

Voces Launches New Training Initiative

How did Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez work with a collaborator, Donald T. Phillips, to write his memoir, “Wiser in Battle: A Soldier’s Story”?

Sanchez and Phillips are the headliners at Voces’ new Short Courses on July 29 and 30, 2017. They’ll be discussing their strategy to give the book Sanchez’s voice, organize it, find a publisher, negotiate differences.

In “Wiser in Battle,” Sanchez details his personal and professional trajectory, from his childhood in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, to his rise in the Army peaking as a three-star general commanding the coalition ground forces in the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2004.

The two-day workshop will give participants the tools they need to begin their own writing, interviewing or preservation projects. (See Page 6).

Voces Short Courses build on a successful Voces Oral History Training Workshop held at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center in Austin on May 28, 2016. The workshop drew a capacity crowd of 45 from as far away as Chicago, Florida and California. That workshop was free but required advance registration.



Photo by Nef Diaz

The participants in the May 28, 2016 Voces Oral History Workshop at Austin’s Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center.

Registration of \$180 for Voces Short Courses covers the cost of two days of workshop half-day sessions, including lunch. Sponsors include Qualcomm Inc.

A Note from the Project Director

Since Voces was established in 1999, we have shared our expertise. That has involved interview training workshops and interviewer training video for our website. But there is far more we can do. And next July, we’ll do it.

We know that many men and women want to write books but don’t know how to begin. We also know that people want to write op-eds—and get them published. And it goes on.

Oral history interviewing remains our core work, and we are continuing that important work. We are also committed to sharing the wealth of creative expertise we have access to. That expertise is broad and deep—and those experts have been generous in agreeing to share it.

All of this is consistent with our mission: to help create a greater awareness of the contributions and participation of Latinos. We are excited about this next step to help people express themselves.



Photo by Qiling Wang

Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

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Cirilo Arteaga

Interview by Valerie Martinez

Cirilo Arteaga was the son of Mexican immigrants who instilled in him deep patriotism for their adopted country as well as pride in his heritage.

He faced discrimination as a child and later in the Army, where he was an infantry scout in the Pacific during World War II. But he was a vigorous advocate for his community and received many honors for decades of community service in Wichita, Kansas, his hometown.

"I am very tenacious when it comes to fighting for our rights," he said.

Arteaga was one of five sons of Eleuterio and Carmea Arteaga. Four would serve in the Army during the war.

His own call to duty came in June 1944. He served in the Philippines, Okinawa and in Korea with occupying forces after Japan surrendered. Arteaga survived bitter battles during his service but was never injured.

After the war, Arteaga continued fighting for Mexican-American civil rights. He worked for the post office from 1948 to 1972. He and his wife, Beatriz, adopted three children.

In the 1970s, he helped the school board win a grant to develop a bilingual education program. He also helped create a park, with tennis courts and a swimming pool, in the El Pueblo neighborhood, the cultural heart of the Mexican-American community. Individuals knew they could turn to him for help with their problems.

His many honors included the Distinguished Community Service Award from then-Gov. Kathleen Sebelius in 2008.

Arteaga said he was proud of his military service and noted that Mexican-Americans won a large number of Medals of Honor. "We had a record that did not stop," he said. "It shows that we belong here."

Mr. Arteaga died on April 21, 2011.

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



Lauro Castillo

Interview by Marcos Castillo

Lauro Castillo grew up in a poor farming family in South Texas, living in a bare-bones house with a leaky roof. The Army provided an escape from poverty but also exposed him to the brutal reality of war.

Castillo was born on Aug. 18, 1922, in Bishop, Texas, about 30 miles southwest of Corpus Christi. He was the oldest of three children born to Aurelio Castillo and Pabla Sanchez Castillo.

Castillo had to drop out of high school to help his family. He was 20 when the Army drafted him on Feb. 24, 1943.

He was first assigned to Cannon Company, 109th Infantry Regiment, 69th Infantry. When he got to England, he was transferred to the Headquarters Company, 3rd Infantry Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Division.

He fought in some of the biggest conflicts of the war in Europe, including the Battle of the Bulge in France, where Allied forces suffered high casualties.

On April 3, 1945, about 80 miles from Berlin, Castillo and his fellow soldiers were walking alongside a tank when German troops hiding in the brush opened fire. When a second attack occurred, Castillo and another soldier dove into a ditch and crawled for 3.5 hours to a house where American soldiers pulled them to safety.

After his discharge, he returned to Texas, where he finished high school and worked for Texaco for 30 years.

On April 30, 1948, he married Guadalupe Duran, and they had seven sons and five daughters.

Castillo received the American Campaign Medal, the European and African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with five Bronze Stars, the World War II Victory Medal and a Good Conduct Medal.

*Interviewed in Robstown, Texas, on Nov. 23, 2012.**



Jack Duran

Tribute

Jack Duran was unlike many of his fellow servicemen during World War II. While many of the others were in their teens or early 20s, he was already in his late 30s, married with three small children. He went into combat toward the end and was a prisoner of war for 13 days.

Duran kept a diary that detailed the suffering he and other U.S. soldiers endured after being captured in Neuastenberg, Germany, on April 2, 1945. His family has preserved the diary.

Jack Duran was born Jesus J. Duran on Aug. 24, 1906, in Chihuahua, Mexico. He later moved to California, where he married and had his children.

He was drafted into the Army in January 1944 and was a rifleman in the 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Division, fighting in Europe.

When he was captured, Duran wrote that the Germans forced him and other U.S. captives to walk for miles in the rain to a POW camp that held Russian and Polish prisoners. The men had no food until the third day and got little food during their captivity.

On April 7, his fifth day in captivity, Duran and other soldiers were taken to another POW camp that held 22,000 Russian prisoners. In his diary, Duran wrote: "Two-thirds of them were sick and all of them were so filthy and dirty, it made us sick." Duran himself got sick on the ninth day with a hacking cough.

On the 12th day, the prisoners could hear incoming artillery shells. The American forces were approaching. The next day, April 14, 1945, American troops rescued the soldiers.

Duran was discharged on Nov. 19, 1945. He was awarded the World War II Victory Medal, a Purple Heart, the POW Medal and a Silver Star for heroic actions during a battle in 1944.

Information provided by Christine Hinkle, daughter of Jack Duran.



Mercedes Flores

Interview by Valerie Martinez

When she was driving throughout Texas promoting the Benito Juarez Squadron, part of the U.S. Women's Army Corps, to other young Mexican-American women during World War II, Mercedes Vallejo Ledesma Flores had no material – just the word of her own experience.

She was effective: She and the larger recruitment effort succeeded at enlisting between 20 and 50 women. The squadron was part of the Air-WACs; the BeeJays, as they came to be known, lived on base during the six-week training and were then assigned to other units across the nation.

The entire campaign lasted from the end of February 1944 until the day of the induction ceremony on March 26, 1944.

Born in Adkins, Texas, 60 miles east of San Antonio, on Sept. 24, 1923, she was one of 19 children of Pilar and Pedro Vallejo, a homemaker and a butcher, respectively.

She was inducted into the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps on April 23, 1943, initially against the wishes of her parents. But Flores appealed to her parents' patriotism and pocketbook: She promised to send her earnings home. She re-enlisted in the Women's Army Corps on March 20, 1944, less than a year after the organization gained full military status. Two of her brothers also served, one in the Navy and another in the Marines.

One week after meeting Frank Flores, a returning GI, at his welcome-home party, she married him. She was honorably discharged on July 4, 1945. She and Frank eventually had seven children, two girls and five boys.

Both she and her husband used the GI Bill: he to become a chemical engineer, she to attend "beauty school, typing, telecommunications, bookkeeping and any other school that the military would pay for."

Interviewed in Houston on Dec. 13, 2014.



Graciano Gomez

Interview by Henry Mendoza

Experiences change lives forever, and for Graciano Gomez, serving during World War II was the experience he said opened his eyes and mind to a greater picture.

Immediately after finishing high school in 1943, Gomez – then an 18-year-old from Redlands, in the Inland Empire region of California – was drafted into the Army Air Forces. After basic training at Amarillo Army Air Field, in Texas, his group was sent to Calcutta, India, and then assigned to serve in the China/India/Burma Theater as part of the 1304th Army Air Force Base Unit.

During the war, Gomez served at the base as a mechanic and gunner. He found the experience memorable, including the times when his area was being bombed.

"Scary, all of us were very young," he said, "There was a mission for us, and we did what we had to do regardless, even though ours was not a battle type of a mission because we were a supportive group. Still, we felt that there was that commitment for us."

Before joining the military, Gomez had not realized how pervasive segregation was. While serving in WWII, the integration and mix of cultures in the Army caused him to start questioning some of the ways of civilian society.

Still, it was not until after his discharge in 1946 that Gomez experienced discrimination firsthand: He attempted to buy a home but was ultimately denied due to his Hispanic heritage.

That experience and his heightened awareness of racial tensions inspired him to become an activist. He contributed to the creation of the Inland Counties Hispanic Roundtable, a group of Hispanic organizations in the San Bernardino region, and founded the Inland Empire Hispanic News, the minority newspaper with the largest circulation in the area.

*Interviewed in Riverside, California, on Jan. 1, 2011.**



Consuelo Hartsell

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Consuelo Hartsell grew up in Rawlins, Wyoming, a small town where hers was the only Latino family until her last year of high school, when a few more arrived.

She was the third of seven children born to Francisco and Carmen Macias, who were farm workers.

Consuelo and her sister, Juanita, found their escape from small-town life as enlistees in the Marine Corps during World War II. Four of the Macias children eventually became Marines.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, "We didn't know what to think because war was foreign to us," she said. "A lot of men from my class were being drafted."

After high school, she joined Juanita, who was working in Texas. But she was bored by her retail job in Dallas. One day, Consuelo announced to her sister: "I'm joining the Marines. I'm sure they'll find something for me."

Both enlisted in 1944 in the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve, which had been created in 1943. They were assigned to the Depot of Supplies of the 1st Marine Division in San Francisco.

Consuelo oversaw supplies shipped to and from overseas, while Juanita worked with maps. At that time, the Marines didn't have housing for women, so the sisters lived in private homes.

In 1945, Consuelo married fellow Marine Louis Orosz. She left the service in August 1946, with the rank of staff sergeant, because she was pregnant with their son, Michael. Louis Orosz later died.

Mrs. Hartsell was awarded American Campaign and World War II Victory medals, as well as honorable service recognition.

When her son was school-age, she got a job as an office administrator at Hewlett-Packard. She and her second husband, James Hartsell, whom she met at HP, live in Sunnyvale, California.

Interviewed in Rocklin, California, on March 26, 2015.



Charley Gonzales Kidder

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

At 18 years of age, Charley Gonzales Kidder was proud and honored that his country gave him the opportunity to serve during World War II. At the time of his interview, those feelings had not changed.

“I got to see a lot of the world and meet a lot of fine people,” Kidder said. “I’m very proud of the service I helped render.”

Born on Oct. 4, 1924, in Bay City, Texas, Kidder was one of five children of Benjamin Cleveland and Refugia Gonzales Kidder, and grew up during the Great Depression. At age 18, he was drafted to serve in WWII and inducted into the Air Force.

After undergoing basic training in Miami Beach, Kidder ended up in New York City, where he worked on airplanes at LaGuardia Field. He was later sent to mechanic school in New Hampshire and trained in mechanics for almost a year before being sent to the Pacific Theater. He was assigned to a base in Finchhafen, New Guinea.

After months of work on airplane engines in New Guinea, Kidder transferred to Guam and later Saipan as the war came to an end. He did not engage in combat during his service.

Upon returning to the U.S., Kidder attended the University of Texas at Austin, where he majored in journalism. He became politicized and got involved in activism at UT; he was one of the founders of the Alba Club, an organization of Mexican-American students concerned with discrimination against people of Hispanic descent.

Kidder married Ernestine Mojica in January 1949, the same year he started his reporting career at his hometown’s newspaper, the Bay City Times. In the following decades, he worked for several Texas publications in different editorial and business positions.

*Interviewed in Goliad, Texas, on July 20, 2010.**



Ernestine Mojica Kidder

Interview by Taylor Peterson

Ernestine Mojica Kidder vividly recalls one of her earliest memories as a young child in Taylor, Texas. Her father lifted her into his arms and pointed to a schoolhouse in the distance. “That’s where you’re going to school as soon as you’re old enough,” she remembers him saying. “When you’re 6, you’re gonna go to school.”

In the mid-1930s, Kidder’s father moved the family to Austin, where she attended Palm Elementary School. She spoke hardly any English at first, but with her parents’ encouragement she was able to pick up the language and began to love school.

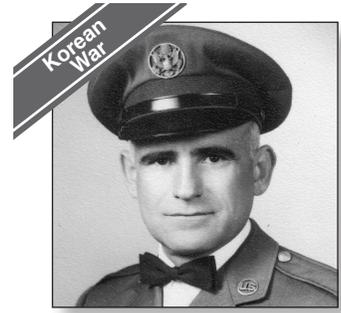
After the end of World War II, she met an Air Force veteran named Charley Kidder, who had moved to Austin to attend the University of Texas. They fell in love and married while she was still a high school student, to her parents’ chagrin.

Kidder’s husband, a founder of the Alba Club at UT and a member of the GI Forum, was involved in fighting discrimination against Mexican Americans. While she did not become directly immersed in activism, she decided to make a difference by educating others.

With the support of her husband and children, Kidder resumed her education and earned a bachelor’s degree from Texas State University, later followed by a master’s. She taught at a number of institutions before achieving her dream of teaching at Victoria College in Victoria, Texas.

In her retirement, Kidder became involved with programs that promote education such as the Latina Forum, in Victoria, which awards scholarships to exemplary young Latinas.

*Interviewed in Goliad, Texas, on July 20, 2010.**



Manuel Lozano

Interview by Nikki Cruz

World War II veteran Manuel “Sarge” Lozano’s childhood was spent in a San Antonio orphanage. After a childhood marked by struggle, he went on to enjoy a successful career in the Air Force and public service, a happy family, and a close friendship with Bill and Hillary Clinton.

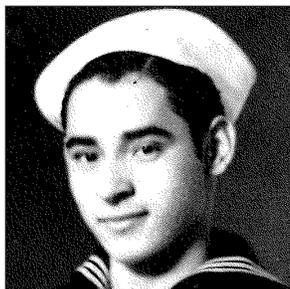
Lozano was born Feb. 15, 1920, in San Antonio to Eucario Lozano and Josefa Perez. He was one of nine children. After the loss of his father, his mother had to put him into the St. Peter-St. Joseph Orphanage.

Lozano graduated from Central Catholic High School in 1940 and joined the National Guard, 36th Division. After being called to active duty, he was assigned to Lubbock AFB, where he was put in charge of the maintenance of AT-6 airplanes. It was in Lubbock that Lozano met his wife of 60 years, Louise Vestle. They had two daughters, Mary Jo and Lou Ann.

Lozano remained on active duty until November 1945, when he was released at Fort Sam Houston. He re-enlisted in the Air Force in 1948. He was deployed to Greenland, Spain, Morocco and Peru. Soon after returning to the United States in April 1963, he was discharged at Little Rock AFB with the rank of senior master sergeant.

Lozano worked for the State of Arkansas Department of Revenue for 20 years as a computer systems analyst and director for planning and data processing. He retired in 1986. Around that time, Bill and Hillary Clinton lived across the street from the Lozano family, and the two families became close friends. Lozano worked on Clinton’s gubernatorial and presidential campaigns.

*Interviewed in Little Rock, Arkansas, on March 23, 2013.**



Raul Portales

Interview by Patricia Portales

In the summer of 1943, Raul “Roy” Portales, a 17-year-old worker at a San Antonio grocery store, made his dream of sailing the high seas a reality by enlisting in the U.S. Navy.

Macedonia Portales, his Mexican-born mother, initially opposed his joining the Navy but eventually relented and signed the paperwork authorizing his enlistment. His father, Refugio, had passed away when Roy was just 13.

After six weeks of training at the San Diego Naval Station, Portales and his fellow sailors made their way to Seattle, Washington. There, he was assigned as seaman third class to the USS Grumium, a ship that transported gasoline to American vessels in the Pacific.

As the ship made its way across the ocean, Portales recalled spending days painting the ship, mending ropes and scouting for enemy vessels.

On June 1944, the USS Grumium was converted to an aviation support ship, and Portales got to see the war firsthand in the Okinawa battle zone. He recalled seeing remnants of destroyed ships, the decks lined with body bags.

It was in the Okinawa harbor on April 6 and 7, 1944, that Portales’ ship experienced its only battle against Japanese forces. Kamikaze planes dropped from the sky and launched suicide attacks on anchored U.S. vessels.

This experience made the crew all the more thankful when, in 1945, the captain announced Japan’s surrender and the end of the war. After returning to the U.S. and reuniting with his family, Portales was discharged in Galveston as a boatswain’s mate third class.

Back in San Antonio, Portales had various jobs, including finishing floors and working as a milkman. He married Velia Quiroz, with whom he had five children: Raul, Oscar, Albert, Cecilia and Christina.

Interviewed in San Antonio on May 21, 2008.



Juan Provencio

Interview by Robert Rivas

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, Juan Provencio of El Paso, Texas, knew what he had to do. As the war overseas had worsened, his father, Manuel, an immigrant from Mexico, had told his sons: “All of you men must be ready to go and help your country. You were born here, and you have been given many privileges that many don’t get. It is up to you now.”

Provencio was inducted into the Army Air Corps in March 1942. Within months, he flew his first plane, the start of a military career that would span three wars and three continents.

Based in England during World War II, Provencio was co-pilot or pilot in 25 bombing raids. “I think I was on some of the toughest missions presented over there,” he said.

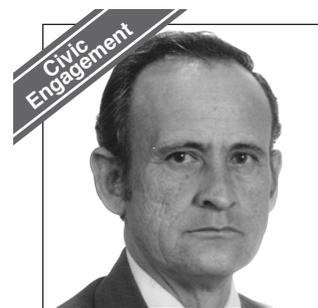
They included a mission to Schweinfurt, Germany, where the U.S. lost 65 planes – the biggest losses up to that point, and a daring long-distance raid to East Prussia, in which many planes ran out of gas and had to ditch – but not his.

In 1947, he returned to El Paso as a civilian and Air Force reservist. In 1951, during the Korean War, he was activated and served in the U.S. and then Panama. He later served in Vietnam.

When he retired in 1972, he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, four Air Medals, the Meritorious Service Medal and three Commendation medals.

He died at home on Jan. 24, 2014, surrounded by his wife, Marisa Luisa, and five of his eight children.

Interviewed in El Paso, Texas, on Aug. 12, 2008.



Alberto Lara Rojo

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Alberto Lara Rojo, a native of Marfa, Texas, received his call to serve in World War II in 1944; by that point his three older brothers, all members of the Civilian Conservation Corps, had been drafted. His father, Ruperto Rojo, served in the artillery during World War I in Germany.

Rojo was inducted into the Navy on March 25, 1944. After a couple of other jobs, he was assigned to be a storekeeper.

He served most of the war “2,000 miles away from home”—Pearl Harbor, Kaneohe Bay, Wake Island, Saipan and the Midway Atoll. While he did not participate directly in combat, he recalled that one time a kamikaze struck an airplane parked on top of his ship, the USS New York.

Rojo was honorably discharged on June 6, 1946, in San Pedro, California, with the rank of storekeeper, third class. Upon his return to Marfa, he earned his high school diploma after getting some academic credit for his military service.

He married Margaret Hartnett on Nov. 28, 1948. The couple had three children: Patricia Ann, Alberto and Daniel. Rojo supported his family by working as a bookkeeper at an automobile dealership, and later selling insurance in nearby Alpine, Texas.

In later years, he became highly involved in his community, holding posts as a city councilman, Presidio County commissioner and president of the Alpine Community Center.

Rojo was also a member in several community and veterans organizations, and was involved in a movement to end discrimination in the Alpine Independent School District.

Interviewed in Alpine, Texas, on July 8, 2013.

Korean & Vietnam Wars



John Soltero

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

John Soltero's hand mimicked the path of his B-17 dropping bombs onto Berlin, his smile radiant as he recounted flying over Germany with a burning engine and an alarm telling him to bail out.

"If I jumped out over the city, they were going to chop me up like a hamburger," said Soltero, "and I told the guys around me, 'Don't you dare jump,' to let the others jump if they want, but we'd stay on the plane."

A veteran of three wars, Soltero has a risk-taking nature, a trait that might be rooted in a childhood lost to taking care of his family. After his father left home when Soltero was just 11 years old, he and his older brother had to work to support their mother and siblings.

Airplanes became his life early on. Soltero often visited the airport in Globe, Arizona, and observed the workers who maintained the aircraft. Later, he attended night school to learn to be a mechanic. He eventually knew enough to get a job with an airline in Phoenix.

When World War II was underway, Soltero decided to enlist and asked to be assigned to the U.S. Army Air Force.

Things moved quickly after that. Soltero's training was cut short, and he was sent to England with the 303rd Bombardment Group (H). The unit, nicknamed the Hell's Angels, was present at several key battles in the European Theater, including the invasion of Normandy on D-Day.

Soltero retired as a senior master sergeant in 1971, after 30 years of Air Force service through WWII, and the Korean and Vietnam wars.

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

VOCES SHORT COURSES

July 29 & 30, 2017

For more information, go to:
vocesshortcourses.org

Topics to be covered:

- Multimedia/Exhibits From Oral Histories
- Preserving Family/Community History
- Basics of Book Publishing
- Writing an Op-Ed
- Writing a Memoir
- Writing a Children's Book

Early Bird Registration: February 15 to April 30, 2017

Advance Registration: May 1 to July 15, 2017

Onsite Registration: July 29 to July 30, 2017

Event Location: Thompson Conference Center, UT Austin





Alejandro Lizarraga

Interview by Martin Lizarraga

Alejandro Lizarraga's plans for medical school were deferred because of the Korean War. In the end, the GI Bill made his dream possible.

Lizarraga graduated from Texas Western University in El Paso, his hometown, in August 1954. Efforts to extend his college deferment while he applied to medical school were denied. Three days after graduation, he received his Army draft notice.

Lizarraga had to leave his wife, Herminia, who was pregnant with their first child, for basic training at Fort Bliss in El Paso. He would sneak off the base at night to visit his family, returning well before reveille.

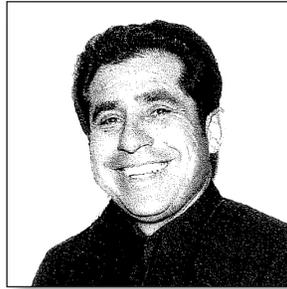
An armistice had ended the Korean War in 1953, but times were still tense. At Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, he was trained as a medical corpsman to provide first aid to soldiers injured in battle. His last posting was at Fort Hood in Killeen, where his family joined him. He was assigned to the 46th Armored Medical Battalion, Company C, in the 4th Armored Division. "It was sort of a MASH unit," Lizarraga said, using the acronym for "mobile army surgical unit."

After his discharge in 1956, Lizarraga attended Southern Methodist University while he applied to more medical schools. He was accepted at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

"At that time, one of the big factors that helped me was the GI Bill. It paid for my tuition and my medical school and helped with my cost of living," he said. "When you convert the dollar to pesos at that time, it was very favorable to the person with the dollars."

He went on to a medical career in Florida, Mexico and Oklahoma, retiring in 2000. He now lives in Austin, Texas.

Interviewed in Austin on Feb. 23, 2016.



Louis Lopez

Interview by Joseph Padilla

Louis Lopez had a distinguished 29-year career as a police officer in Denver. Long before community policing was a widely adopted practice, he focused on establishing good relationships with the minority communities where he worked, to defuse tensions with a department that was mostly Anglo and sometimes hostile.

He faced bigotry from some of his colleagues, whom he called "low-brow Neanderthal-type individuals who had no business being police officers." But he never let it slow him down. He made detective in just five years and continued to rise through the ranks.

"I always looked at things straight in the eye, and I didn't take negative things" into consideration, Lopez said. "I always thought there was a better way of handling things, but you have to be involved. You can't do it sitting at your desk."

Lopez served in the Navy during the Korean War, working on a repair ship that was docked in Japan. He returned home after the war, then did another stint with the Navy before joining the police force in 1955. At the time, there were just four Latino policemen on a force of 500.

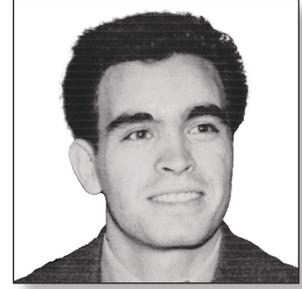
Lopez used his own experience as an amateur teenage boxer to help create a youth boxing program that evolved into Denver's Police Athletic League, which now provides sports opportunities to more than 7,000 young people.

Lopez was a lieutenant in charge of juvenile operations when he retired in 1984, with about 70 commendations. He graduated from the FBI Academy and has taught at several colleges.

He says the police department is more diverse than in the past but still has a ways to go.

"It has changed to some degree," he said. "We have to see more Latinos advance, in terms of sergeants and lieutenants and captains and chiefs."

Interviewed in Denver on Sept. 7, 2011.



Ramon Lugo

Interview by Richard Griswold del Castillo

Ramon Lugo was a 21-year-old farm worker in 1950 when the Army sent him to fight in a war halfway around the world.

"I guess you'd call it child labor now," he said. "It was rough."

Lugo grew up in Glendale, Arizona. His parents, José Lugo and Guadalupe (Vasquez) Lugo, worked in the fields, and so did their children in the summers when they got old enough.

Ramon dropped out of high school to help support the family of 11 children.

In December 1950, the Army drafted him and assigned him to the 2nd Infantry Division, 46th Regiment. He was sent to Korea to fight against an enemy he knew little about.

"The communists wanted more land, I guess," he said. "We had to push them back."

Lugo saw some of the toughest combat of the war. He recalled seeing a North Korean soldier "blown into 100 pieces" by a mortar.

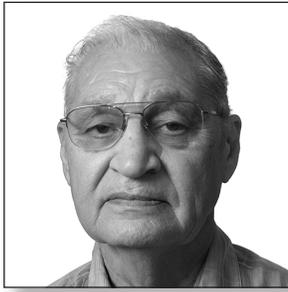
Lugo was nearly killed himself in another mortar attack at the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge in 1951. The explosion threw him up the side of a hill and injured one of his feet. After he was treated by medics at a field hospital, Lugo spent six months recuperating at a Tokyo hospital.

He was honorably discharged on Oct. 2, 1952, at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, California. He went on to work as an aircraft mechanic at Douglas Aircraft plants in California. He married Aida Lopes, and the couple had three children: Felicia, Raymond and Gregory.

Lugo was awarded a Purple Heart and a Combat Infantry Badge, but he said he never received his Korean War service medal with two Bronze Stars.

"It affects your brain, all the stuff you see out there."

*Interviewed in National City, California, on June 7, 2010.**



Angel Montenegro

Interview by Lana Bennett

If Angel Montenegro could live his life over again, he would not change a thing.

Montenegro grew up on a farm in Wellington, Kansas, one of 11 children of Mexican immigrant parents, Hermenegildo and Manuela Ledesma Montenegro. The family lived on a farm, and his father was a railroad maintenance worker. Montenegro dropped out of high school to work as a manual laborer.

Two of his brothers had served in the Army during the Korean War. After the war, Montenegro followed them into the Army and was stationed in England, where he was a private in the 803rd Engineer Battalion (Aviation). He served from December 1954 to July 1956. He repaired planes, trucks and machinery, but his main responsibility was helping to build airstrips for emergency landings at the base.

“It was interesting, and working with my hands is what I liked to do,” he recalled.

While he was in the Army, he sent money home to his mother to help with the farm.

After his service ended, Montenegro moved back to Wichita, Kansas, and married Margaret Romero. They had four sons.

Montenegro found a successful career as a mechanic for cars and planes. His final job was repairing police cars for the city of Wichita, from which he retired in 2000.

Montenegro said he enjoyed serving the country in the Army and missed being in the service afterward. While he might have found a better job with more education, he had no regrets.

“If I could go back in time and do my life over, I would not change anything,” he said.

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



Press Montoya

Interview by Joseph Padilla

Press Montoya never had a doubt about serving his country. His older brother served in World War II, and when the Korean War began in 1950, Montoya was ready.

Montoya was born in Dixon, New Mexico, in 1930, during the Great Depression. He was one of eight children.

At the age of 20, just three months after getting married, Montoya enlisted and departed for Fort Riley in Kansas for eight weeks of basic training and advanced infantry training. He then received eight weeks of medical training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio before leaving for Korea.

Upon arrival, Montoya was assigned as a medic. He helped save lives in important battles like the Battle of Triangle Hill and the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge, which resulted in two Bronze Stars for Montoya. However, Montoya never saw himself as a hero. He said soldiers, including himself, often had to make on-the-spot decisions during combat situations.

“Heroes aren’t born,” Montoya said. “They’re made.”

Montoya also received an additional Bronze Star, a Korean medal and a Combat Medical Badge. He was made an honorary member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars too, but eight months after his honorary induction, Montoya had a bleeding ulcer and needed six units of blood. His brother asked the VFW for blood. The organization told him they had blood only for white veterans.

That incident hurt Montoya and inspired him to turn to activism. He founded the American G.I. Forum with other local residents, was a member of the Lions Club, served as chairman of community relations for 31 years, and served 18 years helping the local police department recruit qualified officers.

“I’m a proud man. I don’t take that. I’m an American. I fought for this country for everyone to be as equal as they can get,” Montoya said.

Interviewed in Fort Lupton, Colorado, on Jan. 21, 2012.



Ernesto Sanchez

Interview by Laura Barberena

Laredo, Texas, native Ernesto Sanchez didn’t always want to join the military. He was a college student – hoping to get an officer’s commission in the ROTC – and didn’t want to leave his family. That changed when he learned that communists were advancing through Korea. Sanchez decided to sign up.

Sanchez was born in Laredo on Dec. 4, 1928, to Ernesto Sanchez Sr. and Paula Rodriguez, who had emigrated from Mexico to find a better life in America. After graduating from Martin High School in 1949, Sanchez went to Laredo Junior College, Texas A&M at College Station, and the Texas College of Arts and Industries in Kingsville. After his time in the military, he earned his master’s degree in education.

Sanchez was stationed in Japan as part of the 40th Infantry Division, 223rd Regiment, where he made extra money by giving loans to fellow soldiers who gambled and by doing soldiers’ laundry for a quarter per load.

He was soon shipped to Korea and was stationed as a guard at the 38th Parallel, the border between North and South Korea. There, he requested to be moved up to the front lines and was made a corporal with his own platoon. He took part in the battles of No Name Hill, the Iron Triangle and Heartbreak Ridge.

After his return, he was stationed in Los Angeles and then at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, before he was honorably discharged. He lived in Laredo before moving to California, where he got a job teaching English and Spanish in Big Bear City. He had four children from two marriages.

At the time of his interview, Sanchez was back in his hometown of Laredo to teach people about “what really happened in Korea.”

“(People) have to know why they’re free,” he said. “We did good.”

*Interviewed in Laredo, Texas, on March 6, 2010.**



Tony Dodier

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Tony Dodier grew up in a military family in South Texas. His father served in World War II, his grandfather in World War I. Growing up in South Texas, he understood that they expected him to go to Texas A&M University. He did, and he signed up for the Army ROTC program.

Dodier was already married when he went to college and had three children by the time he graduated in 1969. Within months, he was on his way to Vietnam as a second lieutenant and platoon leader in the 198th Brigade of the 23rd Infantry Division.

In letters to his father, Dodier said he was concerned about the “uncertainty and confusion” that he observed and a “lack of caring” by senior officers. He said his platoon had a code: “We are going to get each other through this.”

On May 28, 1970, he was ordered to have his men clear mines from an area where the Viet Cong had been. A scout had warned that the area was heavily booby-trapped, but the company commander ordered the platoon to go ahead anyway.

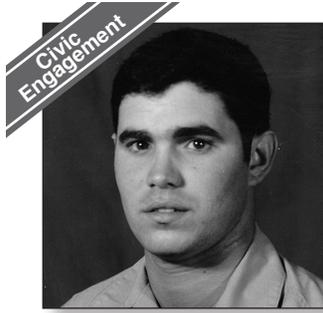
The consequences were tragic: Dodier lost his right foot by stepping on a “toe-popper” mine; 27 other men were wounded, and three were killed.

The toll of that day still weighs on him.

“We promised to get each other through. I promised.”

Dodier was awarded a Bronze Star for Valor and a Purple Heart. He and his second wife, Sylvia de Anda, live on his family’s ranch in South Texas.

Interviewed in Zapata, Texas, on Aug. 1, 2015.



Jorge Haynes Jr.

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

As a young man, Jorge Haynes Jr. was not very serious about life. He was a student at a community college in Laredo, Texas, but said he majored in “flag football and [drinking] beer after 11 o’clock in the morning.” That changed in January of 1967, when he joined the Air Force.

Haynes loved planes, and the Air Force trained him to work on supersonic Lockheed SR-71 reconnaissance planes, and set him on a path to college.

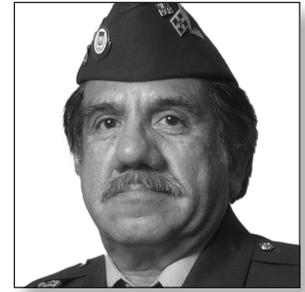
“Today, people will tell you that I’m kind of a computer geek, that I’m a tech guy. It all goes back to Keesler,” an Air Force technical training center in Biloxi, Mississippi, “and how they kind of made me feel comfortable about electronics.”

During the Vietnam War, Haynes worked on the advanced navigation system as part of the 9th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing in Okinawa, Japan. After being honorably discharged in 1971, Haynes earned a bachelor’s degree in government at California State University with straight As. A professor, Joe Serna, inspired Haynes to volunteer for the United Farm Workers, where he lobbied the Legislature to improve working conditions for migrant farm workers. From there, Haynes worked nearly 30 years in government: as a lobbyist, as a speechwriter for Texas Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, as a deputy to Texas Comptroller Bob Bullock, and as senior director of external relations at California State University.

Enlisting in the military was the turning point in Haynes’ life. Today, he remembers the opportunities his service gave him, as well as the sacrifices he and others made.

“When you see a soldier at an airport, at a restaurant, just tip your hat to that person,” Haynes said. “They’re doing something that many of us don’t want to do.”

Interviewed in Lakeway, Texas, on July 9, 2015.



Richard Leal

Interview by Consuelo Dean

Rick Leal grew up in small-town Kansas. He never imagined that he would be sent to Vietnam, fighting a war in a country he knew almost nothing about before the Army drafted him at age 19.

“It was a heck of an experience,” he said. “I grew up real quick.”

Richard Domingo Leal was born in Strong City, Kansas, on Aug. 4, 1948. He grew up 20 miles north, in Bazaar, where his father, José R. Lopez-Leal, worked for a railroad. He was the sixth-born of eight children.

The family lived in housing the railroad had built for workers. It was out in the country, 75 feet from the tracks, with no running water or indoor plumbing. He and his brothers would pump water from a well and carry it back home.

His parents divorced when he was 13, and his mother, Juanita Solis-Leal, moved her children to nearby Newton. Leal dropped out of high school in his senior year and was drafted by the Army.

In 1968, he shipped out to Vietnam as a rifleman with the 1st Battalion of the 12th Infantry Division.

One night on guard duty, he heard noises in the distance. He threw a grenade toward the noise. Soon after, he saw a flash, and a rocket was shot toward his location.

His unit sent mortars in the direction the rocket had come from. The next day on patrol, they found blood, weapons and sandals – evidence that the enemy had been there.

Leal was discharged in 1969. He married Maria E. Arteaga on April 5, 1975, and they had two daughters and one son.

Back home, Leal paid little attention to the anti-war protests. His job had been to protect South Vietnam from the communists in the north.

“The United States is my country,” he said. “I’ll do anything for it.”

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



Frank Martinez

Interview by Rea Ann Trotter

With a wife and a child, Frank Martinez never imagined he would be drafted to fight in Vietnam. But then he got the letter from the Army.

After basic and advanced training, he was sent to Vietnam in July 1969, as an infantry grunt in the 196th Infantry Brigade, 23rd Infantry (Americal) Division.

“The worst part was the detachment from my wife and my child, and not knowing what was going to happen or if I would come back,” he said.

After 10 days in Vietnam, squad leaders were able to pick their soldiers. Martinez was the most wanted.

“They were saying, ‘Listen, I need this guy,’ talking about me,” Martinez said. “I thought, ‘I’m looked at as one of the treasures here.’ It made me wonder why they wanted me here, but not in the United States.”

Then Martinez he found out why he was the most prized.

“I was told that Hispanics and blacks would fight together until the end, because we had been fighting in the U.S. all our lives. White guys were more likely to have a nervous breakdown or run because they didn’t know what fighting meant. Minorities have been fighting all their lives.”

Nothing had prepared him for combat.

“Vietnam was shocking for people who had never seen death,” Martinez said. “Some people would ask each other if they knew if they had killed anyone (in Vietnam). I know I have. ... I’m Catholic and I always knew the Commandments. Thou shall not kill. ... When I came home, I had a big conflict with religion and with life itself.”

In 1984, Martinez discovered he had cancer. He blamed Agent Orange, a toxic herbicide that the U.S. used in Vietnam. He died in November of 1996.

*Interviewed in Greeley, Colorado, on Jan. 1, 1994.**



Jesse Montenegro

Interview by Sheila Kinnard

Jesse Montenegro served in the Air Force in the Missile Division within the headquarters of the 15th Air Force during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The crisis affected him more than the Vietnam War did.

He was stationed at March Air Force base in California, where his job was to oversee missile silos around the area.

During the crisis, from Oct. 14 to Oct. 28, 1962, the Cuban government had Soviet nuclear missiles aimed at the U.S. The crisis was resolved after the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles in exchange for the U.S. promising not to invade Cuba.

The American public did not know the true extent of the missile crisis because “the government cannot or should not tell its citizens everything,” he said.

Montenegro was born June 5, 1942, in Sharon, Kansas, and grew up on a farm. He was one of 11 children of Hermenegildo and Manuela Ledesma Montenegro, Mexican immigrants. His father worked in railroad maintenance.

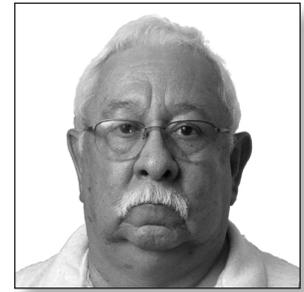
After his discharge in June 1965, Montenegro went to work for the U.S. Postal Service. He and his wife, Pamela, married on May 23, 1970. They had four children: Denise (Gardner), Mark, Brian, and Andre.

He values military service and supports reinstating the draft. “If you don’t know where you’re going or what you want to do with your life, commit two years to the military and that will set you straight.”

He compares the military to an “antibody,” adding, “When something goes wrong in the country/world, the military bands together to fight and try to make it right.”

He thinks of the Air Force as his family and looks back at his years of service with fond memories.

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



Blas Ortiz

Interview by Catherine Shepherd

In 1963, Blas Ortiz and his Marine unit were greeted with gunfire when they arrived in Vietnam.

“It wasn’t a picnic,” Ortiz said. “No sightseeing.”

After an initial tour in Vietnam, Ortiz volunteered to return and spend two more tours in the jungle fighting alongside his unit, Co. E, 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division.

For Ortiz, the brotherhood he felt with his fellow Marines compelled him to extend his service.

“We were close,” he said of his fellow Marines. “You knew who you could depend on.”

Ortiz was born in Spencer, Kansas (about 9 miles east of Topeka), on Feb. 3, 1944. His parents, Gabriel Ortiz and Adelaida Lopez, had 11 children — five girls and six boys.

After his three tours, Ortiz was honorably discharged with the rank of sergeant E-5 in 1967. He received two Naval Presidential Unit Citations, the Combat Action Ribbon and a Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross, among other awards.

Upon his return to Kansas, Ortiz worked as a carman welder for the Santa Fe Railway Co.

Vietnam continued to affect his life long after his service. His exposure to Agent Orange caused sores in his skin, which continued to require regular treatment at the time of his interview.

Ortiz also had post-traumatic stress disorder, which drove him to alcohol and caused his first marriage, to Mary Sanchez, to end. A second marriage, to Dorothy Guilfoyle, from 1982 to 1988, ended in divorce. He was later able to quit drinking and remarried Sanchez, who passed away in 2003. In 2006, he married Linda Watson Cross, a 23-year Marine Corps veteran. And he had six children, three daughters and three sons: Lisa, Sara, Gabriel, Christina, Glenn and Paul.

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



David Valladolid

Interview by Henry Mendoza

After David Valladolid almost got his eyes blown out by a mine while serving in Vietnam, doctors feared he would become blind. Through good fortune and a strong will, he eventually recovered 90 percent of his eyesight and returned to a career of public service in the United States.

Valladolid was born in Oxnard, California, (60 miles northwest of Los Angeles) to Genaro Valladolid and Rita Torres on June 22, 1948. After his father died when David was 4 years old, his family moved to Fresno, and eventually settled in San Diego, where his mother worked as a nurse.

Fresh out of high school, Valladolid was drafted by the Army in September 1968. Against his family's wishes, he joined the service and was deployed to Vietnam with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade as the unit's radioman.

His job made him a "lifesaver." Valladolid could control which messages reached his unit and did not hesitate to block orders that he considered to be unnecessarily dangerous for his fellow soldiers.

In July 1969, Valladolid was injured after a Claymore mine exploded near the body of a dead Viet Cong. His eardrums were blown and his eyes were badly hurt by the blast. After the incident, he spent weeks recovering in hospitals in Saigon and Japan.

After his return to California, Valladolid became involved in the anti-war movement and went to college at San Diego State University, where he earned a degree in public health in 1975.

In the decades since, Valladolid has been involved in public affairs, working with local and state authorities in different capacities. Since 1996, he has led the Parent Institute for Quality Education, an education advocacy organization.

*Interviewed in National City, California, on June 7, 2010.**

WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOCES



*By Kathy Warbelow
Adjunct Professor, School of Journalism*

I started working with Voces as an editor this past summer. I had no idea how powerful an experience it would be. It opened my eyes to so many untold stories about the Latino experience, including brave service during wartime, the courageous fight for equal rights, and the roots of political and community activism.

Many of the interview subjects are ordinary people who did extraordinary things, sometimes at great personal cost. I edited several stories about a six-week walkout in 1970 by high school students in Uvalde, Texas, to protest discrimination in the schools. The district told seniors who participated that they would lose credit for that entire year unless they returned to class. They did not back down.

Another lesson I've learned is the power of individual stories. You can say that many Hispanics fought bravely in World War II, but hearing individuals describe the perils they faced really drives that home. One Vietnam War veteran wore his uniform for the interview because he was proud of his service, even in a controversial war.

I've become very passionate about this project and will continue to be involved.

Kathy worked in daily journalism at major news organizations for over 30 years. Most recently, she served as the Austin American-Statesman's managing editor and business editor. She is an adjunct professor in the School of Journalism.



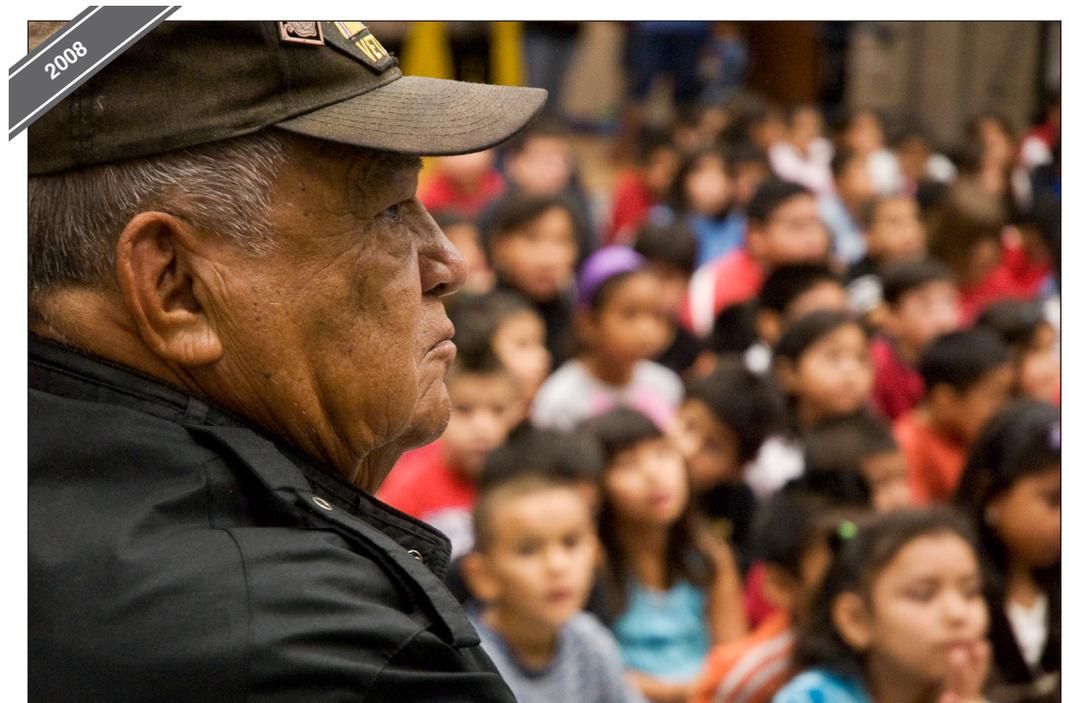
*By Myka Rodriguez
Sophomore, Marketing*

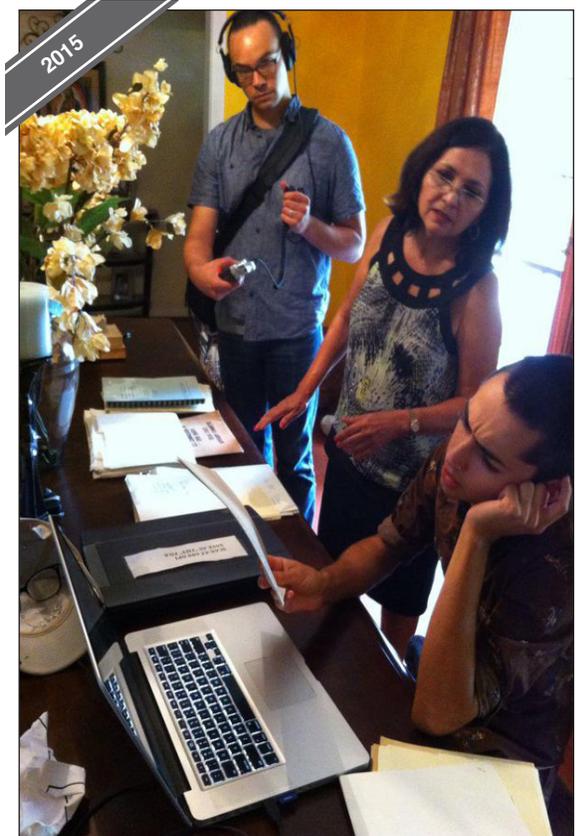
During my year and a half at Voces, I have learned so much, going from a volunteer to a student employee. I am currently a second-year marketing major, and Voces has provided a great opportunity for me to work with video editing and other related media tasks. Through inputting information in databases and editing videos, I have learned so much about WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The primary sources of history that I interact with on a daily basis are valuable and important, especially in the information age, where we can easily record and document remarkable stories such as the ones in the Voces project.

I have also learned about the importance of information management through databases and other records. It's important to be meticulous and thorough in recording data, in order to portray an accurate history of events that occurred. Many stories are out there, and we have the means to collect and preserve them for future generations.

**For more information about
Voces Oral History Project visit:
vocesoralhistoryproject.org**

Voices throughout *the years*







José Aguilera

Interview by Brigit Benestante

As a high school student in Uvalde, Texas, José Aguilera participated in a walkout that was ultimately unsuccessful and resulted in his leaving school. Yet he has no regrets: The experience defined him as someone who would stand up to the discrimination he had witnessed and felt.

Aguilera was born Feb. 11, 1953, in McAllen, Texas. From a young age, Aguilera was aware of the discrimination against Mexican Americans in Uvalde. He was forced to sit in the balcony of the movie theater, while white students were allowed to sit on the main floor, and his teachers punished him for speaking Spanish.

Experiences like those eventually motivated him to participate in the April 1970 Uvalde High School walkout, which was coordinated by Mexican-American community members protesting the lack of diversity among teachers. Aguilera joined hundreds of students who walked out of class in protest.

“It had to be done,” Aguilera said. “I didn’t want my kids to go through that.”

After six weeks, the protest failed. But Aguilera doesn’t look at the walkout as a complete loss.

“(The walkout) defined me as a person. I am really proud of that,” he wrote.

Aguilera was drafted in 1972 and shortly afterward, he joined the Navy. He served on two ships and was deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Puerto Rico and Jamaica. He was honorably discharged on June 4, 1976, at the grade of E5, with medals for sharpshooting.

He married Margarita Lopez on Dec. 19, 1976, and the couple had a daughter, Carina, the following year.

Aguilera remembers the discrimination he faced, but he also notices the abundance of Mexican-American teachers at the Uvalde schools today.

“I actually used the Constitution to express myself,” he said. “I see the American flag rise and—golly—I get a lump in my throat.”

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



Albert Alvarez

Interview by Dylan Nikolettopoulos

Albert Alvarez did not have to make any tough choices to become mayor of Pearsall, Texas. He knew exactly why he wanted to do it and had the necessary background and name recognition as the son of a longtime county commissioner.

“I wanted to be like my dad and follow in his footsteps,” said Alvarez. “Not only in the business world, but as an elected official as well.”

Alvarez was born Feb. 23, 1967, in Pearsall, a city about one hour southwest of San Antonio. His parents, Adolfo and Guadalupe Morales Alvarez, ran an auto parts store and were involved in local politics. His father’s activism led to his election in 1980 to the Frio County Commissioners Court, where he served for 16 years.

In spite of his family’s visibility in public affairs, Alvarez said that he, like other Mexican-American youth, faced discrimination in Pearsall schools. Administrators frowned on the use of Spanish, and they generally held low expectations for Hispanic students.

After graduating from Pearsall High School in 1985, Alvarez enrolled at Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville), where he earned a business administration degree in 1990.

From 1991 to 2010, he pursued a career in public service, working with the Texas State Comptroller’s Office in San Antonio in various capacities, including as an accounts examiner, legal assistant and criminal analyst.

Alvarez returned to Pearsall in 2010 and found himself in a prime position to launch a political career in his hometown. He ran successfully for mayor of Pearsall in 2011 and served two terms in office.

Today, he continues to follow in his father’s path as the manager of the family business, now known as Adolfo Alvarez Inc. The company operates three auto parts stores in south Texas.

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



Felicita Munguía Arriaga

Interview by Hope Teel

At the age of 12, Felicita Munguía Arriaga witnessed her mother being turned away from the polls for not being able to write her name on her election ballot. That incident, her earliest memory of Mexican Americans being dismissed as inferior, stayed with her for life and inspired her to become an activist.

Arriaga was born in Rosenberg on May 23, 1947, to Pedro Munguía and Jesusa Sanchez. The family lived on the Mexican-American side of town.

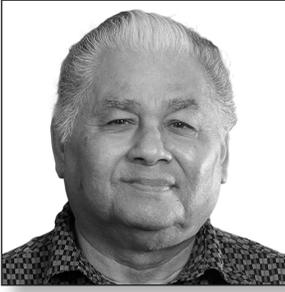
Segregation was a part of daily life in Rosenberg when Arriaga was young. She recalled that Robert E. Lee Elementary School, where she began her education, segregated Anglo, Hispanic and black students into separate rooms. Downtown businesses, like a local soda fountain, denied service to Mexican-American customers.

Arriaga dropped out of school before finishing eighth grade and married Modesto Arriaga the following year. The couple moved to “Little Mexico,” then a small unincorporated community out of Rosenberg that lacked most basic services. At the urging of her friend Dora Olivo, a teacher, Arriaga started taking petitions to city officials, who slowly and reluctantly moved to provide the area with paved roads and other amenities.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Arriaga joined activists like Olivo and Lupe Uresti in efforts to educate the Mexican-American population about their voting rights.

In 1979, Arriaga and Uresti ran for City Council but lost after facing strong opposition from the local political establishment. They continued with their efforts to educate voters and ran again the next term. Uresti eventually prevailed and followed a political career that led to her becoming the first Mexican-American mayor of Rosenberg in 1992.

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



Modesto Arriaga

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

A young Modesto Arriaga was playing baseball with his church team in Rosenberg, Texas, when police officers pulled up and asked for one of his teammates to go with them. Later, the boys learned that the ballplayer's brother had drowned while swimming in the Brazos River. Back then, Mexican Americans were not allowed at Rosenberg's public pools.

The incident led to the desegregation of the public pools after Father Jack Broussard, a priest at the local Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, and other members of the community put pressure on the City Council.

In later years, Arriaga saw greater strides for the Rosenberg Mexican-American community as it became more politically active. His wife, Felicitia Munguía Arriaga, played a key role in the political awakening.

Arriaga was born Feb. 24, 1941, in Rosenberg, Texas, to Pedro and Estefana Guerrero Arriaga. On April 17, 1962, he married Munguía, whom he had met when they were still teenagers. The couple went on to have six children.

In the 1960s, the African-American civil rights movement opened Arriaga's eyes to the discrimination that Mexican Americans like himself were subjected to.

"I started looking back at my life when I was young and I said, 'Yeah, they did it to me too,'" he said.

In later years, his wife, Felicitia, became one of the most prominent activists in Rosenberg politics. Throughout the 1970s, she, along with leaders like Dora Olivo and Lupe Uresti, worked intensely to increase the involvement of Mexican Americans in public affairs. With Arriaga's full support, Felicitia eventually ran twice for the City Council.

"They stood for trying to better the community, like trying to get the people to vote and in City Council, so we can have a voice in there," he said of the three women.

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



Olga Charles

Interview by Anna Casey

Olga Charles was a senior at Uvalde High School in April of 1970, when scores of students walked out and boycotted classes for six weeks to protest what they perceived as the unequal treatment of Hispanic students.

She did not walk out; her father forbade it, and she personally did not recall facing discrimination at school or in the community.

"I couldn't understand why they walked out," she said. "Was there racism? Maybe. I never felt it."

Charles was one of three children of Alejandro and Teodora Charles. She recalled her youth as happy and sheltered. She enjoyed going to school to see her friends, as school took her mind off her mother's declining health. Teodora Charles died of breast cancer in 1967, at age 40.

After finishing high school, Charles went on to junior college and had a long career at Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. In later years, she moved to Laredo and then to Austin, before returning to Uvalde in 1999 to fulfill her father's wish to live out his life there. She began working at the Newspapers in Education program within the schools and helped raise funds to build a new library in Uvalde.

Charles said that the adults who organized the walkout did a poor job and "left students hanging." Many who walked out ended up losing credit for the entire school year, and some lost scholarship opportunities.

"Was it a learning experience for all of us? Maybe it was," she said, "But times have changed; people have changed. If it's going down in history, let's put it there so people can read and hear about it. ... But since that time, I think we're in a better place."

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



George Garza

Interview by Prakriti Bhardwaj

Because of his position as a middle school teacher, George "Josue" Garza was a leader in the Mexican-American community in Uvalde, Texas, in 1970. He was the one who worked on behalf of Mexican-American students and their families.

"I was an advocate. Parents would come to me because of their lack of English, and I would go with them to the principal," he said.

So when the local school board declined to renew his teaching contract, the community sprang up in protest and staged a six-week school walkout that roiled the town and continues to have repercussions. These days, Garza downplays his own part in the walkout.

"That was like a climax to a chain of injustices that had been occurring," he said.

His father, Josue Rodriguez Garza, was a minister for a local church, the Mexican Assembly of God, a Pentecostal congregation. His mother, Luisa R. Flores, was a homemaker, rearing the couple's 10 children. The family moved around South Texas before settling in Uvalde in January 1955. Garza was ambitious; as a child he sold oranges, apples and homemade tortillas door to door. By his early teens, he had his own newspaper route.

Garza graduated from Uvalde High School in 1958. He joined the Army Reserves in 1956 and was drafted into the Army in 1961 and served one year with the 49th Armored Division. He married Rachel de Leon on Dec. 29, 1961. The couple eventually had two sons, Ronald and Daniel.

Garza attended Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde and earned a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M Kingsville (then called Texas College of Arts and Industries) in August 1964.

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



Margaret Gomez

Interview by Arnold Garcia

Margaret Gomez credits her early political awareness to her father. Jose Dolores Juarez was a Mexican immigrant with little education, but he closely followed political and world events.

“He read the newspaper from cover to cover every day,” she said. “A lot of times, he knew a lot more about what was going on in the world than I did, so when I got home from work, he would talk to me about what was going on,” she said.

Juarez inspired his daughter, who became one of the longest-serving elected officials in Travis County, Texas. Since 1995, Gomez has been one of the five elected commissioners who oversee county government in the area that includes Austin, the state capital.

Gomez attributes her political longevity to old-fashioned shoe-leather campaigning.

“We walked door to door. We made contact with people on a one-to-one, eyeball-to-eyeball basis,” she recalled of her first campaign for commissioner in 1994. “I still believe if you don’t walk, you run the risk of not winning.”

In 1973, she became an aide to Richard Moya, the first Hispanic county commissioner. The job taught her about the workings of county government; working on his re-election campaign taught her about raising money.

In 1980, Gomez ran for constable, won easily and held the office until 1994, when she ran for the Commissioners Court. She has held onto the seat ever since.

Gomez has no plans to retire. “I’ve thought about running for something else, but I love what I do. I think I’ve found my niche, and I don’t know how many people can say that,” she said.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on June 26, 2015.



Eleazar Lugo

Interview by Jorge Haynes

In April of 1970, Eleazar Lugo played a key role in a six-week school walkout in Uvalde, Texas, an event that would have a lasting effect on him and the local school system.

Lugo was born July 22, 1950, in New London, Wisconsin, where his parents worked in the fields. His parents, Eusebio and Elosia, had four sons and four daughters.

He thrived in school in spite of the low expectations teachers had of the children of farm workers. By high school, he had emerged as a student leader and activist, and later became one of the leading figures in the massive walkout protesting discrimination against Mexican-American students.

Although Lugo felt no fear during the walkout days, he recalled that Texas Rangers and FBI agents were a common sight. They had been sent to Uvalde in an effort to suppress the protest.

After the walkout, Lugo was one of the many students who lost credit for the school year because they had missed so many classes. Though he did not graduate, he was able to earn a GED and enrolled at St. Edward’s University in Austin.

Two years into his college studies, however, Lugo dropped out and returned to Uvalde to work for the city water department. He later worked at Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. for 30 years as a lineman and repairman.

While Mexican Americans now hold positions in local government and formal segregation is a thing of the past, Lugo said minorities in Uvalde still lack a voice, and too few Mexican Americans are involved in community issues.

Lugo married his high school sweetheart, Maria Robles, on June 30, 1973. They have a son, Eleazar, and a daughter, Marisela.

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



Vilma Martinez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Growing up in San Antonio, Vilma Martinez was constantly reminded by others of the things she could not do, simply because she was a Mexican-American woman. Martinez instead forged her own path, becoming president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and U.S. ambassador to Argentina.

Martinez, the oldest of five siblings, was born to Marina and Salvador Martinez in San Antonio on Oct. 17, 1943. Her father discouraged her dreams of becoming a lawyer and told her she was more likely to get married and have children. Instead, Martinez used her savings from baby-sitting to attend the University of Texas at Austin, and later Columbia University Law School. Martinez’s lifelong commitment to civil rights arose from her own experience growing up in San Antonio, a city “that was in many ways racist.”

After graduating from law school, she worked for the NAACP and played a role in important civil rights cases. In 1973, 29-year-old Martinez was chosen as the first female president of MALDEF. During her presidency, MALDEF won two Supreme Court cases that expanded immigrant protection. In 2009, President Barack Obama named her the first female ambassador to Argentina. She served until 2013. She and her former husband, Stuart Singer, had two sons.

Martinez was able to accomplish all that she did because she didn’t listen to the people who told her she couldn’t.

“I was told, ‘You shouldn’t go to the academic high school; [you’re] not going to get into college,’” Martinez said. “I was told women could not be litigators; a Mexican-American woman should not be head of a Mexican-American organization. All of these times when [I was] told, ‘You can’t do this,’ my response was, ‘We’ll see.’”

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on April 28, 2016.



Elvia Pérez

Interview by Reina Olivas

Elvia Pérez's senior year in high school was turned upside down when she joined a student walkout to protest the firing of a popular Hispanic teacher, as well as discriminatory treatment of Latino students.

Pérez, then 17, had been a top student in the class of 1970 at Uvalde High School in South Texas. But once she joined the walkout, she became a radical agitator in the eyes of the school board. Like the other walkout participants who were seniors, she would not graduate that year.

But Pérez said she knew it was the right thing to do.

"I had a very keen sense of justice, and my sense of social justice prevailed and I said, 'This is something I have to support,'" Pérez said.

The walkout, which began on April 14, 1970, grew to 500 students and lasted six weeks. The protest divided the community, with many Anglos opposed. Pérez recalls going to a school board meeting where armed Texas Rangers were stationed on the roof.

"I thought, 'Gosh, this is America. We have the right as citizens to speak up and speak out.' And I just didn't understand that," Pérez said.

Pérez and other seniors lost credit for the school year, but she later earned her GED and earned bachelor's and master's degrees.

She became a teacher, a principal, and director of a student data project for the South San Antonio School District.

"I think there was a lot of good that happened" from the walkout, she said. "People became more politically aware. People found their voice. Despite the fact that it was difficult, it was good."

But she worries that some people have become complacent. "I don't know why people don't get out and vote, but they don't," she said.

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



Sergio Porras

Interview by Brigit Benestante

Two years before Sergio Porras received his draft notice to serve in the Vietnam War, he was marching in the streets of Uvalde, Texas, with hundreds of other Mexican-American high school students. It wasn't war or the draft they were protesting. The students of Uvalde High were fed up with discrimination in the town's public school system.

Porras was born in Harlingen, Texas, on May 7, 1951, but grew up in Uvalde. He noticed the discrimination in Uvalde from an early age.

"You were a 'dirty Mexican,'" Porras said. "We were treated differently, big time."

On April 14, 1970, the Uvalde school walkout began, and student protesting lasted for six weeks. While the immediate cause was the firing of a respected Hispanic elementary teacher, the issues grew to include the prohibition on speaking Spanish at school. Porras, 17 at the time, participated in protests and was a volunteer tutor. Students who participated in the walkout lost an entire year of school.

Porras didn't go back to repeat his senior year; he went to a six-month GED program in Lincoln, Nebraska, and then attended Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde.

He received his draft notice in 1972 and chose to enlist in the Navy. The day before leaving, he married his then-girlfriend, Zulema Lara. They had three kids: Omar, Eduardo, and Juanita.

Stationed on the USS Saratoga aircraft carrier off the coast of Vietnam, Porras worked 18-hour days. The carrier participated in a battle in the spring of 1972, and Porras experienced direct bombing.

Porras was honorably discharged in May 1975 and returned to Uvalde. Porras was active in community and political issues as a young man, and that has continued, especially after a battle with lung cancer that required two surgeries in 2009. He's been an elections judge for more than 25 years and is on the local committee for the United Farm Workers.

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



Olga Muñoz Rodríguez

Interview by Alfredo Santos

When the Uvalde High School walkout began in April 1970, Olga Muñoz Rodríguez was a young mother working for the telephone company. Her son was not yet in school, but she knew from experience the discrimination that Mexican-American students faced, so she joined the protest.

The walkout fueled her commitment to civil rights, and she became a community leader, radio commentator and newspaper publisher in Uvalde in South Texas.

She said the walkout awakened activism in the Mexican-American community and led to changes in the school and the community.

"People were more emboldened to do things for the community," Rodríguez said.

Mexican-American parents had been complaining about issues including poor maintenance of their children's schools and the lack of Spanish-speaking teachers. Ending the contract of a teacher who had advocated for Hispanic parents "was the straw that broke the camel's back."

On April 14, 1970, the walkout began. Rodríguez became secretary of the Mexican-American Parents Association and wrote letters to the Uvalde Leader-News "to express our side."

While the walkout ended along with the school term in 1970, Rodríguez said it had emboldened residents to press for change, even if it would take several years.

Her contributions included the creation of El Uvalde Times, a weekly newspaper that was a forum for the Latino perspective on local issues, from 1978 to 1980, followed by another paper in 1991 and 1992.

She credits the changes in Uvalde to the Mexican-American parents who stood up to the establishment. "Their bravery allowed some compassion to filter through, and some changes have come about because of that."

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.



Alfredo Santos

Interview by Anna Casey

Growing up in Uvalde, Texas, and in California, Alfredo Santos evolved into an activist.

As a child, he noticed the unequal treatment of Mexican Americans. It wasn't until he got older that he began to understand the social conditions that led to the inequality he lived with. In the late 1960s he joined the Mexican American Youth Organization in Uvalde and began discussing issues in the Hispanic community. In 1970, he joined a walkout at Uvalde High School to protest discrimination against Hispanic students and the dismissal of a Hispanic teacher. The experience changed his life.

Santos had dropped out of high school in his junior year. But MAYO awakened his activism, and he became involved in the Chicano movement.

"When the Chicano movement started, I then started to grasp for a better understanding of who I was," he said.

"The walkout was really a manifestation of a lot of issues that had been building and boiling over the years," Santos said. "The people said no to discrimination, no to poor education, no to a lot of the bad things that had been going on."

Santos' activism continued into adulthood, including as a labor organizer for the United Farm Workers in California. As a student at the University of California Berkeley, "I reinvented myself and became Alfredo. ... I was very comfortable in my new identity."

He married Diana Luna, a schoolteacher, in 1993 and they had one daughter, Yleana.

Santos now runs a community newspaper, *La Voz*, based in Austin, Texas.

Interviewed in Uvalde, Texas, on April 9, 2016.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOCES



*By Brigit Benestante
Senior, Journalism and Government*

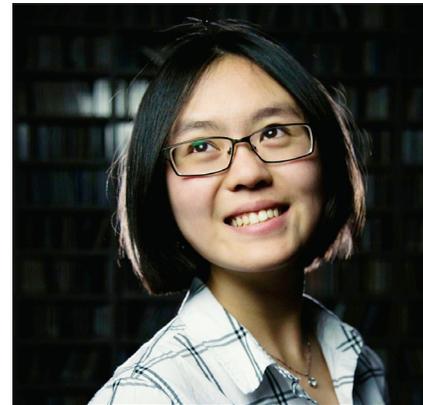
During the spring semester of 2016, I took Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez's class, Oral History as Journalism. I signed up for the class to fill a degree requirement and had little clue what an oral history was. Taking Dr. Rivas-Rodriguez's class would eventually lead me to an internship and would expose me to the wonderful project that is Voces.

Throughout the class, students interviewed subjects for the Voces project. We spent the beginning of the semester learning about the 1970 Uvalde, Texas, high school walkout and about Latino civil rights in Texas. Toward the end of the semester, we had the opportunity to travel and interview participants of the walkout in Uvalde. We interviewed people with amazing stories – people who had challenged systemic racism and were willing to share their experiences with us.

After conducting the Uvalde interviews, I was in love with the work Voces did. I became a project intern in May 2016 and have since learned so much about hundreds of incredible individuals. With Voces, I manage the archiving and indexing of interviews with the Nettie Lee Benson online collection. I also had the pleasure of writing a few stories for our website and newsletter this summer.

During my five months with the project, I have not only sharpened my journalistic skills – interviewing, writing, storytelling – but also learned how important it is to give a "voz" to those members in our community who deserve recognition.

Voces is telling the stories that need to be told, and I am proud to call myself an intern with the project.



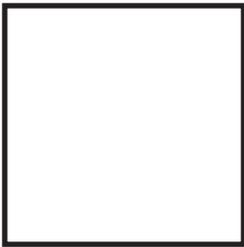
*By Qiling Wang
Sophomore, Journalism*

My name is Qiling Wang. I am a second-year graduate student at UT-Austin with a major in journalism. This past summer, I interned at the Voces Oral History Project as photo editor. It was an honor and pleasure for me to work for this project, which has given Latino communities an outlet to tell their stories. I was able to read stories and see photos that I had never encountered in any publication. This experience has inspired me as a photojournalist to find important stories to tell.

Throughout my internship, I helped Dr. Maggie select and edit photos for the project's latest newsletter. I also scanned and organized archive photos for the incredible photo collection of Voces. All the work here has allowed me to understand a bit about the rich Latino historical heritage. I was touched by the courage and resolution demonstrated by each individual.

I was also fortunate to have the chance to do Facebook and Instagram posts and interact with the communities that Voces has built during the past 17 years. By reading people's comments, I could feel their appreciation of the stories we were sharing.





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Voces is a partnership of staff, volunteers, 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

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