GILBERT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF

CONSUELO "CONNIE" SALAS

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Museum



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Edited by Pat Castaneda

Interview by Carol Shepherd
July 18, 1992

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Gilbert Oral History Project

Interview: Consuelo "Connie" Salas
Location: 3 Linda Lane, Gilbert, Az (Salas home)
Date: July 18, 1992
Interviewer: Carol Shepherd
George Salas is also present at the interview.

Interviewer: Mrs. Salas your family has been here for a long time. Just for the record, give me your full name, your parents names, both mother and father, and their parent's names.

Connie Salas: I am Connie Padilla Salas. My father was Fortunato Andrade Padilla, and, of course, you know that my parents were from Mexico. I will tell you about them.

My mother was Ramona Mendivil Padilla, and my parents came...my dad was born in Altar, Sonora, Mexico, in 1896. His father was Augustin Padilla, who married my grandmother Marie Delores Andrade.

They had five sons. The first three died. One was a pair of twins, I think. The fourth one was my Tio Trini. Trinidad Padilla. Then my dad, Fortunado. My Grandfather, Augustin, did a lot of traveling, mostly to California, and it was on one of his trips that his father, who was a judge in Altar, died. And my grandmother was most of the time living with the in-laws, and her relatives were here in Casa Grande already, so she was pretty hard up I imagine, or wanted to get away, and the children went with my grandmother.

My dad was only two when he came to the states. My Tio Trini was the older one. He looks like he was eight years older than my dad. So she came with the two boys, and she came to Casa Grande with the rest of her family.

It was in 1904 that they moved to Mesa. My mother used to tell me about the house there on University. They had a house there on University, which I think is a big building now, a very pretty place. Then they moved to the ranch, to Baseline. I think that was in 1910, around there. They moved to, which we still call, the Valencia Ranch. It is right on Mesa Drive and Baseline. They are building on it now, but that is where my dad lived. When my grandmother came to the States, she had two little boys, and somehow or other she met...she didn't have a husband, so then she met the one that we know as our grandfather, Mariano Valencia.

I can remember him...I don't want to call him a peddler, but you know, he had like a truck and he sold everything. All kinds of things. He went around from house to house.

They did that in the good old days. He had this big truck and he sold everything from sugarcane to tortillas.

Interviewer: I wonder if he is the one George Ruiz was talking about that used to bring the truck to their neighborhood and they bought everything?

Connie Salas: Right. And you could order things. For instance, if you were buying or you needed something, he would say, "I'll get it next time." That's what he did. The kids afterwards...I have to laugh at my cousin. We get together and we talk about things like this. My cousin Luke was saying one day, "You know, I can never eat a yellow bananna. I always have to eat the ripe ones. The brown ones." Because that was what he had left over from his trip, so that was what we ate.

But my grandmother, I can remember her. I was very young when my grandmother died, my Tata Mariano's wife. They used to kill a pig because, you know, they always had a pig and a cow, chickens. Well, it was a little farm and we had everything. Like a little ranch. Well it was a ranch anyway, not a farm. A ranch. And they always had sugarcane growing. All our vegetables. We grew them.

Interviewer: You grew sugarcane?

Connie Salas: Yes. My Tata did. I didn't, but they did. I could see it at the back of the ranch, rows and rows of it. And they would harvest and sell it. Not as sugar, but as the cane itself. Sugarcane. He would have it in the big truck.

And we used to visit the ranch an awful lot. Some of my happiest memories are of the whole family getting together there, and my mother and my grandmother always cooking. Always had dinner under those big pecan trees, and had all kinds of food. My mother used to make those big...my mother and my grandmother made the best tortillas ever. They would make huge tortillas. If my mother wasn't a good cook when she came to the States, well my grandmother taught her a lot. I think that from there we, her grandchildren, have all learned, and I think we are all good cooks. Anyway, we love to cook.

Well, my father, when my grandmother and this grandfather married...see, I never knew the one in Mexico. However, years later my aunt said I should look him up because he was a very well-to-do person in California. His children, and whatever. I am sure he remarried and had a family. But he was there, and he evidently did good. But I just didn't

feel that...if he didn't check on our dad, why should I go look. I'm kind of mean, aren't I?

Interviewer: Now he was your..?

Connie Salas: My real grandfather. My real grandfather. Like I said, my grandmother left him to come to the States.

Interviewer: When he was in California, she came up here?

Connie Salas: Yes.

Interviewer: So they separated?

Connie Salas: They separated, yes. And they never heard from him again. But somehow or other one of my father's sisters later on, a daughter of this Mariano Valencia, knew about him being in California, and she said, "Look into it Honey, 'cause, you know, he might...." Well, I was very young and I just didn't feel that I wanted to. I didn't look into it or check on him, or whatever.

But anyway, my grandfather, my Tato Mariano, the one that I knew as a grandfather, he had the boys, my Tio Trini and my dad, and they worked for him. They worked in the beginning on the Roosevelt Dam. My grandfather used to have two teams of horses and wagons. And that's how they would take all of the materials that they needed at the dam. My dad must have been very young, because he got married at twenty-one, and he did all of this in nineteen...the dam was, I guess, dedicated in 1911, and my father and my Tio Trini and my grandfather worked at that dam, as I said, by bringing in the supplies. On the way back they would gather wood and he would sell the wood. He was really...he was known as a Jew because you know how Jewish people like to sell? And he did. My grandfather did. He was a salesman.

Anyway, my dad and my Tio Trini worked on that, and like I said, they had the President...as a matter of fact, they did a very good job there and they would take those wagons...I was told that they loaded up their stuff right there in Tempe. You know, where they had that fair they used to take stuff to over there?

But my Tato Mariano and my dad and my Tio Trini did most of their work by taking their goods to the dam with the teams of horses and loaded wagons. So when President Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, came and dedicated the dam in 1911, my grandfather, my Tato Mariano, and my dad and my Tio Trini were there. And that has always been kind of a

highlight, that the President had been there for the dedication. I didn't know that, but anyway my cousin Pat was telling me all about that.

My mother was born in Santana, Mexico. We have the same problem with the adopted grandfather, because in my mother's case, my mother was the firstborn, and my grandfather was Francisco Mendivil, and my nana was Elena. I don't know what her last name was. What was her last name? Elena...I can't think of her last name right now, but I know it.

Anyway, my grandfather at the time was a ranch hand. You know, like a foreman on horseback to take care of the ranch. My mother was born, and she was two when my Nana Elena died. At that time they had a cousin, a young girl, Eloisa, who was my real grandmother's cousin, came to take care of Mom and help with the house.

Well, after my grandmother was buried and all, they ended up getting married. My mother stayed mostly with my grandfather, horseback and all -- she would oversee the ranch. She grew up like a ranch hand, very good at whatever she had to do. She used to tell the story about...she only had a fourth grade education. She loved school. She was smart for that. Maybe so much with her experience, but she read everything she could get ahold of. Of course, in Spanish.

She used to tell us that when she was about eleven she would help my grandfather water the ranch. They had a team of mules or donkeys and they had a well, and they used to have to get the water out with what she called a "boot." They didn't have any buckets or whatever we have now. For that matter, we don't have wells now. We do have wells, but you know, I'm trying to say she used to get the water out like that, making the mules go round and round to draw the water out, and somehow or other she'd get it and pass it on to somebody else so they could water their fields.

Now, Mom used to bring water home in big pots. She said there was something that Grandmother, my nana, made to have on each shoulder. You know, you have seen the Indian ladies, is it the Hopi Indians, who do that? They are the only ones I can think of. They wear those pots here and on the head. Mom could carry water like that. Then they grew their vegetables, their wheat, and she would grind the wheat by hand on the metate. She said she had big callouses on her hands from grinding. Can you imagine grinding that flour to make those beautiful tortillas that we make? That fine? I can't imagine. But that's how they did it. She did it until she was seventeen.

When mother was seventeen, during about that time, my Tia Elise, which is one of the girls there in the picture, was

here in Casa Grande. My grandfather's brother, Antonio, had come to the States and, somehow or other, they got together and they got married, and he took her back to Mexico. At that time it was hard for everybody, but it was paradise here considering what they had to go to in Mexico.

He took her back to live with, probably, my grandfather, or around there, because I know that my Tia Elise always loved my grandfather, 'cause she said he helped her. She had three children over there in Mexico, my Tia Elise did, and my Tio Antonio. She said he was always, Francisco, which was my grandfather, was always supporting and helping them. Finally it got real bad because they were having Indian raids. The Apache's got kind of wild, and they used to come and raid the little villages, you know, where they lived. And they raped, they killed, they stole whatever they could, you know.

My mother at seventeen, my grandfather worried about her, and he was so jealous and possessive of my beautiful mother, you know, at seventeen. One day the Indians, the Apaches, got so close to their village that they came to the house. My grandmother, Eloisa, wrapped my mother...she says that they used mats for sleeping. They didn't have beds. They had little straw mats, and everybody had their own little straw mat and they put it on the floor, I presume, at night when they would go to bed and go to sleep. And then when they were through, they'd just roll up the mat and put them against a corner. There was always a corner with all the mats. However many kids you had, their mats were rolled up in a corner. In a way it would be good. We wouldn't have to wash sheets or anything. Be kind of hard though. (Laughter)

Anyway, my grandmother rolled up my mother in one of those mats and put her against the wall with the other mats, and the Apaches came and went through the house and took what they wanted. If you had anything of value, they took it and they left. During this time my Tia Elise, when she would hear of a raid, she would pass out. She was so scared. And she wrote home and said, "Hey, come and get me! I can't take this anymore."

It was in one of these raids that they went, that the relatives here...I think it was two brothers and a sister who went and got her. They went and got my Tia Elise and the three boys. Well, they had a problem, because she had the three little kids, and they had to go horseback to come and meet the train to bring them into Mesa. So my Tia Elise asked...she is in a home right now. She is about ninety-seven. She asked my grandfather if she could possibly bring mother so she could help her with the three

little ones. You know they just couldn't make it unless they had her help. So that is how she came. They let her come. Tia Elise said, "I'll send her right back."

So anyway, they drove in from Santana. They drove all the way to the ranch. They already had the ranch here on Baseline. See they were cousins. They were all there. My grandmother and my Tia Elise were cousins, and the brothers who went over to get them. They were my grandmother's relatives. Just like they had gone over to get her.

So anyway, my Tia Elise came and brought my mother and there she met my father. My mother was seventeen and she married my dad by the end of the year. She never went back.

When they crossed the border, she used to tell me, there were no border lines. It was open. You could go back and forth. You knew what was the United States and what was Mexico. But it was not like check in, check out. Well, by the time she was able to go back, or she could have gone back, they had built borders and fences and all of that. But she never got her citizenship papers. She never got immigration papers. She didn't go back until after I was married, 'cause I fixed her papers then.

It was too bad, because the first year she got married, the second year she had my brother. First brother, second brother, and then by that time they started going to school. You have to give account for every year that you have been in the States when you get your immigration papers. So anyway, I did that for her and she got to go visit my grandfather.

My grandfather died at the age of eighty-four. He was a very handsome, very fair, blue-eyed man when I first met him, because I got to go before mother did. I used to spend some summers. They moved to Nogalas later on in years and they lived in...I don't know when they moved to Nogalas, but I know that I use to visit them when I was about twelve, thirteen years old. I used to go spend some summers over there with them. And my grandfather still worked. He was with the police department there in Nogalas. Then later on he retired and, of course, I got married and I didn't go there so much. I didn't spend anymore time over there. We probably visited once or twice a year, but in the meanwhile I did get my mother's papers fixed.

I used to enjoy going there. I still do. We've lost everybody now as the older people... my generation is the one that exists there now. They are just cousins.

My mom had a very colorful life here. They came, like I said, were married, and I guess Mom and Dad lived with our grandparents there on the ranch for some time. Then they moved. Like I said, he worked as a ranch hand most of his

life, and he was working from one farmer to the other. I think in 1939 he had a heat stroke, and he couldn't work anymore. So he got a job as a gardner, and then he worked at Tremaine as the gardner, and I remember then he didn't make the money that he did while he was baling hay. He used to bale with the machines. He used to make the bales.

My dad died in 1941. He went back to baling a year after his stroke, and on the 20th of April, a Sunday evening, he came home from work very excited because he was going to bring some money in now. He was outside working on my mother's shovel, because we all liked to work in the yard. My mother called him and said, "What are you doing working out in the dark? You're doing it as if you're not going to be here tomorrow."

He said, "Well, you never can tell."

He came home, had supper and went to lay down for the next morning. He was going to get up real early and do more baling, and he died right before my eyes. He was just taking his shoes off, sitting on his bed, and I was taking care of my youngest sister while my mother was finishing up the kitchen, and he died. I think I was about ten and my sister was one.

So anyway we kept on. I was too young, too little to understand the fact that we did not have a father. My mom took over and we really didn't miss him. To tell you the truth, I didn't really miss my dad until I saw my girls playing with their dad, with George, and I thought, "Gee, it would have been nice to have a dad so that we could play like that." I know that he loved me because I was his first girl.

They had my oldest brother, Frank, in 1920. Then they had a little girl, named Maria Louisa. We never met her. She died a little girl. Then my brother, Manuel, was born in 1925. My brother Gilbert was born in nineteen twenty... let's see the dates here. I couldn't believe how many kids they had one right after the other. My brother Manuel was born in 1925, my brother G.B., which is Gilbert, was born in 1926. I was born in 1928 and, see, I was the first girl. So I know that I was very special to my dad.

Then my sister Ann was born in 1933. My sister Mary Helen, who we call Chachi, was born in 1938. No she was the youngest. No, it's Annie, then it's George. George was born in 1938 and my sister Chachi was born in 1939. So I could just look at these dates and think, my God. One right after the other. I feel so sorry for my daughter now that she has the two little boys. One right after the other. She just...those kids, they have their hands full.

Interviewer: What did your mother do then? How did she support you?

Connie Salas: Well, we went on welfare, and we took in washing and ironing, and my brother Gilbert worked at Sam Lee Grocery Store here for many years. The other ones, we all worked at anything that came along.

My oldest brother, Frank, was already married. He got married very young. He married Olivia, and of course he was married and living in Flagstaff when Dad died. And then Manuel was maybe about sixteen. He was working at anything that came along.

I guess we were doing mostly labor like picking cotton, whatever it was then. We did go to school and later on... well, let's see, let's go back. They worked just regular field work, I guess, is what it was, until when they went into the service.

When they came out of the service, they each came back and took civil service work. They each, Manuel, Gilbert and Frank all worked in the civil service. Now Frank had a service station that he worked, owned, for many, many years in Flagstaff, until he started working at the Bellmont Ordinance in Flagstaff. That's where my brother started. That's where Manuel and Gilbert started their civil service job after the service. After they put in their time. We had two Marines and two Army guys, and when they came back...

My youngest brother George, started his civil service job here at Williams Field. And I think Gilbert did too. Gilbert worked at Williams Field. Then he went into the service. Gilbert went to the Korean War. So did my youngest brother, George. Manuel and Frank were in the big one, World War II.

Anyway, they worked, they married, and my brother Frank was killed in 1961, and my brother Manuel is already retired. He lives in ?. My brother Gilbert is also retired. He lives in ?. They put in all this time with civil service, and the only one who is working and thinking about retiring now is my youngest brother George. He is not even fifty-five yet. Anyway, I know he has put in his time. He stayed with the civil service and also guard duty. National Guard.

Interviewer: What job does he have with civil service?

Connie Salas: He works with personnel. He has always worked with personnel and now, what he is doing lately is an awful job I think. He is closing bases. But he has to do

what they send him to. Like a couple of weeks ago he was in Colorado closing a base there. No, the first base he closed was in California. I forgot. He said he was close to Mohave Desert, around there, 'cause he had been there, and we had visited him when he first joined the Marines. We visited him in Mohave. Now he is at Almagordo, but he is not closing any bases, and he is with the National Guard.

I have to tell you that when my brother George was born, at that time I was so naive I didn't even know...I always felt that babies came from the stork, you know. And my mother had him in the next room, and we didn't even know about it until I went in the following morning and there he was. He was such a beautiful, huge baby. He weighed eleven pounds, and Mother handed him to me. I guess she was so weak she just handed him to me, and I looked at him and I said, "Mom he is beautiful! He is so huge. He looks like Porky Pig."

And you know that up to now I still call him Porky. I don't think his wife appreciates it, but to me he is still Porky, and I can see him. Like you heard me say the years that we were all born, so I loved him so much that I just took care of him all of time. I took care of my sister Ann, too.

I remember when Ann was born also. She was five years younger than I. And again we were alone, and she told me to go outside and call somebody, and I did. When I went back in the house there was Ann. There was Annie. But I was so jealous of her. All because, see, I used to get all of the attention. I was a baby for five years, and I used to get all of the attention. And when Ann was born, I tell you, my brothers, they would come home from school.... We lived at Barkley's Ranch at the time, and I remember this so well. We lived at that ranch, and they used to take the school bus, and they thought so much about me that....
(End side A, Tape 1)

"Mi hija" means daughter in Spanish, but my mother always called me "mihita," so everybody always called me Mihita. Even my brothers called me Hita. I never heard the name Consuelo. It was always Mahita. Even Mr. Barkley's son, Ted Barkley, called me Hita all the time because they thought that was my name. In school they used to call me that. Manuel and Gilbert would call me Hita because the boys.

I don't remember too much about Frank. He was older and he was always into other things. Not playing with me like Manuel and Gilbert did. But anyway, when they got home from school I was just crushed because they would just bypass me

and go see Annie. The new baby. And my dad would come home from work and, of course, they would fuss over Annie. Finally one day...one thing about me, I am not shy, and I finally broke into tears and said, "What is the matter with you people? Don't I mean anything to you anymore?" And of course, my dad just hugged me and told me that of course I was going to be his number one special all the time. But I used to get so mad because they would just ignore me all the time.

As time passed they still paid a lot of attention to her, but my dad remembered me, that I was the special one anyway. But they did for a long time. It wasn't until I grew. The older I got the guiltier I felt, because I really was jealous. I really didn't like her. Then my brother George was born, and I loved him. That was so different. He was my baby. Then the following year mother had Chachi, and so I got to take care of Porky all the time. We were very close. We still are.

Interviewer: Where was the Barkley Ranch?

Connie Salas: The Barkley Ranch is over here on Baseline, almost in front of that cemetary now that they have. I remember those ranchers, Barkley, and Mr. Draper. He was across the street, and we had our little house there. This is my first recollection of the Barkley Ranch. We ended up on Cooper Road. Mr. Cooper lived on that corner. We could even walk to the ranch, but we didn't. I don't remember ever walking, but I am sure the boys did. To the ranch. The one where I told you that my grandparents lived on at Baseline and Mesa Drive. 'Cause everybody went to the ranch.

My dad worked for Mr. Barkley for many, many years until we moved to Gilbert. We started building our home here in Gilbert, which was right next door to...it used to be a mission at that time, you know? Our little church, St. Anne's? We had to come over, and we lived on...let's see, we moved from Barkley's. Oh. My dad started working for the WPA. Things were getting better. Yes, my dad started working at WPA, and we lived in a little house over here on...now what is the name of that street? Where McCrides have their place now. You know where Suzy McCride lives? Where is that?

George: The first street east of Gilbert.

Connie Salas: The first stree east of Gilbert, yes. Behind the theater, or whatever it is now.

George: There where all that machinery and old cars and stuff are.

Connie Salas: They had a little house there, and we lived there, and of course, again, I remember that very well. We had our little garden. The boys had rabbits. We always had a cow. This was during the Depression mind you. So, growing up I never knew about the Depression because, thank God, we always had something to eat. Dad worked again baling hay. He was doing all right. We always had the garden. We used to help Mom can. I never helped her in the kitchen, though, 'cause I was always busy taking care of the kids. Therefore, I missed out on learning how to make tortillas. I had to learn afterwards. It was very hard because I never was able to make them like she did with out a rolling pin.

We lived in that little place. That's where I started to school, from that place. Then Gilbert was working at Sam Lee's, and I guess Manuel was just picking cotton, and Frank, I don't know what he was doing. Frank went to the CC camp.

Interviewer: Where was that located?

Connie Salas: Frank was in Flagstaff.

Interviewer: Flagstaff or Sedona?

Connie Salas: Flagstaff. The CC camp was in Flagstaff. That's where he met his wife, Olivia. I guess he must have been eighteen. No he was sixteen. They let him go in at sixteen, because he was there a couple of years, and I know he left that place all ready to get married.

My dad, after he had his heat stroke, worked a lot at Liberty Market. It was owned by Eddie and Edith, Chinese people. It was Eddie. I don't know what their Chinese name was, but Eddie and Edith. Her name was Edith. He worked for them for a long time, trying to recuperate from his heat stroke. I know he worked for Tremaines, as a gardner. Then, like I said, he thought he had gotten over his heat stroke, and he went out that Sunday to work, started to work, and it got the best of him.

But from there on, we were working and at the same time building our home here on, what is it, 27 Bruce? And we had that built at least so that we could move in, and then we added on and added on. You know how a house is. You are never done. We're still not through with this. Every day there is still something else to be done.

Oh, I have to tell you this. Electricity. We moved there without electricity. It was my job to take care of the lamps. I hated that job because I was forever breaking the globes. Of course, I had to have them cleaned real good, you know that soot that got in them, and all that. I was forever getting in trouble for breaking them. But then, thank God for electricity.

I was so puzzled with electricity. I have to tell you this. I use to lay at night...of course, we didn't have any lamps or switches. We just had the lightbulb and the string that you pulled to turn it off. Before, when we were at the Barkley's ranch, we had a little victrola that we used to wind up, or a radio. How did we get to listen to the radio? Batteries? Must have been with a battery because we used to listen once in a while.

But most of the time we were busy taking care of the garden or the animals or whatever. Or the kids. Anyway, when we got to live over here on 27 Bruce we had a radio. We used to connect it with the same switch as the lightbulb and after supper we'd all sit around the table and listen to "The Shadow" and "the shadow knows," and the "Lone Ranger" and stuff like that. Before we did our homework we had about a good hour of listening to the radio. It was fun. I remember doing that with Dad. My mom, bless her heart, she was always taking care of one kid, or doing some kind of work. I don't remember her ever listening. Besides, this was in English and Mom spoke mostly Spanish. Anyway, where was I?

Interviewer: The electricity.

Connie Salas: Well, finally we got the electricity. They had the electricity before Dad died. One day I was lying on the bed, looking up seeing this bulb, and I wondered how does that light get into that bulb? The more I thought of it, I had to check on it. And I got up and I got a chair, 'cause I couldn't reach it, you know. And I got up and I was going to put my finger up there but I couldn't reach it. So by me was a pair of scissors. I opened them up because I still couldn't reach it. I unscrewed the bulb and I put them up. Well, the thing knocked me down, and I think I lost my curiosity ever since then. I mean, things can happen to me and I don't check on them, because that really scared the daylights out of me. I've accepted a lot of things without questions since then.

Interviewer: You started school at Gilbert Elementary?

Connie Salas: Yes, we started. We went to school. I used to think I was going to love school, and I was so fascinated by school because my brothers used to go. My mother used to fix them lunch and pamper them in the morning, fussed over getting them ready, you know. They would take the bus from Barkley's Ranch. I could hardly wait for my mom to fix me a lunch so I could go to school. Well, as it happened, we had already moved, and I started school, and when we got to town I didn't care to go anymore because the boys had to get up and get themselves ready, and they just walked to school. There was no fun. They would come home for lunch. There was no real need to go to school. I grew up speaking Spanish at home, and then I knew that once I went to school I would have to learn English. I was kind of resentful in my pride there for a while. It was going to be so hard, and I hated to tackle something new.

I started school, we had a teacher, her name was Margarita Scalanti. She went around one summer, around the houses, asking if there was any...of course, she knew that there were beginners, first graders, and she went to our house and I remember opening the door and she said, "Yo soy la Senorita Scalanti." She says, "May I speak to your mother?" So I called Mom and she came, and she talked to Mom, and that was the last time I heard that woman speak Spanish.

She said that she was going to be my teacher, in Spanish of course. She was talking to Mom in Spanish and telling her that she was going to be my teacher. And like I said, that was the last time I heard her speak Spanish. I felt so good about it, because when I saw her and I heard her speaking Spanish I thought, she'll understand me. We'll get along fine, it's going to be fine going back to school. I was kind of excited again. By golly when I got to school and that lady did not speak one word in Spanish again to us.

And so, anyway, we had our own Mexican School, which I never minded at all. With the discrimination and all this and that, it didn't bother me in the least because I had to learn English. To me that was it. We went, we had three years in the first grade.

Now mind you, when I started to school I had to have a picture of an orange, which I knew as naranja all the time. At the age of six I found out it was an orange instead. By pictures we learned. We didn't have phonics, we just learned by pictures. Then we started putting pictures together. Then we started writing, and, oh, how I hated the writing. I have the worse penmanship because I hated those long wide lines that they had, and that you had to do all that work.

Anyway, I spent three years in the first grade. The second grade wasn't all that bad, and I know that a lot of my friends resent the fact that we were not allowed to speak Spanish on the school grounds. But I can see it. If we spoke Spanish the minute the teacher turned her back on us, you know, we would never have learned. And, as it is, I am sixty-four years old, and still George corrects my English. Mom died correcting my Spanish, so if I had any sense I would have one heck of an inferiority complex. I don't care. I am glad that I know what I know. I guess perhaps if I had to live my life over again I would have gone to school. But I tell you, I went to the ninth grade, and it was during the war. I quit because I could get a job. I could get clothes. I could do this. I was sixteen, and a smart aleck kid.

Interviewer: Where did you go to work?

Connie Salas: At the base. Williams Field. I worked in the cafeteria. I worked as waitress for many years, and I was only sixteen. No, maybe I wasn't even sixteen, because before I worked at the base, why I went ahead and worked as a waitress, because right after my dad died, Mrs. Blakely--my girls learned to call her Grandma Blakely. She is a very dear friend of mine, the Blakely's. Lula Blakely and Charles Blakely had the furniture store and the restaurant. As a little girl I used to go wash dishes for Grandma Blakely. There was a big box that Grandpa would put down for me so I could do dishes, and I graduated to frying hamburgers. I used to get up at six o'clock in the morning and go to work, especially at the beginning of the war. We were very, very busy.

I don't know how they came upon it, but we had to feed the prisoners of war we had here. We had a base of prisoners of war right across the street from my grandmother's ranch on Baseline and Mesa Drive. There were Yugoslavians and Czechoslovakians. Real handsome young men. We had to feed them for breakfast, and then they worked at something. Then we did their supper, too. So I got to work on that with them. Lot of times we couldn't understand them, but there was always somebody that was head of them that told us. And then, of course, there were the American soldiers who were taking care of them. But I worked for Grandma and Grandpa Blakely for many, many years.

Then I worked at the drug store where I met George. In between then, when I first quit school...see, after I quit work for Grandma Blakely, I worked for Mr. Webber at the drug store across the street, which is now the realty

company here. It used to be a drug store. And we had a theater over here.

And, oh, I used to think, when I grow up I am going to have ten kids and give them all ten pennies and let them go buy something. Because you know how they all came in with pennies and they'd say, 'I want this one, I want that one, no I want that one?' Oh, it was so hard for me. But anyway, I always said when I grow up I am going to have ten kids and give them all five pennies and let them come shopping over here to get even with them.

I worked at the drug store after I worked with Grandma Blakey. As a matter of fact I was working at Grandma Blakey's when I got the job at the drug store. And, like I said, that's where I met George. I still worked there for...I must have worked at the drug store there for years. But when I worked for Mr. Webber, I was much younger.

It was funny that he trusted me. I must have been about fourteen, fifteen years old, and he trusted me before he trusted any grownup. He would leave over the weekend. And also, I used to get a kick out of that old man because he was very proud and didn't like to think that he needed me to translate for him. He says, "You know, I know a lot more Latin than you do."

I said, "Well, why don't you use it?"

He says, "Well what does he want?"

So I would tell him what the customer wanted. I guess I worked there, and I worked at the drug store, which used to be the drug store over here. Were you here when we had the drug store here?

Interviewer: No.

Connie Salas: Is it closed now?

Interviewer: I came right after it closed.

Connie Salas: See, I worked for Arnold, and then they sold it to Mr. Caty, and I only stayed with Mr. Caty until they got the hang of it. By that time I was married, and I got pregnant with Christina right away, and so I stayed home for awhile taking care of my kids. Let's see, George and I got married and it seems like...

Interviewer: What year did you get married?

Connie Salas: 1949. At the end of the year we built here. We built, and we are still here. We had two children.

Christina and Mona. Christina lives in Indianapolis right now with our two beautiful grandchildren. We have two grandsons. And we lost Mona in an automobile accident in 1970. What else did I miss out?

Interviewer: One thing, let's go back a little. Did your family ever talk about the time of Pancho Villa?

Connie Salas: No. My mother talked about a war there in Mexico. But it was mostly like a civil war there. Again, with the Apaches. Mother used to talk about Father Keno bringing in a lot of Chinese. Instead of like here, you know, they brought in slaves, the colored slaves. In Mexico they brought Chinese. She says she remembers them. They put them to work just like slaves. Like the negros were here, they were over there. I don't know who brought them in. The Spaniards, I suppose, were bringing them in. It was Father Keno that kind of put a stop to that. They fought to put a stop to it.

My mother talks about a civil war that she saw, but it was not Pancho Villa. I guess Pancho Villa was in another territory than where Mother was. She never talked of him. She would have, because she talked about the time when their President in Mexico didn't allow the Catholics and the Catholic church. She talked some about that, but she never talked much about Pancho Villa. She knew all about him, but he was never in the state of Sonora. I think he was on the other side, in the state of Chihuahua and all that. I know he had a home in Chihuahua. See, and that is further out. So Mom didn't have anything to do with Pancho Villa.

Interviewer: Which Apaches were they?

Connie Salas: The same Apaches that are here in...Yaquis. The Yaquis.

Interviewer: Was that Geronimo?

Interviewer: No, I don't think so. I think Geronimo was over here giving everybody a hard time. Yaqui Indians are the ones who were raiding the places over there in Sonora. Geronimo was an Apache wasn't he? Yes. I don't remember her ever talking about him. She always talked about them as Yaquis. They are the same ones who are here in Guadalupe. You know, there is a settlement of them here in Guadalupe. Lets' see, what else?

We all went to school here in Gilbert. My mother loved school. Oh, she was so upset when I quit school. She had

my brother Gilbert talk to me, and all this and that, and I still said, "Oh, I don't want to go to school."

Anyway, that was one of the things that if I had to do over again I suppose I would go to school. The last two graduated. My youngest brother ended up getting his masters when he was already married, and he's into teaching now. My youngest sister is living in Longview. She married a man, Tom Strable, from Cedar Rapids, and they lived in Cedar Rapids for a few years, then they moved to El Paso. I believe they lived sixteen years in El Paso. And just now she moved to Longview, Texas, and I am getting ready to go see her Monday, God willing. I never have been that way.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about the man who started Rosarita.

Connie Salas: My uncle? I told you that about ten years ago we had a big family reunion. In this picture that I have here, it is his son who did the picture, the drawing. We had a family reunion, and I was presented with that picture. George did the frame.

My uncle married my father's cousin, who we still call aunt. My Tia Chowa Rosaura. That's why they named the place Roserita, because it's for Rosaura. Notice it isn't Rosita. It is Roserita.

I wish I could find that book, because he explains...all the time he wanted to do that. He was a painter, he worked at everything. Did everything and a lot of things, and he finally was able to get somebody to believe in him, and go in together and start this deal about...he wanted to make some tamales. And as a matter of fact, John, George's brother, built him a machine that they thought could mass produce the making of tamales. He did get a lot of ideas. He did. As a matter of fact, in the book it tells the people who were in with him. Who financed him to start this thing.

Also, he was in the painting business. As you know his son is an artist. He worked with Lindsay, Guererro and Lindsay, in the paint shop. Now Lindsay isn't with him anymore. Lindsay died sometime ago, but they still keep the name. The kids are all working there. They are also old by now. They are keeping the business going. I don't know what year they sold that building to Beatrice Company. He sold it. It is not his anymore. But they still get royalties on it.

Interviewer: Refried beans were his first product?

Connie Salas: I believe he started working with tamales mostly. That was what he wanted to do. But then he did the corn tortillas. And they have everything now. He did it. He wanted to work with it, and he did it. He is the one who married my Tia Chowa. He died about two years ago, and his children are running the business now. They don't have anything to do with Rosarita, but they do run the Guererro and Lindsay sign company.

Interviewer: What were the war years like here for you?

Connie Salsa: My brothers Manuel and Frank were in the service. We worried an awful lot about them. My oldest brother Frank was in Okinawa. He said the reason why he lived was because there were so many of them. They were just dying. The Japanese were just hitting them, knocking them over as they were coming in, but there were so many Americans that they overtook them.

Now my brother Manuel got a purple heart in France. He did a lot of walking. He was wounded in France. He came home very, very depressed. He came home, and got over it, and he went to work right away again.

And that is when my brothers got their jobs. They got married young. In fact, they all got married pretty young, except me. I was twenty-one. For a girl, that wasn't young in those days. Anyway, I was twenty-one when I got married. My brothers got married real young, and they lived in Flagstaff. My brother Gilbert later went on to the Korean War. Then my brother George was in the Korean War also. But I don't think they saw any action like the older brothers did.

Interviewer: After your father died, was your mother able to maintain the house?

Connie Salas: Oh, my mother was super. I don't know how she did it. My mother was thirty-nine when my dad died, and we never doubted her. Whatever she said, that was it. I thought that she just knew everything, because we never doubted her. Everything that she said was it. She did, she stayed. She took care of all of us. Held us together, and I asked her several times, "How come you didn't think about getting married?"

She said, "No, all I thought about was seeing you guys grow up."

The real funny part that I have to tell you about my mom.... Like I said, she grew up practically on a horse. Well, the first trip that she went on later when she was

more modernized here in the States, she went to visit my sister in Cedar Rapids. Well, I put her on a plane and I put a note on her. She was so mad because I had put a note on her that said, "I don't speak English, and if I get lost call these two telephone numbers." But she was so proud of herself. And she said, "It's quite an accomplishment from riding a horse to this huge 707."

She was a great lady. She never showed us that she was afraid. She just took over, and with a strong hand too. Can you imagine just waking up the next morning with a house full of kids? The oldest one was Frank and he was twenty-one and he was married. There was Manuel, who was sixteen, then Gilbert fifteen, then me, a smart aleck, and my sister who was just a year old. She did a terrific job. Like I said she loved school so much that...she didn't try this on me. I wish she did. Guess I was older. But my youngest brother George one day decided he was not going to go to school.

My mother said, "Oh, yes you are."

He said, "No, I'm not." So he went outside and sat down.

Spinny Sotomeyer was our policeman, across the street. She called him over there and said, "Take this kid to school. I don't want any dummies here." And he put him in the police car and drove him to school.

When my brother received his masters, he said he was tempted to tell that story of how Mother...'cause he was speaker for their graduation class. He said, "I was tempted to tell about the story when mother made me go to school in the police car." Of course, we are grateful. I wish she had done the same thing with me, but I guess she was too busy worrying about the rest of them, that when I said... And, actually, I think there was the feeling that a girl didn't need the education like a man did.

End of side b, tape 1

Interviewer: You never did feel any discrimination?

Connie Salas: No, I didn't.

Interviewer: What about your neighborhood? Did you have a lot of interaction with your neighbors?

Connie Salas: Well, we lived on this side of the tracks, let's put it that way. Most of my friends lived on the other side of the tracks, and I guess that started it. We were friends. I had some very good friends, but Mom was a person who always liked to have us right there. I mean, at

home she knew where we were at all the time. I didn't get to go visit my friends, except maybe once a month or on a very special occasion. It was either I would visit Betty, my very good friend. Betty was Nunez then. She married a Carrillo, Sammy Carrillo. And the Ruiz's, they lived next door, almost next door, to Betty. And the Nunez's, Irene. Those were the kids I went to school with who were in my grade. Mother knew their family, and I could go there, maybe once or twice a year we would visit.

I was always busy. I was always busy with one of the kids, and there was never a dull moment at our house. Gosh, there was always something to do. I can't see...like people say now, they're bored. And mind you, we didn't have TV. On special occasions we would listen to the radio, like I said, around the table. We always had a garden. We always had to tend the garden. We always had chickens. Most of the time we had rabbits. You have to take care of things like that. And kids. I had tons of ironing to do. We took washing and ironing in to help us make ends meet. I used to do a lot of ironing.

I remember especially hating those irons. I don't know if you ever came across a butane iron? They had a little ball, like this. A stainless steel ball on the edge of the iron. I don't know how we put the gas in there, but I know I had to pump it with a pump to get it hot. It was a heavy iron. I don't remember doing any ironing with, what were they called...the flat irons. I suppose Mother did.

Another iron that we had was charcoal. It had charcoal inside it. You heated them also on top of the stove, I guess. I'm not too sure. I know they were always heavy, irons. I know because I feel now. My arms are practically dead.

Then we were always busy. There was an empty lot right next door to us, and there was always enough kids that we used to play with or have come over to the house. Mostly people came over to our house rather than for us to go to their's. Mother didn't let us go alot of places. Mostly we were there. She specially had to know where I was most of the time, and she did know. When we were in school we were gone the regular hours, but after that... Now I think when the kids come home with so much homework, why didn't they do it at school? Because we used to come home from school and we didn't do that much homework because we had to do all of our jobs. I had been doing ironing and washing and cooking for other people.

Interviewer: What kind of washing machine did you have?

Connie Salas: Oh, I remember at the beginning, my first recollection when we were at Barkley's Ranch, we used to wash with a scrub board. And Mother was a fussy washer. Oh, gosh, she had that black pot going real early in the morning. She used to use lye on the clothes and boil the clothes. We used to get them out with a heavy stick, and bring them out and rinse them out two or three times and use that bluing. It was my job to hang up the clothes. The smaller clothes. We used to hang up everything. She had the prettiest wash. Oh, she had those sheets so pretty. We ironed the sheets. Not only the pillow cases but the sheets. Which, you know, I don't do anything like that anymore. She had beautiful embroidered sheets. She didn't have any beautiful bedspreads, but our sheets were pretty, and beautiful dishtowels. Oh, she emboridered them. Napkins. She used to embroider our napkins.

We had a purpose for everything. Like the flour that we used to buy, we used to buy in big quantities for a family of seven, nine with our parents. The flour sacks, we used those for dishtowels. Second, the sugar bags. The sugar came in ten pound bags. They were softer, she used to make slips for me or panties. We used to buy salt in a little bag too. She made those into napkins. Pretty, with hand work. Oh, our free periods. You know what we did in our free periods? I never took naps. In our free periods she used to make us do hand work.

Interviewer: You received communion from the Pope?

Connie Salas: Yes, I was very lucky to have done that. One morning our secretary from the church called me and asked me if I wanted to receive communion from the Pope. She said that he would be distributing communion to a hundred people. One from each parish of the diocese of Phoenix. I accepted it. Didn't do too much about it. I didn't tell anybody. The only one I told was my young nephew. In fact, I wrote him a little note because he teased me one day because my sister owns a Cadilac. I said I'm too humble. I could never own a Cadilac. A Mercedes Benz maybe, but not a Cadilac. It's too flashy. It's not me. So I wrote him a little note and said, "Would you believe your Aunt Connie? I am going to receive communion from the Pope. I still can't believe it."

So then my sister wrote back to me and said, "You, the humble person who can't drive a Cadilac, is going to receive communion from the Pope? We teased each other.

And it was later on the same year that Joseph called and asked for Christina's hand in marriage. Later on, when I

went back to our sorority group they said, "Say something exciting that is happening to you this summer while we were away." I said, "Well, I have two real exciting things happening. Can I tell two?"

They said, "Well, I suppose so."

They all knew that Christina was in this religious order, you know, and I wasn't going to have any grandkids. I said, "I picked up the phone one day and I heard this young man say, 'Mrs. Salas, this is Joseph Catoul. May I talk to Mr. Salas?'"

I said, "Sure." So I called George.

But then I had the phone and I wondered, what's this? Christina had already told me that she was dating this young man. And it was so beautiful the way he asked for her hand in marriage. He said how they met, and what he thought of her, and this and that, and he promised to take care of her forever and do so well. Gee, I was so excited I almost cried. It was exciting.

So at about the very same time our secretary calls me and tells me that they had chosen me. I thought, of all the people, they asked me. Then later on I talked to John, who is a Eucharist minister also. He said, "Are you going to be distributing communion when the Pope comes?"

I thought, "Maybe that's what Barbara meant." I couldn't be receiving communion from the Pope. So I called Barbara again and said, "Barbara, am I really going to receive communion from the Pope?"

She said, "Yes you are."

I said, "I thought I was suppose to distribute communion."

She said, "No, you are not going to distribute. We have the Eucharist ministers from Gilbert who are going to help over there, too." Because, you know, they had rows and rows of people.

So there I was. Then I went to practice and Father Dale, the one from St. Tim's who everybody loves, was there, and there were ninety-nine of us. The hundreth person missed, and he told us that we got a pass that came...I'll show it to you in a minute. We got a pass that we had to have for security purposes. We were to go in first, and we were to sit, I mean, so close to the Pope. It was unbelieveable. But already the parishoners had recieved their tickets to sit in the audience, and we had some good seats. So when I got over there that night they gave us the tickets. We were close to the Pope. We were down right in front of him.

I had, of course, my ticket and George's ticket. So I came home and asked George, "Do you really mind, we have such good tickets here, if I called my sister and asked her if she could come?" He said, "Sure, go ahead." He

practically raised my sister. She grew up with him. And he loves her too. So he said okay.

So I called my sister, and I said, "Fly down!" It was Friday and I said, "Fly down for Monday. I have tickets to go to the Pope's Mass."

So she did. And she came and, oh, it was so exciting. Of course we got lost coming out, and we had to stand in line for such a long time, and then I found out that I didn't have to stand in line because I had my pass, so I could have gone through. But I worried because my sister had rheumatoid arthritis and had to stand in line. I worried that George might get tired of waiting and want to leave. But everything worked out real good, and that was one of the biggest excitements that I have had in life, and I am very happy.

I guess that's why I said to the sorority...I let it out. I hadn't told anybody because I just couldn't believe it. It was nice. I'll show you the pictures.

Anyway, they have a big cathedral dedicated to St. Anne over there. Father got a statue of St. Anne for us through Mrs. Mary Felix. She was very sick with cancer. She was a sister to the Basha's men. He got our first statue of St. Anne that we had for many, many years. We had mass with Father Fontaine. Used to have mass every day then. We were a parish so... He stayed for a long time, and he lived across the street. He had the rectory across the street from us.

Interviewer: How soon did they build the rectory?

Connie Salas: Oh, we had a rectory. We just bought a house that belonged to Mrs. Pine. Alfred and Mrs. Pine's mother had the house across the street from us. It still stands. The Silvas' have that house now. Arthur and his wife own the house there. That was the rectory right across the street from us. And the church was next door to us. Father Fontaine lived there for many years. Nades was like a visiting priest, and he came in 1943. Our first priest, pastor, was Father Fontaine. Then we had Father O'Daugherty, who is Monsignor now. Third, we had Father Collins. Fourth, we had Father Gavin. He married me and George. Fifth, we had Father Collinnen. Sixth, we had Father Monahan. Father Monahan was the one who was here when Ann died. Seven, we had Father O'Boyle. Father O'Boyle married my brother George and his wife. Father Casey was number eight. Father Casey married my sister Chachi. Father Gavin, I told you, married us.

Father Neviless built our new church, and we tore up...in fact, George went over with a boom truck and tore off the little mission. Then we built on the outside of it. And then Billy Gibson came in with a tractor and backhoe and cleared off the building. Then we built right on top of that other building.

When Father Patterson came, the little church, the mission, was just one little room. He added the sacristy. He, himself made the adobe's. I saw this man with his rolled up pants mixing the mud for the adobes. And they added on, he and someone else, added on another room which was our alter, you know, the sacristy. That all came down when we built.

Interviewer: What year did you build St. Anne's?

Connie Salas: This building here, that was about fifteen years ago. It had to be...oh, gosh, I'm not good at dates. Father Niveless built it. Then we had Father O'Herne and Father Morales, and he built this St. Anne,s here. Are we there five years now? About five years, because Father Morales was seven years with us, and now we have Father Lord. He is our twelfth priest.

I am happy to say I have been very active in our church. I have sort of taken a leave of absence right now since I started to work. Since George retired, I figured we had to keep a happy marriage. I went to work. I married him for better or worse, but not for lunch. So anyway, I have been working. I have a family who I clean house for, and I used to do catering, but I'm not into catering that much anymore since I feel I am needed here more now. And I cannot be sure of my commitments. So I just figured the people I clean house for won't hurt if I should miss one day, one time. So I would rather stay with cleaning houses. I love the people I work for. I have been doing it for the last six years now.

Interviewer: George Ruiz was telling me he remembered lots of dances at the Legion Hall. Do you remember those?

Connie Salas: When we first moved to Gilbert from the ranch, there used to be right where that building is, it was originally a bank. I don't remember it as a bank. Where I told you there was a drug store across from Liberty Market. I don't remember it as a bank, but Dad said it was a bank. I remember it as a drug store. There was an empty lot between what would be the pool hall and that bank. And they used to have a platform there, and they had dances every

Saturday night. It was what we used to call an Okie dance, 'cause they had the western music and all that. Everybody went and, gosh, that was our Saturday night thing.

And the little town was busy. We had the same stuff that you see right along Main Street, but people came shopping and my dad was busy at the store. He used to work for Liberty Market.

Then another time they had movies right there. They had an open screen, and we used to watch movies. It was very quiet. We only had one policeman, and our fire...at six o'clock we used to have a siren that sounded. At six o'clock. That was the siren that they used for fires, or if there was a disaster or something.

It was a busy little town. You know that Gilbert was the hay capital of world? At one time we had...especially the Mexican fellows, they all had to pick cotton in the winter, and they hauled hay during the summer, and they did pretty well. They all had their brand new trucks and did all this work. Always busy.

Interviewer: You didn't mention when your family got their first car.

Connie Salas: Oh, gosh, I can go back thinking. I remember this man who used to pester my dad to buy a car. We never had...I don't remember ever having horses and wagons. I remember the Indians used to come by, and other people had them. Like my grandfather had the wagons and the mules that hauled. But I remember this one time, this man came over and sold my dad a huge car, and my mother hated it. I know they argued over it, and then they finally got rid of that, and he got a small Model-T, or whatever it was that we had, and it was so exciting getting in it. We used to have to crank it up to get it started. It was fun. Especially when my brothers got up there. "Step on the gas," and they would crank and crank, and sometimes it would go on and sometimes it wouldn't.

Then it wasn't until...I don't know whether we got another one between. I know it was never a new car. But I think when Dad died we still had one of the old Model-T cars. I don't know whether it was a Model-T, but that's what we called them then. Mother never drove. As we got older and the kids got married, each one had their own car and went their own ways. When I met George, he just had the pickup from the shop, and then later on we had the car. Seems like ever since then everybody had a car.

But here in Gilbert it seems like the only ones who had a nice car was the Castros, because that lady was a good saver

and they only had a son, Felix, and they always had a nice car. She always used to pay cash for them. I know she used to say, "I paid $800 for this car." Can you imagine? I remember her one time saying that. Of course, she never drove either, at that time. But she was a hard working person. She used to go out there and pick cotton with her husband, just like anybody else.

Interviewer: Did you ever pick cotton?

Connie Salas: Only once, and I always thought that kind of work was very exciting. During the war they took the school kids, and I think they didn't like us, because we got to playing and we would tear down the cotton balls before they opened up and play with them. I didn't, but my brothers did. We never were good at it, because it was hard work, I guess, and it was cold. But they did it as we were growing up. As kids they did it. When they grew up they didn't, but I think everybody did as kids.

Interviewer: When they took you out to the field when you were in school what did they hope to do? Was there a shortage of workers?

Connie Salas: Oh, yes. It was during the war, you know, and they didn't have the hands to do it. They didn't have the machines like they do now. Just went as a group. The school volunteered, and we went out there, and we all had our gunnysacks and you were suppose to fill them up. And there were kids that did it.

I always wanted to go places. I have always loved traveling, and some of my friend's parents would take them to California to pick peaches and stuff like that. All the fruits and vegetables. Whatever they had. They would leave real early, and they would always come a couple of months late to school. I used to say to my dad, "Why don't we go? They always come and they're wearing new shoes and new clothes and they make so much money, they probably have a car."

"Oh, no," he says, "Mihita, you don't know the trouble they go through."

I never worried about that. All I could think about was they had new clothes and they come in late for school. They don't have to be there at the beginning.

Dad never believed in taking us out of school, and I guess that is why they decided one time, after we didn't have the hands, all our boys were in the service, they asked the

whole bunch of kids. I imagine I must have been about ten or twelve when I did this.

Interviewer: What about your dad. Where did he go to school?

Connie Salas: I don't know about my dad's schooling. I know he spoke English pretty well, and I never did ask about my dad's education. I know my mother only had a fourth grade education 'cause she would bring it up several times. See, I was only ten when my father died. And as far back as I can remember my dad was always working someplace or at the house. We were just busy.

Interviewer: How did he and your mother meet?

Connie Salas: Like I said, the day that my Tia Elise came from Mexico, my mother came with them, and they came to the ranch where my father was. That's where they met. Actually we are related. We would have been relatives anyway because my Tia Elise was my father's cousin, and my mother was a niece to the man that my Tia Elise married.

Interviewer: So they were distant cousins?

Connie Salas: No. My Tia Elise married my grandfather's brother on my mother's side, and then my father was related to my Tia Elise. I have two cousins, one that is from my mother's side, and one that is from my father's side, and they are married. And I always said they are both of our cousins. See now, Pat is my Aunt's daughter, on my father's side. Al is my cousin on my mother's side. His grandmother and my grandfather were brother and sister. They are here in Mesa.

I don't remember anything about my father's education. I know that they were hard working, and I know that my Tata Mariana had 'em...I guess, whether he helped him or not.

Let me tell you about George Ruiz. His grandmother was my godmother. We were very close. It was another one of the families that...and I still pray for them, for my godparents, because they were always there for us. They had a ranch. They owned the ranch. My nino owned the ranch, and they were a large family. But they grew cotton and they harvested.

Interviewer: Who was this?

Connie Salas: This was Francisco and Avelina Molina. They were my godparents. They are George Ruiz's grandparents. We were very close. As a matter of fact, Mother had so many kids that she said she was almost embarrassed to ask to have godparents, so from me on, beginning me, Annie, George, they stood up for our baptisms altogether.

Interviewer: Did you have any neighborhood?

Connie Salas: Actually we didn't. Like I said, we lived over here, there was an empty lot next to the house and the church. And then on this corner Mr. McFetric lived there, which was later on to become my teacher. We just didn't visit that much.

Mom was a person who got up and there was always work around the house. There was always something to do so that we didn't spend time visiting. We were always friendly. I have always loved people. Like I said, I didn't have any problem with discrimination because I've always felt, "Hey if you don't like me that's your problem. I do."

There was a lot of things, like I have always felt that I was humble, by nationality and descent, and by means. But I never felt bad about it, because I have always felt good about myself. Because hey, I am me.

I am a very lucky person. I have had some...one of the things that stands out in my mind right away, of course, is losing our daughter when she was just twenty. I don't know who killed her. I don't want to know, becaue he was a drunk driver, and I don't want to have hate in my heart, and I think I could hate him. Because at that time my daughter was pregnant. She was a beautiful girl, a happy go lucky person, a lot like her mother. A very happy person, and she was five months pregnant, and this guy just ran a stop sign drunk, and killed her immediately. Later on I felt that there are worse things than death, and I don't hold it against anybody. I just figure it was meant to be.

Interviewer: Your other daughter, she is married to..?

Connie Salas: My daughter Christina has always been the other way around. She is a beautiful person too, but she is very quiet. Very reserved like her dad. Very independent. Always was able to do a lot for herself. She was a very smart little girl in school. Had no problems whatsoever in school. Everybody liked her. But even at the house here she was very quiet. Now she would talk for a little while and then say, "Okay, I'm going to my room," and that was it for Christina that night.

Later she graduated and she went to school. She was going to college here for awhile, then she decided she was going to go to California. So she went to California, and she wrote back that she was going to join this religious order. Of course, I worried and worried about her, but what can you do? Later on I figured that God had done that to me to let me know that other people besides Catholics are going to go to heaven. I was just a narrow-minded person. I just knew the Catholic church. She joined a nondenominational organization. I cried a lot. I visited her every place they'd send her and worried about her. Then I realized one day that, hey, she is in there because she wants to. She is not brainwashed. She is a smart person and she was happy.

Interviewer: She was a sister then for fifteen years?

Connie Salas: Yes.

Interviewer: Which church?

Connie Salas: It is a nondenomination church with the...what is it called? What is that order Christina joined George? Holy Order of Mans. M-A-N stands for something, but I don't know what it is. In the last five years, I guess, some of those kids decided to get married. Besides deciding to get married, they decided to join a group that had more foundation, and they joined the Greek Orthodox Church, which is very much like the Catholic Church, except they do a lot more praying.

Then they could get married, and Christina married one of the brothers there. Joseph Catoul in the order, and she was thirty-nine, I believe, at the time, and would you believe she got pregnant right away and they had one baby, and then right away they had another one. We have two grandchildren. She is forty-one now. She has her hands full with those two little boys. They are beautiful. Right now, today, they were supposed to take off to go to Atlanta to visit another couple who were in that order.

In that order they worked at Rafael House there in San Francisco. They did a lot of good. But that is all they did. You know, like wake up and what good am I going to do today, and bam, bam, bam they had to do this, they had to do that. The kid got up at five o'clock in the morning and just worked herself all the time. So I feel very...I guess it was what she wanted, so it's okay. Of course, I am happier now that we have the grandkids. It is harder for them now because they are older and starting a life now. The only good thing about it is they both have an education.

Joseph has his degree in biology, and he is still going to school nights, which makes it harder for Chris to stay home with the boys. She is a good cook, a good seamstress and good mother. And we have those two beautiful children.

Interviewer: How old are they?

Connie Salas: Paul is three and Georgio is going to be a year the seventh of August, and they are just super. They are just great. And, of course, they call us Nana and Tata. My mother loved her grandchildren, and it is a shame that...I really feel bad for Mom not being able to see Christina's kids, because somehow or another Mother had a habit, I don't know whether it was a habit, but she had a way of favoring the oldest grandchild. In all her kids. Like she favored my oldest brother, Frank's, Dollie. Then down the line until me, and my Christina was Mother's favorite. We were close. Mother lived right next to the church, so they were very close and they loved their grandmother.

As a matter of fact in my cooking, as I was learning, they would say, "Oh Mom, this is good. It's almost as good as Grandma's." That was what Mona used to say when I did beans or rice or chicken rice that was one of Mother's favorites. She would say, "Oh Mom, this is good. It's almost as good as Grandma's." And they would go there often and visit with their grandmother. They called her grandma.

Because I grew up not speaking English, I made sure that the girls spoke English before they went to school. It was a little rough on Mom, but she understood. A lot of times if she was in a bad mood or something and Mother would talk to Mona in Spanish, Mona would turn around and say to me, "What did she say Mother?" Mother would mimic, "What did she say Mama?" (Laughter)

But they loved her dearly, and Mother developed diabetes when she was sixty-five, and before this Mother always made tortillas for us. Her big things like, you know, "We're going to cook a pot of beans and this rice," and she'd always...and then by that time I started to work.

I worked at Wingfoot Market for five years as a cashier. The kids needed braces and all this. So I said, "I'm going to work until I can get Mona's braces." Well, I finished with Mona and then Christina decided, "Well, maybe I should have some too."

So anyway I worked for that, and Christina was old enough now to look after Mona. So then, when Christina graduated from high school and she said she wasn't going to go to school, I said, well, I am quitting. I said I'd keep on

working if you promised to go to school. She said, "Mom if I am going to school, I'll do it on my own." She got a job at Motorola, she didn't like it, and she went back to school.

By then I was home, and I was doing all kinds of little things here and there. And I think I fooled around for about a few years doing nothing but a lot of charity work and a lot of church work. I belonged to the Lions. I belonged to the Beta Sigma Phi sorority for twenty-five years. You know, we'd attend all that stuff. We entertained. I belonged to the Lionesses. I kind of gave a lot of that up since I am working more steady, and since we have been fighting cancer for seven years, you know, and then this last year we were told it was terminal. So I thought, well, I'll just stay home as much as I can.

With the church, I was one of the first Eucharist ministers that they had. I always think, gosh, my mother would criticize me and tell me I am not worthy. But then who is? I know I am not worthy, but when I took the Eucharist ministry in church, I thought I was just going to be taking communion to the sick. To my older Mexican ladies. They are gone now, and I don't do it anymore. Most of those people are gone. I think the only lady who is living now, and she is in a rest home for many, many years, is Mrs. Nunez, Beya Nunez. She is way in her nineties. She is the only oldtimer who is left of the people who knew my parents. I did take communion to a lot of those people. Then it got to where the church has come up with, hey, you have to do it now in church. Well, I did it. I just resigned last week.

In our church it used to be I knew everybody, and like Father Patterson said, I was to be the hostess, I was to be a host for St. Anne. I try to do that, and I knew just about everybody in church. And now, I don't even know my neighbor. We just have so many more people coming. Our masses are just filled to the rim all the time. We are getting a lot more people, and hopefully...this building we built is a multipurpose building. We are going to eventually build our church when we get through paying for this one. I don't know if I'll see it, but if I do maybe I'll be able to go back to work to it. I was on the building committee for this one. It's pretty, and I think it will make a nice multipurpose building, rather than the church, when it is finished.

Interviewer: You also built the classrooms at the back.

Connie Salas: Yes, then they built...Father Patterson followed through and...Father Patterson ended up with us again at the very end. He died here in Gilbert. He left us $50,000. He was a rancher, you know, before. His family were in the ranch business, and where the Patterson school is was part of his ranch. They had money, but one of the brothers was a doctor and the other brothers, I think, lawyers. But it was a big family and they had money.

Father Patterson was a very dedicated priest. I mean a hard working priest. He did a lot of work himself. Manual work. And he cared. And to me, as far back as I can remember, he was the best priest ever.

Interviewer: Then he was actually from Gilbert?

Connie Salas: Yes. I think they might have come from California, but he was from here. He orginated here.

Interviewer: They owned the land at Patterson School?

Connie Salas: Yes. He also gave some money to a retirement home here. I am not sure. I don't think it is called Patterson, but I think there is a place where he donated some money, too. He had the money.

Mrs. Erramuzpe was always my idol because I used to see her coming in with her kids to church, and I thought, "Oh, someday I would love to be like her." Of course, to me she was an older lady then, and I caught up with her. I never thought I would, you know, 'cause I was just a young kid, and I used to hope that I could be like her. She helped an awful lot in the church too, and she and I worked together a lot.

I worked with a lot of people in the church. Like I said we made tamales, and I am very grateful I did that, because in my catering, which I learned later, I learned a lot by working with the church. I learned a lot from working at restaurants. Just before I started my cleaning business, I worked at Truffles in Scottsdale, which is a little shop where they have all these fancy little things and charge you an arm and a leg for everything. It is real pretty, and it's nice. I also worked at the base, I worked at the restaurants, Wingfoot market. I was a cashier for five years there. I have worked for Border Company. You know the mail company? I used to be a demonstrator for them. I love working. I love people. It has never bothered me. What else can I tell you?

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs. Salas.