenching the Voting Rights Act. “I provided a lot of information to the people who developed testimony to get the Voting Rights Act passed in 1975,” he said. “It had a tremendous positive effect on Texas.”

*Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on March 10, 2015.*



**George Korbel**

Interview by Vinicio Sinta

Three years into his law career, George Korbel left his native Breckenridge, Minnesota, (200 miles northwest of Minneapolis) in 1971 to become a VISTA attorney with MALDEF in San Antonio.

The very first case he handled upon getting to Texas put him on a course to handle voting rights issues, which would become his life’s work. This landmark case, eventually known as *White v. Regester*, challenged the election of state House of Representatives through at-large districts.

Since voting in the state was typically polarized by race, and African Americans and Latinos were minorities in most urban areas, it was difficult for candidates from these groups to get elected.

*White v. Regester* reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973. The court ruled that the district reapportionment in Texas was unconstitutional, as at-large elections were discriminatory against African Americans and Mexican Americans.

A few years later, the evidence gathered for the case provided a roadmap for the expansion of Voting Rights Act to the state.

Korbel was among several attorneys, activists and academics who testified before the U.S. House and the Senate. His testimony detailed the existing patterns of discrimination against African Americans and Mexican Americans in Texas.

After several months of debate, Congress expanded Voting Rights Act coverage to Texas and other jurisdictions with substantial Spanish-speaking populations.

In addition to his work as an attorney with MALDEF, Korbel has also worked with the EEOC, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the Texas Rural Legal Aid Fund (now Texas RioGrande Legal Aid), and continues to run his private practice from San Antonio.

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*

# POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COLLECTION



**Frances Luna**

Interview by Joan Vinson

When Frances Luna was growing up in the 1940s and '50s, Mexican Americans in Texas had little political power. But she would be part of a new generation who would fight for self-realization.

Luna was born on April 10, 1937, in Booth, Texas, about 30 miles southwest of Houston. Her father, Elías Rodríguez, was a Mexican-born farmer and her mother, Frances Rodríguez, worked at a laundry cleaning business. Her family moved to Hungerford and then to Rosenberg when she was a high school freshman.

Luna witnessed discrimination in Rosenberg. She remembered certain establishments denied service to people of Mexican descent, and the local movie theater was segregated by race. She and her sister were subjected to unequal treatment in school due to their knowledge of Spanish.

Discriminatory practices, such as the poll tax, also stymied the political participation of Mexican Americans.

Inspired by Willie Velasquez, Luna became an active volunteer with the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project. She said Velasquez traveled to Rosenberg from San Antonio to hold voter registration drives.

"[Willie Velasquez] taught us to stick to the issues ... that are important to the people," Luna said. "You are here to help. You're not here to make a name for yourself or get recognition. That's the biggest lesson I learned."

Luna took Velasquez's teachings to heart and continued her involvement in politics. She participated in Lupe Uresti's campaign for mayor of Rosenberg in 1992 and was a member of organizations that promoted the political participation of Mexican Americans. After retiring from her work at the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1994, she worked as an elections judge.

*Interviewed in Richmond, Texas, on March 23, 2014.*



**Rolando Rios**

Interview by Jess Brown

When Leo Rios, a cab driver in San Antonio, Texas, was shot dead by a passenger, his wife Teresa Hernandez was left without any means of raising their son and three daughters. But that was the summer of 1952 and help was at hand.

"The Democrats had just passed Supplemental Social Security," said Rolando Rios, the son, who was just 7 at that time.

The Rios family was the first in Texas to qualify for supplemental income, allowing young Rios to stay in school. He went on to become a soldier, a lawyer and a key figure in the struggle for Hispanic political rights.

Rios was drafted into the Army in 1968 and was made a lieutenant. After serving three months at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, he was injured in a road accident and was evacuated. Eventually, he received a medical discharge.

He went on to study law at Georgetown University and returned to San Antonio to work in enforcing the 1975 Voting Rights Act in Texas. Rios opened his private practice in 1981.

In 1994, he ran for Congress as a Democratic candidate against Henry Bonilla.

"When I lost, I went back to my redistricting and we sued the state of Texas," he said. "We redrew that district that I lost in and made it more Democratic, and so the guy I ran against got defeated the next election."

Rios married Susana Solis in 1990, and the couple has three children: Noe, Maricela and Claudia. He continues to contest civil rights and immigration cases.

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*



**Francisco Robledo**

Interview by Anderson Boyd

Sometimes, an insensitive fundraising proposal at a school meeting is all it takes to kick-start a successful political career.

Two elderly schoolteachers at Pearsall in Frio County, Texas, suggested that they raise funds by hitting up drunken Mexican Americans in local beer joints. Francisco Robledo, a young father attending the meeting, felt deeply offended. If they really wanted to reach Mexican-Americans, he told them, they should go to the church on Sunday.

"I said, 'Man, that's not right. They're always finding ways to disparage our community, and here we have 80 percent of our community applauding them for it. That's not right,'" Robledo said. "So that's when I started getting a little bit more involved."

He went on to become an avid champion of Mexican-American rights, serving twice on Pearsall's housing authority board, one term on the school board, and two consecutive terms as Frio County Precinct 1 Justice of the Peace.

Robledo was born at Pearsall in 1938. As he worked with his father as a farm laborer, he taught himself to read, write and do math. At 21, he married Maria Elizondo and the couple had three children: Susana, Alberto and Umberto.

Everything he has done, from working in fields to serving in political offices to starting his own pest control business, has been to improve lives, he said.

"You do [politics] for one reason: to better yourself [your community] and your family, first and foremost," Robledo said. "I knew what I had to do to support them was work my butt off all the time."

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*



## Amalia Rodriguez-Mendoza

Interview by Megan Breckenridge

Amalia Rodriguez-Mendoza became the first minority district clerk of Travis County in 1991 and only the second minority woman to hold that position in the whole country. She went on to serve for 24 years, championing the causes of Latina women, women's health and the arts.

Born on Feb. 17, 1946, Amalia grew up in the predominantly Mexican-American border city of Del Rio, 260 miles southwest of Austin. She went to San Felipe School District in Del Rio and graduated with a degree in sociology from UT-Austin in 1972. She was the only one of her six siblings to graduate from college.

In 1973, she married Valerino Mendoza in Austin, and the couple had a daughter, Melyssa, in 1978. They divorced in 1986.

Her predecessor as district clerk, John Dickson, had been in office since 1977. When he stepped down in 1991, Rodriguez-Mendoza won the position.

Before taking over as district clerk, she ran the voter registration office, serving as the director of the Division of the Travis County Tax Office from 1982 to 1989. Her knowledge of the voting process helped her play an instrumental role in the online empanelment process, which she calls "one of her greatest successes." It was a necessary improvement because "if you make the process difficult, people aren't going to do it."

She said she was not in it for the title but for "getting Hispanics to vote and support different causes." She also focused on "improving the process in the office, to automate the system," and make it more efficient.

*Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on April 6, 2015.*



## Alma Salinas

Interview by Estefanía de León

Alma Salinas, a lifelong Democrat, switched to the nascent Raza Unida Party in the 1970s. A native of Pearsall, Texas, Salinas used to take Mexican Americans to the polls on election days. But it seemed the Democratic Party, which the community supported, was doing little for them.

Salinas was born in 1933 to George Washington Escobar Hernández, a cowboy, and Virginia Treviño Hernández, a housewife. She became politically active in her late 30s and began driving Mexican-American voters to polls. The last person she took to vote was her mom during the 2014 elections – also the last time Virginia Treviño would vote before she died in February 2015.

Growing up with three siblings, Salinas became aware of the tensions between Mexican Americans and Anglos at an early age. At Westside Elementary, Salinas saw children being prohibited from speaking Spanish even though most of them, including her, spoke no English.

"At the time I was going to school, teachers were exclusively Anglo," Salinas said. "[Even] by the time Raza Unida was getting started and my children were starting school, there were only a handful of Mexican-American teachers, which was not representative of the population."

Salinas married Alfredo Salinas, a Korean War veteran and farmworker, in 1955. The couple had eight children, all of whom went to school in Pearsall.

Mexican Americans are better off today and have more political rights, but Salinas said much remains to be done.

"I always remember [President John] Kennedy [saying], 'It's not what the country can do for you, it's what you can do for your country,'" Salinas said.

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*



## Yolanda Treviño

Interview by Stacie Richard

After graduating from high school in 1959, Yolanda Treviño was determined to get away from the discrimination that was so pervasive in her hometown of Pearsall, Texas. In the small town, Mexican Americans had little political power, and many aspects of daily life were marred by prejudice.

While Treviño's parents were politically active, she recalled many Mexican American and low-income citizens did not take part in elections due to the Texas poll tax. Schools were segregated along racial/ethnic lines, and Mexican-American students were often denied recognition for their achievements.

Inspired by her father's wish that she become a teacher and help improve things in Pearsall, Treviño set off to study and work. She majored in elementary education at Texas Woman's University, in Denton, Texas (40 miles northwest of Dallas), and started her teaching career at the low-income Edgewood School District in San Antonio.

Shortly after, she heard about the opportunity of teaching in Europe and moved to Germany to work as a teacher and later as counselor at schools for children of U.S. military and government personnel.

Treviño said she believed that her time away from Pearsall helped prepare her for the changes that the town was going through, even if things were still far from perfect when she returned.

In later years, Treviño worked as a principal for the Pearsall Independent School District from 1978 until her retirement. She brought improvements to education in the community, securing Title VII grants for bilingual teachers, and helping set up one of the first dual-language programs in the state.

*Interviewed in Pearsall, Texas, on March 29, 2015.*

\*NOTE: The Voces Oral History Project attempts to secure review of all written stories from interview subjects or family members. However, we were unable to secure that review for this story. We will accept corrections from the interview subject or designated family members. Contact [voces@utexas.edu](mailto:voces@utexas.edu).

## **WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

***If you believe it is crucial that Latinos' stories be included in our country's historical narrative, we need your support.***

The process of producing high-quality interviews, acquiring photos and compiling stories for publication involves the effort of several people with multiple skills. Fortunately, enthusiastic volunteers perform some of the Project's work. But funding is essential to manage the material we gather, to ensure it meets our high standards, and to promote the Project in various ways. With your help, we will continue to build a world-class archive that will last for generations to come.

### ***Here are some ways you can help:***

- 1. Conduct an interview** — If you know someone who has an important story and who meets our criteria, send us an email.
- 2. Record an interview** — Especially needed: volunteers with access to good equipment who can provide video recording expertise.
- 3. Arrange a book signing in your area** — If you can help us get there, our project is glad to visit your community, present a slide show of our riches, and sell books to support our project. Where we can, we try to visit colleges and universities or other schools, along with community events.
- 4. Keynote addresses** — Our project has provided keynote speakers at various events, especially during Hispanic Heritage Month, Memorial Day, Veterans Day. Honoraria are directed back to Voces.
- 5. Donations/Grants** — No amount is too small — or too large! If you have access to foundations or other institutions or individuals who might be interested in supporting our work, please let us know.

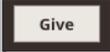
## **DONATING TO THE PROJECT**

Donations to the Project are tax-deductible under tax code 170 (c) (1).

### **TO DONATE BY CHECK:**

Please make checks payable to UT-Austin, with a notation that the donation is intended for the Voces Oral History Project.

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## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Voces is a partnership among staff, volunteers, donors, the men and women we interview – and everyone who makes this important work possible. Together, we continue to make a difference!



Photo by Miguel Gutierrez Jr.

### **MAIL-IN DONATION FORM**

I'd like to make a donation in the amount of  
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Please denote where you'd like your donation to go • Endowment Fund • Digital Initiatives • More Interviews

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