

Interview with Vera Aguilar Soto
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SL: Where were you born and how did you get to Carlsbad?

Soto: I was born in (not clear). When I was a baby we lived in Colorado, then moved to Los Angeles, then to Santa Ana and from there we moved to Carlsbad in 1921 and have been here ever since. I was the youngest of six children.

SG: Why Carlsbad?

Soto: We were looking for a better life in the United States. We used to go to Santa Ana where there was lots of seasonal work, picking string beans. When we came to Carlsbad there were only 5 houses. We lived in a two story, four bedroom house and that's where I was raised.

SL: Did others in your family work besides your father?

Soto: Yes, my oldest brothers, on the farm. My father's name was Fidel and he was a farmer.

SG: What was a typical day like for the women?

Soto: Washing, cleaning house, making tortillas, what you have to do.

SG: Did you socialize with other women?

Soto: Oh yes, everybody knew each other

SG: Who were the other families?

Soto: Acuna, Ramierez, Cantabrana.

SG: Did the children play together?

Soto: Not exactly, because the houses were far apart. But we would get together for birthdays and holidays

SG: How did you celebrate the holidays?

Soto: By making a lot of food, a little music and the children would play around outside. That was all.

SL: Did you go to Saint Patrick's Church?

Soto: No.

SG: What church were you raised in?

Soto: The Protestant. The church across the street (from our house), the Wesleyan Missionary Church. First Mr. Spencer was the minister and then Mr. Henley.

SG: Do you know why your family chose to go to this church rather than the Catholic Church?

Soto: We started going to the Protestant in Los Angeles and then in Santa Ana. I really don't know why, but that was the religion I was raised in.

SL: Was there a school?

Soto: Yes, Pine School, the elementary school. We all went there. It was a small school down where the Senior Center is now. Mrs. Crane was the one who took over everything and was later the second or eighth grade teacher.

SG: Did all Carlsbad students go to that school?

Soto. Yes, there weren't that many (children).

SG: Did; they make you speak English?

Soto: Oh yes, no Spanish at all, not around school grounds. If you said something in Spanish they'd get after you. At home we could do it but not at school.

SG: Did your parents learn English?

Soto: Yes they did, maybe they didn't speak it real correct but they understood most of it.

SG: Where there any problems between Mexicans and Anglos?

Soto: No, it was a very peaceful time

SL: What subjects did you study in school?

Soto: Spelling, arithmetic, geography. It was not like it is now. Now they have all kinds of projects.

SG: Did you ever have any expectations of going to college?

Soto: At that time, no. You would graduate and either work hard in the fields or do something else. My brother did graduate High School and he didn't have any college but he started his business (after High School)

SG: Which brother?

Soto: Peter Aguilar

SG: I understand he owned quite a bit of property in Carlsbad.

Soto: Yes over where (Pea Soup) Anderson's is now he owned all that land. They used to grow string beans there. And over where the freeway is now, that was where one of his houses was. He owned some here and in Palm Springs.

SG: Do you remember the Avocado Days?

Soto: They'd make avocado ice cream, it was delicious. Everyone was served half a sandwich and a bar of ice cream, free! They would sell trees and all kinds of things. Booths were all over. In the afternoon they would have a ball game. You know where MacDonald's Pharmacy is now? That was a ball field. Mrs. Ortega had two sons playing and boy, did she yell for her sons! People came from all over to Avocado Days.

SG: Where they're other festivals?

Soto: When I was six or seven on a Sunday the Mexican people would have horse races, right here on Roosevelt Street from this corner up to Laguna Street. Two horses raced at a time.

SG: Did they bet on the races?

Soto: Oh yes, Of course they were not big bets. I don't think they bet that much.

SG: Were these farm horses?

Soto: No they were trained racehorses. It was a lot of fun watching them.

SG: What did your family do for Christmas?

Soto: Well my family came down from Los Angeles. Sometimes they had to sleep on the floor because they were so many. Especially the Fourth of July they came too. There was a little parade in Oceanside. Leo Carrillo would make an effort to come every year. He'd walk all the length of the parade shaking hands. He was very nice to people. I remember him very clearly. He bought many acres west of San Marcos, built a nice place. Actors and actresses used to come down all the time, spend the weekend.

SG: Do you remember when they had flooded streets in Carlsbad when it rained?

Soto: You know, way back, maybe 40, 50 years back the rain would start in late October. From that day on it would rain on and off. Then in January and February it would rain a

whole week, day and night, steady. It used to get so flooded. Those who had cars were in trouble, but there weren't that many cars.

SG: You lived on a farm?

Soto: We had all kinds of animals, goats, dogs, horses, cows, everything.

SG: How did you get water for your farm?

Soto: When we got here there was no water, Dad had to dig a well. It had a pump and we got our water out of that pump.

SG: Any unusual flavor to it?

No, it was good, very good.

SG: Have you heard the stories about the mineral water in Carlsbad?

Soto: Yes, over on Carlsbad Boulevard. They used to come from different places for that mineral water.

SL: Did you taste it?

Soto: Oh yes, it tasted a little salty. It's incredible that we could live on what little we had. That's the reason my folks had all kinds of animals so we could eat and milk those animals. And then we needed the horses to work in the fields and to ride around on.

SL: Was it hard to live in Carlsbad during the depression?

Soto: Very hard, very hard. Especially the families where they had eight or ten. They would go up north where they could pick grapes and things like that. It got so bad there was no work. My father took my husband and my two bothers and himself up north.

SG: How did you get by during that time?

Soto: My mother was supporting my two children and me and I was pregnant with the third. Mr. Kentner from the Twin Inns Restaurant saw me and asked where Victor was. I told him he had to go up north. Mr. Kentner was a very nice man, he said, "This is no time for him to be gone. You tell him to get right back here and I've got a job for him". I wrote my husband a letter and he came back and that's where he worked till the depression was over. Those years were bad, for everybody, not just us.

SG: Did you ever work yourself?

Soto: I didn't work until my older ones could help me take care of the younger ones. Before that I didn't work at all.

SL: Where did you meet your husband?

Sote: Here in Carlsbad, my father knew his father so that's how we met and of course we met in the school too.

SL: Did you know him a long time before you got married?

Soto: Not too long, we got married right away. But I got married too young.

SG: Did people lose their property here in Carlsbad because of the depression?

Soto: Well some did. Here in the Barrio there was a man named ^{La Betta} (Lobeca?) that had lots and houses to sell and my father bought a couple of houses. I guess that's why they sold (because of the depression).

SG: When the bank closed were people upset?

Soto: Yes (laughs) the one who had money was me, you know why? At school they taught us to save our money. They would take it and put it in the bank for us. I didn't have much, maybe a couple dollars. They wanted us to learn to save. My father didn't have money in the bank at that time. Some people didn't believe in putting money in the bank, they just hid it.

SG: Do you remember the Villasenors?

Soto: He was a big business man, sold liquor, that's how he started.

SL: Was there a central meeting place in the barrio?

Soto: Yes, a restaurant on State Street. There were pool tables and beer was sold.

SL: Where did you meet your friends?

Soto: Mother never let me go anyplace, she was very strict. But my friends could come to my house. We met mostly at school.

SG: What did you do for fun?

Soto: My mother would take the family down to the beach. We would bring food, especially on a holiday.

SG: What can you tell about Carlsbad's incorporation?

Soto: I don't get involved in things like that and my folks didn't either.

SG: Did you ever go on a grunion run?

Soto: During a certain time of the month the grunion would come up on the beach. People would bring food and light bonfires. Our family went sometimes.

SG: Who made the decisions in your family?

Soto: My father.

SG: After you were married who made the decisions?

Soto: I would think it was me. My husband would always say to the children, "If your mother says it's okay, then you can do it".

SG: How many children do you have?

Soto: Six. Danny, Elizabeth, Esper (AKA Anita), Vera, Victor and Tom Ray the baby. I was very strict with my girls. I was raised that way but I think I went a little overboard.

SG: Did you encourage your girls to get an education?

Soto: Not too much because we couldn't afford it.

SG: Did they work?

Soto: They helped me around the house and when I started working both of my older daughters started working in the fields too.

SG: Where did you work?

Soto: I started working for Frank Frazee in the gladiola fields. My husband Victor was a boss there but most men were away during World War II. Frank Frazee wanted me to be in charge of 50/60 women. During the war a certain amount of acres had to be planted in food so he planted limas. His son Ed Frazee came in a big truck to the barrio to pick up the women every day. We were out in the fields near the ocean and one day a big ship was offshore honking and honking and shooting off firecrackers. Finally someone said, "The war is over!!" We were so happy we started banging on pans. A lot of the women had men in the war. After the war he (Frazee) laid off all those women. But I continued to work in his big barn where he had 20 women cleaning the gladiola bulbs and sorting them off a belt that went by.

SL: When the men came back from the war did they go to college or back to their lives?

Soto: They went back. Things weren't any different. There weren't many businesses that they could do.

SG: Did they use the GI Bill for housing?

Soto: No I don't know of any.

SL: Did you encourage your daughters not to get married as young as you were?

Soto: Yes I did, very, very much.

SG: How old were you when you married?

Soto: (Laughs) That I won't say, but I was too young. But of course I have a beautiful family and I'm not sorry about that.

SG: What would you say is the biggest change you see in Carlsbad?

Soto: It seems to be getting bigger and bigger every year. It was very different in those days. To start with the climate was beautiful, it was very peaceful, everybody was nice to each other. Lots of people that just came to eat at Twin Inns looked around and they liked it so they moved in.

SG: Can you tell me about the movie stars that came here?

Soto: I cant tell you about that but I did know that Leo Carrillo ha a lot of them coming down to his place.

SL: Do you remember when there were troops stationed on Chestnut Street during World War II?

Soto: I remember that the army used to practice up and down the ocean with big canons. There were many soldiers. It was something to go and look at, but it was so loud! The ground would shake.

SL: When the Korean War was over did they use the GI Bill?

Soto: My son-in-law was in the Korean War. My son Tommy Soto went overseas for three years in Vietnam. I was a wreck the whole time. Everyone was so afraid of losing a son, but they had to go. God brought him home safe but he was skin and bones. My girls made all the kinds of food he wanted. He gained the weight back.

SL: Do you think your son got the same respect as soldiers in other wars?

Soto: They were treated with respect. They were in a bad, bad place, very dangerous. He was trained in Texas. He used to write me often, said not to worry. He was driving a truck, mostly at night. When he told me that I knew he was going overseas. He sent me every penny he made and I put it in the bank so when he came back he had a little money.

SG: What kept the barrio together?

Soto: I think it was because it was a small town and everybody knew each other. They didn't have much to do. Sure, there was some drinking but they didn't have the violence like they do now. Maybe they did fight some but they did it with their fists, not guns and knives like they do now. Mostly on the weekends you would hear them around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning with their guitars, singing, but that was nice. We didn't have a

policeman here. If there was a fistfight a policeman from Oceanside would come here and settle them down.

SG: Do you have grandchildren?

Soto: I have 19 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren.

SG: And your husband?

Soto: Victor Soto passed away in October 1985

SG: So you were together a long time.

Soto: Well no, we were divorced before that. But we stayed friends to the last day. We were never enemies.

SL: When you were having your children was there a hospital built yet?

Soto: I had four of them at home and the last two in Oceanside Hospital. *Gene* Gr. Gibbs was the only doctor here and he took care of me until he retired. I loved him like a father, not like a doctor. He took good care of me and my children. Then I went to Dr. Fairchild and then to Dr. Kelly from Oceanside.

SG: Did the doctor come to your home?

Soto: Yes, Doctor Kelly. She was a beautiful woman, and she always dressed so beautifully. By the time I had Vera, my youngest daughter, she got there after the baby was born, but the nurse was there.

SG: I want to thank you very much for this interview.

Soto: You're very, very welcome.