

★ Volunteer Spotlight

Project website: www.utexas.edu/projects/latinoarchives

Gus Chavez [Interview Coordinator]

Birth date: May 23, 1943
Birth place: Sonora, TX
Residence: San Diego, CA
Occupation: Retired higher education administrator. Former Director of the Office of Education Opportunity and Ethnic Affairs at San Diego State University.

How did you hear about the Project?

The project came to my attention when I read a small newspaper article about the documentation of Mexican Americans who participated in World War II.

Why are you interested in the Project?

I was interested in the Project for several reasons. First, while in high school, I had been a member of the American G.I. Forum (junior status) in Sonora, Texas and later in the main chapter in San Diego, Calif. My early involvement brought me in contact with many of the founders of the American G.I. Forum, such as Dr. Hector Garcia, Chris Alderete, Ed Edar and many others who were also involved in the Civil Rights movement of the 60s and 70s. Second, I was a U.S. Navy veteran (Hospital Corpsman), and anything that involved Chicano military veterans was of great interest to me. Third, working at San Diego State University offered me the opportunity to involve the Student Affairs department under my direction to use this project to connect it with a segment of the Latino community who had served our country during the horrific World War II. It also allowed the university to conduct student/parent outreach and recruitment with families with fathers—many now grandparents—who had been in the “big war.”

What did you do (getting the two students to do interviews)?

In my position as director of a Student Affairs Department, I annually hired various full-time professional staff and numerous student assistants...The WWII Project fell into the category of student/community outreach. I hired two students who were studying to be K-12 teaching professionals to conduct the preliminary research and interviews with local Mexican-American veterans, many who had been members of the American G.I. Forum in San Diego. The university

provided the recording equipment and materials for the interviews.

What do you think SDSU got out of it?

I sincerely believe the university's position in the region was strengthened by being involved in and exposed to a segment of the Mexican-American community that had been for the most part invisible.

What did the students get out of it?

The students hired to conduct the research and do the actual interviews never stopped being amazed at the tenacity, personal character and strength of the vivid emotional and mental recollection of the World War II veterans in the project. As difficult as it may seem to believe, these students were the first individuals these Mexican-American veterans had ever allowed to “interview” them about their “war” experience. Time and time again, the students with wide eyes and big smiles on their faces would come to me and state, “Mr. Chavez, we have another incredible story today.” Perhaps the greatest tribute the students paid to the Project and their work was when students would ask the veterans for their autographs.

What did you get out of it?

My response is at two levels—personal and professional. Personally, I felt that I had gone full circle beginning with my early high school involvement with the American G.I. Forum (junior status) in Sonora, Texas where I was taught invaluable life lessons by, at the time, relatively young Mexican-American World War II veterans to once again through this project, being reeducated by World War II elders in San Diego. The intimacy and personal accounts of the war related to me by the veterans reinforced my belief that our community made tremendous sacrifices such that our country is what it is today because of the Mexican-American men and women who served in the military during this time. Professionally, being involved with this project allowed me the opportunity to engage the university in the process of officially recording a period in history that was missing from our community. It also provided me with the opportunity to continue one of my passions, that is, student leadership development. I truly believe this project continues to advance the belief held by the leaders of the Civil Rights and Chicano movements that our young people in higher education can and will make a difference in the development of our community.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

- ★ How to preserve family heirlooms: photos and letters.
- ★ Volunteer spotlight on Robert Rivas, an interviewer with the Project.



Photo by Jayna McLeod

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PRE-ORDER A Legacy Greater Than Words

Since 1999, the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project at the University of Texas at Austin has captured the untold stories of this WWII generation.

Altogether, the project videotaped more than 500 interviews throughout the country and in Puerto Rico and Mexico. This volume features summaries of the interviews and thumbnail photographs of the individuals. The stories featured in *A Legacy Greater Than Words* chronicle the lives of Latinos in the 1930s and 1940s—stories that generally have been omitted from historical accounts of either World War II or the Great Depression. Distributed by the University of Texas Press.

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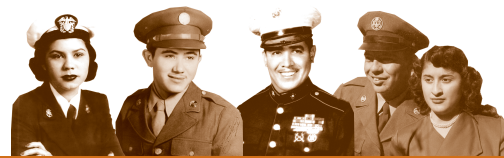
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Insider NARRATIVES

Presented by the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project ★ Issue No. 4, Fall 2005



The Play Comes Together

“Voices of Valor,” based loosely on interviews from the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, is quickly taking shape and includes a Los Angeles based actor with a ton of movie and television credits, as well as a production team of nationally and internationally recognized experts.

The play is being written by James E. Garcia and will have six actors, four men and two women, including Mike Gomez, a Los Angeles-based actor/director whose credits include “Hunter,” Clint Eastwood’s “Heartbreak Ridge,” Robert Redford’s “Milagro Beanfield War,” Jack Nicholson’s “The Border,” Gregory Nava’s “El Norte,” the Cohen Bros’ “The Big Lebowski,” Luis Valdez’ “Zoot Suit,” and “Born in E. L.A.,” among many others.

The production line-up includes:

- **Director—Richard Trujillo**, a Phoenix actor/director and ASU graduate, is also the drama director for the Silvestre Herrera Jr. High School for the Fine Arts, in Phoenix. (The school is named for Mr. Herrera, a WWII Medal of Honor recipient.)
- **Scene Designer—Richard Isackes**, who is also the chair of the UT Department of Theatre and Dance. Professor Isackes has won several awards for his scene design work in theatre, opera and television.
- **Lighting Design—Amarante Lucero**, Head of Design/Technology and Head of the Automated Lighting Program, in the UT Department of Theatre and Dance. Professor Lucero holds lighting design credits for his work throughout the world.
- **Costume Design—Susan Mickey**, the head of the Costume Design Program, at the UT Department of Theatre and Dance. Professor Mickey’s credits include extensive design experience in regional theatre, television and film. Her costume designs for film and television include “Miss Evers’ Boys” for HBO and “Mama Flora’s Family” for CBS.
- **Musical Composition and Scoring—Queztal Guerrero**, a 23-year-old Phoenix-based violin virtuoso and vocalist.



Part of a poster for the play, “Voices of Valor.”

The play will be staged at the Gammage Auditorium in Tempe, Arizona on March 11, 2006 and at B. Iden Payne Theatre at the University of Texas at Austin March 24 and 25, 2006.

The Play's Beginnings

Garcia had first suggested the idea of a play to Rivas-Rodriguez in 2001. By 2003, the two had talked more seriously about the project and Garcia promised that part of the eventual royalties from the play would revert to the Project. Rivas-Rodriguez, who had known Garcia for years when they were both journalists, felt Garcia would be true to the stories and that the play could showcase the oral histories.

In 2004, Garcia approached Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, the director of ASU Public Events, about “Voices of Valor,” knowing that ASU Public Events would provide resources to bring the play to a higher level.

Jennings-Roggensack recognized that “Voices of Valor” would signify an important commitment to the Arizona community.

Michael Reed, Director-Cultural Participation & Programming for ASU Public Events noted that

“Voices of Valor” would represent “just how important the arts and culture are in telling the entirety of our American history.”

ASU not only agreed to produce it: it also recruited the University of Texas at Austin as a partner. PAC director Pebbles Wadsworth was immediately persuaded.

“This new production proves that our similar goals of sharing our knowledge of Latin America through the performing arts can be accomplished two-fold when we work together,” said Wadsworth.

ASU’s Michael Reed and UTPAC’s production manager Rachel Durkin Drga, have collaborated on the logistics for “Voices of Valor” since March 2004.

Playwright Garcia says the material is rich, but the challenge is also great.

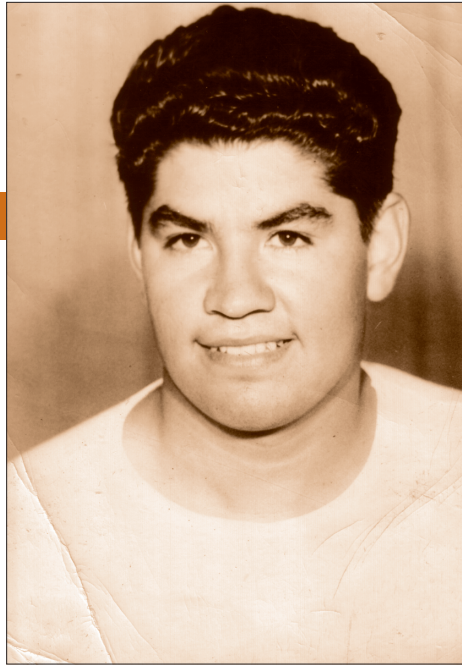
“My job is to find a way to condense the immensity of their [the WWII Latinos and Latinas] experience into less than two hours of storytelling on stage,” he said. “It’ll be up to audiences, not to mention those veterans who are still with us, to decide whether I managed to achieve that goal.”

Garcia and Trujillo say that the enthusiasm being generated between ASU and UT suggests a run beyond Tempe on March 11, 2006 and Austin on March 24 and 25, 2006.

★Featured Interviews

Project website: www.utexas.edu/projects/latinoarchives

The following stories share Latino World War II experiences both in battle and on the homefront. These include tales of a young man standing up for the rights of his small town, an overseas marriage proposal and a wartime radio operator turned teacher. Full-length stories accompanied by pictures are available on our website. Be sure to check back with the Project in our winter issue of *Narratives Insider* for more interviews and experiences.



Tribute Luis Calderon

Date of Birth: August 25, 1925
Birthplace: El Paso, Texas

Soon after his 18th birthday, Luis A. Calderon was drafted into the U.S. Army. He fought with the 75th Infantry Division for 94 consecutive days ending on April 13, 1945. That relatively short period of time in his life would have lasting effects on him and his family. During the Battle of the Bulge, the temperature was -10°, and Calderon developed frost bite. The medics just sprayed his feet and sent him back to the fighting. Often caught without rations, Calderon would eat whatever he could find: raw potatoes, spoiled food in bombed out homes. In hand-to-hand fighting, he was hit with the butt of a rifle directly over his heart. It wasn't until open heart surgery in February 1979 that Calderon discovered the blow had pushed his chest bone up against his heart, triggering later complications that would be the cause of his death on Nov. 22, 2002. Calderon married Amelia Hidalgo in Juarez, Mexico in November 1946 and raised three sons and two daughters. "Dad had a profound effect on all of us who knew and loved him," said his son George Calderon.

This is based on information provided by George Calderon.

Arturo Holguin
Date of Birth: April 24, 1930
Birthplace: Santa Clara, New Mexico

In sparsely populated Santa Clara, New Mexico, Arturo Holguin grew up watching older brothers going off to war and a city on the verge of extinction. Less than two miles away, at Fort Bayard, the government had established a hospital to treat veterans with tuberculosis. Mr. Holguin believes the proximity of the hospital to Santa Clara contributed to the spread of the disease in his community that took the life of one of his five sisters. In the 1950s, Santa Clara lost a junior high school because there was no running water or sewer system. During a town meeting, the city council was about to vote on abandoning their efforts to fix the situation when Holguin stood up to protest. He was appointed to a vacant city council seat. During his time on the council, Holguin organized the construction of a 700-foot well and brokered a deal to build a sewer system off of their more prosperous sister town's existing system.

Arturo Holguin was interviewed by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez on July 15, 2004 in Areanes, New Mexico.



Joe Hernandez
Date of Birth: Feb. 22, 1924
Birthplace: San Antonio, Texas

During the 22 months Joe Hernandez was in Europe, he flew 35 bombing missions as top turret gunner on a B-24. The raids over Germany were particularly difficult. As Hernandez's plane and crew approached their target, they were met with a barrage of anti-aircraft gunfire. Flak—bursting shells from anti-aircraft artillery—exploding next to them would vibrate the whole plane. On three different occasions, the damage was bad enough to force the B-24 into an emergency landing. Yet it was planes in Hernandez's own squadron that triggered his closest brush with death. While flying in tight formation, the B-24 became caught in the violent turbulence created by the nearby planes, called "propeller wash." The whirlwind plunged the crew into a tailspin. The plane dropped 5,000 feet before the pilot was able to right it. Fortunately, the crew was able to land safely. Hernandez became an aerial gunnery instructor in Boise, Idaho until his discharge in September 1945.

Joe Hernandez was interviewed by Brenda Sendejo on July 18, 2004 in San Antonio, Texas.



Leonard Fuentes
Date of birth: Nov. 6, 1922
Birthplace: Laredo, Texas

Fighter pilots are some of the most skilled in the military and must go through rigorous training, which many do not finish. Laredo, Texas native and retired United States Air Force pilot Leonard Fuentes made it through flight training to go on to fly planes such as the powerful P-47 Thunderbirds. He was schooled in aviation at Texas A&M University, where he earned a two-year degree in nine months through a program designed to quickly train the pilots desperately needed in the U.S. military at the onset of the war. Flying with the 87th and 79th Fighter Groups over Europe, Fuentes successfully completed eight missions starting in February 1945. Since the war in the Pacific was still active at the time of Germany's surrender, Fuentes voluntarily offered to help the troops in the Pacific. On the way to the Pacific corridor on a naval ship, the war ended, and Fuentes was returned to the United States with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

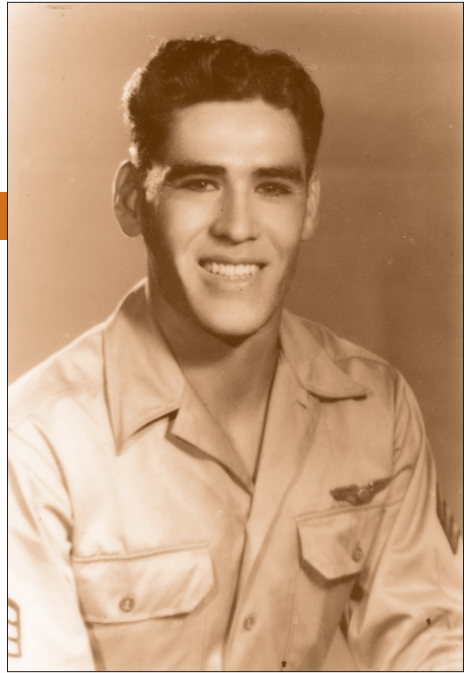
Leonard Fuentes was interviewed by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez on Nov. 6, 2004 in San Antonio, Texas.



Juventino Guerra
Date of Birth: June 18, 1917
Birthplace: Hebbronville, Texas

Raised in small towns and on ranches, Juventino Guerra had never been very far from home. The war opened new opportunities to travel and learn other perspectives. His time with the 324th Material Squadron and the 941st Air Engineer Squadron during WWII took him to Buenos Aires, Argentina, around the African continent, to Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Sicily and Italy. Guerra's squadron was responsible for readying planes for flight. Guerra, based on experience obtained through his clerical job at Cavazos Tourist and Insurance Agency in Laredo before the war, was responsible for keeping records of the members in his squadron. His camp was bombed in Corsica, France, during which Guerra was wounded in the left knee. He proposed to Elena Pimentel in a letter while overseas and returned to marry her and open his own business as an accountant and later a real estate broker.

Juventino Guerra was interviewed by Markel Rojas on Nov. 6, 2004 in San Antonio, Texas.



Alberto Rede
Date of birth: March 30, 1921
Birthplace: Redford, Texas

For many, war is a time of life-and-death experiences which can emotionally scar people for life. Alberto Rede was grateful for his role as a radio operator in a C-47 cargo plane during World War II and says that he was lucky enough to stay out of the line of enemy fire throughout the war. Born in a border town 16 miles south of Presidio, Rede was the youngest of seven children. Rede was proud of his Mexican roots as well as his native state and referred to himself as a "Texican." He served in the Pacific with the 395th Carrier Group. After two years serving in the Pacific, Rede was sent back home. He used the GI Bill to earn his bachelor's degree in business and a master's in Spanish at Columbia University. His calling in life was teaching, and Rede spent 42 years as a teacher.

Alberto Lujan Rede passed away on April 10, 2005.

Alberto Rede was interviewed by Robert Rivas on Oct. 12, 2004 in El Paso, Texas.

STEPS TO TRANSCRIBING

The ultimate goal of our oral history project is to make our interviews available to the public after they are transferred to the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. But it isn't enough to have the material there—the archives must be accessible, that is, easy to use. Generally, the preference is to have the interviews transcribed, word for word.

A professional-quality transcription costs more than \$200 per 2-hour interview tape. It involves transcribing, editing, formatting. Our project has fully transcribed only 24 interviews; in the interim we have at least indexed the tapes, giving a 7 to 10-page broad breakdown of the interviews—not quite as rich as a transcription, but a good compromise.

The following section outlines the steps we take to creating a transcript.

Dubbing

We first dub our video-recorded interviews to audio cassettes.

Equipment

We use audio cassettes and transcribing machines. These machines, which resemble big tape recorders, let the typist slow down the tape to hear tricky phrases. The machines also have headphones and a foot pedal, which let's you keep your hands on the computer keyboard while you rewind the tape using the foot pedal.

Transcribing

We try to make the transcription as close to the actual interview as possible.

On each page, a "time stamp" is included two or three times, so that readers may find particular segments quickly.

It looks like this:

SENDEJO: What were you thinking when you were applying for the job?
12:05
ORTIZ: Well, I was scared, I thought, 'Surely they won't give me the job!'

Editing

After the transcription is completed, we edit in two steps.

The editing process is done in three steps.

1. A second person listens to the tape, comparing the paper copy of the transcript to what she hears, marking corrections on the paper copy.
2. Now, a second person enters the written corrections into the electronic copy of the transcript. The names of everyone involved in the transcribing process are included on the transcript, and the date of edit are added to the heading. The printed copy is kept for the record.