RECUERDOS DE MONROVIA: HISTORY OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

by Susie Ling, Monrovia Latino Heritage Society

Top left: Wedding of Lucille Guardado and James Espinosa in 1927 at I.C. (Photo courtesy of Mary Lou Espinosa Sandoval); Top right: First grade at Charlotte Avenue School in 1922 (Courtesy of Johnny Romero); Bottom: Monrovia's fruit pickers in 1920s. Benny Romero is boy on right (Courtesy of Mary Lou Sandoval).

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By Susie Ling[1]

INTRODUCTION

Monrovia is nestled in the northeast corner of Los Angeles County against the San Gabriel Mountains. With land from Rancho Santa Anita and Rancho Azusa de Duarte, Monrovia became the fourth oldest general law city in Los Angeles County when it incorporated in 1887. In the 2010 census, Monrovia had a population of 36,590 with 41% non-Latino White, 7% African American, 11% Asian, and 38% Latino. Like in other California communities, Mexican Americans have been an integral part of Monrovia for generations.

In those days, this whole valley was just beautiful… It was all orange trees. Oh, it was so beautiful that it ain't funny. There was no traffic. There were horses on Huntington Drive…. It was really a beautiful place.[2]

We used to live on Huntington Drive… When I drive down Huntington [today], I would remember when my brother and I would lie down on that street. There wasn't that much traffic [then]. We would be lying there and my brother would say, "Oh, there's the light of a car way down there…" So we would then get up to let the car pass. Then we would lie on the street again. We played hopscotch on Route 66. There was an airport next to us. When it was really foggy, they would blow a horn. Then the men would all go to the airport with their cars and turn their headlights on for the incoming plane.[3]

It was in the 1920s that Monrovia segregated the Mexican, Black and Asian communities south of the Pacific Electric tracks on Olive Avenue. Near Chestnut Ave. and then in the middle of Almond Ave. was the spur – a secondary railway used for freight. It ended at the Day and Night Water Heater Company on Shamrock. Almond Ave. was the main residential street of the early Mexican American community.

On Almond, the train ran in the middle of the street. Our side of Almond was paved, but the north side was just dirt. It must have been dusty and noisy, but I don't really remember that. [Mexican Americans] lived between California and Shamrock. We used to place pennies and nails on the track to have the train flatten them.[4]

THE ANCESTRY OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

In the 1900 census, there were about 51 Mexican Americans living in Monrovia on Lemon, Charlotte, Walnut, California, and Maple. Most of these Mexican Americans were California-born.

Mexican Americans – including the Garcías, the McKinns, the Espinosas, the Guardados - are of mixed racial and cultural heritage. They are descendants of Spanish and other Europeans, Africans, and indigenous peoples of Mexico and the United States. While Mexican Americans may have been classified as Caucasian and White, they have certainly not had the same social rights as other European Americans.

Louís and Lucinda García moved to Monrovia in the first decade of the 1900s from Pasadena; they owned and built their compound at 511 Almond. Louís Pilar García was born in Los Nietos (Whittier) and his brother, Jesse, and sister, Rita, also lived in Monrovia. Jesse lived on Walnut west of Myrtle, while Rita and her husband, Manuel Mason, lived on Almond. Louís, Jesse, Rita and Manuel spoke English to each other, although all were bilingual.

Louís' wife, Lucinda Valentine García, was born on Valentine's Day in 1879 in Pomona. Lucinda's parents were Manual García and Ysidora Palomares. Lucinda was a descendant of many early Californians. These include Roque Jacinto de Cota (1724-1798), one of the 1781

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[2] Interview with Carlos Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.
[3] Rosalie Cardiel García on 21 August 2012 in Rancho Cucamonga.
[4] Cecilia Mejía Romero on 20 May 2013 in Monrovia.

Spanish *escoltas*, or soldiers escorting the original *pobladores,* or settlers of the pueblo of Los Angeles. Lucinda is related to Don Ygnacio Palomares and Ricardo Vejar, the founders of Rancho San José. Another ancestor is José María Claudio López, the *mayordomo* or overseer of the San Gabriel Mission from 1821 to 1830 and *alcade* or mayor of Los Angeles from 1826 to 1827. Louís and Lucinda raised nine children and many more grandchildren on Almond Ave. in Monrovia. Their great-great-grandchildren still live in the house.

McKinns were part of the Monrovia community. Próspero Paul McKinn was born in 1902 in Silver City, New Mexico. He is the son of Jimmy "Santiago" McKinn, who was kidnapped as a boy by Geronimo and hundreds of Apaches in 1885. Jimmy's father, John McKinn, was a merchant marine from Ireland who married Lucretia, a woman of Mexican descent. Próspero married Margaret Espinosa of Monrovia and had seven children.

Margaret's father, Toribio Espinosa, was probably born in Mexico and her mother, María, belonged to the Papago Indian nation of Arizona. Toribio was a ranch hand at Lucky Baldwin's estate; Mr. Baldwin gave the Espinosas the property at 911 S. Magnolia in Monrovia. Both Toribio and María died prematurely in 1923 and are buried at Live Oak Cemetery in Monrovia. After his parents' demise, James William or Jimmy Espinosa - born in 1904 on Lucky Baldwin's estate - raised his younger siblings Adela, Frank, Frances, and Margaret in Monrovia.

Jimmy Espinosa married Lucille Guardado, the daughter of Víttoriano Guardado and Inocencia Yáñez – both of Zacatecas, Mexico. Lucy and her siblings were born in Southern California. Between 1900 and 1930s, many immigrants came from Zacatecas, Jalisco, Durango and elsewhere. Some of these immigrants paid a penny or two to cross the Texas border. Many felt pressure to leave Mexico during the 1910s Mexican Revolution; this coincided with the linking of the Mexican Central Railroad with the Santa Fe line that led to Monrovia.

My dad was born in 1912 in Durango. He used to talk about the Mexican Revolution. When he was a small boy, he saw a lot of rich people who were hung. His father, Manuel, worked on a ranch in Durango... They came on the train. Grandpa Manuel and my dad would work on the railroad while the family lived in the boxcar… Dad said it was so cold working on the tracks that his ears were permanently burnt from frost. My grandfather's face was burnt too. I guess they came to America for a better life.[5]

Jim Espinosa and Monreal on a citrus farm in 1920s. Photo courtesy of Mary Lou Espinosa Sandoval.

BETTER LIFE

Until the 1950s, Monrovia's Mexican American community was like one extended family tied to each other by kinship, church, school, work, and community. The *compadrazgo* system of godparents, brought the families even closer.

Everybody knew everybody… When I was growing up, my mom knew all my friends' mothers. It was a different time. We didn't lock our doors like we do now… My friends and I would go skating and bicycle riding. We had a real childhood. All the girls would jump rope on one or the other end of the street. There would be about ten of us with all different ages. It was so much fun, especially in the summer. We went swimming. We biked to Fish Canyon in Duarte. I didn't own a bike but I borrowed my brother's. We skated on Shamrock in the park. We played jacks; I even taught all my grandchildren (laughs). I played cowboy and Indians and marbles with my brothers. I had my own bag of marbles. We would race down the driveway. Everyone got along.

[5] Carlos Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.

We eventually even married other Monrovians. We felt secure knowing their families… I married a Monrovian in 1955. And my second marriage is to another Monrovian.[6]

Monrovia was a relatively simple life. We went everywhere on foot. In the summer, the movies and the swimming pool were the great things. We would go up Royal Oaks to Watson's Berry Ranch to work in the morning. Then we swam in the afternoon. I also worked at the swimming pool cleaning lockers. I got free passes. We spent long days at the pool. We climbed the foothills. We hiked to Duarte. We would swim in a little lake. We ate cactus apples, oranges, plums, peaches, and anything we could find. We had no sense of time. We didn't worry about too much. We knew discrimination but it didn't bother us. We could only swim two days, Mondays and Thursdays, [in the Monrovia Plunge]. And those were the days they chlorinated the pool (laughs)… There were two movie theaters. The Lyric was a little nicer than Monrovia Theater on Myrtle Avenue. Lyric showed technicolor movies and Monrovia had black and white western movies. You could sit anywhere at the Monrovia Theater. But the Lyric Theater restricted us to the sides. You couldn't sit in the loge section. We just wanted to see the movie and we didn't care where we sat. We would get a big bag of popcorn for a nickel.[7]

Growing up in Monrovia in the summer was hot and dusty. We ran around barefooted. We played baseball, basketball – barefooted on asphalt. We put nails on the train tracks. I sword fought with Marty, [my wife] Rosalind's brother. We would ride our bikes to Monrovia Canyon and Azusa Canyon. On the way, we would raid the strawberry fields. In those days, our mother let us go anywhere we wanted. [My brother,] Jess would take me to the dump to get parts to make our bikes. All the kids would get-together and mess around… We made things by hand. We made our own kites. We'd swim in the canyon's streams. Lake Lulu was really a little swamp. We jumped in the water and came home with moss and dead frogs in our pockets (laughs). Sometimes, we'd get our feet cut from broken beer bottles.[8]

In Monrovia, there are no known Mexican *mutualistas* (mutual aid societies), provincial organizations, or clubs/gangs into the 1950s but "if someone was in trouble, the community would come together…There was a family where the father left and all the other neighbors just pitched in and helped out."[9]

And Monrovia had community leaders like Big Jim Espinosa, Julian Fisher, and Doña Lucinda García. Big Jim's daughter, Mary Lou, reflects:

A while ago, I went to a funeral and fell into conversation with a lady I met for the first time. She remembered my father! She used to live in Duarte and there was a flood there in the southern barrio when she was just a tiny girl. But she remembers that my dad got his truck and brought all the flood-affected residents back to Monrovia. He did that all day long. He took them to the homes of their family members and friends where they would have shelter. When he came home, he was so tired and wet. My mother started crying. My father said, "I couldn't come home and leave those people there." He was a special and caring man.[10]

Jim Espinosa with daughter Mary Lou and the Peterbilt truck in early1950s on S. Magnolia Avenue. Big Jim was a Teamster.

By the 1940s, Julian Fisher became the first and only African American reserve police officer in Monrovia. "El Pescador" knew the community and would often call Big Jim whenever there was a problem at the local watering hole after pay day or with a rambunctious youth.

[6] Cecilia Mejía Romero on 20 May 2013 in Monrovia.
[7] Lloyd García on 21 August 2012 in Rancho Cucamonga.
[8] Enrique (Henry) Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[9] Carlos Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.
[10] Mary Lou Espinosa Sandoval on 18 October 2011 in Azusa.

Growing up, sometimes it was kind of rough. We used to have race fights in school in the 1950s. We knew all the Blacks and they were like brothers. But the Whites were a little bit richer. It was interesting. We'd get in fights all the time... When we got in trouble, the police would say, "You guys go back to Almond." There was one Black policeman, Mr. Fisher. He was great. He would help us when we got in trouble. He would come talk to us all the time. He lived across the street from my aunt on Royal Oaks.[11]

The police officers would always cruise Almond Ave. We knew what time their shift began. They'd beat us. I was fortunate because I never got beaten but one of my friends got caught. Another couple of guys were beaten by the baton. They would never hit you on the face. Mr. Fisher was our advocate and he was a reserve officer. Let's say a bunch of Mexican teens were having a beer on Almond. When Mr. Fisher was done with his shift, he would drive by and say, "You boys better get in your yards. The other police officers will be on shift soon." Then the other police officers would drive by hoping to catch us. Julian Fisher was the first African American [male] to graduate from Monrovia High. He was a member of the Monrovian Merchants baseball team and later became an umpire every Sunday. He would help people; it didn't matter if you were Black or Mexican. He would help people clean or anything.[12]

In May 2011, the City of Monrovia named a park after Lucinda García, an important matriarch in the Monrovia community:

When [my grandparents] came to Monrovia, Lucinda García helped my grandmother rent a house next door on Almond… Later, my grandmother found a place on 424 East Maple. Lucinda helped them go to City Hall for the paper work because Lucinda could read and write English and Spanish. My mother, Jennie, spoke broken English. The house was in my Aunt Antonia's name as she was working and qualified for a loan.[13]

Nana [Lucinda García] spoke English and Spanish well. When people came from Mexico, Grandma would help people find homes. She would feed gypsies and hobos off the train tracks. Everybody knew she had an open house – just like her great grandfather, Ygnacio [Palomares], did in the olden days. He was the same way. He would feed people coming from Mexico and let them stay over.[14]

CULTURE AND BEING MEXICAN AMERICAN

There were more African Americans than Mexican Americans in the Almond Ave. environs. Mexican Americans were the statistical minority at the local Catholic parish, Immaculate Conception, and at Huntington Elementary School. As a result, Mexican American children spoke more English than their counterparts in Azusa or El Monte:

[Italian] Mrs. Biscotti had a store near Immaculate Conception and her son ran the gas station. She was very old but rode her bicycle everywhere. We bought soda for five cents with a two-cent bottle deposit. Gus, an Italian man, pushed a cart and sold ice cream. There was an ice man that came around and you could buy twenty-five pounds or fifty pounds of ice for your icebox. He was a Black man and he let us get chips of ice… There was a Helms Bakery man that came around. The vegetable man had an open truck and he was a Mexican from Azusa. There was a Jewish man who spoke some Spanish who came around with his son to sell clothes… Mom said he used to walk door to door with his suitcases of clothes, but he later came on a truck. The Watkins lady sold perfume and there *was the Fuller brush man. Of course, Papa Pete sold the best* raspados *or snowcones... There was a Chinese family with a store on Huntington Drive.*[15]

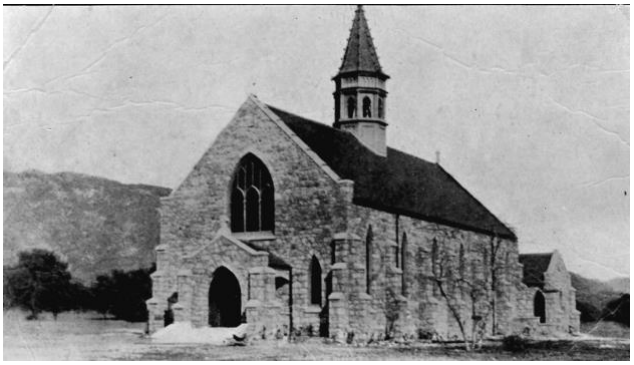
In Monrovia, there were more English-speaking Mexicans than in Duarte and El Monte… Maybe

[11] Carlos Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.
[12] Interview with Paul Louis Romero on 20 May 2013 in Upland.
[13] Enrique Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[14] Sylvia Robles Cardiel on 17 June 2012 in Duarte.
[15] Cecilia Mejía Romero on 20 May 2013 in Monrovia.

Monrovia's Mexican population was smaller and we mixed with Blacks more so we spoke more English. If you spoke Spanish at Huntington School, the teachers would smack you or reprimand you. At Immaculate Conception [school], there were very few Mexicans so you really couldn't speak Spanish. I spoke Spanish mostly with my grandfather, José Horta. He made us speak Spanish but everything else was English.[16]

Still, Mexican culture was prevalent:

When I was in Catholic school [at Immaculate Conception], I took some tacos one time for lunch. The other kids said, "Where did you get that?" They didn't even know what it was. My mom was a great Mexican cook. Then when my mother started working [cleaning house] for the ladies, she got more Americanized. And we had more money. She started sending me to school with sandwiches and stuff. But we ate tacos at home.[17]



Immaculate Conception of Monrovia.

On Sundays, we went to Immaculate Conception. I was in the Boy Scouts there for a while and I won a trip to Catalina for two weeks. I remember being on a Monrovia Day float. We were dressed up as friars for the Catholic Church float.[18]

There was a curandera *[folk healer], Doña Tomasita, in Duarte or Rocktown. When I was little, I always got sick so I saw her many times. She spoke English well and was probably my mother's age. She was a big lady. But we were rivals with the Mexicans in Duarte and Azusa. We got along with El Monte. We'd got to El Monte Legion Stadium for dancing. I just went and I didn't care who was playing. There was Johnny Otis and Joe Houston.*[19]

When we were real young, our parents would take us to jamaicas *in Chino or El Monte… It had stages with comedians, bands, mariachis, everything. We'd go there for a day. Our parents let us run wild… My mom took us to Mexican movies in Los Angeles, but we didn't like it. We'd tease my aunt, "[In the movies,] why do all these Mexican men get drunk and then sing to their girlfriends at the window?" (laughs)…My dad and others would go to Manuel's [where they had] a pool table and a handball court. There was a lot of drinking. It was on the south side of Almond. Upstairs, they would gamble and play poker. Manuel was Mexican. Every Friday night, it was there. I went there once with my dad. He went upstairs and I stayed downstairs and had a soda and played pool. By the time I was old enough to play cards, Manuel's was obsolete. Manuel raised fighting cocks too. But he got busted.*[20]

We often went to Hick's Camp in El Monte to visit my cousins. I thought it was so much fun that they had dirt streets. As teenagers, we went to their dances at nearby dance clubs. [My cousin] would come to our dances at the National Guard Armory, on the southeast corner of Monrovia Park. We had big bands and R & B Black artists like Etta James, Little Esther [Phillips], and Jay McNeely. We were raised on Black music in Monrovia; we never danced to Mexican music until much later. My cousin in El Monte listened to more Mexican music and spoke more Spanish.[21]

EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

In the early 1900s, Mexican Americans in Monrovia – men, women, and children - were mostly farm harvesters, sometimes following the crops to California's Central Valley. Citrus groves stretched from Pasadena eastward to the next county.

Grandpa had been a foreman of the orange pickers for C. O. Banks, a packing house in Monrovia. C. O. Banks gave the job to my 19-year old father, [Jimmy

[16] Paul Louis Romero on 20 May 2013 in Upland.
[17] Carlos Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.
[18] Reginald Quinteros on 4 June 2013 in El Monte.
[19] Carlos Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.
[20] Enrique Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[21] Rosalie Cardiel Garcia on 21 August 2012 in Rancho Cucamonga.

Espinosa, when Grandfather died]… The only jobs for Mexican [Americans] were the orange groves or strawberry picking. Orange groves were all over the foothills: Duarte, Azusa, Glendora – all the way to Ontario. When the orange season was over, my dad would seek other jobs and then take his orange pickers north to get other work. They went as far as San Jose or wherever there was work. He would take all the orange pickers in his truck, about ten people. He found jobs for his Mexican men who were mostly from the barrio of Monrovia… Dad started his own trucking business. He was intelligent and an extremely hardworking man. My dad's first truck was a Chevrolet and he would haul oranges, produce, and tomatoes back and forth from up north to Los Angeles… My dad ended up with a Peterbilt, the ultimate in trucks at that time. You can haul a lot more… Dad wasn't home a lot. He traveled to Arizona and elsewhere. Dad retired from driving at age 65 as that was the Teamsters' union rule. I still have Dad's Teamster pin. That will go to my son, David, when it is time. David wanted to be a truck driver. My father discouraged him and said, "That's a hard hard way to live, especially if you have children."[22]

As the Southern California economy diversified, many Monrovians found work in foundries. After World War II, jobs in construction and as gardeners became more accessible to Mexican Americans. There were a few entrepreneurs who served an ethnic niche.

My father also helped build the Santa Anita racetracks in 1934. He was in construction. He helped build the Duarte Dam… Grandpa Avalino cleaned for the Day and Night water heater company near Immaculate Conception Catholic Church… We used to have stickers from the Day and Night Company and we put it on our bed and everywhere… I picked blackberries, boysenberries, raspberries on Royal Oaks and Mountain. I worked with my cousin, Jimmy Boy. He would climb up the wooden ladder to get the navel oranges on the top. The smaller kids would pick the lower oranges. We had bags and small clippers in our pockets. We were called ratas *or small rats… My Aunt Ramona and my two sisters worked there too.*[23]

Bracamonte, McKinn, Rivera, Olivas, Valenzuela all worked in the foundries. Even some of Monrovia's African Americans worked at foundries and became friends with the Mexicans. The wages were a lot better than picking. But it was hard hard heavy work. They would help each other find positions. At one point, my dad went on a one-man strike. They were doing piecework and Dad wanted two cents more per mold. Dad was one of the faster workers but the owner denied him the little extra money. So Dad left. He went to the Burbank foundry and he got work immediately. On the second day, the Burbank owner asked Dad if he knew other workers. Dad pulled Prospero McKinn, one of the Olivas, one of the Fonsecas with him to better themselves... The wages were comparable to construction. It beats the wages from picking to death... Uncle Albert, Manuel Sombrano, and my dad started their own foundry, Imperial Cast Iron Foundry, right after the war in Southgate… At one point, Dad's business was the second largest foundry in Los Angeles.[24]

Monrovia's foundry on Railroad Avenue near California circa 1920s. Photo courtesy of Johnny Romero whose mother, Cruz at 15, is seated 2nd from right.

My father got a job at the Santa Anita racetracks walking the horses and working with the trainers. My dad would travel around the country with the race horses. As a very young man, he saw the United States and learned how to gamble with the jockeys and trainers. They played dice, cards, and all that. He knew that whole underworld and never became part of the working class like his brother. In 1936 or so, he was smoking marijuana, drinking, and gambling…. He was sent to San Quentin. He was in San Quentin when war broke out. There was a program for prisoners to join the service. He was in the war for the duration. He was sent to training in the Southwest desert and then got shipped to the

[22] Mary Lou Espinosa Sandoval on 18 October 2011 in Azusa.

[23] Victor Guardado on 30 March 2012 in Monrovia.

[24] Paul Louis Romero on 20 May 2013 in Upland.

Aleutian Islands where it was freezing. Then he island-hopped with the Army until the end of the war.[25]

My father, Jesse Bracamonte, was born in 1912 in Azusa, California. He lost his mother at an early age. He and his father traveled here and there, to Coachella, picking fruit… Dad played in semi-pro recreational baseball leagues. He played for the Monrovia Merchants. He played every Sunday… They went to play other local teams and he played against Jackie Robinson and Billy Kilmer – also born in Azusa - who later went on to the NFL. Barney Glenn was the Monrovia coach and he asked if I would sell soda at the ball games, so I got to meet Billy Kilmer too. It was fun… Dad did different jobs: picking fruit, digging ditches. Then Dad worked at Gregg foundry in El Monte. There were a lot of foundries during the war years; they even made iron cast toys. Dad retired from Gregg.[26]

Monrovia Merchants with Jesse Bracamonte in front left. 1948. Photo courtesy of Bracamonte Family.

Mexican Americans started work at a young age mostly picking crops. By sixteen or seventeen years of age, many left high school to work fulltime. By the 1950s, some found opportunity in more stable salaried positions in civil service or business.

When I was six or seven, my parents would take us to this ranch in West Covina on the corner of Merced and Azusa Avenues to pick walnuts. My sisters and brothers and I all worked… I remember it would be all of our vacation and then I would return to school a month and a half after it started. That was hard on me; I missed the beginning of school and I was always lost… When I was about thirteen, I would pick oranges. I would walk down to Huntington Drive and California to get picked up by the truck. I went with the neighborhood men. They would take us to the orchards in Covina, San Dimas, all over the place… I was making my own money. Sometimes, I would pay my mother to make me lunch. I was making forty or fifty dollars a month and I used most of it to buy my car. When I was about fourteen, I even went to Fresno to pick grapes. The fields were really my schooling; I really enjoyed it… I was always working. I didn't want to go to school because of the bullying there.[27]

I even went picking; it was like camping for me. When we were picking, it was with the same friends in Monrovia. I was seven or eight and I picked grapes and pears. After my dad got a job, we didn't go anymore. I only went for about two weeks at a time. The money we got from picking would be to buy our school clothes. We would also buy a big bag of beans and a can of flour that would last for the whole year. My dad was a construction worker. He did cement. He helped build the 210 freeway. He worked for the union in El Monte. Later, he was a foundry worker. Then he did some gardening in Monrovia after he retired… My mother cleaned houses in Monrovia and San Marino from the 1940s through the 1960s. My mother worked with her sister, Flora.[28]

Several women carried a double burden and worked outside the home to help support their families. There were limited job opportunities.

Mom worked for a period at Monrovia Laundry on Myrtle Avenue, between Walnut and Olive. It was on the west side. It was quite a big business, laundering mostly clothes. Mom's younger brother, Dave Eredia, used to be a boxer here in the Monrovia area; nobody could beat him, my father said. He was a handsome man. Uncle Dave taught Mom how to pitch and she pitched all through school at Huntington Elementary and at Duarte School... After she got married and had my oldest brother, she was

[25] James O'Balles on 30 May 2013 in Pasadena.
[26] Rosalind Bracamonte Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[27] Reginald Quinteros on 4 June 2013 in El Monte.
[28] Carlos Valenzuela on 16 June 2013 in Azusa.

still playing with these women's teams. Later, she suffered a lot from arthritis in her hands. She claimed the heat and steam at Monrovia Laundry made it worse.[29]

Monrovia Laundry on Myrtle, 1948. Photo courtesy of Johnny Romero who joked, "All the Mexican women work at the laundry one time or another, didn't they?"

Grandma was a homemaker and she took care of many grandkids. In the 1950s, she went to work making holsters for the Hopalong Cassidy factory. She would walk to a little factory between Walnut and Chestnut, between Mayflower and Alta Vista. My mom and aunt worked there too. There were many factories there.[30]

For about ten years, I worked at Neff Instruments which opened in 1956 in Monrovia. I was making PC boards – soldering, welding with a magnifying glass... [As a single parent,] I was working two jobs until 9 pm and it was so hard.[31]

WORLD WAR II

On 22 May 1943, the *Monrovia Daily News-Post* reported that the men and women from Monrovia in the service was "numbering nearly 1000". Their list included Frank Valenzuela of 224 W Chestnut; the Sánchez brothers - Danny, John, and Tony of 509 East Walnut; Charles Ochoa of 139 W Walnut; Frank Quinteras [sic] of 503 Date Avenue; Amado Ramírez of 918 S. Canyon; Edward Guardado of 616 E. Maple; Raymond Miranda of 1230 S. Sherman; William Morago of 212 W. Walnut; Fabian Gutiérrez of 523 E. Maple; Jesse Monreal of 1209 S. Sherman and Eugene Ortíz of 515 E. Cypress. George Aguayo, Raymond Cárdenas, and Edward Dennis Ochoa joined the list of World War II soldiers that lost their lives.

I even remember the air raid during World War II. My uncle went to the service but before that, he would wear a silver hat and come around to make us pull our shades down. They covered some of the lights with dark cloth. I remember one time a Japanese plane flew over; they said it was a Japanese plane. My Uncle Jesse and Uncle Alex were in the Army as well as my cousin Arnold and his brother.[32]

My three older brothers served in World War II… My family bought a house in the 1940s in Monrovia because that's where they could afford. They probably got an allotment because my brothers were in the military.[33]

The Japanese American neighbors were interned during World War II, earning much sympathy from their Mexican American neighbors:

Our house was surrounded by Japanese strawberry fields that ran north from Huntington Drive. The Uyeda family also planted watermelon and cantaloupes. They used to have a little house and a fruit stand facing Huntington Drive. When the war started, they were sent to Manzanar concentration camp. I didn't quite understand. I remember thinking, "I'm so glad Mexico didn't get into a war with the United States because they would have then sent us back to Mexico." My parents thought it was just terrible, my dad was angry. They didn't approve of the evacuation of our Japanese neighbors. My father said, "What do they have to do with the war? They live over here." The Japanese neighbors left their homes and lost everything. They were very very nice.[34]

Fruit and vegetable picking became the domain of *braceros*, temporary workers from Mexico between 1942 to1964.

Tío Ysabel worked at Monrovia Nursery. Tía Antonia retired from Monrovia Nursery too. She was a propagator and pruner… She was the longest Monrovia Nursery employee; she knew Harry E. Rosedale. Uncle Ysabel was a foreman there. He

[29] Leonard Romo on 20 December 2012 in Arcadia.
[30] Roberta Valenzuela Gasper on 25 September 2011 in Monrovia.
[31] Mary Ruth (Cuca) Zermeno Mack on 23 March 2012 in Monrovia.
[32] Sylvia Robles Cardiel on 17 June 2012 in Duarte.
[33] Christina Bocanegra Valenzuela on 16 April 2013 in Azusa.
[34] Mary Lou Espinosa Sandoval on 18 October 2011 in Azusa.

would run the crews from Mexico. There would be about fifteen or eighteen men in a bus, in short pants and huarache *sandals. They would work sun up to sun down canning, putting small plants into larger containers. Uncle would walk around, count the containers, load them up in the truck, and take them out. This was in the 1940s and 1950s. These were braceros and they lived in Quonset huts, long aluminum buildings in Irwindale. You think it was hot in there, it was. They would be fed sandwiches but the Mexicans weren't used to sandwiches. I felt sorry for them. Those poor guys were paid very little. They would stay for about a month and then they would be sent back and another group would come. They were paid about 5 cents per can. The workers didn't want to stop for lunch because it was piecework.*[35]

DE FACTO SEGREGATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

About ten percent of Monrovia was African American and "White trade only" signs were prevalent into the 1930s. Built in 1925, the Plunge pool allowed Mexican and African Americans to swim only on Mondays. The Monrovia Latin American Club protested the segregation at the pool and at the local theaters in August of 1938.[36] After 1943, City Council allowed "colored and Mexican residents" to also use the pool on Thursdays. This public pool was finally desegregated in 1949.

When I in Monroe School, I had an Anglo girlfriend who lived near Walnut Avenue. She invited me to go to the Monrovia pool with her. My mom let me go so I must have been in the fourth or fifth grade. But when we got there, the pool manager told me I couldn't enter because I was Mexican. I started crying. That made such an impact on me. My girlfriend was real mad at the pool man. Do you know what my parents did? They both went to a City Council meeting to object to that segregation. I was so proud of mom.[37]

Felix J. Gutiérrez was part of the Monrovia Latin American Club. In 1905, his father, Francisco J., came to Monrovia and worked for B. R. Davisson Company as a cement foreman. By 1925, Francisco opened his own cement business. In fact, Francisco helped build the Monrovia Plunge. As Felix would only be able to swim one day a week at the pool that his father built, Francisco actually allowed Felix and his friends to baptize the pool with their frolics before opening day.

Felix was of two Mexicans to graduate from Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte (MAD) High School in 1937. He lettered in track and was an artist for the school's *Wildcat* newspaper. Upon transferring to Pasadena Junior College, Felix started his own newspaper, *Mexican Voice,* from his home at 323 E. Lemon. Felix was a pioneering journalist documenting the Mexican American movement throughout the Southwest. In a blistering editorial with political cartoons, *Mexican Voice* questioned why Mexican volunteers were considered "White" by the World War II draft board, but "colored" by the Monrovia Plunge, school districts, and neighbors. Felix also opined in the *Mexican Voice* how American segregation was similar to Hitler's racism.

The Mexican Americans fought for their civil rights alongside their African American neighbors:

[My grandfather,] Louis García helped build the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Monrovia. The congregation was mostly Irish and Italians and they wanted the Mexicans to sit in the back. Both my grandparents sat in the middle of the church. Louis said, "I helped build this church and no one is going to move me." He spoke up for all the Mexicans.[38]

For several days in the summer of 1943, White sailors were allowed to arbitrarily chase and

[35] Enrique Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[36] "Ask Freedom to Use Plunge During Week." *Monrovia Daily News-Post*, 16 August 1938, 1.
[37] Mary Lou Espinosa Sandoval on 18 October 2011 in Azusa.
[38] Sylvia Robles Cardiel on 17 June 2012 in Duarte.

beat Mexican Americans, especially those dressed in zoot suits, also known as *pachucos*. Arcadia's Santa Anita racetracks served as an Army ordnance base. The *Monrovia Daily News-Post* on 9 June 1943 reported:

Scores of soldiers were in town last night looking for zoot suiters, and were seen touring favorite haunts. However, the zoot suiters were conspicuous by their absence for the most part last night. However, it was reported that soldiers found one Mexican near the Clifton school and removed his zoot suit.

Notice was served on zoot suiters yesterday that Monrovia will not tolerate any of the hoodlum tactics that have been rampant in the county for the last week. In police court yesterday Judge Ranney C. Draper meted out stiff sentences to two local Mexicans charged with disturbing the peace as a result of a disturbance with a Santa Anita soldier and his wife at the corner of Myrtle and Olive avenues Monday night.

These two local youth were sentenced to six months in county jail and $500 fine. Later, one joined the military service.

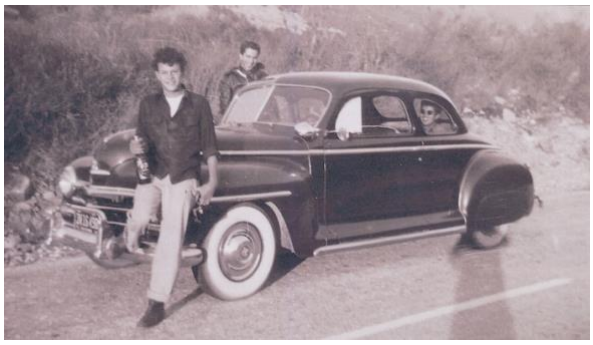
In 1947, there was a reported case of police brutality against James O'Balles and Gilbert Leno Kiihoa. *Monrovia News-Post* on 16 December 1948 reported O'Balles and Kiihoa filed two separate civil suits against the Monrovia police for "allegedly beating three prisoners on 18 December 1947 in the city jail." The suit was for a total of $75,000 in damages. The civil suit named three police officers, the police chief, three councilmen, and the mayor. On 11 May 1949, Frank L. Scott stepped down as police chief after 23 years of service.

Dad and this guy, Gilbert Kiihoa, got beaten up really bad by the Monrovia police. People said Gilbert was Black but Gilbert said he was Hawaiian. Gilbert and Dad were real good friends. They took pictures of their injuries. Dad got a lawyer and sued the City of Monrovia. It went to the Grand Jury that met at the Library Park. And the police chief was fired. My father won.[39]

In the 1950s, more Monrovians fought against discrimination:

My two older brothers and I would go to bars on Olive. There were three: Huey's, B and A Shack, and Patty's Patio – right across from the Red Car stop. B and A Shack didn't serve Mexicans but we didn't want to be denied. We wanted to go in there and get a drink. They wouldn't seat us. It took a while to be able to go in there. If there was a problem, you would have to take care of it. One time, I went to a Black bar on Huntington Drive between Shamrock and California. As soon as I went in, they started giving me a bad time. They said, "What are you doing here?" But two of my Black friends were there and they vouched for me. It was just like the White bar in that I didn't belong. It built a lot of anger in me.[40]

[My cousins] Johnny or Jako and Benny lived at 424 Maple too. In the 1950s, Johnny wanted everyone to vote. He convinced my mother, my Uncle Ysabel, and other members of the family to register to vote. He even helped five or six people mark their ballots.[41]



Joe Leon, Pete Moreno and Arnold Garcia in the foothills.

Racial covenants restricted housing choices:

My husband and I were looking for a home in Monrovia around 1954-55. The real estate agent took us to a place on Pilgrim Road, near Duarte Road. She went in first to announce our arrival. But the owner said that she was very sorry, but that her neighbors would not want Mexican people living in the area… I was heartbroken. I couldn't believe it. We couldn't even see the house because we were of Mexican descent.[42]

[39] James O'Balles on 30 May 2013 in Pasadena.
[40] Reginald Quinteros on 4 June 2013 in El Monte.
[41] Enrique Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[42] Mary Lou Sandoval on 18 October 2011 in Azusa.

Growing up, I was happy with my neighbors and my community. But the town was prejudiced. I always fought for myself... One time, I went to get a haircut at a barbershop on Olive, right off of Myrtle. They wouldn't give me one. At the Lyric Theater, you had to sit on one side. I wasn't happy with the way things were. I love Monrovia. In fact, I wish I had bought a house there. But I wanted to buy a house north of Foothill. I came to El Monte because it was easier for me here while I was raising my kids. I wanted to get out of Monrovia.[43]

1940 kindergarten class at Huntington Elementary. Photo courtesy of Joe Garcia.

By the 1920s, Monrovia restricted most African American and Mexican American children to Huntington Elementary. In 1964, a study by the League of Women Voters found "no [W]hite children at Huntington School, and no [B]lack children at the three other district elementary school."[44] In 1934, a group of African American parents led by Milton Smith refused to continue sending their children to Huntington School. The school was already "sagging" by the 1920s and the 1933 Long Beach earthquake did serious damage to the brick building. Rather than integrate the school system after the lawsuit, Monrovia rebuilt Huntington School with Public Works Administration funds in 1937. It remained racially segregated until 1970 after race riots at Monrovia High.

Huntington was pretty rough. I got paddled by the principal. A Black boy and I were horsing around and the principal took us to his office and told us both to bend over… On the very first day of school, you knew you were segregated. There were no Whites at Huntington. You are a human person and you know that you are denied... The Whites had more chances in life. When I went to Clifton [Junior High], I was speaking Spanish with one of my friends. The teacher said, "Come on with me, I'm going to wash your mouth out with soap." He took me to the gym. I said, "You are not going to do that to me." And he backed off. There was a White girl at Clifton that lived north of Olive, about three blocks from school. I started walking her home. Her brothers were angry; that was a no-no. That stopped. That kind of stuff just ate me up. I saw another boy get thrown against the wall by a teacher. When you are not treated with respect, it builds anger.[45]

Irene Armas circa 1950s at Monrovia-Arcadia-Duarte High School. Photo courtesy of Cuca Mack.

The school was segregated too but we just accepted that. At Clifton, it was the first time I went to school with White persons. I was under the impression that White people were smarter than everyone else. When we went to Clifton, we talked my mother into buying white bread for sandwiches; we didn't want burritos. We didn't want to look out of place. After a

[43] Reginald Quinteros on 4 June 2013 in El Monte.
[44] Mary Ellen Romney MacArthur. "De Facto Segregation in Monrovia, California: Almera A. Romney and Huntington Elementary School." Dissertation, University of Oregon, August 1993, 241.
[45] Reginald Quinteros on 4 June 2013 in El Monte.

year or so, I realized White people weren't smarter. You then realize you can do anything you want.[46]

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE IN MONROVIA

One thing is that I refused to send my kids to Huntington School [in the early 1960s].We lived five doors from Huntington School on Canyon Boulevard but I sent my kids across town to Monroe School. I wanted them to have the same break as other kids…

We bought our home north of Foothill in 1974, after the desegregation. We still live here. When we moved [here,] our neighbor was a Chinese American young couple that were 4th or 5th generation American… It was hard to buy homes outside of the [Almond community] even in the 1960s. Some of the Mexicans moved to Azusa, Baldwin Park because Monrovia was slower to change. Prejudice was part of everyday life; I didn't pay much attention to it. What else could you do?

When we were growing up, we saw a lot of racism. Once when I was a little girl, there was a drug store on Myrtle and Olive, next to the street cars. It had a soda fountain and I wanted a soda or something. I remember sitting on the stools waiting and waiting and waiting for the soda jerk to take my order. The man was not busy; he was talking to another customer. The store was practically empty but he was ignoring me. I think I finally just left. The swimming pool and schools were segregated then. But that's all water under the bridge.

There are a lot of newer Mexicans in Monrovia today. In the 1980s, I worked at Safariland near the Live Oaks cemetery. They made leather holsters. Most of the workers were from Mexico that did the sewing and leather work… It was hard fitting in. Being American of Mexican descent was like being between a rock and a hard place. I didn't belong with the Mexicans from Mexico but I didn't belong with the Caucasians from Monrovia either. I was like a breed of my own. ..

When I was at Monrovia High, it was mostly White. Now I see the students coming out of Monrovia High today, most of them are Mexican…

I've lived in Monrovia all my life. My kids were born and raised here. I already bought my burial plot in Monrovia near my grandparents and other relatives... I like the parades and the stores… I must like Monrovia, I'm still here (laughs).[47]

Monrovia Latino Heritage Society

The Monrovia Latino Heritage Society was established in 2010 with a mission to "archive and showcase the extensive history of Latinos within the Monrovia community." This nonprofit organization has held photo exhibits at the Monrovia Historical Museum and at PCC's Shatford Library. They also helped organize the first Monrovia Cinco de Mayo street fair in 2011 and sponsored several fundraising dances. The Society is proud to sponsor scholarships to encourage Monrovia youth to pursue higher education. MLHS has a Facebook page.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

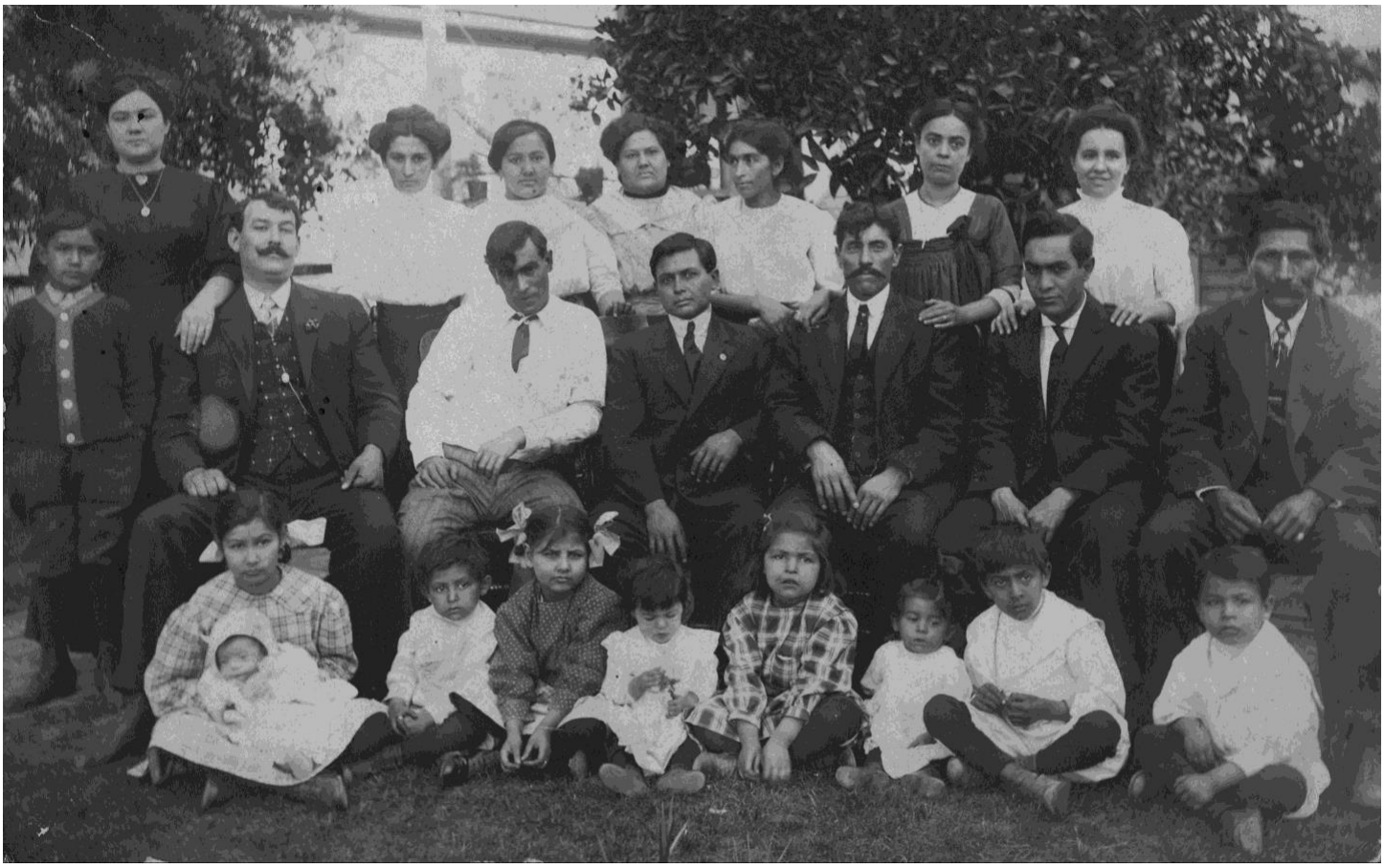
Front cover: Left is Vittoriano Guardado and family, who came from Zacatecas before 1910 (photo courtesy of grandson Victor Guardado); Right are Pilo Olivas, George Flores, and Frank Valenzuela in 1943 (photo courtesy of Frank Valenzuela); On the bottom is the Espinosa Club Baseball Team and Johnny Luna Band in 1934 (photo courtesy of Victor Guardado).

Inside back cover: Top: Anthony Cardiel and Ralph Hernandez in the back and Alex Hernandez and åCharles Cardiel in the front in the 1940s (courtesy of Sylvia Cardiel); Bottom left: Mary, Angelina and Ruth Romero in 1920s in front of Chestnut's freight line and Richfield gas tanks (courtesy of Johnny Romero); Bottom right: Maria "Willie" Horta on Almond Ave circa 1940s (photo courtesy of grandson Louie Romero).

Back cover: In top photo circa 1920s, Lucinda Valentine Garcia (1890-1958) is 3rd from right in back row and her husband, Louis Garcia (1880-1956) is 4th from right in second row. Lucinda is a descendant of

[46] Enrique Olivas on 21 July 2012 in Baldwin Park.
[47] Cecilia Mejía Romero on 20 May 2013 in Monrovia.

the Palomares family (photo courtesy of Clara Bracmonte); Bottom is Monrovia's citrus packing house on Railroad Avenue – north of the Santa Fe lines - between California and Myrtle in the 1920s (courtesy of Johnny Romero).

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