

Voces celebrates two milestones

Voces has reached its 1000th interview — three years earlier than anticipated. It got a boost from a film director in Los Angeles and a scholar in New Mexico. That’s one milestone. The other will happen in 2019, when Voces will celebrate 20 years of recording the words of Latinos and Latinas.

Film director **Jesús Salvador Treviño**’s production company, Barrio Dog Productions, has been collaborating on a website, Latinopia.com, for several years. As part of that effort, Treviño has been conducting lengthy interviews with Latino/a contributors in several areas (arts, film and TV, literature, music, theater) and producing five-minute minidocumentaries to post to Latinopia. In 2017, Treviño generously donated 134



Courtesy of Cynthia Orozco

Cynthia Orozco
unedited interview recordings, mostly on mini-DV, to Voces. They will make up the Barrio Dog/Jesús S. Treviño Collection, as part of the Voces archives. The collection is a tremendous addition and includes interviews with famed artists such as Malaquias Montoya, playwright

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Photo by George Rodriguez

Jesús Salvador Treviño, film director



Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Photo by Qiling Wang

A Note from the Project Director

For our next act, look for an annual report that outlines our work for the upcoming year, rather than a newsletter.

By going to an annual report and eliminating the newsletter, we’ll be spending more time on disseminating our actual interviews. Top of our list: posting fully transcribed, entire interviews online. This is, after all, what Voces is about: the actual interviews. Thanks to the generosity of wonderful donors, led by Guillermo Nicolás of San Antonio, we have a beautiful new website (vocesoralhistoryproject.org), and now we’ll be raising money to transcribe and post our fabulous interviews on that website.

Join us on this next leg of our journey to bring a greater awareness of U.S. Latino and Latina perspectives to the world!

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WWII COLLECTION



Margarito Barrientes
Tribute

A family man and skilled orator, Margarito Barrientes rarely spoke to his loved ones about his experiences in World War II.

According to his eldest child, Elia Gonzales, he would sometimes share small snippets of his time in the war, which, she recalled, were always out of context.

"He would say, 'I remember those nights when it was freezing, and we would be hiding in the foxholes and we would be out there for hours and days. And it was so cold, you couldn't feel your feet or hands. You couldn't feel anything. You couldn't move,'" Gonzales said.

Barrientes was born Feb. 22, 1919, in Victoria, Texas, to Merced Barrientes and Camila Torres. He was the fourth out of eight children and grew up in San Benito, Texas, 140 miles south of Corpus Christi, Texas.

He enlisted in the Army on June 10, 1940, at Fort Brown, Texas, and was assigned to the 657th Field Artillery Battalion. According to his military discharge papers, he reached the rank of staff sergeant and served in northern France.

For his service, Barrientes earned the American Defense Service Medal, American Theater Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one Bronze Service Star, Good Conduct Medal, Bronze Star Medal and Victory Medal, among other awards.

Barrientes married Alejandra Delgado in September 1957, and they had four children: Elia Gonzales, Esther Barrientes, John Barrientes and Michael Barrientes.

Barrientes worked as a barber and was known in the San Benito community as a great orator. He was also active in the Knights of Columbus and held office in the Catholic War Veterans.

Barrientes passed away in San Benito on Oct. 30, 1984.

Information provided by Elia and Cecilia Gonzales, daughter and granddaughter of Margarito Barrientes.



Roger Cisneros
Interview by Joseph Padilla

Roger Cisneros is a former state senator and one of Colorado's most dedicated civil rights advocates.

He was born Jan. 22, 1924, in Questa, New Mexico, to Donaciano Cisneros and Todosia Martinez.

He graduated from high school and joined the Army Air Corps in March 1943. He completed basic training at Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls, Texas. He was selected to go to Chanute Field in Illinois for cryptographer training and was assigned to the 33rd Bomb Group.

After the war, he got a job as a typist at Montgomery Ward in Denver, Colorado, making 60 cents an hour.

He met Adelia Dee Trujillo, and they married on March 19, 1949. They later had three children: Milton, Denise and Andrea.

With the help of the GI Bill, he graduated from the University of Denver with a business degree in 1950. In 1957, he obtained a law degree from Westminster Law School and opened a practice that lasted for 57 years. He is a founder of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Latin American Research and Service Agency. He also served with the United Latin American Organization, the Marlee Garfield Improvement Association and many other groups.

Cisneros was elected to the Colorado Senate as a Democrat in 1964, one of only two Latinos in the 100-member legislature. In 1978, he was appointed as a judge of the State of Colorado District Court.

Cisneros acknowledges his commitment to justice for the Latino community.

"Of course, almost everything that occurs affects everybody," Cisneros wrote in his autobiography. "However, there are causes that affect Latinos more. Education, workers compensation, and health are among the issues listed."

*Interviewed in Denver, Colorado, on Sept. 25, 2014.**



Alfonso L. Davila
Interviewed by Ramiro Molina
and Vinicio Sinta

After being struck by shrapnel on a German battlefield on Nov. 27, 1944, 20-year-old Alfonso L. Davila, of Corpus Christi, Texas, was dragged to a big foxhole where he lay next to dead soldiers for five hours.

"It was the first time I ever saw so many dead soldiers," he said.

Finally, he was rescued and sent to a hospital in Liverpool, England, for four months. But even then, one of his knees and both ankles were still swollen from the wounds he sustained.

"That's what saved me from going to the front lines," asserted Davila.

He was reassigned to the Air Force's 53rd Troop Carrier Squadron 61st TC Group and traveled to Trinidad to help with the war efforts there. Davila was well-received by the Puerto Rican and Cuban military personnel.

"When I got off the plane, they all went around me, like if I were something big," Davila said. "You know why? I had my Combat Infantry Badge here, see? And that means that you had been on the front line."

Davila was discharged in 1945. In time, he began working at a commissary at the naval base hospital in Corpus Christi. He retired at age 55.

In 1956, Davila married Enriqueta de la Peña. The couple had four children: Olga, Alfonso Jr., Miguel, and Leticia.

His medals included an American Theater Campaign Medal, an EAME Campaign Medal with three Bronze Stars, a Victory Ribbon, four Overseas Services Bars, and a Purple Heart.

He kept piece of metal shrapnel from 88 mm artillery that doctors removed from his leg—a sobering reminder of the wounds he sustained on the battlefield in Germany.

Interviewed in Corpus Christi on April 15, 2017.

WWII COLLECTION



Noe Espindola

Interview by Phillip Rodriguez

Growing up in an artistic family that moved between the United States and Mexico, Noe Espindola was immersed in two cultures and languages. In time, however, he was given the opportunity to serve his native country — the United States — during World War II.

Espindola was born June 27, 1926, in Austin, Texas, to Maria de Jesús Arias and professional musician Ranulfo Espindola.

The Espindolas were a bilingual, working-class family. They moved around from Texas to Southern California and Mexico City due to Ranulfo's work.

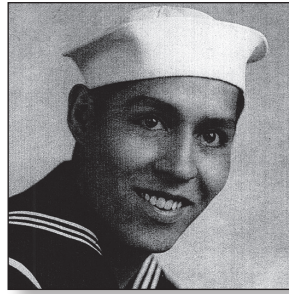
When Espindola's father passed away in 1938 in Mexico City, the family moved back to Los Angeles. His older sisters, Anna and Carmen, helped raised him because his mother worked as a trapeze artist with the Ringling Brothers traveling circus and as an extra in various movies.

Espindola joined the U.S. Army in 1944. After basic training at Fort Roberts, in San Miguel, California, he was shipped to the Pacific Theater with the 11th Airborne Division during the last stretch of WWII.

Espindola says racism was a minor issue at the military camps, but he fought to defend himself and to be seen as an American. He said many Anglos treated Mexican Americans with disrespect and said ignorant things about Mexicans.

Upon returning home from the war, Espindola married his sweetheart of four years, Barbara Burgess. The couple had two children, Sharon and Noe Jr. Espindola worked as a mechanic and later worked in management at an auto body shop.

Interviewed in Los Angeles, California, on June 9, 2010.



Emiliano Gimeno

Interview by Joseph Padilla

Born in El Paso, Texas, on Jan. 24, 1921, and raised in Denver, Colorado, Emiliano Gimeno was the eldest of 10 children.

Gimeno married Irene Arellano on June 7, 1941, in Denver. He and his wife took care of his siblings in addition to their own children.

The couple was expecting when Gimeno decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy. Gimeno believed it was his duty to participate in the war.

"In a way, I did not want to go because of my wife and kids, but I had to go to defend my country," Gimeno said.

He enlisted in the Navy and completed basic training in Idaho. Gimeno served aboard the USS Yorktown, where he was in charge of maintaining the machine guns and the bombs on the planes.

Gimeno was injured on the ship while unscrewing guns from a battle-damaged airplane. A panel flew off and knocked him unconscious. All he remembers is being dragged across the ship and seeing red because of the blood in his eyes. He was down for two days before regaining consciousness. After being put in a drug-induced sleep, Gimeno woke up a day and a half later.

After the war, Gimeno was awarded a Purple Heart and six battle stars from action he saw in the Marshall Islands, the Philippines and Japan.

He was discharged as a seaman first class in October 1945 in Shoemaker, California. Gimeno went to work at a cabinet shop back home and later went into the construction business, eventually running his own company.

Gimeno and his wife had five sons and four daughters: Emiliano Jr., Richard, Patricia, Frederick, Theresa, Benjamin, Marcelina, Joseph, and Maria.

Interviewed in Arvada, Colorado, on June 1, 2011.



Pedro Ortiz

Interview by Vinicio Sinta

From a humble beginning on the west side of San Antonio, Pedro Ortiz's life roles included soldier and accomplished gardener.

Ortiz was born Aug. 24, 1921, to Felix and Maria Valdez Ortiz. Every fall, the family of 10 traveled to eastern Michigan to pick cotton, pecans, and sugar beets in cruel weather.

Working in the severe Michigan weather prepared Ortiz for the harsh conditions he later faced when drafted into the U.S. Army during World War II on Dec. 30, 1942.

Ortiz was a corporal and a trainer with the Headquarters Company, 18th Armored Infantry Battalion. He was the only soldier of Mexican descent selected for that duty. He was part of the 16th Armored Division, assigned to the 3rd Army, under the command of Gen. George S. Patton. Later, he was assigned as an MP (military police) responsible for rounding up German soldiers for their return to Germany.

Ortiz returned home on March 28, 1946. During his service, he received a Good Conduct Medal, American Theater Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern (EAME) Campaign Ribbon with a Bronze Star, one Service Stripe, and two Overseas Bars.

Back in San Antonio, Ortiz returned to civilian life. He became a freight driver and met Anita Mercado, who became his wife. The couple had three daughters: Thelma, Esther and Patricia.

After years as a driver for several companies, Ortiz worked as a sheet metal worker at Kelly Air Force Base, in San Antonio. He was a civil service worker until his retirement at the age of 64.

Ortiz passed away in his San Antonio home on Jan. 12, 2018, at the age of 96.

Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on Feb. 24, 2017.

WWII COLLECTION



Ernest Quiroga Sr.
Tribute

Fighting poverty and discrimination from a very young age in San Antonio prepared Ernest Quiroga Sr. to become a fighter for his country.

Born to a school janitor and a housewife, Quiroga and his brother helped their father clean classrooms in a segregated school that didn't allow Mexican-American students.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, Quiroga was only 16. He was drafted two years later and shipped out to the Pacific Theater in April 1944 with the Navy, where he served aboard the USS LCI 405, USS LCI 875 and USS LCI 821.

Quiroga's ship was attacked with mortar shells on May 7, 1945, killing several of his shipmates and leaving him badly wounded. He was taken to a naval hospital in Peleliu and was honorably discharged a few months later.

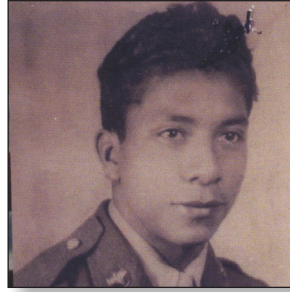
When Quiroga returned to San Antonio, he joined his father at Kelly Field to work on aircraft parts maintenance. He then married Judy Diaz and had two children.

The challenges he faced during his childhood and his military service pushed Quiroga to take on leadership roles as a labor organizer and in San Antonio politics. He also held leadership positions in the Edwards Underground Water District, the Market Square in San Antonio and was vice president of LULAC Council #403.

In 1994, Quiroga was pinned with his Purple Heart Medal at the first LCI reunion in Orlando, Florida.

Quiroga passed away May 6, 1998. As a farewell, The San Antonio Post featured him on its cover in 1999, along with other prominent people from the city.

Information provided by Yolanda Quiroga Ortiz, daughter of Ernest Quiroga.



Joe Riojas
Interview by Vinicio Sinta

Joe Riojas was stationed in the Pacific during World War II with the Army Air Corps, but his letters home never told the dangers he faced.

Riojas was assigned to the 58th Fighter Group, 69th Fighter Squadron. Later, he was transferred to the 338th Fighter Group. His unit was part of the Allied Forces' "island-hopping" strategy in the Pacific — taking territory back from the Japanese.

He was born in Lockhart, Texas, 27 miles south of Austin, on Sept. 19, 1924. He was one of 13 children born to Gregorio Riojas and Macedonia Martines.

He was drafted on April 16, 1943, and reported to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Afterward, he went to San Francisco, where he boarded a ship for Australia, and then the Pacific combat zone.

Once the Americans had cleared out the Japanese, Riojas' unit went on to other combat hot spots in the Philippines, Saipan, the Solomon Islands and Okinawa.

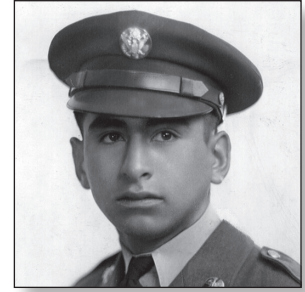
His final stop was Okinawa, where he heard the news that the war had ended.

He was awarded the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with six Bronze Stars, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with one Bronze Star, the Good Conduct Medal, the Victory Ribbon and four Overseas Service Bars.

Riojas returned home Dec. 20, 1945, and moved to Austin, Texas. He worked at Economy Furniture for 32 years, where he learned the trade and made patterns for the furniture.

He met Minerva Banda Riojas; they married and had six children: Jody, Joe Richard, Carlos, Patricia Ann, Samuel David and Rebecca. The couple divorced in 1978, and Riojas married Anselma Trejo. She died in 1994.

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



Sator "Sandy" Sanchez
Tribute

Just days before his 24th birthday, in 1945, Sator "Sandy" Sanchez was killed during his 66th bombing mission, flying over Germany.

Sanchez was a flight engineer on a B-17 that was shot down over an oil refinery in Ruhland, Germany.

Sanchez was born in Joliet, Illinois, 40 miles southwest of Chicago, on March 21, 1921. He and his sister were raised by their step-grandparents after their parents died.

Sanchez enlisted in the Army in 1939 and was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division before being transferred to the Army Air Corps in 1941.

In 1943, Sanchez was assigned to the 8th Army Air Force, 95th Bombardment Group, 334th Squadron in Horham Airfield, England. There, he served as a tail gunner and top turret gunner, before working as a flight engineer on a B-17 airplane. The following year, Sanchez was assigned to the 15th Air Force, 301st Bombardment Group, 353rd Squadron in Lucera, Italy, until his plane was shot down.

Sanchez was awarded a Silver Star, a Distinguished Flying Cross, a Soldier's Medal, an Air Medal with 10 oak leaf clusters, and two Purple Hearts. An elementary school and a park in Joliet are named after him, as is a dormitory in Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany.

The Army Air Corps honored Sanchez's career by emblazoning a B-17 with a caricature of his face, the name Smilin' Sandy Sanchez, and the number 44 — a reference to the number of missions he flew with the 8th Air Force.

Information provided by Julio Cervantes, nephew of Sator Sanchez.

WWII



Ignacio Vindiola

Tribute

Ignacio Vindiola was 27 years old when he joined the Army Air Forces during WWII and was assigned as a radio operator aboard bomber planes.

Vindiola was born May 5, 1916, in Dos Cabezas, Arizona (about 70 miles east of Tucson), to Guadalupe Leon. His mother owned La Fiesta restaurant, where she fed those who were without food during the Great Depression.

Vindiola and his three siblings were all musically talented and played various instruments; he favored the trumpet. The four siblings combined their musical talents to play in their mother's restaurant.

Music eventually became a full-time endeavor, and Vindiola and his brother formed their own band. Vindiola's musical career not only brought him professional success, but also led him to marry the love of his life — Josie Valenzuela, a dancer for the band.

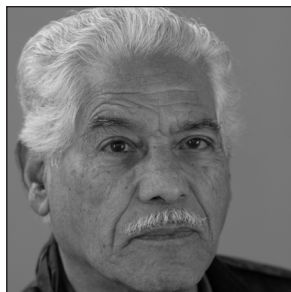
Vindiola enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1943 and was sent to Kansas City for boot camp and then to Atlantic City, New Jersey, for radio operator training. Finally, he shipped out to Okinawa. His job was to operate the radio and drop tin foil out of aircraft to confuse Japanese radar.

After returning to civilian life in Douglas, Arizona, Vindiola ran the family restaurant and worked at the Grand Theatre in town. He later became a postmaster and was also an accountant for the local credit union.

Vindiola was highly involved in the American Legion and kept in touch with the men in his unit for many years. At the time of his death on Aug. 25, 2005, he was one of the last members living.

Information provided by Mary Araza, granddaughter of Ignacio Vindiola.

KOREAN WAR COLLECTION



Philip Cervantes

Interview by Henry Mendoza

Philip Cervantes mastered the science of destruction as a specialist in explosives and demolition during the earliest years of the Cold War.

Born in East Los Angeles, California, in 1929, Cervantes was the fourth of 11 children. His mother, Catalina Rodarte, tended to the household, and his father, Antonio Cervantes, was a carpenter in the construction business.

Cervantes worked in construction after graduating from high school, but things changed suddenly in 1950 when he was drafted into the Army.

Cervantes was a member of the Army's 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Ord, California, and completed basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia.

He and his friend Frank Flores were sent to Germany, where they entered Headquarters Company, 2nd Infantry Battalion.

Cervantes learned about explosives by reading Flores' books. It did not take long for his curiosity to grow into a career.

"I would be called into headquarters in a tent, [and] be briefed on the map to what bridge to knock out," Cervantes said. "When briefing ended, the driver takes you out to the bridge, and I was supposed to knock them out."

Cervantes was discharged in November 1952 and went back home to work in construction to support his family.

Cervantes has wondered about Flores because they never saw each other again after being discharged. He went to several American Legion posts in the Los Angeles area to see if Flores was a member but had no luck finding him.

"He was my closest ally," Cervantes said.

Cervantes recalls his military years as a time of friendships and personal growth.

Interviewed in Los Angeles, California, on Jan. 7, 2011.



Eliseo Cremer

Interview by R.J. Molina

When Eliseo Cremer removed his boots after weeks of frigid combat on the Manchurian border during the Korean conflict, his toenails came off along with his socks.

The men of Cremer's unit, 2nd Infantry Division, 37th Field Artillery Battalion, were advised to put ice on their frostbitten feet or faces instead of warm water. They were given dry clothes to replace their frozen wet uniforms. Some men lost their ears and noses to frostbite.

Cremer enlisted in the Army in 1948. When his Seattle-based unit was called to war in Korea in 1950, he was told he wasn't required to go. But, he volunteered anyway.

"I had been in the service for almost three years. They want me to stay there [in Seattle]. But I want to volunteer; I want to go with the division," Cremer said.

Cremer's parents, Ezekial Cremer and María Perez, from Falfurrias, Texas, had 11 children. Eliseo was born on a ranch called Las Animas on July 14, 1929. He left school after fifth grade to work as a vaquero, a cowboy, roping, breaking in horses and doing other ranch work. When he was 18, he enlisted in the Army.

Cremer has a book with photos from the war, but he admits, "Sometimes I don't want to remember."

He credits Laredo physician Francisco Cigarroa with saving his feet from amputation after the frostbite. Besides the frostbite, Cremer also suffered from malaria. He spent 14 months at a VA hospital in Houston. He was honorably discharged on May 2, 1952.

After the war, Cremer returned to South Texas and worked on oil rigs and as a ranch hand. He married Rosa Dalia Reyes on Christmas Eve, 1954, and had four daughters Leticia, Cynthia, Terri, Sandra Lee, and one son, Eliseo William "Billy."

Interviewed June 16, 2016, in Bruni, Texas.

KOREAN WAR COLLECTION



Samuel Echeveste

Interview by Michelle Lojewski

Samuel Echeveste never saw himself becoming a decorated war veteran serving the U.S. during a time when he was not accepted by his fellow Americans.

His grew up in Miami, Arizona, where he was born on Christmas Eve 1932 to Aristeo Echeveste and Ramona Padilla. He was one of the youngest among four sisters and three brothers.

Once he graduated from Phoenix Technical High School in June 1951, Echeveste immediately volunteered for the Army.

After basic training, he continued training at Army Field Forces Leaders Course and then was assigned to Korea's front lines.

Echeveste became a forward observer to the 81 mm mortar platoon. He was promoted from squad leader to sergeant first class, which gave him the title of platoon sergeant. At only 20 years old, he became the youngest U.S. soldier to serve in this position during the Korean War.

Echeveste received an honorable discharge June 15, 1954, and was awarded a Purple Heart, a Korean Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, a United Nations Service Medal, a Combat Infantry Badge and a National Defense Service Medal.

After his discharge, Echeveste returned home and attended Arizona State University, where he earned a bachelor of arts and a master's in education. He began working in the U.S. and then in Europe at schools for military dependents.

He married Berta Schreiber, and they had two daughters, Diana and Colleen.

His advice to future students: "God gives you good health and a healthy brain. Use it and go to school, and use it as much as you can. Learn as much as you can. Don't expect things that are given to you."

Interviewed in Tempe, Arizona, on Aug. 6, 2010.



William R. Medina

Interview by Joseph Padilla

During his service in the Korean War, William R. Medina fought his battles in the trenches with the U.S. Army.

Medina was born April 20, 1931, in Capulin, Colorado, about 250 miles southwest of Denver.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army in February 1950 and was assigned to the 40th Infantry Division, 223rd Infantry Regiment. Basic training was challenging for Medina because he grew up speaking Spanish and could hardly speak English. He didn't always understand what he was being told when given orders.

Medina had trained to be a paratrooper, but a broken ankle put him out of commission and he was shipped off to Korea. Medina didn't recall prejudice toward Latinos in the service. If anything, he felt there was even a preference for Latinos in leadership roles.

"I think most Latinos distinguished themselves in that role," he said.

Upon arrival in Korea in May 1952, he was assigned to the 8th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. Medina was stationed south of the 38th Parallel, home to some of the most intense fighting during the Korean War. Heartbreak Ridge, Bloody Ridge and Pork Chop Hill were all situated around this region as well.

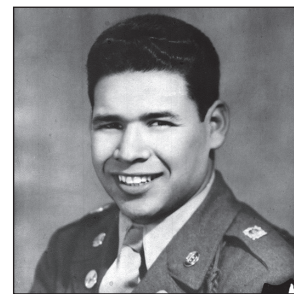
Medina was discharged in May 1954 and received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his service.

He married Corine Duran in November of that same year, and they had five children: Gerald, John, Stephan, Patricia and Norberto.

Medina received his GED diploma and obtained an associate degree from the Community College of Denver in 1959.

"You just don't give up. You keep pumping, and sooner or later you're going to be what you want to be," Medina said.

*Interviewed in Thornton, Colorado, on June 15, 2011.**



Hector Albert Padilla

Interview by Henry Mendoza

A lifelong athlete and a trailblazing educator and coach, Hector Albert Padilla is no stranger to the work that goes into assembling a strong team.

Padilla was born in Tucson, Arizona, on March 22, 1930, to Manuel and Concepcion Juarez Padilla. His father worked for Southern Pacific Railroad until he died at the age of 42. His mother, a skilled seamstress, moved the family to East Los Angeles.

There, Padilla showed much promise as an athlete. He was captain of Roosevelt High's football team and the school's baseball star.

He went to Los Angeles City College in 1948 and enlisted in the Army Reserves later that year. He went to Fort Lewis, Washington, for basic training and was assigned to the 9th Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division.

Padilla returned to Los Angeles City College to complete his education. He then transferred to Occidental College, where he balanced football with academics and training for the Reserves.

He graduated in 1952 with a degree in physical education and received a master's from California State University, Los Angeles, two years later. He then got a coaching job in 1960 at his former high school.

"I am really proud [of] the fact that I am the first Mexican-American head varsity football coach in the city of Los Angeles," Padilla said. "I was looked upon as the father image for 80 percent of those guys; they didn't have fathers at home."

In 1973, Padilla began to coach and teach at the college level.

He married Dora Ophelia Suarto in 1956. The couple had three children: Daniel, Steve and Lisa.

Interviewed in Los Angeles, California, on Jan. 7, 2011.

KOREAN WAR COLLECTION



Pedro Ramos Santana

Interview by Humberto Garcia

Pedro Ramos Santana was born and raised on a plantation in Guayama, Puerto Rico.

His parents, Pedro Ramos, an agriculturist who worked at a fruit plantation, and his mother, Juana Santana, who tended to the house, had 14 children.

He was 19 when he received a letter from the Army, asking him to present himself to register for service. Santana heeded the call, only to be sent back home because he had no facial hair and looked too young.

"They told me, 'Go away; when you're a little older, we'll call you.'"

On March 11, 1946, Santana entered the service. He underwent basic training at Camp O'Reilly in eastern Puerto Rico. He was assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 65th Infantry — an all-Puerto Rican unit.

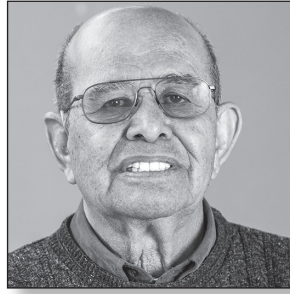
He was sent to Jamaica, where he refueled planes, and then to Trinidad, where he recalled suffering from a muscular lesion that caused him to have an accident. One day in 1946, he felt dizzy and fell down a flight of stairs.

"The thing is that, in the Army, you have to make an effort even if you can't," said Santana, explaining that his strong sense of duty caused him to push himself too hard. "If I made that effort, it was because I had bosses and I was held accountable to them," said Santana.

On Jan. 30, 1947, Santana, then 23, left the Army. He went back to Puerto Rico to finish high school and then moved to New York in 1949.

He received an honorable discharge in 1947.

*Interviewed in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, on March 14, 2003.**



Tereso Reza

Interviewed by Vicki Torres

While most servicemen were on land to fight for the United States during the Korean War, Tereso Reza spent his years of service working aboard a ship.

Reza was born in East Los Angeles, California, on Sept. 23, 1931, to Salvador Reza and Maria Berroteran. He was the second-oldest of seven brothers and sisters.

He decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy in June 1951 at the age of 19, along with his friend Pete Martinez. Reza was a volunteer, unlike most of his friends, who had been drafted.

Reza was first assigned to the USS Iowa and later transferred to the USS Sperry, a submarine tender stationed in San Diego Bay.

During the Korean War, the Sperry crew was involved in overhauling and equipping submarines that participated in conflict. Reza's duties were to clean the second deck, pull cables, fix machinery, and help mend the ship.

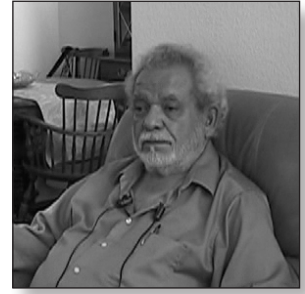
As part of the Sperry crew, Reza traveled to Hawai'i, Chichijima, Japan; Puerto Vallarta, Mexico; and Mare Island, in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In June 1955, Reza was discharged from active duty with the rank of electrician's mate petty officer second class and transferred to the U.S. Naval Reserve.

Back in civilian life, Reza returned to Los Angeles and married Rita Garcia, a teacher's aide. The couple had three sons, Dan, Robert and Steven.

Reza worked as a repairman at Westinghouse and as a stocker at a cabinet shop before getting a job with the City of Los Angeles as an inspector and dispatcher.

Interviewed in Los Angeles, California, on Jan. 7, 2011.



Francisco Rios Padilla

Interview by Joseph Padilla

Francisco Rios Padilla jumped at the chance to leave Denver, Colorado. He got his wish on March 10, 1950, as he walked past a Coast Guard recruiting station on 15th Street, went in and enlisted.

"I didn't tell anybody," Rios Padilla said. "They sent me to Cape May, New Jersey."

Rios Padilla was born Sept. 15, 1932, in Denver to Virginia Rios Padilla and Pracedes Rios.

"My mother's job was raising five kids during the Depression by herself," he said.

At radio school in Groton, Connecticut, he learned Morse code. "They would broadcast dirty stories over the air, and you'd have headphones on and try to figure out who did what to who," Rios Padilla said.

He served for a year on the cutter Bering Strait, which patrolled areas of the Pacific as part of the postwar occupation force. Later, he served as a turret gunner during the Korean conflict and performed air-sea rescues.

During the war, he was assigned to the Air Detachment at Barbers Point, on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. Later he was assigned to the Coast Guard Air Detachment at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi, again doing air-sea rescues.

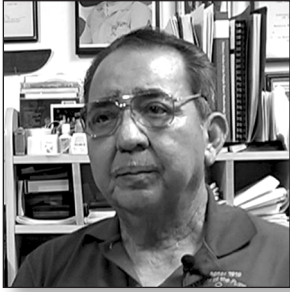
On March 11, 1957, Rios Padilla received an honorable discharge with the rank of aviation radarman 2nd class. He earned a Korean Service Medal and a National Defense Service Medal.

In 1962, he received his bachelor's degree in English from the University of Denver and later earned a master's in modern languages from the University of Oklahoma. He completed his doctoral degree at Oklahoma in 1971, with a major concentration in Spanish and a minor in French.

He retired after 30 years of teaching at the University of Colorado-Denver.

*Interviewed in Denver, Colorado, on July 26, 2011.**

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



Francisco Rene Cortez

Interview by Ryan Edwards

1952 was a big year for young Francisco Rene Cortez. He turned 17, joined the U.S. Marine Corps and got married.

The decisions he made that year changed the course of his life. Cortez went from a teenager who dreamed of being a warrior to a married man and, eventually, the father of 12 children.

He began a 20-year journey that took him from the south Texas towns of his youth – Hebbronville and Corpus Christi – to Japan; Hawaii; the Arctic Circle; Europe; the Mediterranean; the South Pacific; Vietnam; and finally California, where he was discharged.

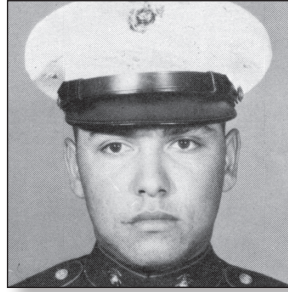
1952 was also the year that Cortez went from being a store attendant at a plumbing company to being a leader of men. Just as fighting in Vietnam began to escalate in 1965, he joined the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, as a platoon sergeant and volunteered to go to war.

During his second tour, he was assigned to the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, in Chu Lai. In all, Cortez completed four tours in Vietnam before returning to the U.S. He was an acting first sergeant at the time of his discharge.

But his journey didn't end there. After his years in the military, Cortez started his own landscaping business and went on to own other businesses as well.

"I started with a lawnmower, a hand edger and a grass rake in the back of a Toyota Corona," Cortez said. "America is the land of opportunity if you just get up and go look for it."

*Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on May 6, 2011.**



Juan Espinosa De La Garza

Interview by Taylor Peterson

Gunshots peppered the ground around Cpl. Juan Espinosa De La Garza. He did not know where the shots were coming from, just that he had to get his men back to Hill 327, a base camp near Da Nang, Vietnam.

He managed to lead his men back to the hill without any losses, but the experience scarred him. Nothing had prepared him for that kind of combat, against an enemy he could not see.

De La Garza was born June 20, 1946, in Phoenix, Arizona. He grew up working in the fields with his family, but he wanted something better.

He enlisted in the Marines on June 29, 1965. After basic training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, he went to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina for training in repairing vehicle bodies and fenders.

About a year later, De La Garza was on his way to Vietnam.

One of his most vivid memories was driving a visiting colonel around to area field hospitals. The smell of death was pervasive. "I threw up. ... It was so bad."

De La Garza was honorably discharged on April 15, 1969. He received a National Defense Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal with one star, the Combat Action Ribbon, and sharpshooting badges.

After the war, any loud noise would send his mind back to Hill 327. He became aggressive, even to his family. He suffered hearing loss and debilitating pain in his back and legs from jumping in and out of foxholes carrying heavy packs. He was unable to work.

"It took me 38 years to get help" from the Department of Veterans Affairs, he said.

He married Rose Marie Martinez and the couple had two sons, Richard and Juan, and a daughter, Genevieve.

*Interviewed in Phoenix, Arizona, on Aug. 16, 2010.**



Eduardo Monclova Fierro

Interview by Frank Hernandez

Around noon one Sunday in May 1968, while on a sweep-and-destroy mission in Vietnam, Eduardo Monclova Fierro's Army platoon was ambushed by the Viet Cong. Part of Fierro's right arm was torn off in the firefight, and he was wounded in his right thigh.

As he lay wounded, 90 minutes into the battle, two Viet Cong soldiers tried to drag him away from his platoon.

Fierro later lost the rest of his arm and began to suffer flashbacks.

His wife, Olivia Ramos, eventually helped him to open up about his post-traumatic stress disorder and the guilt he felt about surviving an attack that killed many other U.S. soldiers.

Fierro, from Alpine, Texas, was drafted in May 1967 and sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, to train as an infantryman. He was assigned to Company A, 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division.

He still has flashbacks to the 1968 attack that nearly took his life. After he was medevaced to safety, he was taken to Cam Ranh Bay and then to a series of military hospitals. At Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, doctors amputated what was left of his right arm.

His war experiences made it difficult for him to transition back to civilian life.

"I had too many flashbacks from the war in Vietnam," he said. "I had to cope with trying to do things that I had taken for granted before with just one arm."

"Everyone that came back from Vietnam seemed to be having the same kind of problems. We're still fighting to get those problems corrected."

Fierro earned a Purple Heart, Bronze Star with V Device, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm Unit Citation and an Expert Marksmanship Badge.

*Interviewed in Alpine, Texas, on Aug. 3, 2010.**

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



Rey Gaytan

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

In a life spent fighting discrimination, Rey Gaytan, a Vietnam veteran and activist for Mexican-American rights, has used art as a form of personal therapy. Eventually, it became his career.

Gaytan grew up in a poor neighborhood of New Braunfels, Texas, one of nine children in his family.

In high school, Gaytan became active in organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens youth group. He was elected state youth director for Texas and New Mexico and twice was elected national president.

As a leader of his local council, Gaytan used his skills to help improve conditions for farm workers in South Texas, who made as little as 40 cents a day, endured poor housing conditions and faced exposure to pesticides.

"I said, 'OK, this is a just cause. We need to help these families,'" Gaytan said.

In 1969, Gaytan enlisted in the Marines to serve in Vietnam. He was trained as an ordnance man to load bombs and ammunition on planes and helicopters, and sent to Okinawa, then to the Iwakuni Air Station in Japan.

After the war, he completed his undergraduate degree in fine arts and a master's in art and anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin.

He has been an artist and art teacher, and he is an active American Legion member, heading the education committee and the Boys State and Girls State leadership committees.

"I've lived a fabulous life because of what I do," Gaytan said.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on May 24, 2016.



Jesse Herrera

Interview by Manuel Aviles-Santiago

Jesse Herrera grew up on the South Side of Chicago in a neighborhood where many of his peers went straight from high school to the steel mills.

That wasn't the future he wanted, but he didn't know anyone who had gone to college. The Vietnam War was underway, but Herrera didn't want to wait to be drafted, which meant he'd go right to the Army. "The Navy appealed to my sense of adventure," he said.

On Aug. 4, 1963, he enlisted. It was the start of an eight-year Navy career.

After boot camp at Naval Station Great Lakes, he was assigned to Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico, as an electrician on the USS John King. After a shakedown cruise in the Caribbean, the ship sailed for the Mediterranean.

He was then sent back to Great Lakes for advanced electrical school before he requested assignment to Vietnam in 1967. "I knew nothing about Vietnam," he said. "I was 20. You think you are bulletproof."

He was sent to Camp Tien Sha, where his basic duty was to guard incoming supply shipments, "everything from Coca-Cola to helicopters."

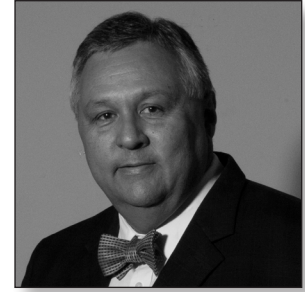
He had dabbled in photography, and during a trip to Hong Kong for R&R, he bought his first SLR (single-lens reflex) 35 mm camera. Later, he enrolled in some photography classes in Illinois.

He married Ruth Ann Pluta in 1970 and left the Navy in 1971. He started working in photo studios and earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois Chicago School of Art and Architecture in 1975.

The family moved to Austin, Texas, where Herrera was a photographer for various state government entities for 25 years.

For his Vietnam service, he was awarded the National Defense Service Medal.

*Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on Aug. 8, 2011.**



Charles Paul Jones

Interview by Catherine Murphy

Charles Paul Jones grew up in San Antonio, Texas, in a west-side neighborhood that included Belgians, Germans, Hispanics, Italians and Lebanese.

"It was a Brooklyn Southwest, for lack of a better term," Jones said. "We all learned about each other's culture. ... Everybody on the block got along."

His parents, Rudolph and Virginia Jones, stressed the value of education, and Jones attended St. Mary's University. He majored in geology and joined the Corp of Cadets, an ROTC program.

Following graduation in January 1970, Jones was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Army's 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. He was sent to the Phu Bai Combat Base in central Vietnam and then to the jungle.

Jones said he was one of only two Hispanic officers in the division. "I was the officer for everybody. But to the Hispanics, I represented something different. I knew I had to do a good job," he said.

His tour in Vietnam ended in 1972. Jones later experienced psychological and physical changes that would be recognized as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

He was a teacher, worked in the oil industry and became a lawyer. He became active in Democratic politics and has been an advocate for veterans, helping to create the Texas Democratic Veterans.

Jones received the Army Commendation Medal, Bronze Star and the Air Medal for his service.

"It was an honor and a privilege to be given the opportunity to be an officer in the Army. ... There is no better thing a young man or woman can do than have the opportunity to serve."

*Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on April 20, 2011.**

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



John Martinez

Interview by Tarrah Miller

John Martinez was born Oct. 13, 1943, in Houston, Texas. He grew up near the city's ship channel and enjoyed watching ships arrive and depart. Sometimes, Navy warships visited and opened their doors to the public, sparking Martinez's interests in travel and Navy service.

In 1963, Martinez enlisted in the Navy. But before he left for basic training, he finished classes at San Jacinto Junior College, where he studied commercial art.

He began recruit training at Naval Station Great Lakes, III., where he said he didn't feel any discrimination as a Hispanic because "everybody got treated equally awful." After boot camp, Martinez attended submarine school for six months.

Martinez served aboard the USS Tirante, a diesel-powered submarine from the World War II era. About 100 sailors lived in cramped quarters, working as a team. The crew was predominantly white, and Martinez was one of only three Hispanics.

As quartermaster, Martinez was responsible for tracking the ship's course. He used a gyroscope, a device that detected the submarine's movement, and penciled dots on a grid paper to chart its progress.

"The main goal of a submarine is to remain secret," Martinez said. "You don't want the satellites or anything to detect who you are or where you are."

Martinez communicated with his loved ones by writing letters and by calling home using shortwave radios where he had to say "over" at the end of each sentence.

Martinez was discharged in October 1971 as a Quartermaster E-5 and returned home to Houston.

Martinez worked as a graphic artist at Bonner + Moore and then was the owner and graphic designer of Diseños. He married Norma Lee Willman on May 28, 1985, and they had two children, Ryan and Celeste.

Interviewed in Houston, Texas, on January 29, 2011.



Jorge Otero Barreto

Interview by Vinicio Sinta

In 1959, a young Jorge Otero Barreto stood up to his mother, telling her he would marry his girlfriend and would not attend medical school in Spain. Instead, he joined the Army.

It was a choice that would have long-term repercussions, setting him on a course that would take him on five tours of duty and 200 missions in Vietnam (1961-1970). He was awarded 38 military decorations, including three Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars with Valor, five Purple Hearts, four Army Commendation Medals; and five Air Medals. He would become known as the "most decorated soldier in the Vietnam War." For his exploits, he became known as "Sgt. Rock" and "the Puerto Rican Rambo."

Otero Barreto was born April 7, 1937, in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, the oldest of eight children — and the only son — born to a middle-class family.

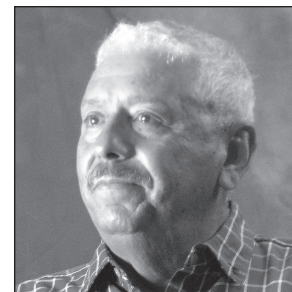
After joining the military, Otero Barreto became the first Puerto Rican to graduate from the Army's Air Assault School in 1960; he served with the 101st Airborne, the 25th Infantry, the 82nd Airborne and the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

"I wanted to be the best, or at least next to the best," he said, signifying his willingness to push himself. "I was willing to kill; I was also willing to die. I didn't have no choice."

Individuals and organizations have been advocating for Otero Barreto to receive a Medal of Honor to better reflect his record.

He and Tomasa Bujana Rodriguez de Otero married in 1961 and had four children.

Interviewed on July 6, 2017 in San Antonio.



Paz Peña

Interview by Wes Hamilton

Paz Peña was born July 5, 1944, in Robstown, Texas, 18 miles from Corpus Christi, to Carlos Peña and Ysabel Lopez. His childhood home had only two bedrooms and a kitchen, and he walked almost two miles to school each day.

Education was always important to Peña, and he saw the military as a way expand his horizons.

"The military became an attractive way to leave," said Peña. "I wanted to go to school but couldn't afford it, so the military was a great option for me to serve and then get my education after."

In 1964, Peña enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and completed boot camp in San Diego, California. After boot camp, he was chosen to enroll in communications school, where radio support and teletypes became his specialty.

Peña was deployed to Da Nang, Vietnam. Duties included laying communication lines around a nearby battlefield, and at night his unit was to defend the perimeter.

After serving 13 months and six days in Vietnam, Peña was relieved of his duties and sent home.

He applied to the University of Texas at Austin and was denied enrollment. Peña made a trip to the admissions office to speak to the man who wrote his rejection letter. The official ripped up Peña's rejection letter and said he could attend UT.

Peña went on to teach at Austin Community College, specializing in political science, Mexican-American politics and minorities in politics.

"Getting into teaching — I never expected that to happen," Peña said. "But it has been very rewarding and one of the best experiences in my life."

Peña married Ysabel in July 1972 in San Antonio, Texas, and had four children: Ana Leticia, Jose Paz, Pablo and Elisa.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on November 5, 2010.

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



Robert Polanco

Interview by Taylor Peterson

Robert Polanco was a soldier in the Army in 1971 when he found himself going back to war in Vietnam after a few days of absence.

He had returned to the U.S. to visit his wife, Elidia Chavarria, and their 2-year-old daughter after they survived a serious car accident. Leaving them again was heartwrenching.

The Army drafted Polanco in 1970. He had already graduated from Sul Ross State Teachers College and begun building a life with his new family in San Antonio, where he was going to be a physical education teacher.

He went to Vietnam as a member of the 101st Airborne Division after learning how to operate radio equipment and the teletype at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

"When they sent me to Georgia, we had to learn Morse code," he recalled. "We had to really buckle down, send and receive words per minute — I think the minimum was 11 words per minute."

In Vietnam, Polanco was a communications officer. His responsibilities included keeping a dialogue going between troops in combat areas and the main base.

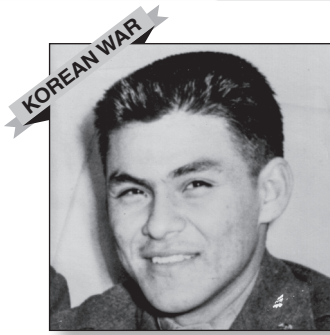
Later, he returned to school and earned a master's degree in education at Sul Ross, courtesy of the GI Bill.

Polanco taught school for nearly three decades and became involved with veterans organizations.

"I should have joined the American Legion and the VFW, but I didn't do that till the late 1990s," he said. "[Now] I am an officer in both. ... I am also a county veterans service officer. It keeps me busy."

He and his wife had a daughter, Jo Elda, and a son, Robert.

*Interviewed in Alpine, Texas, on Aug. 3, 2010.**



Carlos R. Quijano

Interview by Stephanie De Luna

Over 23 years, Carlos R. Quijano served in both the Marines and Air Force and participated in military operations in Korea and Vietnam.

Quijano was born Nov. 4, 1932, in San Antonio, Texas, to Rosa Ambriz Quijano and Robert M. Quijano.

In 1951, Quijano enlisted in the Marines. He spent six weeks at boot camp in San Diego, California, and then went to Quantico, Virginia, for ordnance school. After 12 weeks of training, he was sent to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

In 1952, Quijano traveled to Inchon, Korea, where he commanded about a dozen men in a machine-gunner unit. "Every morning there was a sniper up on a hill," Quijano said. "We would come up to wash our faces, and he would be waiting for us."

After a year in Korea, Quijano returned to San Antonio and later joined the Air Force.

Quijano was sent to Vietnam where he repaired aircraft and guarded the air fields. "It was different being in the Air Force," Quijano said. "We didn't have to find the enemy, but we still had to protect what we had."

Quijano's final discharge from the military was in February 1974 as a staff sergeant.

He married Mary Louise Hernandez on Sept. 1, 1962, and they had three boys and two girls.

Quijano studied electronics at San Antonio College. He worked at Santa Rosa Hospital for 21 years, where he worked on equipment that was used during surgery. He worked at four different hospitals in Texas before retiring at 71.

Quijano remains involved with military organizations such as the Purple Heart Association and the Alamo Marine Corps League, and also volunteers twice a week at University Hospital.

Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on April 26, 2011.



Felipe Ramirez

Interview by Desiree T. Hernandez

A bullet in his chest and scars on his stomach were lifelong reminders of Felipe Ramirez's Vietnam War experience.

"The first round of bullets hit the machine gun. Before I knew it, I was hit. I felt something. I took a big dive and went behind a tree and said to another soldier, 'I'm OK, I'm OK,'" he said.

Ramirez, just 19, had enlisted in the U.S. Army after a year at Laredo Community College, in his South Texas hometown. A friend from high school had been killed in combat, and he thought volunteering to go to war was a way to get revenge.

He was assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry.

When he arrived in Vietnam, he said he became "a different person." Ramirez experienced things he never could have imagined.

"It was hard, very hard, when we were in combat. In one raid, mostly everybody got killed; some got pulled to safety. From 400 dudes, 150 came out, and that was the worst," he said.

Ramirez carried a bullet in his upper chest, a wound he suffered in an ambush when his unit was assigned to clear an area so an Army helicopter could land.

Ramirez served for two years in the Army; his injuries were too severe for a second tour. On being discharged in August 1971, he returned to his hometown and got married. He and his wife, Hortencia, had a son, Felipe IV.

He was awarded two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, a National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal. He died on Dec. 20, 2016.

*Interviewed in Laredo, Texas, on Feb. 26, 2011.**

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



Ben Rivera

Interview by Taylor Peterson

In June 1967, Ben Rivera joined the U.S. Marine Corps and was a member of the Marine FLC Force LA. His goal was to help provide for his family and follow in the steps of his father, who had fought in Europe during World War II.

Rivera was born Feb. 12, 1949, in Tucson, Arizona. His father, Benjamin Rivera, worked installing windows, and his mother, Connie Rivera, was a homemaker. Rivera recalled that his parents did the best they could to provide for their six children.

As Rivera started basic training, he enrolled in scout sniper school, where he trained for three weeks. He remembers training as a grueling process.

"It started out with about three squads of 21 men. After three days the crew was cut in half," Rivera said.

Upon completing training, Rivera was sent to Vietnam. He was eager for the end of his tour, but three weeks before his scheduled return, a sergeant ordered him to go out to the battlefield.

"There's no way I'm going out there," Rivera said he told him. "I have three weeks until I go home. I'm going to go out there and get killed."

Rivera was unharmed and discharged in April 1970 at the rank of sergeant and returned home to Tucson.

For most of his life, Rivera worked as a roofer for a variety of private contractors, and later for Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, where he retired in 2012. Rivera remained involved in the local detachment of the Marine Corps League, where he occupied several positions through the years.

Rivera married Virginia Salgado, a computer programmer, on Aug. 25, 1972, and had two children, Teresa and Benjamin III.

Interviewed in Tucson, Arizona, on August 17, 2010.



Elva Medrano Rodriguez

Interview by Laura Barberena

Elva Medrano Rodriguez's brother, Camilo, served in the Vietnam War and rarely sent letters home. To cope with her brother's absence, Rodriguez, a vocational nurse, turned to prayer and focused on her work with terminal patients.

Rodriguez was raised in San Antonio, Texas, by her mother, Hermila Moreno, a salesperson, and her father, Porfirio Medrano, a U.S. Navy veteran from World War II and the Korean War.

Sunday Mass was mandatory for the Medrano family. Rodriguez says the religious traditions and customs she learned as a child stayed with her throughout her life. "I'm not going to say I'm the best person in the world, but I do believe in a lot of the Catholic beliefs," she said.

In 1966, Rodriguez earned her nursing degree from the Santa Rosa Vocational School of Nursing, west of downtown San Antonio. During the Vietnam War, she worked at Santa Rosa Hospital (now Christus Santa Rosa), treating terminal cancer patients and others with life-threatening diseases.

Rodriguez recalls being the only Mexican American working the hospital floor, along with five African-American women. She didn't notice until the head nurse, who was Anglo, brought it to her attention.

Rodriguez says experiencing a war from the home-front perspective back then was very different than it is today. "We read about it in the newspapers. We read our letters from our loved ones. But we never saw day-to-day combat or live news reels, like we do now with these wars."

Camilo Medrano eventually returned to the United States after his tour of service in Vietnam.

On July 14, 1972, Elva Medrano married Joe Rodriguez, an office clerk, in San Antonio. They had three children: Melanie, Joe and Corie. The couple divorced in 2009.

Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on May 4, 2010.



Ramon Rodriguez

Interview by Frank Trejo

Standing in front of a judge at age 17, Ramon Rodriguez was given two options: Go to jail or join the military. With his father's approval, he chose to serve.

Rodriguez joined the U.S. Army in 1960 and was sent to Fort Ord, California, for basic training. He spent three years with the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Then he re-enlisted and joined the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was sent to Germany, where he became a member of the 509th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division.

In a bold move, Rodriguez volunteered to go to Vietnam.

"At that time I was an NCO, noncommissioned officer, and I thought to further my career I had to go at least get my ticket punched and go to Vietnam," Rodriguez said. He was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division as a platoon sergeant of a rifle company.

From his service in Vietnam, Rodriguez was awarded two Silver Stars and four Purple Hearts over the course of a few years.

Rodriguez was also a member of the Special Forces and served as a scuba team sergeant from 1978 to 1980 in Panama. Later, he became an instructor of the ROTC program at the University of Missouri, in Columbia.

Rodriguez retired from the military and spent the next seven years as police chief at El Segundo Air Force Base in Los Angeles.

Thinking back on his years of service and his life experiences after a troubled youth, Rodriguez did not hesitate to endorse the military as a way to attain personal growth.

"I think everyone should go into the military. It will teach you things as a young man you will never, ever learn on the outside," Rodriguez said.

Interviewed in Los Angeles, California, on Jan. 7, 2011.

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



Juan P. Sanchez
Tribute

Grace Charles remembers receiving a letter from her mother saying that her cousin Juan P. Sanchez had enlisted in the U.S. Army and was on his way to Vietnam.

"It was a frightening moment, knowing someone in our family was going to war," Charles wrote in a text provided to Voces.

A native of Corpus Christi, Texas, Sanchez was the son of Juan M. Sanchez and Hilda D. Perez.

Sanchez enlisted in the Army in 1965, shortly after graduating from West Oso High School. After training, Sanchez was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division as a paratrooper. He also served with a provisional company made up of 85 volunteers called upon to assist combat soldiers in trouble.

One story Sanchez talked about was the time he was about to head back to the United States but stayed in Vietnam to aid his fellow soldiers.

On the very day of his trip home, he and other soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division heeded a call for volunteers. They were flown to the central highlands of Vietnam to support their comrades from Charlie Company, who were stuck fighting off the Viet Cong on No Name Ridge.

Sanchez was granted three Purple Hearts, a Parachutist Badge, a National Defense Service Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, a Combat Infantryman Badge, an Army Commendation Medal, a Bronze Medal and the Silver Star.

On Feb. 14, 1967, Sanchez returned to the United States and was temporarily stationed in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, before finally returning to Corpus Christi. On May 19 of the same year, the Texas Legislature honored Sanchez with a special commendation for his patriotism.

Information provided by by Grace Jones, cousin of Juan P. Sanchez.



Raymond "Ray" Saucedo
Interview by Jackie Rapp

Summers for Raymond "Ray" Saucedo meant loading up a truck and wooden camper with his family and heading to anywhere that cherry-, strawberry- and tomato-picking migrant work led them.

Saucedo was born Oct. 2, 1949, in San Antonio, Texas, to Jose and Seferina Saucedo. Because Saucedo had shortened school years from migrant work, it was difficult for him to learn English. In addition, his parents didn't speak English at home.

When Saucedo was 18, in September 1968, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He traveled to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, for eight weeks of basic training. He received a base pay of \$101 per month and sent home \$90, which the government matched.

Saucedo left on a bus for Fort Huachuca, Arizona, for eight more weeks of basic training. Afterward, he was transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where he trained as a tank mechanic.

Saucedo served in the 11th and 7th Armored Cavalry units in Vietnam and Korea. In Korea, Saucedo patrolled at night because sergeants were nervous that any stray shot could start a war.

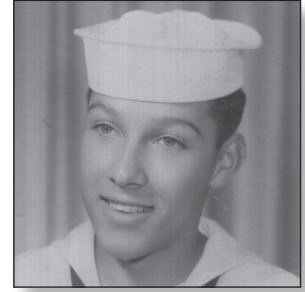
Although he recalls being afraid in both countries, Saucedo says his experience in Vietnam was vastly different than his time in Korea.

"In Vietnam you shoot first, ask questions later," Saucedo said. "But in Korea, you don't want to start an international incident."

Back home, Saucedo helped with organizations such as Meals on Wheels and says he believes he did more with his life because of his service in the war.

Saucedo married Bertha Lopez on June 5, 1976, in San Antonio. The couple had two daughters, Jaclyn "Jackie" Renee and Jennifer "Jenny" Ray Saucedo.

Interviewed in Castroville, Texas, on November 6, 2010.



Richard Soto
Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

In 1966, Richard Soto of Tracy, California, should have rotated off with his surgical team from a hospital ship off the coast of Vietnam. Instead, he stayed on, going AWOL, feeling an obligation to incoming casualties.

"I told the doctor that I was working with, 'I'm not going home.' He says, 'Well ... when they come to investigate, I'll tell them you were here,'" Soto said. "I think he knew there was going to be a court-martial."

But Soto was not court-martialed; he was honorably discharged in 1968.

He was a twin born Aug. 19, 1944, to a farm labor contractor and a homemaker. Soto's father died in a car crash when Soto was 3 years old, leaving his mother to raise five children alone. When his mother remarried later, he didn't get along with his new stepfather and left the family home at 14. He enlisted in the Navy after high school.

After his military service, Soto attended Delta College in Stockton and began learning about the Chicano movement. He participated in several Mexican American civil rights organizations and events, including the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), the Chicano Moratorium in 1970, and the Raza Unida Party.

He earned degrees from Delta and from California State, Sacramento; he also received a teaching credential and a master's in counseling from Cal State, San Francisco.

Soto worked as a counselor at Tracy Unified School District from 1976 to 2011. Since 2011, he has been an adult school counselor.

In 2016, he opened the Chicano Research Center in Stockton, offering an extensive library of Raza books, videos, ballads, and other artifacts to students and anyone interested in Chicano history.

Soto was married and divorced twice and has three children from those marriages: Scott Michael, Miguel E. and Enriqueta F. Soto.

Interview in Austin, Texas, on July 27, 2017.

VIETNAM WAR COLLECTION



Joseph Velasquez

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

When Joseph Velasquez joined the U.S. Navy on April 23, 1968, he received a card asking where he wanted to go if deployed. He wanted to go to Vietnam.

"People would ask, 'Why do you want to go there?' Velasquez said. 'But it would be like going to a wedding and not seeing the groom. I didn't want to miss the action.'"

Velasquez was born Dec. 24, 1949, in Miami, Arizona, about 80 miles east of Phoenix. He grew up quickly, taking on a father role to his younger brothers and sister.

Velasquez joined the Navy in part because he wanted to go to college and have better opportunities than those presented to him at home.

At basic training, the recruits jumped off ships and learned how to create a flotation device using the shirts off their backs. After training, Velasquez boarded the USS Midway (CVA-41) and traveled from the Mediterranean to Vietnam. He worked 12- to 14-hour shifts on the flight deck, where his job was maintaining and fixing aircraft off the coast of Vietnam.

Velasquez recalls that someone was always getting hurt. "Planes were always coming and going in 'Nam. There was always an emergency," he said. Some sailors got blown overboard or hit by a plane taking off.

During excursions from the ship, Velasquez was able to travel to the Philippines, Japan, China, Turkey and Greece, where he took tours and went sightseeing.

Velasquez was discharged in 1972 at the rank of E-4, petty officer third class. He worked for the U.S. Postal Service until he retired. The Vietnam veteran married Alicia Magallanes on March 10, 1982, in Fort Hancock, Texas. They had three children: Tanya, Tina and Travis.

Interviewed in Tucson, Arizona, on August 17, 2010.



Louis Villalobos Jr.,

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

Louis Villalobos Jr., a senior in high school, weighed his options. He didn't have the money for college. He could wait to be drafted to serve in the Vietnam War, or enlist and hope to be assigned somewhere else.

Army recruiters told him if he enlisted, there was a 90 percent chance he'd be sent to Germany. He signed up on March 11, 1966, and finished high school before reporting for duty that October.

When the new soldiers got their assignments, only about five of the 200 men were sent to Germany. The rest went to Vietnam.

All Villalobos knew about the country was that "it was hot, it was a jungle, and they were wearing black pajamas and straw hats." He did not anticipate the rain, the cold, the bugs and the snakes, but he learned to cope with them.

In Vietnam, Villalobos was assigned to Headquarters Company 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, in Cu Chi, near Saigon. His job was ground surveillance — listening with headphones to devices placed out in the field for any sounds that indicated the enemy was near.

In June 1967, Villalobos received shrapnel wounds in his legs and back when his unit was ambushed. In January 1968, he suffered a perforated eardrum in another attack.

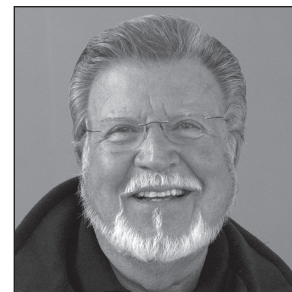
He was honorably discharged March 10, 1969. He and his wife, Amanda, have four daughters — Karla, Angela, Raquel and Maria — and live in Glendale, Arizona. Villalobos worked for the Postal Service from 1971 to 2009.

He said he has some disabilities from the war and is getting help from the Department of Veterans Affairs. "It's taken some time," he said.

He received two Purple Hearts, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Good Conduct Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal and the Marksman M-14 badge.

*Interviewed in Tempe, Arizona, on Aug. 16, 2010.**

POLITICAL



Henry Alfaro

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

When Henry Alfaro began his broadcasting career, he was one of very few Mexican-Americans in the industry. Decades later, his community work and trailblazing career led to him being named by Hispanic Magazine as one of the Top 100 Most Influential Latinos in the United States.

Alfaro was born Nov. 25, 1934 in South Pasadena, California. His father, Enrique Cardenas Alfaro, was a painter with the Southern Pacific Railroad. His mother, Irene Ochoa Alfaro, was a housewife.

Alfaro graduated from Pepperdine University in 1957 with a degree in English. In 1970, he took a job with a Los Angeles station, KABC7-TV, where he broke new ground by covering the local Mexican-American community.

Two years later, he and five other men created the California Chicano News Media Association with the purpose of awarding scholarships to young Latinos interested in journalism.

"One of our main intentions was to bring interest into the Mexican-American culture, both in front of and behind the camera," he said.

The representation of Mexican-Americans in journalism grew dramatically in his time. To Alfaro, that outshines all of the awards and accolades he received.

Alfaro retired in 2005. He was inducted into the National Association of Hispanic Journalists Hall of Fame in 2006, and has remained active as a community leader encouraging young journalists to have their dreams.

"I still want to help in whatever way I can," he said. "I feel as though it is kind of a burden on me. You just don't forget who you are and where you came from, and I am very proud of that."

Alfaro married Carol L. Hamilton, and the couple had two daughters, Julie and Nancy; and one son, David.

Interviewed in Los Angeles on Jan. 7, 2011.

AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COLLECTION



Hector De Leon

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Austin attorney Hector De Leon considers himself lucky to have been born in Austin and raised in East Austin.

"Without being born in Austin, Texas, I wouldn't have been able to go to college," he said.

He grew up not far from the University of Texas, where he would earn both a bachelor's and a law degree. He also lived close to the state Capitol, where he first met one of his lifelong mentors, Henry B. Gonzalez, a state senator at the time. He keeps a photo of Henry B., as he is affectionately known, in his office.

From age 12, De Leon wanted to be a lawyer, inspired by TV lawyer Perry Mason.

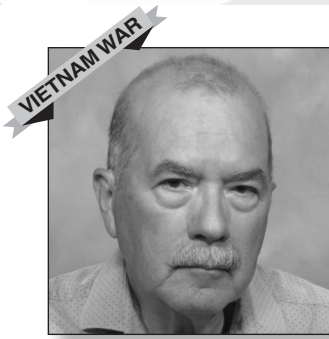
"Now nobody at 12 years of age decides they want to be an insurance corporate regulatory lawyer, I can assure you," De Leon said. "I became the kind of lawyer I am because of circumstances."

Those circumstances include being mentored by an attorney who helped him get a job at the State Board of Insurance. A year and a half out of law school, at the age of 28, De Leon was named general counsel for the board. At age 30, De Leon struck out on his own, establishing a practice that specialized in insurance matters.

Active in the Democratic Party, De Leon ran for Austin City Council in 1983 but was disappointed that the party endorsed another candidate. Feeling that the Democratic Party wanted only his campaign contributions, he moved to the Republican Party, in which he has remained active. He has turned down opportunities to be appointed to various statewide posts, deciding instead to maintain his privacy and have more time for his family.

De Leon married a junior high school friend, Arleigh Stoune, in 1973. The couple had three sons — Daniel, Benjamin and Michael — who all graduated from UT-Austin.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on Dec. 16, 2016.



Juan Garza

Interview by Cat Cardenas

Juan Garza spent much of his childhood on the road with his migrant farmworker parents, traveling from South Texas to Midwestern states to plant, tend and harvest crops.

After the harvests, the family would pile into his father's pickup and head to West Texas to pick cotton before returning to their hometown of Cotulla for the holidays.

From humble beginnings, Garza would go on to a long career in public service as a city administrator and utility executive in Illinois and Texas. He carried with him the values he had learned from his father, Alejandro: a strong work ethic and the importance of treating people fairly and with dignity.

Garza was a good student, with a talent for math. He credits a kindly teacher with encouraging him and helping him prepare his college applications. But his plans were delayed two years when the Army drafted him to serve in Vietnam. He then went to Loyola University in Chicago, earning bachelor's and master's degrees.

His public service career began as an engineering aide for the city of Evanston, Illinois.

He broke down barriers wherever he went; he was the first Hispanic chief financial officer in Moline, Illinois, and the first Hispanic city manager of Corpus Christi, Texas. Wherever he was, he worked to diversify the staff.

He eventually became the general manager of Austin Energy, that city's electric utility, then was named CEO of the Pedernales Electric Cooperative, the largest such co-op in the country. He subsequently was a vice president at NRG Energy, a major nuclear power provider.

He is now semiretired and doing consulting work. "I am having a blast," he said.

He and his wife, Rosario, have one daughter, Bianca Leticia, and a son, Juan Antonio.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on April 17, 2017.



Gabriel Gutierrez Jr.

Interviewed by Chris Hummer

A lawyer for a landmark Texas desegregation case in the 1970s, Gabriel Gutierrez Jr. made contributions that brought important changes for Latinos' access to public education.

Gutierrez was born Jan. 10, 1938, in Austin, Texas. His mother, "Sally" Perales Gutierrez, worked as a custodian for the Austin Independent School District while his father, Gabriel, worked multiple jobs.

Gutierrez dropped out of high school at 17 to support his girlfriend, Connie Villarreal, and their newborn son. He earned his GED diploma while serving in the Army for nearly four years, got a bachelor of business administration from the University of Texas at Austin in 1964, and received his law degree in 1967. He traversed his educational trajectory while helping his family and working 40 hours weeks at the post office.

In 1970, Gutierrez opened a private practice with a focus on criminal law. Shortly afterward, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund brought him in as local counsel for *The United States v. Texas*, a case opened in 1970 that pushed for the desegregation of Texas schools.

Brown v. Board of Education had mandated the desegregation of schools, but many Texas school districts used language barriers as a means for segregation. In 1972, the Supreme Court ruled that Latinos were discriminated against and ordered the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals to integrate them into traditionally white and black schools.

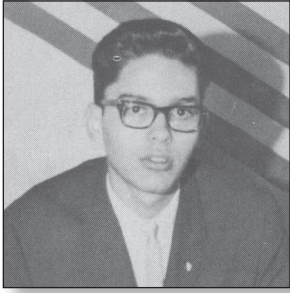
The case continued on appeals for years, and Gutierrez stopped working with it in 1983.

While many students were moved to different schools in the '80s, Gutierrez said that many schools still face segregation by neighborhood and class.

Gutierrez married Connie in 1974 and they have six children: Gabriel III; Rebecca; Jo Ann; Anita; Theresa and Diana.

Interviewed in Austin on March 26, 2014.

POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COLLECTION



Mario Lewis

Interview by Valerie A. Martinez

In high school in El Paso, Mario Lewis was told to forget college, that he “could not compete with Anglos,” recalled Lewis, a Mexican American.

But others saw promise in Lewis as he became active in the Junior League of United Latin American Citizens, which put him on a path to law school and a career of service to equal justice.

Lewis was born Feb. 15, 1947, in El Paso, Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1970. Three years later, he graduated from the University of Southern California Law School. In his first weeks in Los Angeles, he witnessed the violence against the Chicano Moratorium march.

“That woke me up,” Lewis said.

Lewis clerked for the Legal Aid Foundation of Long Beach and the California Rural Legal Assistance. Lewis worked for CRLA for two years after graduating from law school. He then worked for the Community Services Administration.

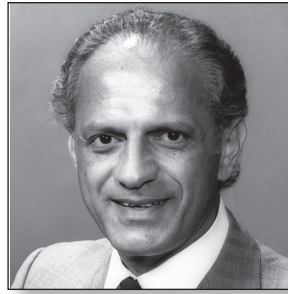
In 1978, Lewis was called to Washington D.C., where he took a series of positions with CSA and then became general counsel at the Legal Services Corp. (an independent nonprofit helping low-income people get legal help). Lewis left in 1982 to return to private practice back in his hometown of El Paso.

Back home, he worked as a volunteer with the El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization, which sought to empower poor people. Finally, in 1990 he set up a partnership with José Rodriguez, now a state senator in Texas, and Carmen Rodriguez.

The Lewises moved back to Washington D.C. from 2004 to 2011, where he worked with the Army Audit Agency. He retired in 2011 and moved to Austin.

He and his wife, Maria Guadalupe, had two children: Diego M. and Elena Angelika Hernandez.

Interviewed in Austin on April 14, 2017.



Emilio Nicolás

Interview by Laura Barberena

For nearly 50 years, Emilio Nicolás was a force in the growth of Spanish-language television, starting by helping his father-in-law, Raoul Cortez, run KCOR-TV in San Antonio. Channel 41 was the first Spanish-language television station in the continental U.S., and would become part of what is now Univision.

Nicolás left a promising career in medical research to work for Channel 41. He wore several hats, including producer, news director, and scriptwriter for commercials.

But most advertisers were not interested in a single-market station, especially one that broadcast in Spanish. With loans, the station was able to stay afloat for six years. But New York banks weren't interested in offering further support.

In 1961, Nicolás joined a group of investors to buy the station. They formed Spanish International Communications Corp., a holding company for what would grow to several stations in Los Angeles, Miami and other cities. The goal was to serve Mexican-Americans and the growing audience of Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Dominicans.

In 1971, a new company, Spanish International Network, was created to handle advertising sales and distribution of programs to SICC stations and a growing number of affiliates.

Some of the partners wanted to change the name to Univision, but Nicolás opposed the change.

He stepped down from SICC in 1987, when Hallmark bought the stations for \$301.5 million, and SIN was renamed Univision.

Nicolás is proud of what SIN accomplished.

“We showed them who they really are, where they come from, and they got used to the language and seeing other people like them” on television.

Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on Sept. 26 and Oct. 4, 2011.



Irma Nicolás

Interview by Laura Barberena

Irma Nicolás is the daughter of a Mexican-American media pioneer, Raoul Cortez Sr. Her father founded the country's first full-time Spanish-language radio station, KCOR, and later started a Spanish-language television station KCOR-TV, that later became the operations center for the SIN television network and Univision.

Raoul Cortez wanted to provide a voice for Mexican-Americans in the U.S., empower them to defend themselves.

“He had big, big dreams,” Nicolás said.

She was one of three children born to Cortez and Genoveva Valdez; her older siblings were born in Mexico. Irma was born in San Antonio on Sept. 12, 1932.

When the mother became ill, Raoul Cortez enrolled the children in boarding school. Irma and her sister went to St. Teresa's Academy, a girls' Catholic school in San Antonio.

“I was a very mischievous child in boarding school,” Nicolás said. “But I enjoyed it so much... We had a lot of laughter and I made a lot of friends.”

She later would go to college for a year and then take business courses.

For several years, the Cortez sisters participated La Feria de las Flores, a scholarship pageant for young girls. There was also an annual Black and White Ball, where girls would come out as debutantes. And that's where she met Emilio Nicolás, who became her husband.

“He asked me to dance,” Nicolás said “I dropped my escort and I danced with Emilio all night long. He sang in my ear, ‘La Vie En Rose,’ in French...then he sang ‘La Mer’...so those are our two songs.”

Emilio Nicolás would later partner with Raoul Cortez.

The Nicoláses had three children: Emilio Jr., Guillermo, and Miriam.

Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on June 1, 2012

POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Jesús Salvador Treviño

Interview by Mary Beltran

It was morning on March 6, 1968, outside of Roosevelt High School in Los Angeles. Public television producer Jesús Salvador Treviño and his crew unloaded three pedestal cameras, placing them at all three entrances.

"We had heard through the grapevine that a number of students at Roosevelt High School were going to walk out in protest of the inferior education they were receiving at the Mexican-American high schools," Treviño said.

Only a few people knew what was supposed to happen, he said. Even the principal had no clue until the 9 a.m. bell rang and hundreds of students walked out.

Treviño was a pioneer in bringing the Latino perspective to American television and film. He started out as a student, and later became an assistant producer on a half-hour television series called "Ahora!" He also directed popular features such as "Star Trek" and "Resurrection Boulevard." In 2010, with two partners, he launched Latinopia.com, which features interviews with prominent Latino creatives, as well as blogs and columns.

"Ahora!" was the first Mexican-American talk show in Los Angeles that explored issues in the Latino community.

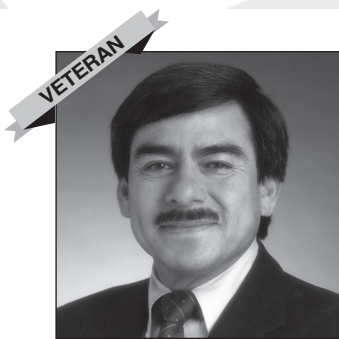
Treviño considers his work directing Showtime's "Resurrection Boulevard" series, about a family's struggles and triumphs in East Los Angeles, as a high point. He brought Latinos into various positions, from camera operators to makeup and wardrobe jobs.

The rise of digital streaming services has created new opportunities to increase Latino representation in the industry, but Treviño said traditional media still is important.

"We create every opportunity we can to do new media and old media to tell our story. We need to have access to as much storytelling as possible so that we're telling our stories, not someone else's."

He and his wife, Barbara Murray, live in Los Angeles.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on Nov. 11, 2016



John Treviño Jr.

Interview by Zoey Lichtenheld

The priest's words hit 27-year-old John Treviño Jr. like a punch in the stomach: "Eres capaz de más." You are capable of more.

It was 1965, and Treviño, an Austin native, was already an active volunteer in his community. He was also a father of six and worked as a driver delivering architectural blueprints. Nonetheless, his priest saw untapped potential.

Over the next few years, Treviño became involved in various War on Poverty programs and would eventually become the first Latino elected to Austin's City Council. He served from 1975 to 1988.

Some of Treviño's earliest memories include helping his mother pick cotton throughout the U.S. He started busing tables at a restaurant when he was 6 or 7 years old, got married at 16, dropped out of school to work full time, and joined the Army two months after his 17th birthday.

Back in Austin, Treviño became active in church and participated in a panel discussing the Head Start program. He was then hired as the first employee for Austin's War on Poverty program in 1965.

Treviño ran for City Council in 1973 but lost. He ran again two years later and won with over 49.6 percent of the vote.

"We're there now," Treviño said. "We're there to stay, and we're there to stay in a big way."

He played a role in building free clinics and helped to establish the Historically Underutilized Business program, which promotes the use of businesses owned by women and people of color within state institutions.

He and his ex-wife, Connie, had eight children — Peter; Paul; John III; Mary Teresa; Michael; Mark; Patricia Anne; and Jesse.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on April 6, 2014.

VOCES

Continued from Page 1

Luis Valdez, and music legends such as Little Joe Hernandez and Flaco Jimenez, to name just a few. Treviño is a longtime Voces supporter, serving as a volunteer judge in Voces' Short Documentary Editing Contest held at the University of Texas' Austin campus.

"When I was looking for where I would donate my collection of hundreds of hours of archival footage culled from 50 years of documenting the Chicano/Mexicano experience, I wanted a dependable site with respect for the material, dedicated stewardship and an assurance that these archives would be there for generations of Latinos to come," Treviño said. "I found that at the Voces project."

Last summer, Voces got a surprise from longtime friend and Eastern New Mexico University history professor **Cynthia Orozco**. Orozco donated audiocassettes (and a few reel-to-reel tapes) of 35 interviews and several more of event recordings to Voces. The recordings go as far back as the 1970s and include interviews with women and men who were involved in Mexican-American civil rights, most notably with the League of United Latin American Citizens (or LULAC).

"I donated my oral history and recorded events tapes to Voces because they are a recognized source all across the country," Orozco said. "My materials will be available to the public forever."

We have also received other interview donations: **Rudy Apodaca**, who formerly lived in New Mexico but now lives in Austin, donated interviews with four Bataan Death March survivors, for Voces' WWII collection.

With the addition of those donated interviews, Voces has gone beyond its 1,000-interview benchmark.

The other milestone is our 20th anniversary. In 1999, the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project (now Voces) conducted its first interviews. Twenty years later, we look back at how far we've come: We have traveled across the country to capture the memories of men and women who have made a difference; co-produced the performance of an original play; produced five books; written and edited hundreds of stories based on the interviews; advocated for inclusion of Latinas and Latinos in documentary films; organized several major conferences and some smaller symposia; given hundreds of talks; raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support the work of Voces; and scanned tens of thousands of archival photographs. We will celebrate that — and celebrate the many who have made this amazing journey possible.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Four things to know about the 1975 Voting Rights Act

How was it different from the original 1965 Voting Rights Act? The 1965 VRA targeted mostly African-American voters in the Deep South. African Americans had faced formidable barriers to registering to vote, voting, and running and serving in elected office. Besides the southern states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia, the law also covered Alaska and specific counties in the states of Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, and North Carolina. In 1975, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund spearheaded an effort to broaden the VRA to cover Latinos. MALDEF maintained that Latinos faced many of the obstacles that African Americans faced.

What forms of protection did the 1975 VRA provide? Jurisdictions were covered under a complex formula that included how many registered voters had cast a ballot in the previous presidential election. Jurisdictions that met that standard (Section 4) were required to get approval from the U.S. attorney general or a federal court in Washington, D.C., before making any changes related to voting (Section 5). The covered jurisdictions were required to demonstrate that the proposed change would not constitute a barrier to the right to vote on account of race, color, or membership in a language minority group.

Was the 1975 VRA effective? Census figures show a steep increase in Latino voter participation since the VRA was enacted. In 2016, about 15.3 million Hispanics were registered to vote and 12.7 million voted in the presidential election. In the 2004 presidential election, 9.3 million Hispanics were registered to vote and 7.6 million voted. As for elected office, there are 34 Hispanics serving in the House and four in the Senate. That represents a substantial increase from 2007, when there were only 23 Hispanics serving in the House and three in the Senate.

What has happened recently? A 2013 Supreme Court decision, *Shelby v. Holder*, eliminated Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act. Without the formula to “trigger” the preclearance provision of the VRA (Section 5), all jurisdictions are free to make changes to election procedures without the approval of the federal government.



Rosie Castro

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

At a young age, Rosie Castro was outspoken about racial, educational, housing and gender inequality. Later she became a prominent political and civil rights activist.

Castro was born in San Antonio on March 7, 1947. Her mother, Victoria Castro, migrated from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and cleaned houses in affluent Anglo neighborhoods.

Castro became more involved in political advocacy as a student at Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio. She started a campus chapter of Young Democrats and became president of the Bexar County Young Democrats. She joined Latino organizations, including the Mexican American Unity Council, the Committee for Barrio Betterment and La Raza Unida.

She earned a degree in Spanish in 1971 and ran for San Antonio's City Council. She lost, but the campaign gave her a high profile.

In 1974, Castro gave birth to twin sons, Joaquin and Julian. Two years later, she started working at the Mexican American Equal Rights Project, researching precinct maps, restrictive covenants, and the impact of unfair voting rules. This initiative helped the city switch to a district-based election system, leading to election gains for Mexican-American candidates.

Castro's sons grew up around political meetings and campaign events, engendering an interest in politics. Joaquin was elected to the U.S. Congress in 2013, and Julian was mayor of San Antonio from 2009 to 2014.

Castro received her master's in public administration from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Castro held positions with the Edgewood Independent School District, the City of San Antonio, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Palo Alto College.

She retired from Palo Alto as an interim dean in 2013.

*Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on Aug. 19, 2015.**



Maria Ramirez Garcia

Interview by Joseph Garcia

By the time her husband began pushing the idea of greater participation by Mexican Americans in her small South Texas town, Maria Ramirez Garcia had developed a strong and broad network of contacts who could support the effort.

Garcia was born July 2, 1940, in Taft, Texas, 136 miles southeast of San Antonio. She and her sisters worked in a segregated movie theater while her mother, father and five older brothers were migrant workers in the cotton fields.

Maria married Miguel Garcia on Aug. 8, 1969. The couple would have two sons, Joseph and Michael. Miguel Garcia got involved in politics in Taft after returning from Vietnam, where he had served in the Marines. One of the first things he did was to establish a Veterans of Foreign Wars center in Taft.

Miguel Garcia was the lead plaintiff in the 1985 *Garcia v. The City of Taft* lawsuit, which ultimately re-established wards in Taft to improve representation of the Mexican-American and African-American communities after a federal court issued its final decision in 1989.

Maria Garcia was part of The Concerned Citizens of Taft, a group that supported her husband's challenge of the city's gerrymandered city boundaries. She was the only woman involved with the group's meetings, advocacy and support.

The year before the case went to court, Miguel was elected to the Taft school board. Miguel served on the school board for only three months because he had to fly to Seattle to receive a bone marrow transplant. He died on Aug. 29, 1985.

Garcia said that she was proud to be involved with the case against the city.

“It tells me that there is hope and a chance for everybody to really achieve what they want to do,” she said.

*Interviewed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on Aug. 1, 2016.**

VOTING RIGHTS ACT



Dora Flores Olivo

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Dora Flores Olivo became one of the few Latinas elected to the Texas Legislature in 1997 and remains a fierce advocate of Latino voting rights and education.

Olivo was born March 6, 1943, in Sinton, Texas, 129 miles southeast of San Antonio. She was the third of eight children born to Isidro Ramirez Flores and Luz Garcia Flores.

She attended Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville) and earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education in 1966. After finishing college, she taught in Corpus Christi.

Olivo married Victor M. Olivo Jr. in 1979. They went on to have two children, Victor III and Geraldo.

In 1975, she completed a master's in early childhood education at the University of Houston. There, she learned more about her Mexican roots and became committed to improving conditions for her community.

Olivo and her husband began volunteering for the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project under Willie Velasquez. The goal was to ensure equal opportunity for everyone casting a ballot.

Olivo earned her law degree from the University of Houston in 1981 and later decided to run for office. She ran as a Democrat for the state Legislature in 1996 and took office in 1997, representing House District 27 in Fort Bend County.

Olivo lost a re-election bid in 2010, and failed in a 2012 effort to return to the Legislature.

However, she continues to advocate for education by working on the Fort Bend County P16 Regional Council, which promotes lifelong learning and helps students from the region meet proficiency levels on test scores.

"I think we haven't fully taken our place in society," Olivo said. "But thank God there [are] people out there that are moving and doing work. There's hope."

*Interviewed in Rosenberg, Texas, on July 23, 2014.**



Abelardo Perez

Interview by Luis Ricardo Fraga

The 1975 expansion of the federal Voting Rights Act impacted millions of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. But the idea began with one man who wanted to help his community.

Abelardo Perez was born Feb. 20, 1943, in Brownsville, Texas. His parents, Juan and Francisca Perez, had no formal education and spoke limited English.

After graduating from high school in 1961 and then served four years in the Navy before attending the University of Houston. He earned a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1968, went to graduate school and earned a law degree on a full scholarship from George Washington University Law School in 1972.

Later, he joined the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund in 1974 as regional counsel in Washington, D.C. Around that time, the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 was up for renewal. Perez set about expanding the act to cover Mexican-Americans.

In 1975, Perez's goal was to expand the law to cover southwestern states with large Mexican-American populations. He used the term "language minorities" to describe ethnic minorities and the language obstacles they faced when trying to vote.

Congress expanded the act and included that in jurisdictions where more than 10,000 (or over 5 percent) of voters are members of a single minority language group, ballots can be printed in their language.

Perez later worked for the U.S. State Department as a diplomat in South America and Europe before retiring in 2005.

When Perez reflects on the act, he thinks of his parents. "The idea that they were getting ballots in Spanish because of my work was very, very rewarding."

He married Carol Beth Infante in 1975. They have three children: Michael, Caroline and Marisa.

Interviewed in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 15, 2015.



Tom Reston

Interview by Luis Ricardo Fraga

Fresh out of the University of Virginia School of Law in 1974, Tom Reston played a key role in revising the Voting Rights Act to expand its protections to Latinos and other "language minorities."

His firm assigned the young lawyer to work with Al Perez, a regional counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Perez's interest was fighting voter suppression in the Southwest, where the Hispanic population was concentrated. And now there was an opportunity: The 1965 law was up for renewal. It did not cover Hispanics and excluded Texas.

But African-American civil rights groups had quietly made a deal with President Richard Nixon: If you agree to extend the law for 10 years, we won't seek any changes. They didn't want to open any door that might lead to a weakening of the law or go back on their word.

MALDEF had little time to collect evidence needed to persuade Congress to expand the act, finally focusing on Texas, where Reston said there was "a clear record of abuse and manipulation."

MALDEF also needed to win support from African-Americans in Congress. Reston said as they presented the facts to the civil rights groups, it became clear that amending the act would have "incalculable" benefits for the black community as well.

In the end, Congress added Texas to the law's coverage and said states had to provide voting materials in other languages in areas with a concentration of language minorities.

Reston said the fight continues.

Defending voting rights will be a "constant battle" he said. "It's more subtle now than it used to be, but the intent is always the same."

Interviewed in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 17, 2015.



Patricia Villareal

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

June 5, 1975, was a red-letter day for Patricia Villareal, a San Antonio native and a staff member of the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the House Judiciary Committee. That was the day the bill extending the Voting Rights Act – and expanding it to Latinos – was passed.

Villareal was born in Sonora, California, to Lonnie Villareal and Stella Finnegan. Her father was a Mexican American who served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He met her mother, a woman of Irish descent, in Manchester, England.

Villareal says her participation in politics started as a teenager when her uncle ran for state representative. After many campaign experiences in San Antonio, Villareal moved to Washington and worked on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and later on the House Judiciary Committee.

With the success of the bill extension, Villareal realized lawyers could indeed effect change, and she vowed to attend law school. She applied to Harvard School of Law and she became involved with the Chicano Law Association, later named Chicano Law Students Association to La Alianza.

After clerking for a few law firms, Villareal landed a position at Jones Day, a Midwestern firm that had just moved to Dallas in 1982. She planned on moving back to Washington, but 35 years later she's still in Dallas.

"What I started really enjoying was the intellectual challenge of law practice. I had been driven so much, by passion and for people and of wanting to make changes, and I got really intrigued by learning and pushing myself," Villareal said.

Villareal is married to Thomas J. Leatherbury and they have two sons.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on May 4, 2017.

Five facts about White v. Regester

What was it? White v. Regester was a 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that established that at-large electoral districts that dilute the voting power of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups are discriminatory and thus unconstitutional, based on evidence from Mexican-American and African-American communities in Texas.

Who was White? Who was Regester?

The case was originally litigated at the District Court level as *Graves v. Barnes*, and renamed on appeal to *White v. Regester*. It originated as a merger of four separate class-action lawsuits that challenged the 1971 apportionment and districting of the Texas Legislature. The new name was for Diane Regester, one of several plaintiffs in Tyler County, and then-Secretary of State Mark White.

What were the plaintiffs' demands?

Some of the plaintiffs' attorneys agreed to focus their attacks on at-large districts in Dallas and Bexar counties. Drawing on the history of inequality and the use of racial/ethnic appeals in political campaigns in those areas, as well as on statistical evidence, the plaintiffs charged that at-large districts diluted the political power of Mexican Americans and African Americans when voting is polarized along race and ethnicity.

How was the case decided?

In 1972, a three-judge panel ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and Dallas and Bexar counties were split into single-member districts for that year's legislative elections. Later, the state successfully appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. In June 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously affirmed that the at-large, multimember districts in Bexar and Dallas counties were discriminatory and thus unconstitutional.

What were the effects of the Regester ruling?

The ruling provided a precedent for other successful challenges to at-large districting schemes at the state, county and local levels, which in turn resulted in a substantial increase in the number of Mexican-American and African-American elected officials. The evidence gathered also informed the lobbying efforts to expand the coverage of the Voting Rights Act to Texas in 1975.



Charles Cotrell

Interview by Vinicio Sinta

As a young political science professor in San Antonio, Charles Cotrell provided key expert testimony in a landmark Texas voting rights case. It was the start of a long career fighting for equal voting rights for Mexican Americans.

White v. Regester declared unconstitutional the state's use of at-large voting to choose state legislators, which had made it nearly impossible for Mexican-American candidates to win.

"It was easy to show that over a long historical period, only a handful of Mexican Americans had been elected," he said. "You had to believe that election systems do, in fact, the way you shape them, discriminate against cognizable groups of people."

In 1975, he testified before Congress on the need to expand the Voting Rights Act, including adding Mexican-Americans to its protections. He also co-founded the Mexican-American Equal Rights Project, which worked to make sure the act was enforced and to educate citizens about its provisions.

In 2000, Cotrell became the first lay president of St. Mary's University, his alma mater. He held that role until 2012, when he returned to teaching.

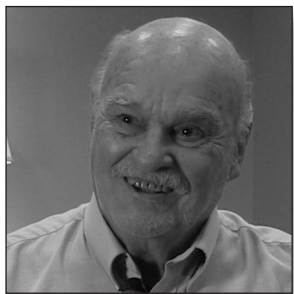
Cotrell said he is worried about the erosion of some of the protections of the Voting Right Act, especially the 2013 Supreme Court decision that effectively gutted Section 5, which required Texas and other states to get approval before changing voting rules in ways that would have a discriminatory effect. Almost immediately, states began passing laws that shortened voting hours, reduced poll locations and required voters to present a photo ID before voting.

"The story continues. In this state, the struggle continues as well," Cotrell said. "We seem to have gone full circle in areas of voting rights exclusion. We have a lot to learn about a culture of inclusion."

He married Abbie Louise Massey and they had four children: Shannon; Jason; Aaron; and David.

Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas, on Aug. 19, 2015.

SOUTH TEXAS/BORDER INITIATIVE



David Richards

Interview by Vincio Sinta

After his graduation from Baylor University in 1954, David Richards had no particular interest in becoming a lawyer. But facing the possibility of being drafted into the military, he enrolled in the University of Texas Law School.

Richards would find in law a way to fight for fairness and equal rights. In the decades that followed, he made his name as a successful lawyer handling voting rights, free speech and labor cases, and had a major impact on Texas' political landscape. Several of his cases went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Richards said his most significant case was *White v. Regester*, which came in response to the state's 1970 Texas House district reapportionment.

Of all the urban areas in the state, only Houston was organized into election districts, each with a single House representative. Districts in other cities instead had multiple representatives, elected at-large.

Working with attorneys for the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Richards assembled persuasive expert testimony on how at-large voting in multimember districts diluted minority voting power and made it nearly impossible for minority candidates to win.

A three-judge panel ruled for the plaintiffs, ruling, among other things, that unequally sized voting districts violated the principle of one man, one vote.

The state lost on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Eventually, Texas moved to all single-member districts.

Richards said he is concerned about recent efforts to make it harder for minorities to vote. "The voter ID thing is a travesty," he said.

Richards married Ann Willis, who would go on to become the Governor of Texas, and with whom he had four children, Celia; Dan; Clark and Ellen. After their divorce in 1980, he married Sandra Hauser, and had two more children, Sam and Hallie.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on April 1, 2016.

Two things to know about the South Texas/Border Initiative

What was it? It was legislation introduced in the 71st Texas Legislature (1989) to provide more equitable distribution of higher education funds along the Texas-Mexico border, as well as in communities in South Texas. It created nine four-year colleges and universities: University of Texas at Brownsville, University of Texas at El Paso, University of Texas–Pan American (in Edinburg), University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas A&M International University (in Laredo), Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University–Kingsville, Sul Ross State University, and University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

Why was it deemed necessary? The South Texas/Border Initiative was prompted by a lawsuit mounted in 1987 by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund on behalf of the League of United Latin American Citizens and other organizations and individuals in affected areas. They sued Texas Gov. William P. Clements, the Texas Commissioner of Higher Education, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the boards of regents of 15 universities and university systems in Texas. The lawsuit contended that communities along the border and in South Texas had far fewer educational opportunities than communities outside of the region. As evidence, the lawsuit demonstrated that Texas public universities altogether offered 590 doctoral programs, but only three of them were available on the border. Only 15 percent of Mexican-American students in the border region attended a public university with a master's or doctoral program; but elsewhere, 61 percent of students attended schools with graduate programs. The Joint Committee on Higher Education in South Texas recommended that the problems be resolved through legislation rather than being forced to through the courts.



Rachel Medina Ayala

Interview by Cecilia Gonzales

For 45 years, Rachel Medina Ayala was an educator in Brownsville, Texas, working her way up from elementary school teacher to assistant superintendent.

Ayala was born May 13, 1947, in Brownsville to Francisco Medina and Maria Torres Medina.

She credits her educational success mainly to her parents.

"When we graduated from high school, it wasn't a matter [of] 'Are you going to go to college?' It was a matter [of] 'Where are you going to go to college?'" Ayala said.

Ayala graduated from Brownsville High School in 1964 and completed a bachelor's degree in education in 1970 at Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville).

Back in Brownsville, Ayala became an assistant principal at Russell Elementary and was later relocated to Stell Middle School as a principal. She eventually rose to the position of assistant superintendent, where she developed her stern and outspoken manner.

"I was the fifth female principal in a district in a male-dominated profession," Ayala said. "If I was not assertive, they would have eaten me up. It's a natural thing for me, a natural reaction if I was to survive in that profession."

Ayala devoted 45 years to Brownsville Independent School District before retiring.

Ayala said the educational system has improvements to make in its funding, especially in the Southmost area of Brownsville.

"I don't know why when it comes to education ... that we have to fight for any sort of funding. The kids are our future," Ayala said. "It's not where you go; it's what you make of yourself."

Ayala and the late Albert Ayala had three daughters, Myrta Garza, Marisol Treviño, and Rachel Renee Ayala. All three daughters are principals in Brownsville schools.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.

SOUTH TEXAS/BORDER INITIATIVE



Norma Veronica Cantu

Interview by Mia Uhunmwuango

As a MALDEF attorney in the late 1980s, Norma Veronica Cantu took on Texas' higher education funding formulas.

"It wasn't just a civil rights issues for Latinos," Cantu said. "It was a serious economic issue."

Cantu was born Nov. 2, 1954, in Brownsville, Texas. She was the oldest of six children of Federico Cantu and Gregoria "Goya" Garza Cantu.

By the time she got to elementary school, she was fluent in Spanish and English and was able to skip first grade. By fifth grade, she was reading at the level of a high school senior. She skipped sixth grade and went to Cummings Junior High School. After junior high, Cantu went on to Brownsville High School.

Cantu graduated from high school at 16 and attended Texas Southmost Community College on a scholarship, later transferring to Pan American University.

She finished college in two years, graduating at 19 with degrees in English and government, and a minor in education. She began teaching at Brownsville High.

After teaching for a year, she decided to go to law school. Cantu received a full scholarship to Harvard, becoming the first Tejana at the law school.

On graduating from law school, Cantu's first job was working for the Texas attorney general's office in the consumer protection division. After that, Cantu joined the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. By 1985, Cantu was named regional counsel and oversaw offices in Texas, New Mexico and Colorado.

Cantu left MALDEF after 14 years and worked for the Clinton administration in the Department of Education. Later, she became a professor at the University of Texas at Austin School of Law.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on March 20, 2017.



Blandina Cardenas Flores

Interview by Natalia Hernandez

Former University of Texas-Pan American president Blandina "Bambi" Cardenas Flores found her life's purpose at an early age: working to provide quality education to students, no matter their ethnicity or economic status.

Over a long career that included positions in government and education, Cardenas Flores helped pioneer efforts toward equal opportunity in the K-12 system and higher education. She eventually became the first Latina president of a University of Texas System institution.

She was born in Del Rio, Texas. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1967, and after a brief stint in Chicago, returned to her hometown to teach high school. She saw firsthand the first challenges that poor kids faced to get an education.

It was the start of a career that included high-profile roles in government and education. As special assistant to the superintendent of the Edgewood School District in San Antonio, she helped turn the district into a national model for teaching Mexican-American children.

She served for 12 years on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. She then helped UT-San Antonio create a College of Education and was its first dean.

In 2004, she was named president of UT-Pan American in Edinburg, in the Rio Grande Valley. Despite a tight budget, in her four years there, the school increased graduation rates, graduated more engineers and made other improvements.

Cardenas Flores' work to assure minorities equal access to quality education has had an impact across the country.

"You become a professional and you see the inequality," she said, "and you decide either you're going to accept it or you're going to want to do something about it."

Her first husband, Andrew Reyes Ramirez, died in 2015. Her second husband, Rafael Flores, passed away in March 2018. She had one son, Alexandro Rudolpho Ramirez.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.



Eddie Cavazos

Interview by Lynda Gon

Eddie Cavazos did not receive any encouragement from his parents to pursue higher education.

"Their concept was, 'If we got you through high school,' then they've done their job," he said.

Cavazos was born Dec. 12, 1942, in Corpus Christi, Texas. Because there was no television or air conditioning, he spent his childhood playing outside.

It was from his peers in high school that Cavazos learned about college. A friend told him to seek advice from his school counselor.

Cavazos said the counselor reviewed his information and grades and said, "Your people don't go to college. You need to go to the military." He voluntarily enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1960 at age 17.

In 1963, Cavazos returned from military service in Germany. He began taking night courses at a community college while working part time during the day to support his wife and first child. After two years, he transferred to Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville).

Later, he served as a Texas state representative from 1983 to 1993. He became involved with the League of United Latin American Citizens Council No. 1. He played a role in the LULAC v. Richards case, a class action lawsuit that prompted the creation of the South Texas Border Initiative, which expanded opportunities for higher education in the South Texas border region.

Cavazos says the lawsuit victory and the South Texas Border Initiative brought attention to South Texas that hadn't existed before.

"It brought an education to people about South Texas, and it brought a sense of pride to younger people and students that they weren't being shortchanged in the quality of education," he said. "All in all, it brought unity."

He married Diana Garcia and they had three children: Randy; Celina and Jennifer.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on Feb. 13, 2017.

SOUTH TEXAS/BORDER INITIATIVE



Francisco Cigarroa

Interview by Yenibel Ruiz

Growing up on the Texas-Mexico border, Francisco Cigarroa developed an understanding that would prepare him to become the first Latino chancellor of the University of Texas System, which allowed him to put into play the creation of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

"Being aware of that the border region was an underserved area, I understood that to get educated was an important value to then be able to give back," Cigarroa said.

Cigarroa's father, Joaquin Cigarroa, and his uncle, Leonidas Gonzalez Cigarroa, were strong role models: Both of them were devoted to improving public education in Laredo, and to bringing in a community college and a university.

Cigarroa was forced to leave the border region to attend college as there was no bachelor degree-granting institution on the Texas/Mexico border. Cigarroa earned an undergraduate degree in biology from Yale in 1979. In 1983, he received his medical degree from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. He did postgraduate training in general surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and fellowships in pediatric surgery and transplantation surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. He and his family moved back home to Texas, and he joined the faculty of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio in 1995. From 2000 to 2009, he served as the institution's president.

In 2009, Cigarroa was named chancellor of the University of Texas System, the first Latino to hold that position. As chancellor, he spearheaded the creation of a new medical school in the Rio Grande Valley, as well as a new university, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, a merger of two institutions.

Cigarroa and his wife, Graciela, have two daughters, Maria Cristina and Barbara Carisa.

Interviewed in San Antonio on May 5, 2017.



Juliet Garcia

Interview by Chelsea Moreno

Juliet Villarreal Garcia forged her own way into the all-male "club" of Texas community college presidents to become president of Brownsville's Texas Southmost College in 1986.

Eventually, she would become the president of the University of Texas at Brownsville, a merged institution that grew out of a lawsuit by communities along the Texas-Mexico border and South Texas.

Garcia was born in 1949 in Brownsville, Texas. Her mother, Paulita Lozano Villareal, worked as a housekeeper and died when Garcia was only 9 years old.

Garcia's parents lacked the resources to attend college during the Depression, so they wanted to make sure their kids went.

"In our family, the way you measured success was how much education you had," Garcia said.

Among Garcia's most important mentors was her husband, Oscar Garcia, who pushed her to continue her education and achieve success.

Garcia attended the University of Houston to pursue a master's degree in classical rhetoric and public address. After getting her degree, she taught in her hometown at Texas Southmost College. With the Ford Fellowship, she attended the University of Texas at Austin and later returned to her teaching job at Texas Southmost College.

In 1986, Garcia became the first Mexican-American woman in the nation to serve as president of a college or university. She says, "The guys didn't know how to handle having a female colleague."

She is amazed at how fast her career has passed by and says she is most fulfilled when she is an advocate.

"It's a good way to spend your life," Garcia said. "It's not just about the salary and the title."

She and her husband had two children: Oscar and Paulita.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas, on February 20, 2017.



Elia Barrientes Gonzales

Interview by Fatima Valdivia Ramirez

Growing up in the mostly Latino town of San Benito, Texas (about 20 miles northwest of Brownsville), Elia Barrientes Gonzales was aware of the lack of minority representation in positions of leadership and was determined to create change.

Gonzales was born Dec. 11, 1957, in San Benito to Margarito Carlos Barrientes and Alejandra Delgado.

Although Mexican Americans made up most of the population in San Benito, Gonzales recalls only Anglos being encouraged to pursue higher education.

"[The counselor's department] had all this information about attending college," Gonzales said, "which was primarily targeted for the top students who were primarily non-Hispanic, non-Mexican American."

Gonzales attended Texas Southmost College in Brownsville for two years before pursuing a degree in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at University of Texas at Austin. At UT, she remembers being the only Mexican-American student in some classes in the department.

After college, she taught middle and high school Spanish at the San Benito Consolidated Independent School District from 1983 to 1986. She obtained a master's degree in Spanish literature at UT while working as an instructor at Concordia Lutheran College (now Concordia University Texas).

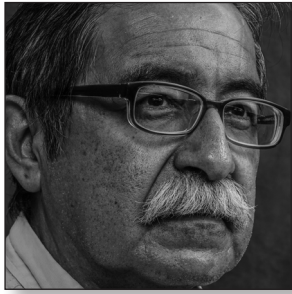
In 1993, Gonzales started working for a UT program, the University Outreach Center, which provided a college preparation program for area high school students. She later became its director and retired in 2012.

Gonzales encouraged her children — four children, Carlos, Cesar, Cecilia and Christian — to pursue higher education and better career opportunities.

"A career is something that you're passionate about," Gonzales said, "that you want to invest your time and energy to make things better."

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.

SOUTH TEXAS/BORDER INITIATIVE



Arnulfo Mar

Interview by Daniela Rosiles

Arnulfo Mar could see the potential in his students at Texas Southmost College, where he taught chemistry. But there was no four-year university within 50 miles, and many students didn't have the money to leave the Rio Grande Valley.

But change was coming.

Mar was teaching at Texas Southmost in 1992, when the school merged with the new University of Texas-Brownsville. The merger was the indirect result of a 1987 lawsuit by border communities against the state of Texas and its two flagship university systems over inequities in higher education opportunities compared to other parts of Texas.

"I think it has to do with this area being mostly Mexicans," Mar said of the lack of educational opportunities. "And I think it had to do with the state not caring for anything that was going on south of San Antonio, even Corpus Christi. I'm going to call it discrimination."

The plaintiffs lost, but the lawsuit spurred the Legislature to create the South Texas/Border Initiative, which led to tens of millions of dollars being allocated for higher education in the region, including the development of several graduate programs.

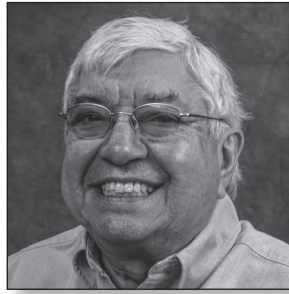
Mar said he believes more improvements are necessary to offer students in the South Texas/Border region the same quality of resources that schools such as UT-Austin and Texas A&M offer.

The students "are more vocal now," said Mar, now an associate professor at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley. "They say, 'Why is it that we don't have programs like UT-Austin? Why is it that UT-Austin's got all this money?'"

"Like I tell the students, 'Some of you are going to succeed in spite of me because I'm just here to help the ones that come halfway.' That's my mission," Mar said.

He married Rosa Serna and they had four daughters: Myrna, Ivette, Stephanie and Angela.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.



Antonio "Tony" Martinez

Interview by Sandra Renee Garcia

Antonio "Tony" Martinez was born Dec. 31, 1945, in Harlingen, Texas, a town about 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. One of six children, Martinez grew up when the railroad tracks were the dividing line between Anglo-American and Mexican-American families.

Later, his family moved to San Antonio, Texas. He attended the Peacock Military Academy, a private high school, and graduated in 1963.

Later, he attended the University of Texas at Austin for his bachelor's degree and went on to law school at St. Mary's University. He graduated from St. Mary's in 1970 and moved back to the valley to Brownsville, Texas.

Martinez's connections to the community and his personal experiences would later translate into a career in politics. He was a board member in Brownsville at St. Joseph's Academy and also helped found Guadalupe Regional Middle School, a Catholic school that provides a tuition-free education.

In 2007, he worked on Barack Obama's presidential campaign and experienced organization and passion. He realized he wanted more for the city of Brownsville, so in 2011 he announced his candidacy for mayor. He was elected and re-elected for a second term.

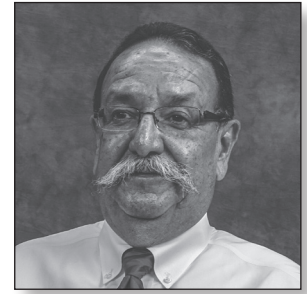
As mayor, Martinez has worked on several initiatives to benefit residents, including hike-and-bike trails to encourage exercise. He assisted with the merger of UT-Pan American and UT-Brownsville; the result is a combined institution, UT-Rio Grande Valley.

Martinez acknowledges that he has been affected and shaped by various moments, both difficult and beautiful, in his life. He says he has chosen to remain a positive person.

"I like to walk on the sunny side of life," he said.

Martinez has been married three times and has four children: Antonio Jr.; Benigno III; Melissa and Andres.

*Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.**



Luis Vargas Saenz Jr.

Interview by José Centeno Meléndez

Luis Vargas Saenz Jr. is a Cameron County district attorney in Brownsville, Texas. However, the path to a seat at the front of the courtroom wasn't easy.

Saenz was born Aug. 8, 1951, in Carrizo Springs, Texas, to Luis Saenz and Filomena Vargas Saenz.

His parents divorced when he was 5, leaving Filomena to raise six children. The family would travel north each year to do farm work for 60 cents an hour.

His mother stressed education; when he was in high school, she sold Avon cosmetics door to door so she could buy him a typewriter and an encyclopedia set. He added Vargas as his middle name as a tribute to her.

Saenz graduated from high school in 1970 and attended Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville). He graduated in 1974 with a double major in English and Spanish.

In 1975, he began teaching junior high English for Brownsville Independent School District.

Saenz graduated from the University of Texas Law School in 1984.

He passed the bar exam on May 5, 1984. Five days later, he walked across the stage at graduation, holding up his State Bar card as his name was called.

Saenz has held various positions in the Brownsville community, including BISD school board president, Cameron County magistrate judge, and now district attorney. His current term expires in 2020.

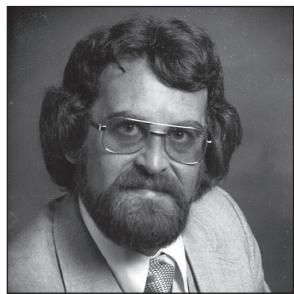
Saenz says he feels fortunate to serve the people of Brownsville.

"As an elected official, you always have to remind yourself that the position, the title — it's not yours," Saenz said. "You're just trying to do what's right for the people and just call it as it is."

He and his wife, Delia, have two sons, Omar and Orlando.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.

REYNALDO GARZA LAW SCHOOL



Frederick von Ende

Interview by Hwa Jin Chung

It was 1988 and Frederick “Ted” von Ende, a professor of English literature, was being grilled in a Brownsville, Texas, courtroom about a report he had written on the state’s higher education system.

Von Ende’s report showed how colleges and universities in the Texas border and South Texas regions had been deprived of essential funding and opportunities for expanded advanced degree programs.

His work was foundational to the class action lawsuit known as LULAC v. Richards, which eventually led to more money for higher education in the region, allowed several local colleges to merge with the state’s larger flagship systems, and brought several advanced degree programs to South Texas colleges.

In 1968, von Ende and his wife, Catharyn, moved to Edinburg, on the Texas-Mexico border, to teach at Pan American College. He saw talented students whose futures were limited because few advanced programs were available, and strong family ties and limited finances kept students from moving to another city.

He did what he could to address the disparities.

He eventually would write the report that showed why South Texas institutions needed more resources. While the plaintiffs in the LULAC lawsuit lost on appeal, their efforts eventually led the Legislature to create the South Texas/Border Initiative which committed millions of dollars to higher education in the region.

More opportunities in advanced degrees in the border region give von Ende the biggest hope for change.

“I’m looking forward to the first of the students at the medical school graduating,” he said. “I think eventually we will get a law school someplace in the Valley.”

He and his wife had two daughters, Sara and Gretchen.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.

Five things to know about the Reynaldo Garza Law School

Years of operation: 1984-1989

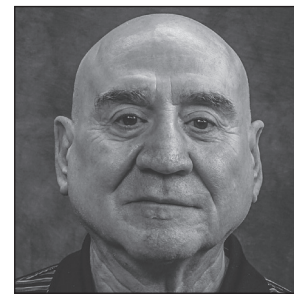
Why was it needed? For people in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the closest law school was at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, as much as 270 miles away. There was a shortage of lawyers in the Valley. At the time, Texas averaged one lawyer for every 360 people; in South Texas, it was one lawyer for every 1,053 people, according to the school’s dean, Michael DeMoss, writing in *Texas Lawyer* in 1985.

Who it is named for? Reynaldo G. Garza (1915-2004) was the first Mexican-American federal judge in the country and a civil rights champion. Garza was a native of Brownsville, Texas, the southernmost tip of Texas, and a graduate of University of Texas Law School. Garza served on the U.S. District Court, Southern District of Texas, from 1961 to 1979, serving as the court’s chief judge from 1974 until 1979. In 1979, Garza was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit.

Why did it close? The Reynaldo Garza Law School never received accreditation from the American Bar Association, despite a decade-long struggle against political and bureaucratic obstacles.

How does it figure into the South Texas/Border Initiative? The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund filed the LULAC v. Richards class-action lawsuit in 1987, alleging that the State of Texas had discriminated against border communities by depriving them of resources in higher education. MALDEF lawyers referenced the Garza Law School to illustrate the point.

Did it graduate any students? Yes. For a brief period, graduates of the law school were allowed to take the bar exam and several passed. Exact numbers are difficult to determine, but Voces has interviewed four of its graduates and one of its instructors; their stories are included in this newsletter.



David Ayala

Interview by David A. Bliss

Not getting an education was “not an option” for David Ayala and his three siblings.

Ayala was born March 3, 1949, in Pharr, Texas, to Marcelino and Ana Maria (Guajardo) Ayala. After he graduated from high school in 1967, he attended Pan American University in Edinburg, hitchhiking the 15 miles from home to campus. His mother always made sure he had a plastic bag with him.

“She didn’t care about me getting wet,” Ayala said, “but she wanted to make sure my books didn’t get wet if I got caught in the rain.”

Ayala left Pan American after a year and joined the Texas National Guard. After basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, he moved to Dallas and worked night shifts as a clerk with the Dallas Police Department.

In 1975, Ayala took a job as an agent with the U.S. Border Patrol and was stationed in McAllen. He finished his criminal justice degree at Pan American University. After that, he attended University of Houston law school and graduated in 1980, passing the bar exam the same year.

Ayala returned to the Rio Grande Valley and established a private practice from 1980 to 1983. He married Rosa Maria Gonzalez in 1981; they went on to have four children: David; Miriam; Anna and Hector. He became a lawyer with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Ayala also taught at the Reynaldo Garza School of Law until it was forced to close because it was unaccredited. In 1993 he was appointed as a federal immigration judge in Harlingen, an office he has held ever since.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.

REYNALDO GARZA LAW SCHOOL



Arnaldo Cantu Jr.

Interview by Yenibel Ruiz Mirabal

Arnaldo Cantu Jr. is one of the few graduates of the Reynaldo G. Garza Law School, the first and to date only law school to have served the Rio Grande Valley. He sits as a judge at the Hidalgo County Court at Law No. 5 in Edinburg, Texas.

Cantu was born April 20, 1954, in San Juan, Texas. His parents, Arnaldo Cantu Sr. and Angelita Guerra Cantu, were administrators at the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District.

"Having grown up with a mom and dad who were educators, I knew by the time I was in elementary school that I was going to go to college," Cantu said.

The Garza School of Law was not accredited by the American Bar Association. While students could take classes and complete the program, there was no guarantee they would be allowed to take the Texas State Bar exam and practice law.

That uncertainty did not discourage Cantu or his peers as they wrote letters to members of the Texas Legislature and other state officials. He and a group of students even traveled to Austin to talk to legislators face to face. In return, one day the dean told students approaching graduation that they would be allowed to take the bar exam.

Cantu became Hidalgo County assistant district attorney in 1989 and served for almost two years. After working in the private sector, Cantu returned to public service in 2003 and was elected judge for Hidalgo County Court at Law No. 5.

Cantu married Hortencia Morales in 1980, and they had four children: Claudia (Castillo), Monica, Arnaldo III and Andres. His children followed the family's professional path: Claudia and Arnaldo III became attorneys, and Monica and Andres pursued careers in education.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.



Federico "Fred" Garza Jr.

Interview by Chris Touma

Growing up in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, Federico "Fred" Garza Jr. always had to be doing something: maybe picking and selling vegetables when he was a boy; maybe helping to incorporate a town when he was still a teen; maybe taking 32 hours of law classes while working three jobs and serving on a school board.

That work ethic, developed from an early age, served his aspirations to give back to the community. In 1996, Garza was elected judge of Hidalgo County Court at Law No. 4, in Edinburg, where he still presides.

Garza's passion for community engagement emerged when he was in high school. He became involved in the effort to incorporate Alton, the rural area where he lived. The area lacked basic services such as paved roads.

Residents voted to incorporate and asked Garza, then just 18, to be the first mayor. He declined because he lived outside the boundaries of the new city but then became a department director and planning commissioner for Alton.

After college, he enrolled at the Reynaldo Garza Law School in 1986. The school was not accredited, meaning students would not be able to take the bar exam. But it was the only option for many students in South Texas. It required a waiver from the state Supreme Court to allow his class to take the bar exam and earn law licenses.

"We're a proud gang of graduates from law school because we did it the hard way," Garza said. "But I just feel proud of my colleagues — lawyers and judges — because we stuck to our guns. We fought and fought, and we tried to do the right thing."

His marriage ended in divorce, but he had three children, Areana; Alejandro and Karina.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.



Rodolfo "Rudy" Gonzalez

Interview by Brennan Patrick

On weekends, Rodolfo "Rudy" Gonzalez worked 18-hour shifts as a nurse at the McAllen Emergency Center so he could attend night classes at Reynaldo Garza Law School in Edinburg.

"The majority, if not all the students, that were going to law school were working as well, on a full-time basis, and had a family or some kind of a business," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez was born in Reynosa, Mexico, on Feb. 19, 1958. His father was a farmworker and his mother a homemaker, and they took their family back and forth to Hidalgo County from Mexico to work in the fields.

In 1980, Gonzalez was accepted to the nursing program at Pan American University, where he completed his associate's degree in 1982 and his bachelor's in 1986.

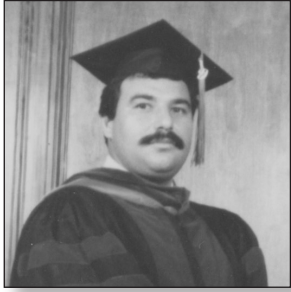
He met his wife, Diana, at the hospital, where she was a histology technician. Nine months later, they married. Eventually, they would have three sons, Rudy, Xavier and Daniel.

Gonzalez graduated from the Reynaldo Garza Law School in 1989, but because the law school lacked accreditation, graduates were not allowed to take the bar exam. The Texas Supreme Court granted a two-year waiver that allowed students who graduated in 1988 and 1989 to take the exam.

Gonzalez passed his bar exam on his second try and spent 10 years as a lawyer. He worked primarily in the civil sector before taking office as judge of County Court at Law No. 1 in 2000. He continues to believe in the value of higher education opportunities in the Valley.

"I think offering programs in an area where you don't have (universities) does nothing to hurt the state," Gonzalez said. "The more education individuals have, the better it is all around."

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.



Jaime Palacios

Interview by Julie Gomez

Jaime Palacios and others from the Reynaldo Garza School of Law slapped stickers on bottles of ketchup saying, "Let South Texas ketchup with the rest of the state" in an attempt to get lawmakers to recognize the disparity of higher education opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.

Palacios was born in San Juan, Texas, on Nov. 15, 1960, to Berta (Saenz) and Hector "Tito" Palacios.

From an early age, Palacios looked to his parents for guidance on education. His mother taught mostly migrant farm workers in the area, and his father led a life of political engagement.

Palacios graduated from Pharr-San Juan-Alamo High School in 1979 and obtained a degree in political science from Pan American University in Edinburg in 1984.

He decided to attend the Garza School, but the school was not accredited by the American Bar Association, meaning students probably would not be allowed to take the bar exam, a requirement for a law license.

The Texas Supreme Court agreed to let Garza students who graduated in 1988 and 1989 take the bar exam. Palacios graduated from Garza in 1989 and passed the exam in 1991.

Palacios worked as an assistant district attorney after graduating and later opened his own law firm, The Office of Jaime J. Palacios. In 2002, Palacios won the judge's seat in Hidalgo County Court at Law, District 2, and now has a program for people arrested on misdemeanor charges of driving while intoxicated.

"I think that you shape [the community] by hard work, being fair and impartial, and treating everybody that comes to you with dignity and respect," Palacios said.

Palacios married Eliza Silva, a speech pathologist, on Dec. 12, 1992.

Interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, on April 2, 2017.



Photo by Martin do Nascimento

In June 2017, the project held its first Voces Oral History Summer Institute for academic researchers.

Participants included seasoned professors to doctoral students, from throughout the country.

Lead instructors were Todd Moye, a history

professor at the University of North Texas and Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Voces director.

Two of the 2017 participants from Bates College in Maine, will be in Chile in 2018, interviewing health care providers.

For more information, see vocessummerinstitute.org



US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal

Vol. 1 of the journal was published in fall 2017 and was centered on Political and Civic Engagement. The UT Center for Mexican American Studies is sponsoring the journal and the University of Texas Press is publishing it. Voces provides photos and an organizational framework.

For more information, see <https://bit.ly/2hjsVC>

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



Photo by Chi Lam Wong

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