

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center  
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An interview with Brother Martin Gonzales  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey in Lafayette, Oregon  
November 21, 2011

MIKE ZAMBRANO: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is the November the 21st, 2011. I'm interviewing Brother Martin Gonzales. This interview is taking place, well, I'm in Round Rock, Texas and Brother Martin is in Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey in Lafayette, Oregon. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Alright! First question we always start off with is where and when were you born?

MARTIN GONZALES: I was born February 22, 1925 in La Mesa, California. We lived in a railroad house there. My dad was a railroad worker and so I was born, we had three little rooms and I was born in one of those little rooms. That's it.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Wow. Did you have brothers or sister?

MARTIN GONZALES: I had two brothers and I didn't realize they were half-brothers 'till we got our draft cards [laughs]!

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, really?

MARTIN GONZALES: They were my mother's, she was married, she had a first marriage and all those years, for 18 years I never knew they were half-brothers 'till we got our draft cards. And I was the first one because I turned 18 on February 22, of '43 and I got the card and my name

was “Augustin Gonzales” and I took the name of “Martin” when I entered the Monastery because, I don’t know, St. Martin de Porres is very attractive. He’s half black and half Latino and we lived in a black neighborhood for a while, so I served in the church with the black Church of San Diego plus Our Lady of Guadalupe, so there was kind of an attraction. So I took the name of Martin de Porres when I entered the Monastery. But anyway, when I got drafted, I got the draft card of Augustin Gonzales and then when my brother, Manuel, who was born in 1917, he got his card and it was “Manuel Barren Gonzales”. And then my oldest brother’s born in 1912. He was “Joe H. Barren Gonzales” and I says, “Where does Barren come from?” [laughs]. And that was their dad. Actually, my father met my mother, I don’t know, in the 20s I guess. And she was a single mother with two kids. And from then on, we just lived together as a family and never realized they were half-brothers to us. I was 18 years old! [laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Wow. So was it just you and the two brothers?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yes. And we lived, the closest I can remember, my oldest brother, Joe, left the house, must have been when I was five, been about five. And he got married real young. So it was at La Mesa, it was just my brother, Manuel and I, and my mom and dad. And we lived in three little rooms. If you ever see a railroad house, they’re pretty small. But that wasn’t unusual at that time. The 30s, which was the time of The Depression, you know? You were lucky to have a job by then, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Did he have that job throughout the entire Depression?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, you know, he was, actually he met my mother when he was about 40. And I think my mom was, she's about 10 years younger I guess. Or something like that. But my dad was from Texas and [laughs] I guess he traveled a lot before he got to San Diego. 'Cause he would have stories about being in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, and then he finally settled down when he came to San Diego. And he claims he didn't know how to read or write but he knew how to sign his checks. And he was a Track Walker, so they had a lot of respect for him wherever he worked. He worked with regular crewmen. Most of the time he was by himself, checking the tracks. And if you know about railroads, they have these little cars you moved by hand. He used to move 'em and go around checking the track and that's what his job was, a Track Walker. And so, that was all the time 'till he retired.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really? Did he, so, he worked alone most of the time but you said he had the respect of others? Were there a lot of Latinos or, what was the predominant ethnicity in that kind of business?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well most of the workers in the railroad were Mexican workers. They usually had an American boss. And up 'till the time that, all the time, well, I was born in '25 and when I come to San Diego, when I got in the Army it was '43, and all those years most of the, the foreman's are always American. And then my dad, like I tell you, wasn't a foreman, he was a track walker, kind of a little higher than a regular laborer, got the same wages, but you had to have someone that was really dependable and he a work ethic I wish I had. You know, he'd go

to work a half hour early, he'd always kept his tools, whatever he had in order. Because that was his trade. He always had a good Hamilton watch because he always had to track of the trains when! The schedules, so they don't catch him on the road. So he was that kind of personality. He was really, and my brothers were the same way. You know, they had a work ethic that they appreciated being able to work. You know, if they dug a ditch, they'd dig it like they were artists, you know? They didn't do anything half-assed, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: They took a lot of pride in their work?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, and that's they way, and I, didn't, don't think I was – I got working and I punched my clock and I would do my job, but I didn't have that, you know? I kind of envied him because I wish I had it, you know? Except when I work in the kitchen on Wednesdays her. I don't want nobody around in the kitchen and I enjoy that job, you know?  
[laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Let's see. What kind of things would your family do together? Were there any traditions that you would share? Like, I don't know, annual basis or anything?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well you know, we lived in La Mesa, and that was about, at that time, well that was probably San Diego, but at that time it was about, oh, 16 miles or 18 miles from San Diego. And we'd drive in to San Diego. My dad and mother had a car, a Dodge, and my brother Manuel would drive it, and we'd drive in to - they were very sociable in the sense that they had

friends and they would come in to visit family and, maybe once a week or every other week. And they would come to drive into San Diego to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, 'cause that was the national church. So we did that together, you know? To come to mass at least twice a month. And we didn't, well, for example, we were kinda poor in a sense. Then they had the world's fair in San Diego, about that time, and we never could afford it. We just didn't go because we didn't have the money. We didn't think bad about it. We just didn't. That's the way it was. And then, like, we'd go out to one of the beaches with the ocean. A Pacific beach I guess. Maybe a couple times a year, as an outing. And then one of the things that happened, you know, we lived in the railroad house and there's no telephone. So if anybody came it was a surprise visit. And in my home, all we had were the three rooms. But in the kitchen, if they saw a car comin', said "oh, here come this, that, and the other one." Well they'd get cooking something and they would have, my dad would pull out a bottle of wine and they guys would be out back there sharing their old stories and the women would be cooking. There was a real feeling of family that you don't sometimes experience today! You know, like I told you, we didn't have no telephones! So anybody showed up, it was a surprise visit or you might hear someone mention that someone might be comin' around, so on and so forth, at a certain time. And so, and we didn't get upset because they come. Nowadays if they didn't tell you ahead of time you'd say, hey, how come you didn't tell me? [laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, it's pretty different today.

MARTIN GONZALES: It's a different world, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, you're right. Did you have any particular places that were your favorite place to be when you were a kid?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well, you know, we were right next to the edge of the city, and so you know, there was just hills. There was a creek, we'd go down to the creek. The other thing we did, my brother Manuel, [indiscernible] and so one other thing, we used to eat a lot of wild rabbits. You know? So we'd go hunting and I would, I was small, I would go with 'em, just to carry their rabbits. And that was part of our food once in a while. And so, kind of being out in the country and playing cowboys or something like that, we were kinda outdoors. And something like that sticks to me. Like we're out here in the country. Not at home. It's beautiful out here. The fall and everything else. It was a long time ago but it speaks to you about God's presence, you know? It's exciting. A lot of people don't like it. I go to town and I'm glad to get out of it. That's kind of my background. Almost like living out in the farm. And you know, we live today, where we lived then, now it's just solid houses, you know? I went back just last February. I told my nephew, "I want to go back where I, the old railroad house." Well, the tracks are still there because they use it for one of these trolleys. But right there where our house was is an exit to the freeway! Just solid houses down there, you know, it just doesn't – I'll tell you it's quite an experience to go down there. Where we had hills and everything else. We just would go walking and hiking and all that. Now it's just solid houses. It's awful! [Laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, we were just back in my wife's hometown yesterday, and she was just noticing some of the changes that the town had gone through too. Oh, I meant to ask you, I assume that your mother stayed at home?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yes, she was a homemaker. Total homemaker. And you know, and my dad, during The Depression, like sometimes it got so bad he just worked three days a week. The other thing used to happen. The hobos would just come by. For some reason they all stopped at our house. And there was never Mexican hobo. They were always either white or black.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: [Laughs] Really?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah! No Mexican, Mexican would be workin'! And those farms around the area, they were all Japanese! And so I grew up, kind of like here we are, I thought the only farmers in the world were Japanese! [Laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: It sounds like you lived in a fairly diverse world there.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. And so the Mexican guys would be working for the Japanese farmers. But, there in La Mesa, there were only two Mexican families or three in the grammar school. So I had the experience, you know, of kinda, kinda being a little different, you know?



MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, I understand. Growing up in San Francisco, you know, I understand. You know, having a lot of other nationalities around.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, and there was no blacks. The high school, Grossmont, where my brother went to high school, they had one guy named Tucker. And old Tucker did everything. He played football and everything else. And so, later on when we moved to San Diego, when they closed the railroad houses there, or shut it down partly. And my dad moved us to San Diego. We moved right in the heart of the black section. Boy that was quite an experience. All of a sudden you live with different people. It took me a little while to kind of get acclimated. When I moved to San Diego, there was, the Italians had their own section down there, the Chinamen had Chinatown, the Mexicans down in Barrio, and the Greeks in Garlic Center, and the blacks in their own area. I'll tell you, it was quite a, now I look back and it was quite an education [laughs].

MIKE ZAMBRANO: It sounds like it. You had mentioned a little earlier that your father was from Texas. Do you know what part of Texas?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, you know he was born in Fort Davis and never spoke English. And his family is from Ojinaga down there, I think just south of El Paso some place.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You had said what? Ojinaga?

MARTIN GONZALES: Ojinaga, yeah. Just right across the border down there. I looked in the map and it's pretty close, just south of El Paso a bit.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: So when I used to ride later on, you know I never had a chance to see my dad's family. For some reason or another, even after the war I never, I just never made it. I'm kind of sorry. And my dad, well that's the other thing that happened. I used to have, when I was a little kid, I think I could see that CD, a DVD, and he had long hair. I don't know, they had these Mexican traditions and my dad, since he worked in the railroads, he'd have a pass and the railroad pass in those days could go all over the country. You know, you could go to Canada. The railroads had some kind of agreement that they could kind of share, anybody, you know, the Canadians could use the American railroads, so my dad went back to Texas when I was about, oh I must have been about five. And it was to see my grandmother to cut my hair, 'cause I had this long hair. And it was auburn. So I grew up with the name Red Gonzales all the time, you know? [laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really?

MARTIN GONZALES: I know! I have no hair now, but anyway, that was, so anyway, I went back to see my grandma. I don't remember her face. Later on they had a picture, she had a lot of Indian in her. She had real Indian features in here. Strong Indian background I think. Whether

it comes from Mexico or not, I don't know. And my dad had brothers and sisters. He had a pretty big family I think. But he only used to write letters to one of my uncles. And that was the only one he had contact with. Anyway, we went back there and she cut my hair. The other thing, and I've got to tell you this, they had this, they had a nun come out here and she said she could learn how to read palms. And I didn't believe it, so I said, "Sure". I gave her my palm. And she looked at my palm and she says, looked at it and followed it and says, "You know something?" She says, "When you were about four or five you were frightened by something. By water." And you know, I don't know anyone who knew about that. But my mother and I guess my dad would have known. And she told me that, evidently they had to cross the Rio Grande River and it was pretty low and they couldn't walk across it, so you had to ride a donkey to get across. And I was about four or five and the donkey kind of jumped and I panicked like crazy. And my mom told me I did it. And you know, ever since then, I don't mind swimming in the swimming pool but I can swim across. But I get in the river or ocean and think of crabs, sting rays, just fear of water. But at the same time *like* water, you know? I used to like to go to the beach and down to La Jolla and then when I was overseas, sailing, the ocean is special, you know? But nevertheless, I always had that fear from water and this, and sometimes when you experience that when you're young, I guess four or five, it stays with you. Well evidently it was close to a river. But that's all I remember of going back to Texas and seeing my family.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What part of the country was your mom born in?

MARTIN GONZALES: Who's this?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, your mother? Where was she born?

MARTIN GONZALES: She was born in Chihuahua. 'Cause she would tell me stories about her, you know stories about her dad. And evidently he was down there by, she had mentioned Cimadivo, and way back, down if you look at the map of Chihuahua, Paral, and she'd always tell me stories. And later on, oh, she died, my mom died in July of '95 and when I was down there I went to see a movie, *The Exorcist*. And you know, when I saw that movie, like, my mother, the stories she used to tell me about when, evidently the religious families, when people were possessed. And then I read the book *Rain of Gold* by Victor Villasenor.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh! Yes! I've read that book!

MARTIN GONZALES: And man, I read that book was like listening to my mom and dad! I'll tell you, I got it. It was a big old thick book and I decided to read it, said, "Eh, I think I'll read it." So I had it in my room and finally we had a community retreat and I had a lot of time so I thought I'm going to take another try. Well I got past a certain page and then I couldn't put it down. You know, they're great story tellers.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yes.

MARTIN GONZALES: I mean they, I just can't tell you, and you kind of miss it? 'Cause you don't see that anymore. [laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, yeah, you're right. It was just one of those books you couldn't put down because you wanted to see what happened next.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, and you know, listening to my dad, he would tell you stories about working the farms in Nebraska and the steel mills and that Colorado and the coal mines. And then my mom would tell about her own experience as a young girl. Evidently she used to like to dance because they used to go on Sundays to the park down there somewhere, it was a Mexican place they lived and then the girls would come and everybody would go to the park to dance on Sundays, you know? [laughs] And so, you know when I read those books, it was like they just come alive to me, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, I could see that.

MARTIN GONZALES: So that's part of my background there.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Did you say earlier that your dad, your father never learned English?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, he claims he never. But he had decided, this thing happened. When he said this book was a bunch of crosses. And he knew all the payments. He was fanatical

about paying his bills. I mean he had credit anyplace. That's one of the things, the first things you get and he'll check and he always had good credit. He always had credit in the grocery stores to get food and then Sears and Roebuck and Wards. He just, all these, it was just like a religion to him to pay his bills and go to work on time. He had that basic, really healthy way of appreciating and being real, you know? He wasn't innocent, he had other faults, but those were the way he was, you know? So he got in the railroads and you had to be a track worker, you had to go down and check the tracks and mark it down and make a report. But he knew how to do it! And he did that for, God, for 30, 40 years.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Wow.

MARTIN GONZALES: But he never spoke English!

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What about your mother?

MARTIN GONZALES: [Laughs] Now, she knew a few words. [Laughs] I don't know what to think about my mom, I don't know what in the heck. You know, we lived in the railroad houses in San Diego, too, and everyone from the housing had these guys selling blankets or, and there were a couple of guys who used to come out and sell, 'cause they have these – you've seen the railroad houses by the tracks, haven't you?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Uh yeah, my wife and I used to live in one when we first got married.

MARTIN GONZALES: And so they, they had two or three families. So these guys that are pedaling these blankets and a couple of the guys would pedal fish and fresh fruit. And you know my mom would be there and I'd come home from school or something and she'd tell me, "Oh, pray for so and so. The poor guy, his daughter is this and that." So she understood English. She'd always tell me to pray for somebody that, those guys that come to sell food to her. They'd tell the story about their family or something, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: So she understood, you know? And, probably more than I realized, you know? [Laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You were going through the Depression. Did you realize that, well, I know you were young. Did you, your family, your brothers, realize that there was a Depression on? That things were kinda bad economically?

MARTIN GONZALES: You know we really, we didn't have the influence of news that you have today. You know, you got the news from papers and radio. And you kinda adapted to it. You know, like we enjoyed, we had our own way to enjoy, like, I've played football since I was small. And playing softball. You just adapted to it. And like, we lived here in Lafayette and we were about 30 miles from the mountain or about maybe 60 miles from Mount Hood in the snow.

Well you know all the time that we lived there in La Mesa, we could never afford to go up to go up to Laguna. Other people would come. You could see 'cause the highway used to go right by the railroad house there. And they'd come back with snow, so you kinda lived without some things but it wasn't very, you didn't think too much of the Depression. You knew that there was hard times but by that time there was eating camps and then, like I told you, the hobos would come by. They lived around the railroad tracks down the road by the woods. And they'd have shacks and you saw those guys. But it was like normal. It wasn't like, you didn't seem to have the complaints that you have today! I mean these guys talking about depression, they all go on the couch. They mob these casinos and they talk about depression. Holy Moses. I don't know if they understand what depression is, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, I don't think people do. I think it's very difficult for people to relate to something that happened in the '30s. I mean today. I mean, it's hard for people to relate to it. Did your family participate in anything like the New Deal or CCE or anything like that?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, we didn't get involved in anything. Involved in City or government stuff like that. We were pretty well in the dark about that, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: You lived kind of a secluded life a little bit. And you were kinda happy with that, you know?



MIKE ZAMBRANO: Is there anything that your family went without?

MARTIN GONZALES: We had food, we didn't have a lot of recreation. You know, 'cause they had to [laughs] we must have been pretty poor because the ice cream guy would come around and you used to push it by hand. You didn't have the cart, the little cart, you know? And a couple of times my mom and I would go chase him. We'd have enough for one popsicle. So we'd buy a popsicle and she'd get half and I'd get half. But you know, we didn't feel bad about it. And then when you had to save money to go to the theater, you know? They had one show there in La Mesa and the only one I can remember was *A Tale of Two Cities*. But most of the things you enjoyed a lot was the radio programs. And you know, the CTE programs, I know there was many of them, but they don't even come close to how we enjoyed radio programs. And you talked about my mom knowing English. Eddie Cantor would come on Sunday and she'd look forward to listening to Eddie Cantor. I don't know if she had the ability, just thinking about it, you know? [Laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: That makes me think, you mentioned newspapers is where you get your information and you would listen to the radio for entertainment. Were there any Spanish newspapers that your parents would read? Or any Spanish speaking radio stations that you would listen to? I mean I don't even know if any of those even existed back then.

MARTIN GONZALES: Oh there was. There was a radio program, a Spanish, that was on the radio. What the heck was that guy's name? It had music and, yeah, they listened to him. But that was about it. You know, and then we got the other news in English, a little bit. I can't remember his name. But I do remember going to the neighbor's house and we'd hear Gang Busters and King of the Royal Mounted. And somehow, like for example, you'd hear the story on King of the Royal Mounted and you'd get excited. You can almost feel as though all those things are happening. And then when the TV came out, they're going to show King of the Royal Mounted on TV and they got all excited. Well it was a big disappointment, I'll tell you [laughs]. Just those, I don't know if when you don't see, you have a chance to use your imagination. It's exciting, you know? And when you see just plain old pictures on the TV it just doesn't click, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, I know what you mean. I used to listen to old radio programs we'd play like that as a kid and you sit there kind of captivated just envisioning the people and the events.

MARTIN GONZALES: Okay and the other thing we used to do once in a while, about a couple of times a year, La Mesa is about 20 miles from San Diego I guess. And then a little further down is El Cajon. And then a little further down, Easton there's lake side. They've been coming across something, years I guess. This guy worked for an Italian that had a big farm and let him plant watermelons down there by the river bottom. So we would go there about once a year, my dad. The old guys were great for telling stories and they loved to be together and just share their old stories and everything else. And that was a big deal. You know, we'd go down there,

we'd bring tacos and have watermelon and take, spend the whole day. You know, come in the morning and it's like a big outing! The kids, we'd find something to do there, just enjoy the place. It was a big experience for us. And then, Tomas, we'd pay him for his watermelons. Everything used to be watered by hand. Everything, really primitive, but he'd make his money and he'd send it back to his family, back to Mexico someplace, you know? So I remember that. And that was kind of special.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Your father, was he in the First World War?

MARTIN GONZALES: Oh no. And you know, it was my dad, when World War Two started and I graduated from high school in '42 and I was 17, so they couldn't draft me. And I didn't want to get in the Navy and I wasn't thinking about the Marines. But everybody wanted to be an Air Pilot or something. Air Corps was very attractive, so you could join the Air Force at 17. Well I tried to get my dad to sign a paper, but he said no, he says, "I'm not going to sign." What happened, he worked at Camp Kearney, this is just in the outskirts of San Diego now. And actually Camp Elliott is around there now, I think, the Navy base. But when he was there, they were bringing in the World War veterans from World War One. And a lot of them were gassed and crippled and everything else. And he told me, he says, "I'm not going to sign this to send you to war like that." He says, "If they draft you, that's fine." You know? He just wouldn't budge. And so I thought, oh this is old fashioned. My dad, poor dad, he's doesn't quite get it, you know? So after I was drafted [laughs], it wasn't all that easy. It was a whole different world in the Army, you know? I was at basic training about, oh it must have been, the first pass

I got, I went home and I said, "You know, I really apologize." Now I realized why he didn't want me to get into the service. So I had to go. You know, it was a whole different world. And not and easy world, so. But he was wiser than I thought he was, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah. How old were your parents when they passed away?

MARTIN GONZALES: Let's see, I've got it right here. My dad was born in 1882 and he died, he was born July 3, 1882, and he died September 30, 1965. And then my mother was born in 1895. And she died in 1974. So he was older I think. Both of 'em, pretty good long life.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. From what you said earlier, I gather that you'd, would you always speak Spanish all the time at home or was it Spanish/English or how did that work?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, we spoke Spanish at home. My parents. But my Spanish wasn't, it wasn't high class Spanish. You know, like I went to the Spanish preacher in that Parish for a while. It was kind of, that was, they spoke good Spanish, so we spoke Spanish at home. A funny thing, it wasn't until maybe 20 years had gone by and then I came to Oregon and I started working, well actually I was the head of the mosque there for the first few years, over in New Mexico, and so you didn't have too much contact with anybody from the outside, you know? So you kinda forgot your Spanish. Then I came to Oregon and I had work in the guest house and by that time, Mexican people started coming up. So then, it was probably about maybe 30 years ago I started reading The Bible in Spanish and then I started really appreciating my

Spanish, my Mexican culture. It really brings a lot of meaning. If you read The Bible in Spanish, a lot of it is ten times clearer than English, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: For me. There's something about the language. Even the, you know a girl Corazon it makes a lot of sense but if you call a girl a heart, it doesn't make sense.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: [Laughter] Yeah, kinda doesn't come out the same way.

MARTIN GONZALES: These guys complain, but I think it's good for them. They get a lot of support now. People, the kids speaking Spanish and speaking English, well that's bologna. I think that we should allow 'em to retain their culture and their language. That's part of 'em, you know? I certainly feel it is and that's the way it's gonna be.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Can you tell me a little bit about your school years? Did you go to school the entire time in the same area?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well I went to grammar school in La Mesa 'till '36 and then we came to San Diego and then that's when I went to junior high school. Like I told you, in La Mesa, there's no, a couple Mexican families, about three in the grammar school. So then I moved to San Diego and I kept in touch with the Mexican community because I went to Our Lady of Guadalupe

Church and I was an altar boy and involved in the church and then I went to more junior high school. It was kind of the roughest school in the whole. There were about four junior high schools in the area. And like I told you, they had at 30<sup>th</sup> and Imperial, that was the heart of the black section. And then Logan Heights was in Barrio full of Latinos, Mexicans. And we didn't have South Americans. It was just Mexicans, you know? Once in a while a guy from South America would show up, but we didn't have that many South Americans. And then they, the Chinese would come to join. At junior high school was in downtown Chinatown. And then they would have a few of the Japanese. They're kinda a closed community. You didn't connect too much with 'em. But when you mixed 'em all up in one of the junior high schools, just a really, I don't know what you'd call it. Just all these different backgrounds. It's kind of rough, a few fights, you know? But it was, now I look back and I'm grateful because now you have all these races from all over, you know? So it was, now I'm grateful for it. At the time, you know? But we didn't have cars, you know? You walked to school and, you know like you never bothered about lunch in town. I mean at school, because I'd take tacos or used to take sandwiches. But once and a while we didn't have bread so I had to take tacos. And you know, when I had tacos I'd go eat away from everybody. How would I put it? I wasn't ashamed. But kinda, maybe. That was then. Then the guys started stealing with, tacos, and then it wasn't as popular as it is now.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: So. That's the way it was. So then I went to the, I was always involved in sports. Even in our parish we had the CYOs and as I grew up. Then I went to public school, federal\_high school for two years. For one year. I was a sophomore. And there was a catholic school in San Diego State and you know how they have priests that teach at Villanova. They're the teachers and so, you know if you went to a public school they had to work with you, try to get you through somehow. But if you went to Saint Augustin, the priests were pretty strict. You know, if you didn't toe the line, you'd go off. And so, the Knights of Columbus used to give a scholarship to the poorest parish in San Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe happened to be the poorest parish. And so two of the guys I knew went to Saint Augustin but after two years they pulled out of it. I think they found it was too strict or something. So then the pastor, they offered me, if I wanted to go to school at Saint Augustin, so I went. And so, there was only about, in my graduating class there was only about 32 I guess? And so, so I had a chance to take part in everything. Football player, basketball player, softball player, did track, everything.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really?

MARTIN GONZALES: [laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You were pretty busy. How were your grades?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well I did pretty good. I had a C+ average. It was enough to get in to Loyola University when I got out of it. I wasn't really into studies and I struggled a little bit but I

could get by. And you know, part of it, you didn't have the home – I used to walk to school to save money. I went back to see how far I used to walk. It was at least three miles. To walk to school every morning and come home. So you know, really you didn't, I didn't have an intellectual background. My parents, you know, they encouraged you to go to school, they'd always want you to study, but you just didn't seem to, I didn't do as much reading as a should have probably done, but then you take part in sports and that takes time, you know? Practice and everything else. So I wasn't into intellectual stuff, you know? Now, even now, I read but I don't read volumes, you know? Mostly I read the things I like. Spiritual and it's a much simpler life. So there wasn't, so, like I tell you, I got by and I was a sociable guy. I was in charge of the altar boys and Boy Scout leader things like that. President of the CYO. So I wasn't, how would I put it, I wasn't a super intellectual guy but I got by, you know what I mean?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, it sounds like you were active. You said Boy Scouts, right?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. [Laughs] In the Boy Scouts, I think we got as far as, we kinda branched off. We then said heck with it and then we got involved in sports. And it took a lot of time. When I went to Saints the last two years I was playing basketball. Played in LA in a tournament. I went up there, I graduated when I was 17, so I must have been 16 years old when I played in the tournament. And I wasn't really a superstar but I was pretty good, you know? [Laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. What did you think about your teachers going through school?



MARTIN GONZALES: Actually in the grammar school, they were really kind to us. They went out of their way to help us. There were very few Mexican families. And then when I went to the junior high they were the same way. And, for example, it was kind of a rough school, you know? And I was raised in kind of a religious background a little bit. So you respected girls. You all had temptations of all kinds but, the language was... I served at church. And so when I went to junior high, when I had to serve mass, the teachers gave permission to be excused from class if I were to have a funeral or something like that. Because I had to serve mass. And so the teachers were pretty, and especially I got along with the coaches. They were kind of role models for me. So they were good. And then when I went to, I remember by sophomore year at the high school, same way. The teachers that I had were very, they really tried to help you, you know? But Latinos were very much, they're kinda like, you didn't see too many leaders. Like there are today. And then when I went to Saint Augustin, I had the priests. And they were the same way. They were a little stricter but I enjoyed that, you know? You'd go to mass and play football or basketball. And so religion was part of our, like, you played basketball. You had a time out, we'd all hold hands. But I don't care if you're catholic or if you were small. And so, we had a handful of – we did pretty good in the last year and so we needed a lot of 'Hail Marys' with everybody holding hands and saying, "Hail Mary!" you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: [Laughs] Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: They had no problem about praying. So the teachers were good, you know? But, you know, that was when I graduated in '42. Just a handful of Latinos were going to college. I mean you could count 'em with your hand I think, you know? And it wasn't 'till after World War Two when we came back and had a GI bill that the guys started going to school. And today I was excited because the kids that I've known here around Oregon are lawyers now and they're teachers and doctors. It's exciting! To see kids – it's alright to be a farmer but you can be something else besides a farmer, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. Right, you could be anything you choose.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. That's part of the education that I remember.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What kind of friends did you have in high school?

MARTIN GONZALES: I always had friends like the guys I played ball with. Of course I was friends with the guys I grew up around the parish. There was a whole list of 'em. You know the CYO, now there's, actually, there was about 36 of us you might say, around that parish who kinda grew up as altar boys and close to the church and CYO. This and that. I went back in February of this past year. And you know, they're all in their 80s so there's only about six of us left. Or eight. [Laughs]. You know, they either died or are in a nursing home. So I've had good ties with the priests I like. I went down in February. My closest friend, Joe Delgaudio, there's padrino kids. Two boys. One's 63, the other is 62. And they're my godsons. You have that

bond, it's like your own brother. And so Lucinado and Ophila and those guys. We were close friends, you know? And I always was kind of a sociable guy. I always have been. And then they were interested in girls. But I wasn't, I kind of struggled in that area, you know, a little bit? [Laughter]. They're all Mexican girls.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You said your friend's name is Joe Delgaudio?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. Joe Delgaudio. He died the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August. We met in 1936. And he was an altar boy and he was in the Navy during World War Two. I was close to him, I was padrino to his first two kids. But he and his wife, Margie, met in the CYO. 'Cause that's, we got together. And that was kinda new for us too. And you know we liked to like go to dance. Probably was before we, when we came back, the war was over in '45. And you know, you didn't mingle too much with the American people. You know, you'd go play ball with 'em and everything else. But the girls, I don't think in the service you even danced with 'em, you know? Now that might. My niece is married to an Anglo, we called 'em Anglos, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: So that was quite a, I look back on how we've changed. Two of my nieces are married to black kids. That didn't happen 'till later, you know? So the racial problem has kind of been ironed out during the years.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: So it's fair to say that you hung out primarily with Latinos?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well we weren't that mingled up. There wasn't too many real leaders. Even in San Diego, of Latinos in '45. And then, from then on I started getting knowledge. Tons of leaders, you know? And at that time there wasn't. I get excited 'cause I see, even the church around here is 50% of Latinos in Oregon, you know? And I see the local parish down there and the leaders are young Hispanics and they're real. They've got real lives. The guy I was preaching with here, our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary foundation. And I told him, I said, "You know, I was 35 then. I feel like Simeon." Simeon in the Old Testament, God promised him that he would get a chance to see he had the Savior in his hands and he could die in peace. That was when he had Jesus in his hands. The prayer was singing and all I could think was I could die in peace. I had the Savior in my hands. And I says, "I see the Mexican taking over." And I says, "Our country's being saved so now I can die in peace!" [Laughs]. So I think he enjoyed that a little bit.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Up 'till the time when you graduate, just before you are drafted, do you have any girlfriends?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, you know, I didn't have a steady. You know, I'm trying to figure out who the heck was I goin' with. I was going to CYO and there was Irene and a couple of other girls. That I met in the CYO. And so when I went to the service, I remember getting letters from three or four. But they weren't much, it wasn't like 'your girl' or anything, but it meant a lot to

get a letter from them, I'll tell you. You're overseas, you know? And 18, 19, you're pretty hormonal, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What, you know, if and when you would go on dates or anybody would go on dates, where would you normally go?

MARTIN GONZALES: Actually in those days, if you went on a date, brother, you either had to go double date and you had to borrow a car from your dad or your uncle. We didn't have cars. And so, you might take girls to a show. And that was about it. You know, and we had CYO picnics and beach parties. And that was it. It was probably, I went back home and I see how the kids, the stuff they have today. They have cars and everything. We didn't have those things, you know? It kind of, dates were kind of like, you'd go to a dance. Mexicans have a dance every, in San Diego, they could have a dance every Saturday or someone was getting married and they'd invite you to the dance. So that was part of going out and dating girls. That was it. But I never, the other thing that happened was when I was 13, probably the closest friend I ever had. When I came into San Diego in '36, now this was probably the biggest influence of my whole life. There was a nun that taught me for first communion. She was a Mexican sister, Sister Defusio. And I found this package in the church, and it kind of harmed you. You're back in the church and it looked like you're not supposed to look at girls, you know? I don't know how they got it all screwed up, but anyway. Went in, and Sister Defusio and then the next one I met, Sister Tarson. She was an Irish sister from San Francisco. Holy family. She was probably the closest friend I ever had. And I think they wanted me, 'cause I

was in charge of the altar boys and this and that. And I wanted to go to the Seminary or something like that. And there was kind of an attraction for that. And I used to go work at the convent because we'd sell papers downtown and meet all the rough characters down there. So I had that close bond with the sister. And it was kind of a taste of what religious life would be like. Kind of a mystery. You'd go to the convent and there's something special about it. And then later on, even prior to coming to the monastery, I met the Franciscan sisters. They came and they started a school there in San Diego. So they've been my closest friends all through my whole life. There was something about, like sister, you could talk to her about anything. You connect. And you share and that bonds you. But I got to tell you, the other thing, kind of a scandal but, I come back from the war in '45. And so what happened in San Diego. And you always had to struggle with this discrimination problem. There was two American Legion posts in San Diego. Post Six and Post 201. They're all for World War One veterans and they're all American this and that. American Legion is kind of haughty a little bit. So when Pearl Harbor happened and the first Mexican guy was Machado and so, last name was Martinez. And so the Mexican guys, the Veterans came back and wanted to get into these posts and you could feel them turn away. It feels kind of, a little bit, they'd look down on you. So they finally just said heck with you guys. We'll start our own American Legion post. So they started Martinez post. And so when I came back from the war there was an American Legion convention in San Francisco. It was in '45. So I came back in October. And so the guys sent me and then two of my buddies. Eddie Canalez and I forget who the other guy is. They're all World War Two veterans. Come up for the convention. Well the American Legion can say it's a convention, but it's a lot of drinking and a lot partying and everything else. Well the sisters taught us from the

time we were 13 until, well at that time we were already 20. And so, [laughs] what happened was I come back and there's just a lot of parties! And when you go, there's a lot of drinking. Anyway, well we got to the convention and I said, "We better go see Sister Tarson. She knows we're here and if we don't see her, she'll cut us out, so..." We all went to the house on 8<sup>th</sup> Street in San Francisco. To see sister. We all had a nice talk. So then when we got through, she says, "Augustin, I want to talk to you." "Yeah," I says, since I was number one. And so we got talking and then she says, "You know how a bunch of sisters were close to you? How you're an ideal kid and this and that? And now I hear you're doing a lot of drinking." [Laughter] And she says, "Now you know how much I love you," and I'm kneeled down so she can do the nun thing. You know bless me. So I'm kneeling down and she cries, "Well if you don't straighten up I never want to see you again." Well I looked down and says and says, "Oh, don't worry about it." Well you know, in June, I just quit partying overnight, you know? But you know, the fear that I would never meet that friend that really meant a lot to me. You know, when you're partying you forget it. But when you're alone, you think about the people that really count. And so when I decided, to go to the Monastery. I called her up and told a few of the superiors down in Walters Grove. I think it's south of Sacramento. A small convent. So I came up to see her and, just like old times, "Yeah come on." So then she lifter her ban so I had a chance to see her and, so that was kind of a key. And when I was with her, brother, it was like, you know, when I met her and I met these other sisters, the thing about religious life, I don't know. At that time, when I decided to come to the Monastery, a Mexican school teacher who I knew for years. And I come up on a long week, I had a long weekend just before Christmas of '51. So I drove up trip, trip, trip by myself. All the way from San Diego up to Walters Grove. Overnight. Then I

stayed two or three days and I went around with sister, helping her with her decoration in the church around there. So we had a chance to visit. And then when I left I had to go back home to give her girlfriend of hers this Christmas present, so I had drive after midnight all the way back to San Diego in the afternoon. But, you know, having made that trip, I realized I had to go someplace where I had to love people like I loved sister. And it wasn't in marriage or to one person, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right.

MARTIN GONZALES: So that was really the influence, even today. And part of it, you know, working the guest house, a lot of it, Mike, if you really love people you listen and you don't judge 'em. You just stare. And they can tell. You don't have to preach to 'em or anything. You just have to be their friend. So I would say she was part of the key. But then when I was leaving, she says, "Augustin, you know where you're going?" I don't know, maybe it was a trap. But she says, "Whatever you do, stick it out even if it kills you." [Laughs] So that was pretty neat. She came up to see me. She finally passed away last, the Holy Family sisters had a daycare and a convent out there in San Jose. I had a chance to see her there on one of my visits. She was a key person in my life in a way, you see? That's part of why I'm here in the monastery.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: That's an interesting way that you put it that, you know, she was, she pretty much wouldn't see you if you didn't straighten up and you're right, you're alone, you start



thinking about things more clearly than when you're in big groups being influenced by other people.

MARTIN GONZALES: And you know, maybe God inspired her. It seems like a hard thing but looking back on the people that really count in your life. Now, and the other thing is, I was in a treatment center for alcoholics and they just have it. I look back now and I go to meetings a couple of times a week and to me it was one of the biggest graces I ever had. A monk now 40 years and I thought alcoholics was a little wino hanging out on the corner drinking cheap wine, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: But, you know, to go to a treatment center, I got in there and anything you wanted to see was there. There was coaches, there was teachers, airline pilots. There were doctors and nurses and everything else. A whole world of addiction. And you know, like, when I left San Diego in '52 there was a little wine, maybe but the ones that took drugs were the doctors and rich people in Hollywood. Now, man, we've got drugs all over the darn place, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, you're right. You're right.

MARTIN GONZALES: The experience in AA has been a real, you know, to me is like, I tell the guys, AA wasn't started by these two guys that were drunk. AA was started by God. Because it puts flesh and blood in your religion, you know? The program that is available to everybody. The damage that drinking does, I can tell you my whole family struggled with it. A couple in prison and a busted up marriage and everything else. It's a real disease, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, it is. You're right.

MARTIN GONZALES: So that's part of my history, but it's an important part. I'm grateful now, I tell the guys, I go to...having gone there probably gave me another ten years, at least ten more years of life. It's not because I drank a lot. In fact I was more like a weekend-alcoholic. It wasn't that. And part of it, we didn't have a lot of money. I go back home now, and you know you go to a dance back in the '50s, four or five guys would buy a pint of whiskey. Now they sell the darn thing by the half gallon, you know? [Laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You said you went to AA when you were 70?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: I was in the monastery and they had a late intervention and, we had picnics and I was in charge – I thought you had to have alcohol to have a good time. And I was promoter of the parties and everything else. Part of the thing, I guess, I went to picnics and enjoyed having a good time and I didn't realize that I was...and so, I didn't want to go! And so, like I'll tell you, it probably wasn't a real...now I go to a meeting, and I go to a meeting and put flesh and blood in your religion, you know? Because this morning's gospel is about Jesus is inside a house preaching and his mom and his brothers are outside and they says, "Hey, your mom and brothers are outside!" And he turned around and says, points at a map inside that house and says, "That's my brother and sister and mother. Whoever does the will of God!" Well that's exactly step 11 of the 12 steps. Prayer and meditation to find out what the will of God is and the grace to do it! You know, I don't know. We're lucky that today there's more respect for the AA program than there was. Because it got me! You know it's all the gospel if you want to read it, you know? I'm sure it's those prohibitions that got messed up when all the church over the last ten years. If they'd have done the 12 steps they wouldn't have had that trouble, you know? So it's been a real grace for me to do that. But that's part of my history. So I appreciate it having had it.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. Do you remember where you were or what you were doing when you heard that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, it's stayed in my memoirs and it's pretty clear there. I was watching a football game. I was, had to be, let's see, I was, it was '41. So that was, I'd have been 16 I

guess. I was watching a football game at the stadium down in San Diego. And the announcer came on saying something about “We’ve been attacked...Pearl Harbor”. You didn’t even know where Pearl Harbor was.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: And then after that, by that time the newspapers would have “extras”. The news counters when you walked around town, selling Extras, you know? So by the time I got out of the stadium, the guys were out on the street walking saying, “Extra! Extra!” You know, so, but when you heard it you wanted the announcer to cut it out and go on with the game. We weren’t that concerned about it. But after that, things changed a lot. It was almost like we were aware we were kinda in war and then they started to bring all the restrictions and used to put these big balloons around the aircraft landing in case a plane tried to attack or something like that. A lot of fear like that. And a lot of confusion too. But it wasn’t all, for us, part of us, like, you didn’t get that much news. You got it from newspapers and radio. And so it wasn’t like watching TV today and see some guy shot over [indiscernible] and it’s shot right on the screen right there. So it didn’t seep in till later. Then restrictions started, you know? And that’s what I remember. But I went back to school. I was a junior and my memoirs, I think I mentioned, that during that, about a year later, I got drafted in ’43, it must have been ’42 they come out with this movie *Guadalcanal Diaries*.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh yes.

MARTIN GONZALES: You'd look at it and it's kind of exciting. Thought, oh man, this is great, shoot it out. But I can still remember being up in the hills in Leyte Island in '44. I can almost remember the time. I was sitting there, wet. Just waiting. Just sweating it out and thinking about that silly movie. It's not all that exciting to be wet, hungry, and everything else. [Laughter]. Hollywood does a pretty good job of making things look pretty good.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah. What was I going to ask? You mentioned the factor of fear. Is a lot of that the fact that you're on the west coast and people are thinking the Japanese are going to invade?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, and it's kind of, then they had that black out. They had that blackout and so it was kind of mixed up. They had that fear. The fear and kind of got a half-confusion. They don't know. And they thought they had these balloons. Big air balloons that were on aircraft land and so. I don't know, I guess if planes came they hit the balloons or something, I don't know. We had a couple of aircraft plants there – Rohr, the big one downtown. And then you start feeling the, I guess they started the draft program. You could see it. They start bringing in a bunch of regulations and so you start getting to feel it. In the beginning they were getting into something, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, yeah. Did you happen to see any Japanese that were beginning to be taken to internment camps?

MARTIN GONZALES: You know, I went to school and then I was down, they were, they just, I didn't see anybody being shipped out. I don't know, they just disappeared. But you know, the guys right now, they could have said a lot of stuff about World War II. You know, the question about Japanese. But the Japanese are a pretty closed community. And I remember going to junior high school and there was a couple of guys there in my algebra class. I mean that was Eighth Grade, brother. And that guy, he'd ask questions of the teacher that the teacher couldn't answer. You know, we didn't know if the guy, what age he was, you know? And so, and then I talked to a couple of guys. They always had the, they had a bunch of 'em living down by the bay there by the Catamarans. And you know, it's like, now you hear that maybe, I was living right close to the bay. So they had the harbor there full of ships. They kinda, you could say maybe they had a touch of how many ships there were and this and that. So there was, it wasn't all that, the fear, how would I put it? If they had lived in the face of that fear they would know when they took these...they couldn't tell because they were just very closed communities. They were good at school and everything else. But kind of, when they enclosed 'em, they made a decision that, I wouldn't condemn them for it, you know? If you had known 'em, went to school with them, even the farmers, they were kind of very much, you wouldn't mingle with the rest of society. And it's kind of a, now it's a whole different story. But at that time it wasn't. And so when they did that decision, they had to make some kind of... And of course you find out there's sabotages and everything like that. I would be slow to condemn 'em, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: And I just say because I look back on the way it was and like I say, I went to school with these guys. They were good but when it happened, and later on, you'll see these fellows were good and end up being good soldiers. Some of my close friends were Japanese, you know? But when it did happen it wasn't all that clear. It wasn't done with, a lot of, you had to make a decision. It was wrong but it wasn't all with malice, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, no, I can understand that. Different times, different amount of information going out to people. You had a couple of years before you actually get drafted. Did you, did your family, did your parents all support the war effort?

MARTIN GONZALES: You know, they never questioned it. They never questioned the war. You know, they were pretty supportive. And they didn't condemn the government or nothin' like that. They were part of the Americans and there's a war for some reason or another, they just did it. My family, you know it's like, you're almost proud that we had to serve. All the way through. Even the parents who started USO, they got out and all volunteered out there. Tried to support the guys, 'cause you had a big Navy, a lot of Navy sailors in San Diego and a lot of Mexicanos from Texas and all the other places. So, Guadalupe USO was one of the, the ladies in the parish were very supportive.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Can you tell me a little bit about some of the rationing that was going on? Before you got into the service? I'm talking about your local community.

MARTIN GONZALES: Oh yeah, there was gas. There was gas and meat. I mean there were a lot of shortages, supplies. You had to do without some of the meat stuff, you know? So they felt that. I think the gas was rationed too. And they, you know, the people they knew they had to do it and there wasn't a lot of complaining. You know, they knew we were in the war and had to do something. They were supportive. A war we were pushed into and so we were doing what was right. So they accepted that. You know, there was rationing, and they felt it. A mean, quite a while. And then just like blackouts every night. Yeah, you really felt. And today, you know, you have so much. These are supposed to be hard times but we have a surplus of everything.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, it's really different now. Did your family have any particular political preference? Were they Democrat, Republican, Independent? Anything like that?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, no, they never had anything like that. Never concerned them. My mother liked President Roosevelt [laughs] and they liked the Kennedys. They loved old John. My mother would call her grandson, El Presidente because his name was John. So they didn't, no they didn't, they had a lot of respect for President Roosevelt.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay.



MARTIN GONZALES: They, Americans, were kinda anti-Hoover a little bit, you know? Kind of a high class, rich guy or whatever it is. It wasn't, they didn't get involved that much in politics for the most part.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: They just kinda, you know, stuck to the family, took care of family things?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Maybe again, another issue linked to information going out. Not like today, you turn on cable and you have ten different channels blasting their opinion 24 hours a day.

MARTIN GONZALES: No, you didn't. I can't remember having anything like that, brother.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. No it's fine. Do you remember getting your draft notice?

MARTIN GONZALES: I can't even remember. I know that I got it. And then, it was kinda like, it was like a real experience. You know, I lived in San Diego and I think the biggest trip we ever took was going to LA to play in the basketball tournament when I was in high school. So, we went up to San Pedro after I got the draft card for examination. They bus you up to San Pedro for the examination. So when I got out of high school I went to work at Rohr Aircraft. And before I got the job there, they give you a check-up. And I had to get a doctor's permit because

I had some kind of, I don't know what they found on my heart, a little murmur? But here I played basketball, captain of my basketball team and everything. So then I went on and got drafted. When I got the draft card, the draft board, went through all the examinations, and you get toward the end and they ask you, "Now, do you have anything, do you remember anything bad about your heart, this and that, this and that?" So I didn't want the other guys thinking I was going to chicken out, but I told the guy, I says, "You know, I had to get a special permit to work in aircraft. There might be something wrong with my heart." I kinda of said it so that no body was able to hear. [Laughs]. Then the guy says, "No, you're too young to have heart trouble." So that was it.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What was the name of the aircraft plant again?

MARTIN GONZALES: Rohr Aircraft.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: How would you spell that?

MARTIN GONZALES: R-O-H-R.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: R-O-H-R. Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: It's still there. They used to make motors for the aircraft plants.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: And what was your job there?

MARTIN GONZALES: I just, I used to work in the assembly line making, I don't know, panels to put around the motors. Just a sheet metal worker.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Was the pay pretty good?

MARTIN GONZALES: I don't remember. \$1 an hour or something like that. It wasn't a high paying job. It was a job. Like everybody had. You had to go to work at the aircraft plant or something to help. It was a good place to work when you're waiting. It wasn't the lowest paying job, but it wasn't a high paying job. Just stayed there for long enough and became a foreman or something like that. But when you're 18, there's no...the only good thing was I was in charge of their basketball team so that helped a little bit. [Laughter]. It wasn't a high stakes outfit.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. Did you ever feel any discrimination at this particular job?

MARTIN GONZALES: Uh, there was always, not a big discrimination. But most of the bosses were white. Once in a while you'd see a Latino and that was kinda rare. There wasn't really that much discrimination.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. So, you're working there when you get your draft notice. Is that correct?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: So you get your draft notice and you're ordered to report. Where?

MARTIN GONZALES: I had to report to, they bused you to San Pedro.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: Fort MacArthur.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. And then you go down there and what process do they go through? Physical? Oh yeah, I guess you mentioned the physical.

MARTIN GONZALES: That's all. The physical. And if you passed, you go by bus and then you come back. And then when you come back, then you're in for, they ship you out. From there, you go to your – I ended up in Camp Roberts. California. I took my basic training in Camp Roberts. That was it. It was pretty simple, you know? I think you go home after you passed your exam. And then I don't know how long it was, brother. Maybe a couple of weeks or maybe a month or something like that. Then you get the orders to report back to the, some

place in San Diego to take a bus back to Fort MacArthur and then you're processed. Then they give you clothes and stuff like that. And then they decide where they're going to ship you. So I happened to end up in Camp Roberts, California.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: And you said that's where you did your basic training?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. Now you didn't get to choose the Army, right? When you get drafted, they pretty much tell you where they need you?

MARTIN GONZALES: That's right. I think they might have – no, they might have asked me, "What do you prefer?" I can't remember exactly. They pretty much tell you where they want you. And then it had to do with your, how you qualify and IQ. You know, the exam? I guess if you're high IQ they might put you in a different branch.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: So I ended up in Camp Roberts but I was in a communications company. Wire communications. So you learn wire communication plus basic how to carry a rifle. Things like that. That was a little higher than others down the road would be. Teaching everybody but machine guns and riflemen. But I was in wire communication I guess because I finished high

school I guess. But we never, there was never wire. I never used any of it. I never got up to wire communication. I went to the different camps and I was stuck in this light platoon when I joined the Calvary.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What did your parents think when they found out you were drafted?

MARTIN GONZALES: Oh you know they kinda accepted it, brother. They didn't really complain. They didn't tell me to go across the border to Tijuana or something like that, you know? They were American people. You know, they, this is their country, you know? That was part of it. Because your country wanted you to do it. They didn't complain much. They knew other people were going, that were at war. When they finally come across, they were supportive. They were kind of proud of me, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: That's the way I remember.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Did other Latinos, at least when the war broke out, did they go forward to enlist as well or did they wait to be drafted?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, some of 'em joined. Some of 'em joined the Navy. You could get in the Navy at 17 and, they're pretty generous. I can't remember anybody. The only one I

remember was one of the guys I knew, Felix Rodriguez. He got drafted and he had to sign a paper that, he was from Mexico, that if we fought against Mexico that he would fight against his country. And he said he wouldn't do that so, I don't exactly think he was a draft dodger. He just decided to go to Mexico. So he lived out the war in Tijuana. With his family over there. But he's the only one that I know of that kind of pulled out of the deal, you know? I don't want to judge him but, you know, he was a, he was never going to fight against Mexico or something like that.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. Yeah. So you're at Camp Roberts. Can you tell me a little bit more about your basic training? You mentioned the communications and a little bit after that it was getting more into learning how to use weapons?

MARTIN GONZALES: First thing, come into Camp Roberts, we all loaded in the bus. What happened when I got drafted, brother, they were drafting guys that already, that was 1943. So the war broke out in 1941. So they'd been drafting for two years and by that time they had already got the cream of the crop which is guys from 20 to 25, in their 20s. So by the time they got to me in '43, they started grabbing guys at 18 and often these guys had been deferred. Which would be some guys had been in business and so a lot of 'em pretty out of shape. I was in pretty good shape having played basketball and all that stuff. But pretty green as far as – a whole different world. I mean the environment and everything else. I wasn't a holy Joe but you get in a new environment and it's a lot of cussing and rough talk. All about women and all that stuff, you know? It's kind of, part of the world. So when I come in, I was still in shock, I'd

never seen a person pass out. We got to Camp Roberts and we got off the bus and they have the parade route. Man, a couple of those guys, they just passed out from the heat. You know just carrying their bags back. So that was kind of a surprise for me. And it was pretty rigid, you know, getting up. They don't fool around there. [Laughs]. I guess they're pretty rigid. Strict. Especially the [indiscernible] they want to break you in and get away from... They're pretty, the discipline was something I hadn't experienced before that. Even when I was going to high school and playing football and the coach. But it was a different story. So actually, brother, I think I had to go – I was under the impression a little bit, I remember going to see a Chaplain. He was a big guy. Must have been a football person. And I remember he was a big help to me. At just one meeting. And I kinda tapered off and then I just worked myself into the whole thing. Then I was part of the guys and what they did and everything else. But I would go to mass when I had a chance. I tried to be faithful to my faith, you know, and that helped a lot. The only thing was after 13 weeks you were supposed to go home. And somebody picked up small pox or something in our barracks. So they quarantined the whole barracks. We couldn't get out of the barracks for another three weeks. So everybody goes home. I had a chance to go, I think three trips to San Diego from the camp. But the visits home were, it was horrible. Because we'd leave about 11:00 or a little before maybe. And we'd go non-stop down 101, Santa Barbara, LA, and finally get to San Diego at home about 6. And your day home, you'd see your mom and dad and have dinner and then maybe you had a party or something. And then you'd have to leave the next morning about 11:00 so you could be back at Camp Roberts by midnight, you know? It was really hard. You know I look back and you enjoy going home but at the same time as soon as you got there you had to come back. That was a hard thing. And



even when we finished our training, they only give us about five days or six days to go home and then ship us overseas. So now when you see guys go home for a month or two or three weeks, it was a whole different world, brother. [Laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Where did you ship out from the United States? Was it San Diego? San Francisco?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, when I left Camp Roberts, I went on to, there was another staging area in Fort Ord in Monterey.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: We went through there. Probably maybe about two or three weeks. And they kinda sort you out. And then from there they sent us to Camp Stoneman up in Pittsburg, California. It was a miserable camp. Barracks all green and everything was foggy. And then from there they rode us on to a Victory ship. The guys and we headed for Brisbane Australia. So I remember that. And I remember going under the San Francisco bridge and the ladies up there at the top of the bridge waving good bye to us. [Laughs]. I think we came down, I'm trying to figure out how we, we came down and we came to a barge. There must be a river from around Stoneman. And it takes you down to San Francisco where you load on to a converted Victory ship made into a troop ship. So it was really kind of a homemade operation. It wasn't really nice. It was run by merchant marine and they had a four inch gun or a three

inch gun or something like that. And then the cooks were our own cooks. So that was the only trip we took with merchant marine personnel and army personnel in charge of the ship. But we went from, the first campaign from the \_\_\_ to the Philippines all navy transferred there. They were a real transfer ship. They had good food and quarters were a lot, they were crowded but they were a lot better.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You said you were on your way to Brisbane Australia?

MARTIN GONZALES: We took off and the first thing that happened, about half the ship got seasick.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: That was miserable. You know, it's a big stinkin' mess. And I don't know how many holes they have, brother. You go down four or five and boy they pack you in like sardines. That was slow and it wasn't a pleasant ship. You could go top side, you know, during the trip. And when you're on guard, you know, you're top side. But when we come out, we had destroyers with us. Protecting us from submarines for one day. And once while we got on. And the skipper would go about his own. He took a southern route. We thought we was going to stop in Hawaii but they didn't stop anywhere. We went non-stop all the way to, I know we crossed the equator 'cause we had a celebration as we crossed the equator.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What kind of celebration?

MARTIN GONZALES: What do you call that? Shellbacks.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh, the Shellbacks. Okay. Was this just for, did it include everybody on the ship, 'cause that's usually a Navy tradition?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. Everybody. They had a big celebration. The other thing that happened, it was probably important. We were quarantined for, it was probably about a month. So one of those weeks, went out there and got a half a case of beer. Water beer. Before you know it, when I grew up there for recreation after the boy scouts, we'd have boxing gloves. So everybody learned how to box. So we got quarantined, my company, before you know it, somebody got the boxing gloves and before you know it some guy's...and so, the last camp out we had before they ship us out from Camp Roberts was a two week camp out. And so on the Sunday, they had kind of a holiday. And so the last thing that booked on the holiday was they had these boxing gloves. They was from the Chowhound at B company because the Chowhound from my company was just dog company. There was two companies making this last camp off. The last so-called maneuvers we were going on. So I happened to be in a foxhole. My companion was a little guy, can still remember, Emil. He was blonde and he was a truck driver. He was older. He was probably about 25 and cut like crazy. [Laughter]. And so he called me "Squirt". He said, "Hey Squirt, go down and get those gloves. I wanna box you." I was scared, you know, that this guy would beat me up, you know? But I couldn't say no. He

kinda bullied you a little bit. I went and got the gloves and then we put 'em on. And I just jabbed him once in his nose but he started bleeding like crazy, you know? Then I got scared. I hurt this guy, you know? Well that night at Chowhound, happened to be a guy from, I still remember the guy's name, Johnson Yulu. Sweede from Minnesota. He couldn't fight worth a lick, you know? He didn't even fight. He was running and so a guy in my company threw him out and threw me in there. Well I must have got the guy by surprise because it ended up being, I went in to fight. So then I was tagged as a boxer, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really?

MARTIN GONZALES: [Laughter] So then when you go up there on the Shellback celebration, they had a boxing tournament! So here I get tagged with, you know, in those days you almost, when they told you to do something you almost like, instant obedience, you know? Even if you were scared, no matter what. And so. That, I ended up being kind of a half boxer. And actually when I joined the first Calvary in January, by that time was '44. And after we had our first campaign in the Admiralty we finished about June. We had about six months from June to October, to go to the Philippines. So they had softball tournaments and they also had boxing. There again I got stuck. So I won the 140 pound championship. That was my last boxing career there. I wasn't all that good. I liked boxing but I didn't have any KO punch or anything like that.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: [Laughs] Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: But that was what happened in the Shellback celebration. Then we got to Brisbane and there was a racetrack there. There was a center and there was like distribution points. Then they send you out to different camps. And so I was sent to the First Calvary. I was assigned to be a BAR assistant. The BAR man in my platoon was Don Chase.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Don Chafe?

MARTIN GONZALES: Don Chase.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Chase.

MARTIN GONZALES: C-H-A-S-E. Yeah. He was a big kid. He was from Minnesota. He sold Bibles. And you know what happened. The First Calvary, they were a regular Army. A lot of, the other thing I was going to tell you was, that was the first time I realized the border Mexicans didn't get along with border whites very much. You could tell the difference. But in combat they're all the same. There's no discrimination in combat. But when you pull back, and you know, out of combat you could tell there was...you didn't have much of the Officers and the Sergeants, they're white. But it changed as we got into, by the time we finished in '45, we had Mexican Sergeants and Non-Coms, and very few Officers. I think there might have been one or two but most of 'em were. You'd see 'em kind of changing. That was part of what I went through.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Do you feel that they received the same kind of respect as white Non-Coms, or, I'm sorry, white NCOs or white Officers?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, once they became Non-Coms, they got the same. Actually there was one First Sergeant that was from Arizona, Gutierrez, and he got killed in Leyte. But they respected him. I think he would have become an Officer if he hadn't got killed. He was a big guy. He was pretty much Americanized. A lot of the Mexican guys from Texas were pretty Mexicanized. You know what I mean? Their language, their English. I used to get a lot of razzing because I was from California.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Uh-huh.

MARTIN GONZALES: You know, the [indiscernible] and the "Ay, caramba!"s. And I gave it back to 'em. Especially when I started boxing. I wasn't afraid of 'em. You're kinda not afraid. Just teased back and forth. So they were pretty, they were, the Mexicanos from Texas were very Mexicanized a little bit. They were, the guys from California were Americanized a little bit. You could tell the difference between the guys from California and Texas and Colorado. And there was, I don't know how to put it but you could tell the difference.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, there were subtle differences between each group?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. The Californians were more Americanized. The guys in Texas, pretty Mexicanized. They were regular Army, you know? They joined the Army, some of the guys, because of the Depression. You really think discrimination, like, we were in Camp Roberts and when I was boxing in Camp Roberts I was the really amateur. But we had a boxing team and there were guys that fought Golden Gloves, AAU. We had a couple of good Mexican guys that were, what the heck was his name? Two or three of them. I really like them. Of course, Cordova, they had fought AAU down in Texas. You get in there. And one of my idols was Sugar Ray Robinson. I liked to watch Sugar Ray Robinson. He had a good dance. And so we had a tournament, a contest. That's when the blacks, they're either Port Battalion or Steward's mates. They didn't have 'em as, even in the Army, I guess in Europe they had 'em mostly as truck drivers. They didn't have 'em in the front lines. So anyway, the Port Battalions from the Navy, the Admiralty, they had a boxing team. And they brought it over to fight against our regiment. The 12<sup>th</sup> Calvary. Well I remember two of the fights were pretty raw. This black kid just almost killed one of our guys. And then they gave the decision to this one guy because he was a Sergeant or something like that. It was terrible. You know it was almost a riot because they were betting on 'em, you know? Those blacks, that was the closest I'd ever seen to a riot because they got robbed. I mean. You had to be blind not to see, this black kid had this Sergeant hanging on there, you know? And the other time, I like to tell, one of our Abbotts here, the Third Abbott. He was the Lieutenant Commander aboard a Carrier. And he happened to be in the Carrier, one of the Carriers. Defending the landing in the Philippines. Abbott and I, once in a while we get talking, but I told him one of the things that shocked me was, we were going to, it was either going to the Philippines or going from the Philippines to Luzon. I was in

guard by the Officers' mess in the Navy ship. These guys, I mean we were in combat. These Navy guys, man, the Officers dressed in their formal suits and everything. And all the guys that were serving them were either shipmates or Filipinos. I thought I was in the south some place, you know? And here, you know, in the front lines, the Officers, they're almost the same as a regular soldier. You know, they got the same foxholes and almost eat the same food and everything else. But the Navy, I'll tell you, if you could get a seat. I couldn't believe it! We're right at the front lines, we're fighting. And then they have this high class discrimination. But that was part of it. It left an impression on me anyways. I mean that was an old tradition.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. Let's see. So I think the last location you mentioned was, what? Oh gosh. You get assigned to the First Calvary in Australia.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Where do you go from there?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well we went from there. That was, I got in there in December. And then in January, they decided, MacArthur was going to the, if you look at the map, you'll see New Guinea and you'll see New Britain. By that time New Britain raids were there. And there's a little group of islands, they called it Admiralty Island. The Bismarck Archipelago. And the reason the Navy wanted, MacArthur wanted it was it's a coral island and it formed a bay in there about, I don't know, maybe nine miles long and about six miles wide, with a narrow



entrance. So they wanted us to go in, so they assigned the Calvary to go in and that was our first campaign. But when we left Australia we had to go to New Guinea to Oro Bay. Through there probably two or three weeks, getting ready for the staging area before we took off for the Admiralties. So that was the first time we had Japanese bombers come over a couple of times. And then we're also not too far from the battle ground of Bruno. Which had happened early in the year. There was still a bunch of Japanese skulls all over the place. The old Texans, they're crazy. They'd pick up a skull and pack 'em up and send 'em back to Texas, you know, as a souvenir?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really?

MARTIN GONZALES: So that was the first campaign we had, but we still hadn't tasted combat. So then we made the landing and you'll see in my memoirs, I think I got it there, I'm not too sure. We made the landing and the Fifth Calvary, they went into Negros Island and they did most of the fighting at the airstrip there. And then we came in the 12<sup>th</sup> and we came in kind of to clean up the rest of the islands. And then there was four regiments in the First Calvary. There was Seventh and Eighth. And the Seventh and Eighth came later. So that was our first experience of combat. But once the heavy fighting was done, the first few days when the Fifth Calvary was there, they had to have it out with the Jap Marines. And they, uh, I don't think the Japanese, they didn't have a lot of troops. They had it pretty well fortified but it wasn't a real super battle. But it dragged out because we had to chase these guys through, had to clean up the place. We come in there, probably the first part of March and by May you could consider

the Admiralty Islands secure. So it took maybe two, two months. By that time, and they made a big base there because they made airstrips and they didn't have to pour concrete because they're coral islands. So they get the Captains, they just made these airports. I mean Air Force bases. And they were flying, by that time the Admiralty Islands was the closest place close to the Philippines. That's where we had to wait after that. And that's where, you probably, in my memoir, I got a decoration there. Our first encounter from my company was on patrol and I was the BAR man's assistant. So Don Chase, as we're moving out, we had to reinforce the platoon or something, I don't know how many yards. We must have come a hundred yards and we spot a camp of Japanese. And he opened up and he's big enough, if you've ever seen a BAR, a BAR is a pretty big gun. He could shoot 'em in the shoulder. I was the assistant so I had to feed the clips to him. Big old, 30-caliber, 20 rounds a clip. So I was feeding the clips and then he got shot. I remember he was crying and you just act automatic. Well I know I had to go to my May Day and I'm pulling the straps up and I've gotta take the gun over. And they're firing the darn thing. And I couldn't fire from the shore. I had to get behind a stump or something. That's all I remember of that action. And I ended up being there covering the retreat. And they had some other guys got hit. And we had to retreat back to our perimeter, back where we came from. 'Cause you had to take care of the wounded. And they carried Don Chase out. So I became BAR man in that operation. They got him on a destroyer, tried to get him back to New Guinea hospital, but he died in the destroyer.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh.

MARTIN GONZALES: He was the first casualty. And so anyway, about, oh, I can remember the day. Saint Patrick's Day. Because when I was up at San Francisco I lost my Silver Star and I had to get, Senator Hodgefield got it for me and replaced it. A buddy of mine, a Federal Mediator. He's a close friend of mine and I told him I lost it. He said, "Can I get it for you?" and I said, "you got it." But I don't have the citation. And I had the date that it happened. It was Saint Patrick's Day. So that was March. But in August the Captain calls me in his office and says, "Gonzales, you're going to get a four star award at the ceremony" and this and that. I never thought it was just a big operation, you know? But anyway. That was our first experience in combat with shooting somebody and everything else. So we had closer calls and more days in operations since then in Leyte. But that was our first kind of a baptism of fire. And when you read my memoirs, that's when I met Fred Simon. He came over from Kansas. But when I came back from, all the guys they retreated to the perimeter. And it was myself and another guy, hoping they wouldn't shoot us 'cause we were the only ones left up in front. We came back and hollered, "Don't shoot us!". So when I come back from my hole, Chase had gone. They had put him already in the barge and tried to get him out. So we got some replacements in. They sent Fred Simon. He happened to be one of the replacements. The other guy with him, Roger Smith, was from my home town of San Diego. Look, I'll tell you they were drafting us from 18. Rodney was 38 years old and I was 19, so he was twice as old as I was. So anyway, I still remember that. So Fred and I from then on were pretty well together during the whole war. Part of the story of the war is Fred Simon. So you'll hear it when you see the memoir and how we were together and we got together. But that was our first encounter. And then the rest of

the Admiralty was pretty, mostly waiting for the big operation. To bring MacArthur back to the Philippines.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right.

MARTIN GONZALES: That happened October 20<sup>th</sup> of '44.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What island is it that Don Chase gets hit?

MARTIN GONZALES: It was Negros Island in the Admiralties.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay. And that's what you got the Silver Star for? The action in Negros?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, well, they probably [indiscernible]. What happened, he got shot. And so the guys, this other guy got wounded, so they pulled out. But in the action, you just shoot. You're shooting away and you lose track of time. I still remember, the only thing I remember about that was that I got behind a sub and I was shooting down where I would could see. Actually when I saw, I think I saw one or two Japanese Chase was shooting at 'em. Then afterwards I was just shooting back to their position. And we kept shooting away. And before we know it, this one guy, an older guy, was next to me. He was a rifle man. I think he called me "Junior". Because my name was Augustin Gonzales Junior. They don't want to call you "Augustin" so everybody was "Hey Junior". And I had a baby face. "Hey Junior, we better get

out of here.” So by that time, everybody had left. And here we are up there shooting away. [Laughing] And so we came back and I think they give us credit for – and made it possible for them to pull out without getting more casualties, you know? But it wasn’t, you don’t feel like a hero. I’ll tell you right now, you don’t feel like. Like I told you, two months later or whenever it was in August, and I said, “What?”. I never thought that was so heroic. Anyways, they thought it was pretty good.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You just basically feel that you’re just doing your job?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. You know. There was fear. Like I still remember, ‘cause you could hear the Japanese. The Japanese, their bullets sound like firecrackers. And it’s hard to tell where they’re coming from. And you’re just waiting, you know, just shooting away. And then finally they quit shooting, and that’s when you start coming back. But by that time the rest of the company, the rest of the patrol was back in the foxholes. So that, it wasn’t like I was shooting a bunch of guys down, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, no.

MARTIN GONZALES: And you know, I’ll tell you the truth. We wanted to kill somebody. I didn’t want to go all that way and not kill someone, you know? But now, I’m grateful, I think it would have bothered me if I had seen guys, just like I’m talking to you, and then shot ‘em dead, you

know? I don't think it would have, it would have bothered me today if that had happened. I realize now, it's a whole different world, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah. At this point, what unit, I mean I know you're with the First Cavalry, but what Company or Regiment or, what was that breakdown?

MARTIN GONZALES: I was in the Second Platoon, A Troop. Of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. And we were the First Squadron. Each Regiment had two Squadrons. So we were the 12<sup>th</sup> and we had the First Squadron was A Troop, B Troop and C Troop. And the Second Squadron was G, F, and I guess, I don't remember the other one. So that's what we were. We were Second Platoon. And I was with the Second Platoon all the way, finally in the last, we were getting ready to get to Japan and I got transferred to Headquarters Platoon. I was going to be a Flame Thrower when we landed in Japan but God saved us. [Laughter].

MIKE ZAMBRANO: So you would have been with a Flame Thrower had you invaded Japan or been in on the invasion?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yup. And the life expectancy of a flame thrower isn't very long, brother.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, no I can imagine. I'm curious, what was your first impression of Freddie Simon when you first met him?

MARTIN GONZALES: He was skinny! [Laughter] He's a country boy from Kansas, you know? And so you know, I was kind of your macho type. And I was always a friendly guy. But he looked kind of feeble. But I'll tell you the truth.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really? [Laughter]

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, but he ended up being a tough, he ended up being a BAR man, you know? He'll probably tell you himself. But when he came he was kind of, he looked green. By that time I'd been in the Cavalry about oh. The guys, when we hung around, they cussed like crazy. I never did cuss, you know? It wasn't because, I didn't hang around. I played ball with tough guys. Cussing was never my occasion I guess. And Simon was a little bit like that. He was kind of a clean cut guy. And we used to go to church together, played ball together. He shared his story of his family and his girlfriend and all that stuff. We were kind of clean cut kids really. But like, I was a poor guy, just regular. Not bad people. We got teased a little bit, about being a good guy. We went to church together. I'm sure we had temptations of those types, but we were pretty clean all the way around.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: It sounds like you two made a good pair.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, we were. Chase, I'll tell you about Chase. What happened was he ended up in the Land Platoon. But a big guy, he was about 230 and husky. And when you're that big they used to put you in a Machine Gun Platoon or a Mortar because you're big. But the

Mortar guys and the Machine guys, were regular tough rascals, drank a lot. And a big topic was the gals they took out. But Chase used to sell Bibles in Minnesota! [Laughter] You can't have a guy with a Bible as the head of these guys. So finally they said, why don't you get him out of here and put him in the Land Platoon. So that's how he ended up being a BAR man. Chase and I would have, we had good conversations. He had opinions. So we'd talk about different things about our church and things like that. And he was older and he was a real swimmer. He was clean cut. He was really clean. But he was strong and a real soldier, you know? So I was sorry, I'm sure he's in heaven right now. [Laughs]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: It sounds like it. Let's see. Just at this point, since you've been in the service for a little while now, can you tell me a little bit about your living conditions when you weren't moving around?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well you mean after we got through combat and everything?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah. When you get overseas like to Australia, then when you get over to the Admiralty Islands, what are your living conditions like?

MARTIN GONZALES: Okay, Australia was camps. I was at Camp Strathpine. It was kind of bare. One of the things that drove me nuts was you had to go around and "rock the field". You know, pick rocks. It was pretty bare. I wasn't all that excited about that camp. A lot of mosquitos. And then we got out to New Guinea and our bay was probably three weeks. Right away you



pitch tents. So we lived in tents. And then, when you're in combat, you live in fox holes. So all that time we were fighting in the Admiralties we were living in foxholes. And then when we finished, we set up our camp and we had tents. And there's about eight guys to a tent.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: They have outside showers. You've got a latrine way down the end. I'm trying to figure how those showers worked. They were all cold water. Pretty kind of bare. It's all tents. They have where you eat. They never had any barracks. And then we went to the Philippines, it was, by the time we got there it was all foxholes. All the way, all through the Philippines till New Year's of '45. And then we pitched tents. We came back, it took us about 68 days to get through fighting the Japanese at Leyte Island to secure the island. And then Philip took us out but then MacArthur, his dad was commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> in 1900. And he wanted the First Calvary division to come into Manila and liberate the prisoners at Santo Tomas. Involved in that battle. So we didn't have much rest. You know, we finished about New Year's and then about February or January we were up and on our way to Luzon. But when you come down from the mountains in January of New Year's of '45, you had tents and it's muddy and rainy. And you know, the poor cook, because there's been nothing but C-Rations and K-Rations and, you know, praying no army combat chow. They had ham, eggs. So everybody, well, most of the guys got diarrhea. So all night, man, you'll see the old guy walking down the troop street walking down to the end where the latrines were. It was a big mess to finally get your stomach adapted to good food. But then it was alright traveling by ship from

Leyte to Luzon. But then from Luzon we went nonstop in foxholes. The Battle of Manila was over probably, actually we fought Manila and then we had, we were in tents for about a week or two and then we headed to Anapu Mountains and that was real tough fighting. And then we went south and it was all foxholes. Except when we got to Mauban in the little port town. We slept in the marketplace and that was a concrete floor. We thought that was great 'cause it was dry. But it's concrete, you know? You slept on a rock. And then at the last camp in Lucena where we're getting ready to go to make the invasion in Japan, there we had tents again. So it was never barracks, it's always tents. And then we got to Japan and there were big tents. But then I think we spent a week and we moved into a Japanese Army camp before we headed back for the states.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Lucena. That's in the Philippines?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. The southern part. We fought Manila, we went down to Los Banos and fought. And then we went close to Batangas. And then we shot over to Tayabas. That's a province. And then Mauban is a border town. It's the beach town of Tayabas. And we stayed there about a month. The month of May of '45. And then we came in to Lucena and then the First Calvary really settled down to prepare for the invasion of Japan. That's where we heard the end of the war. So that was good memories there.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Mr. Simon mentioned a story. I think that you were probably there. When there's fighting going on in Manila and you get close to, I forget the name of the hotel, but it was MacArthur's old headquarters?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, the Manila Hotel.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: You know, what I remember of that, Fred and I, we were put in, the thing I remember about Manila. First thing was I joined Fred. He fought, what happened, Mike, we got to Lingayen Gulf and we start making that famous, what the heck did they call it. It was a famous march.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Oh the Bataan Death March?

MARTIN GONZALES: We had, MacArthur ordered the division to get down to Manila, bypass the Japanese. There's a name for the march and it can't come to my mind right now.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Are you referring to the Bataan Death March?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, no. This was after, we came, America was already in the Lingayen Gulf. And the Calvary came and the flag column. MacArthur ordered the First Calvary General

to head to Manila and go right down and don't spend too much fighting with the Japs on the side. Get right down to Manila and liberate the prisoners. Well about the second day I come up with cramps in my stomach. And I went to the guy at the medic. It took about two or three days to get to Manila. Well it was either the first or second day and I come up with these cramps. And everybody knew that Manila was going to be the hardest fight, and it was. And so when I went to the medic, they give me a look and they say, he made me feel like I was trying to chicken out or something like that. And all I could tell him was I had cramps, you know? Like I couldn't sleep at night. Well then the Filipinos, you always made friends. You fought one place to another and then we'd stop and then another group would bypass and go ahead. It was a leapfrog deal. And so we'd always stay one night, so when we were there in the Philippines, we'd give 'em candy. The poor guys had never had anything decent to eat in years. And so they, this Filipino couple, they made a tea for me. I told 'em about the cramps. So I vomited a hookworm. It's almost like a fingertip. From your nail. And they came out. So I give it to the medic. So then they send me out and send me to a field hospital. And so I ended up being in the outskirts of Manila. My Regiment, Fred and those guys, the job came up and they, some of the hardest fighting was in Rizal Stadium. We had several of the guys killed. So then I was in the hospital and the artillery was behind the hospital and they were shooting into Manila. So I could hear the artillery going all night. And then my Lieutenant, Lieutenant Macado, he'd come in after about a week. And he got shot in there. I remember he says, "Hey Junior, they're having a rough time out there." He was telling me about the guys who got killed and this and that. So then in the next tent where I was, there was a kid got a leg blown off. He cried all night. I remember that.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Uh-huh.

MARTIN GONZALES: So when it came my time, we were going to mass, and I had to see the doctor to evaluate you. You can tell him you're okay and ready to go or you can tell him you're sick and they'll send you back. I still remember it was, you really attempted to say you're sick, or maybe you really were sick! So I finally just said, "You know, I'm okay. I'm ready to go." It looked like after I told him, "I'm okay", I was almost sorry I told him because the next day they picked me up. Took me in a weapons carrier and then I joined Fred Simon when they were just close to the YMCA. And that was about two blocks from the Manila Hotel. So I had about two more weeks of fighting before we hit the river. Quezon Boulevard, well the changed the name now, but it used to be on the waterfront. And that's where we were going, down by the waterfront. Fighting the Japanese that were in these hotels and they were in the buildings and everything else. And so [we were] in the outskirts of Manila and [laughs] I remember they opened fire on us and so we all hit the deck. We all hit the ground. I still remember this jeep come up. And everybody looked in it and said, "Who in the heck is that stupid guy driving up with a jeep?" And who walks out but General MacArthur?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Wow, really?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. And he come out and we're right next to his hotel! [Laughter] We all looked up and he had an Officer and a Sergeant driving the old jeep. It was automatic, man.

Everybody got up. If the old general could stand up, we could stand up too. I remember that. And then the next night we were, we spent it in Manila Hotel and it was around the time of my birthday 'cause my birthday was the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February. And Fred's was the 24<sup>th</sup>. And I always say we celebrated our birthdays in the Manila Hotel. And we were in the first floor. The main floor was no man's land and the Japanese in the Cellar. So at night you had to pull guard and you could hear the Japanese [Shouting Sounds]. And they're trying to get out. 'Cause Walled City is right next to it. And I guess they were there in Walled City. And I still remember, I had a car beam. I tried to just shoot his poor Japanese that tried to get out. And then he stopped dead when, we were throwing these flares up. And when they saw a flare up they wouldn't move. They would just stay still. But I remember Fred hit him with a BAR 'cause he's a tracer. 'Cause he was the BAR man and I was assisting him. And then the next thing you hear, this Japanese, when the Japanese used the, when they throw a grenade, they have to hit it against something to get it loose or something. And then you could hear the clicking. And this guy, he must have put the grenade under his jaw because the next morning, his whole head was blown off, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Wow.

MARTIN GONZALES: That, I remember that. And then the next day, we were going to move down by the Manila Hotel to the waterfront. Well we got there and I don't know if it was artillery, Mike, or if it was the Japanese, but it fell behind a bunch sandbags. And there was an opening on one side and one on the other side. Well we happened to be on the side that was

covered. But the concussion, I'm sure it was about ten feet from us. The concussion was so strong, it just picked us up, like a body slam when you're wrestling and the guy throws you down?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: And I never forgot it. It's a horrible feeling to be picked up and dropped. Well by that time, Fred got hit. A bunch of wood shells, I don't know how many he killed. And Fred was one of the guys that got hit by shrapnel from that. And the other guy that was real close to Fred, he got hit and when we picked him up, he was stunned but he had just a little cut in his stomach. So thought we'd send him to the hospital and he'd be okay. Well San Miguel finally, I think he hemorrhaged inside and so he died. But that was the one that I think Fred was talking about. It was one of our real close calls. You know, we're lucky to be here talking to you. But what saved us was that the shell fell behind these sandbags. It was a bomb shelter that the Japanese had built.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: So that was, that's probably what Fred was talking about, I'm sure. Fred and I differ a little bit on some things. I think he remembers. But he remembers Anapula pretty well. Over, the Japanese were in caves and all. There were two of us. Usually it was three in the hole. That night there were two of us. They were shooting point blank at us all night. And

we just prayed, you know? And I'm sure prayers helped us out, getting out of that hole. So that was about, from then on, we went south and Los Banos, from then on there was very little opposition. By the time they got to Mauban it was pretty mellow. Luzon was pretty well secure by then.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What happens once Luzon's secure? Where do you guys go? Do you get a rest period?

MARTIN GONZALES: They only came back to Lucena to get camp. By that time they're already making preparations for the invasion of Japan. So that was part of the training. And I don't know, it may be my memory but I don't think, my memories of the end of the war were we already did our preliminary landings, preparation for our landing in Japan. And the ships were all loaded with all the equipment and everything for the invasion. And we were supposed to, the last operation, the last maneuvers we had, and that was just, the last ready to ship out and head for Japan. I was supposed to come in, my flight was over in the first wave. And come off in the alligator and that was all, we did all that, and we just went back to camp. And the camp was almost, we packed everything up, we were just waiting for the staging operation. That's when we heard that the war was over. I mean first we heard kind of a rumor about Atom bombs. But even that was foggy. We didn't, I can't remember that it was very clear. Like I told you, we didn't get a lot of news and they were pretty secretive about a lot of stuff. But then when we were in, they had this radio and it never really worked very well. But the day the Japanese gave up, it came on and said that Japan had surrendered. And that was probably the



happiest day of my whole life. You know, I really experienced it physically. It was joy that lasted until this day, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah. I can imagine. It's been a long war to this point.

MARTIN GONZALES: And it's hard to, you can only say it and you can't expect someone else to have the same. The only thing is, even when they told us that 60% of us in the first wave would never make it to the beach, we had kind of doubts. But it so happened, I lucked out. When I came in to Yokohama, you had to come in to Yokohama. So this invasion force that was going to land, instead of being an invasion, we went ahead with the plans and we come up with occupation troops. But we had to pull in to Subic Bay because of a big hurricane coming up. We were there two or three days, a couple of days, and then we headed down for Japan. Well it happened to be, we got in the same day that MacArthur was signing the treaty. The Missouri was about a mile away from us. And I can tell you because I was there. And I have, if I can find it, I have a picture that I found in a magazine where it has a picture of the Missouri and it shows a lot of planes and it was probably the best picture I've seen. The whole sky was full of planes. I mean it was a roar. But as we came in the channel, we had to come single file. Because there's little islands all over the place. And it was a narrow channel coming in to Yokohama. I still remember being at the topside and looking. Then I realized it would have been one heck of a time trying to avoid being shot at from these islands. Because I don't care how good the bombers were, they're not going to hit a whole island. You know, I think they had more misses than they do hits, and they're a good morale builder but that's the way it is. I think they might

have been pretty close when they said that 60% would never make it to the beach. That's my memory of coming in. And I can remember we were that close to the Missouri that we could see that they were having the ceremony. And after we got to Yokohama docks and we were in the embassy building. We were there waiting maybe three or four hours before some truck came over to take us to the Imperial parade route. But MacArthur come back and we had a chance to see him when they came back. 'Cause that's where his headquarters were, in the Embassy building. And they came back out after having signed, taken the surrender from the Japanese. So that was a big day for us. The other one was, I probably put it in my memoirs. When we got out the docks, you had to march about probably about twelve blocks to the Embassy building. Well at least for two blocks there were Japanese officers and you could tell they were officers because they had sabers. And they were about six feet apart. And the parade ran from one side of the street to the other. Kind of a sign of surrender. And I can still remember, I could feel the pain of their, there wasn't a smile there. It was all deadpan faces. I could feel the pain of surrender. But also, deep inside of me I was happy that we were victors. We didn't have to be shooting it out.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right.

MARTIN GONZALES: And having seen those sad faces, then from then on for about seven blocks, and the curb with the kids and the people, and when I seen these kids, it's automatic. You right away, you hate war. You can't believe that you're killing kids like that. And when you see Japanese kids, they're the cutest kids in the world. Big old smiles. And the people. And

then later on, we were there for a month. We had people washing our clothes and stuff like that. And then we went around, had a chance to go around with an officer checking buildings and things. So I got to meet kids in school and other people. And you know, war is not for the people really. It's the damn guys that are the head of it. They start it and they're not even part of it, you know? They make you go out there and get killed and slaughtered. So you take a whole different look at what war is like, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. Before the Japanese surrendered, did you have the occasion to run into any Japanese prisoners?

MARTIN GONZALES: You know, I had one trip when I was in Lucena. When I was in Mauban, this family was there. You know, you always, you want to make friends with everybody. One of the girls that made friends with me, [indiscernible], she told us her family lives, she was, she looked a little bit Mexican to tell you the truth. I think she was half Hispanic or something. 'Cause there's a lot of Spanish in Manila. So then when we, one of the things when we were in Lucena one of the times, when we go over into Manila, and we hitch hiked and they planned a dinner for us. And lucky, their house, her mother's house in Manila, they were pretty well off. 'Cause they had this plantation in Mauban, it was a coconut plantation. So when the war was done, they just moved down there and left Manila. And so they gave us the address, we ended up while we were there visiting she showed us a scrapbook, a society page. So they were pretty well up in society I guess. Oh, I gotta tell you the rest of this. You know, the Filipinos, they eat fish with bones and everything, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: So they give us this fancy dinner. Boy I almost choked on the silly bones. I couldn't eat the fish. I didn't want to insult them, but I had a handful of crumbs. I take these crumbs and I finally swallowed the bones. But we had a nice dinner with them. But when I was there, this one guy looked out of the building and she says, "he's going to be the next President of the Philippines". And that was Osmena. Osmena was staying with them. So there was a few houses in Manila that were destroyed. And then her family was pretty well off. I think their last name was Hilario Severo. And right now, over here in McMinnville, the guy is a Filipino in charge of the lab department for one of the medical clinics. Where we go to. And he comes out here to mass. But we happened to live in Lucena when we were there. That was his hometown. He just went back there a few months ago. And I says, I'm sure Melados, I think she, her family came back to the states. If she lived, she'd probably be, well I was 20, she'd probably be about 90 I guess. I don't know. The last time, I lost contact with her, but she sent me a picture when I was in Japan and by that time, I wasn't interested. I was more interested in getting home. But anyway, he went to Mauban to check out to see if he could find Melados and they were having some big, international company for imports. The Ferio limited or something. He didn't get a chance to see her. I think they're probably back in the States someplace if they've got their own business, you know? But it was nice to have gotten the chance to have seen it. At he was, Osmena was the first president after the Americans took over. He led the country for, I don't know, two or three years.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: You said Selenas?

MARTIN GONZALES: Osmena. That was the president.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: How do you spell that?

MARTIN GONZALES: O-S-M-E-N-A. Something like that. Osmena You look it up. He was the first president after the war. But the Severo family, they must have been pretty much something high society I guess. But everybody was, they were happy. They treated these poor Filipinos. They were a loving kind of a family. Kind of people. They're really, at least it was hard to see 'em suffer so much. Pretty strong people. A lot of the customs are very Latino, you know? Music.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Really?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, and dancing. They're very much, a lot of joy in their families. And they have a lot of customs. You know when we were in Mauban in May, it was like being in Paris or San Diego. And on Lady Guadalupe day they had the girls that would come and offer flowers. And a lot of the customs are very much Mexican, Spanish. So that was about it.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: So how long were you in Japan before you shipped home?

MARTIN GONZALES: Pardon?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: How long were you in Japan before you were shipped home?

MARTIN GONZALES: I was just there a month. You know what happened, Mike? Fred and I, we got points because he got a decoration and he got a bronze star and a purple heart. We had a hundred and some points, and the older guys that had been over there before us, they knew they were coming home. They had the ship out in the harbor. One day they loaded these guys. They found out they had a lot of room left. So then the first Sargent came back to the camp and he said, "Hey, you guys are next in line." And we made it for the next batch. And I remember I was kind of drunk. We had been drinking beer that night and we were asleep and we thought that guy was just pulling our leg. So right in the middle of the night he came and woke us up. He said, "You guys, pack up and go if you want to go." And then they offer you a different day if you stay and you can do this and that. When they said 'come home' we were ready to come home. I'll tell you. I'd already ordered some softballs to start a softball league and I was passing out softballs and gloves and shirts and everything. I was like Santa Claus or something. So that's when we found out. So we were only there a month. 'Cause we got there September 2 and by October 13<sup>th</sup> we were on our way home.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: So how long does it take for you to get across to, where? Do you go to Pearl Harbor first or you come back to the states?

MARTIN GONZALES: No, no, no, no. The other thing that happened, you know like I tell you when we left San Francisco, about half the ship was full of seasickness. But you know, when we were coming home, there wasn't one guy sick. And we came to know the route because it was pretty rough. You're on the ship at night and it was a Navy transport. And they had two meals a day. Breakfast and supper. And a brief lunch. And everything was just first class. But it was rough seas but nobody got sick because they were coming home. And I still remember coming into the Golden Gate! And there was some lady there waving us in and I said, "Hey, that's the same lady that said good bye to us!" [Laughter] I still remember that. Next thing I remember, we were at barges going up to, we got out in San Francisco and headed back to Stoneman and they had all kinds of people on boats going by wishing us a happy return. From then on it was a lot of parties. Too many parties.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: What rank were you when you left the service?

MARTIN GONZALES: I was a PFC. Never got higher than that.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: And between then time, well, let me ask it this way. I assume you headed home first once you made it back to the States?

MARTIN GONZALES: Headed what?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Um, once you got back to the continental United States, you went straight home?

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah, I went right down to Camp MacArthur, Fort MacArthur. We went by train I think, brother, from San Francisco to San Pedro. And then everything, the buses were on strike, so we had to hitchhike from San Pedro to San Diego and right away we got discharged. But people would pick you up. They'd give you a ride. Everybody was happy. We were Veterans, you know, so they were really nice.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: So from the time you get discharged, how long is it before you end up with The Abbey?

MARTIN GONZALES: Like I told you, I had a rough, part of it was trying to get together. It was, I got out in '45 and I ended up in Trappist Abbey in '52. And what happened is I went to college, University of Loyola from about '46 to '47 and I took a pre-med course and I thought I was going to be a doctor or something. But you have to have good grades, you know. Part of it, I guess, you know you always have a desire to serve or help somebody.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: And so then I was there for a year and part of it, even there, Mike, I gotta say I was like a weekend alcoholic. And I didn't know it. I didn't know it until I was 70 years old.



And I thought drinking was part of a Mexican tradition. A lot of drinking in our time after that. Even dancing and things like that. Part of, I think not making it in college I think it was part of that. And then, so I didn't go back. I was going to go back because I lived on campus from '46 to '47 and then I met a priest there. The priests, they really wanted to help us, you know? You know, because the Latinos were starting to go to school. And so they wanted Latinos to take up college. 'Cause there weren't that many going to college. So they were kind. And Mike, can I get you to call me in a few minutes? I want to call someone to get them to bring food over so I can finish. Otherwise I have to leave here. Or are you ready to end?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Well there's probably a little bit more that we need to cover, but I'll tell you what. Why don't you do that and we can talk a little bit later and we can set up maybe 30 minutes?

MARTIN GONZALES: Well I can call back right away. I just want to tell 'em and then I can finish out whatever I have to do.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Well I'm thinking I'm probably getting close here to pick up my son in a little bit. But we probably need another 30 minutes.

MARTIN GONZALES: Well what I can do, I can take the food over to the guest house. And then when can I call you?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Do you still have my cell number?

MARTIN GONZALES: Why don't you call me when, right now it's five minutes to twelve here.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: Could you call me in about 45 minutes?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, I think so.

MARTIN GONZALES: Would it be better in a half hour?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, let's say I'll give you a call at about 2:30. I'm sorry, a half hour.

MARTIN GONZALES: Okay, that'd be fine. I didn't know we'd be talking this long.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: No, no, that's fine.

MARTIN GONZALES: And you get thinking back on a lot of things that happened. It's interesting. Not only that but I have to tell you about Thanksgiving. 'Cause Thanksgiving is Thursday and that's a special story that I've gotta give to you. So in a half hour. 12:30 you call me.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right. Okay. Thanks. Bye.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay, it's running.

MARTIN GONZALES: Well I came back and I'll tell you there was a lot of celebrations. So then I went to college at Loyola there. They were very good to me. Did I tell you that I met this priest, Father Fairman? And he was, we were rough-and-tumble but, our role-models were or athletes, ball players or boxers. A lot of the priests were kind of, pretty delicate people, you know? Pretty, kind of, not ball players, you know? So anyway, Father Fairman was twice as kind to me when I was at the library. When I used to leave, I used to say, "Ah, poor Father. If I ever have real trouble I don't think I would go to a poor priest like that. He couldn't handle all that stuff." [Laughs]. Anyway, I left school and then I went home and I tried to go visit a couple of guys. Part of it, it was you got that, I wasn't quite settled. You know I look back and I was drafted when I was 18, just out of high school. It was kind of hard, I guess emotions. I always found if you're raised, you know, in the 50s, Mike, you know in the Mexican tradition if you married somebody it was for keeps. And so, I guess when I was, I can look back at times when I was involved in Leyte thinking, well if I get out of here I'll have a nice, find a little farm someplace, get married, have kids and all that. But then you come back and it was a whole different world. It was not all that easy to settle down. And so, part of it, so then, when I went and visited with these guys and we finally went under into the cleaning business. So then I tried different jobs. I finally got a job with a Rohr aircraft. And I worked there, and you know,

something tells you you want to do something else. And like I've told you, then I'd been close to the priests and the nuns, but I always almost thought if you decided to get into religious life or priesthood, you had to have, almost you had to be kind of a Santo or an angel or something. I had to face the music and I wasn't a Santo and I wasn't an angel, you know? I was a man. I was just like regular life, Mike, you know? Played ball with the guys. I was in charge of the basketball team at Rohr. And softball team. Always involved in sports. But a lot of the times involved a lot of partying and drinking. And was like, in the neighborhood there was always some kind of like dance. And so that was part of our way of life. Our CYO kept together and most of them married into the people in the CYO. They did pretty well. Anyway, having all those ups and downs, finally most of my buddies got married. And I don't know, one of those weekends I had a big rough time and you know, it's easy in those days, the taverns close about 1:00 in San Diego, but it was easy to go to Tijuana and have a good time. And so when I came back, I can still remember the date because it was June 13, 1951. And after having one of those rough weekends, I had to see somebody, you know? So I decided well maybe I'll go to confession. So I went to my parish in San Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe. And it happened to be a Jesuit parish. Well it so happened they had transferred Father Fairman, this priest I thought I'd never go to because he was such a kind and gentle sort of person. Well he happened to be the guy that answered the door at the rectory. But he was a brilliant guy and he was the director of a community of Sisters. A spiritual director. So he knew church history by his hand. The same old Father Fairman took me to the parlor and went to confession. And at the end he says, "Augustin I think you've got a religious vocation". And that's how I ended up in the monastery. And I said, "Geez!" So now when I work in the guest house, I said mass for the

brothers for years. And I don't know, I kid the guys and would say, "Don't send any angels or saints because they won't make it." Some of the repentant sinners stick around. They're the type who know who they are. I came to the monastery really to try it out and get it out of my system. And if it didn't work, I'd go look into married life and be married-ville. 60 years later, it gets better, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: But it made me respect a lot. People I work with have gifts and people are married and it's a privilege. The responsibility of being married and raising kids. So I'm kind of glad that, I realize that, you know you have a way of life where I can go out to people and really love people and be part of it. Only thing is I'm the only Hispanic in the community. I don't know why we don't attract them. And what happened, Mike, the other thing is when I looked into Trappist life in '51, Thomas Merton was pretty well known and there was an article in Readers' Digest about Veterans after WWII entering religious life. Our own [indiscernible] had about 200 or 190 or something like that. The other big Abbey in Kentucky had about 190. The other one in Iowa had at least 150. It seems when you go through the war experience like WWII, you have that hunger for that peace and some real stability. Something inside. The only thing is what happens, like when we came home, we came home and I can remember, I was home thinking and you long for some kind of peace. Especially in the front lines. You're always in the danger of death. There's always that kind of instability in the war. You long for this peaceful way of life. When you come home, and no matter where you are, you have to work at

it. Life is that way. It's a challenge all the time. So then they didn't find it in regular life so they say, "Well, I'll go to the monastery." Well it so happens the monastery is the same way. The life is the same. You have to work at it. You have to live and you have to pray for it every day. I mean there's no way out of it. I'm here 60 years later and I have to pray for faith, for vision. You have to pray. The spiritual life has to be real to you. And it can't be real for a lot of people. Like when I went home in February, the intensity of life in the outside it's not that easy. To take time and kind of deepen your life. It's a conscious of spirit, you know? And so that, now I look back and I appreciate it. It's funny, sometimes God, the man I owe my life to is this poor priest that encouraged me to go where I thought I'd never go. I had a chance to see him before he died. He was out in Santa Clara. And he was actually in the history department at Santa Clara. Wrote a couple of books. But he was a brilliant man, Father Fairman. So he probably saw something deeper in me than I saw in myself. So that's my coming into the monastery. So that's about what it is. We haven't had, in our own community we haven't had a lot of, right now there's probably about four or five of us from WWII. After the Korean War a couple of new mugs came from that war. The Vietnam War and the present war, we haven't had... And it is, mounted that there's a lot of hope in me because we have a program where they can come and spend time. Even a man who doesn't want to enter. You know, they have a chance for a kind of, you don't even have to be a Catholic as long as you're a Christian or, even had a Buddhist come spend time because he had to go to all the prayers. They just don't take the Eucharist. But they have a chance of being a part. And looking, an honest look at life and the mystery of life and it could be good for everybody, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: So that's, really I hope someday you have a chance to come by, Mike, and even with your family, and take a look. So when I send you that DVD, it isn't to show off. It just, you know, what I mean is I don't think a guy should be a super sinner but you know, we're human. And I think the Church and myself, we realize that we're not all built, we have to struggle with faith all our lives. There's no picnic anytime. We're no better than anybody else. It's just some of us are called to this way of life. And when, the thing is, if you give it a good try, if you don't find your peace in here, and they give you five years or six years. It's no sin to say this is not my way of life. For some I think it's a, I think more will be called to this way of life if they took a good look. And lead a fulfilling life. I feel called to my family, my friends. And I feel that it's the right call, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, I understand.

MARTIN GONZALES: Anyway, so you know the deal. And I'm not pushing anybody to come here. But if they have a chance, don't worry about, to give God a chance to look at some way of life. Even for anybody to take time to be. I think sometimes, when there's a lot of activity, Mike, there's no depth. And we need to be quiet. All of us, to kinda deepen. Even back off from your family and look at the gift of your wife and your kids. The whole mystery. It's powerful, you know?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Right.

MARTIN GONZALES: I'm not trying to be a Holy Joe or anything like that. But the other thing I had to tell you about, Thanksgiving. That day I went out, it was Thanksgiving. It's in my memoirs, but I'll tell you. Thanksgiving of '44. The other thing that happened, and you could tell this, nothing ever happened according to schedule. You know, all the planning the poor Army made. You had to adapt to the situation day by day, you know? And we had only come in late. The journal or the Headquarters probably thought, go through Leyte in three or four weeks. Well, it took us 68 days. We were in the last ridge from the, if you come in, you see Leyte Valley and Ormoc Valley, and there's the mountains that separates them.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: Well we got through Letye Valley and sent our regiment over in the mountains. The 32<sup>nd</sup> and the others were coming down the end. And there was hard fighting. And this last ridge was an observation point and they had to get it, so. So we tried twice and we got shot down. And we were trying to figure out. And then, Thanksgiving day, they sent us turkey by pack train. And it so happened the Colonel had went ahead really ahead of schedule. And he left the position real unguarded. And so any troops that come to our position had to go through this fork in the trails and so we left it unguarded and the Japanese came and took one over. So when the pack train came in the Philippines with the turkey for us, they're watching the perimeter and instead of seeing Americans they see these Japanese bases. So they



dropped the turkey in the garden and they just ran. It was lucky nobody got killed. So then we were cornered for, oh man, a week! And that, so that was Thanksgiving in '44. And Fred now just happened to be, you know when you don't eat, all you can think of is something that you really like. You know. And reading about the prisoners at Santo Thomas and there's all the, the food. It's all they could think of. The food back home, something they really liked. Well I was sitting in that foxhole, and all this waiting, we finally fought our way out of that. But during that, before we got, fought it out and got cleared, I don't know how many days. But every time you get down to hardly anything. And you'd think, all I could think was refried beans and some fresh tortilla. And old Fred, all he could talk about was some kind of corn dish his mom would cook for him. So when it's Thanksgiving I always call him up to remind him of Thanksgiving. So he can enjoy his turkey a little better! [Laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: I guess you'll be calling him in another few days here.

MARTIN GONZALES: Yeah. Actually, you know we went back for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There was only about two of us from the whole division. What happened was, right here locally, one of the guys that owns the big airlines, Evergreen Airlines, and they have three big museums over here in McMinnville. It's probably the top cargo plane in the country. But he was, he used to come to mass out here all the time. I think he was an appreciator of WWII Veterans. I think he himself flew in the Korean War. But anyway, he would come to mass, and he had this cargo plane going to Hong Kong. So I thought I'd get a ride and go back to the Philippines and celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup>. 'Cause there was a guy in the division from Oregon, landed with us in Leyte.

And then they went on to Okinawa and we stayed on and fought in Luzon. Well one of the guys went back for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and they had about 500 veterans. So I thought for the 60<sup>th</sup> they'd have a big gang at least. So the [indiscernible] paid our way for Fred and myself and Fred's son. So we flew to Japan and then to Manila and down to Leyte. But you know, it was kinda a shock. The President of the Philippines came down and talked for the celebration. There was only about two of us from the First Calvary Division that showed up. You know? And the whole celebration in Leyte, I can't remember more than about 60 people. Americans.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah.

MARTIN GONZALES: And so, you had to face the music, you know, the WWII veterans, God is calling us home faster than we think we are. So we're grateful that we're alive. And that we can help you somehow, maybe. Most of all, Mike, even after 50 years, 60 at the monastery, one of the things that's kind of a little painful. I can still remember Fred and I in Tokyo. We're getting ready to come home and we thought about the war and really believed that the end of WWII was going to be the end of all wars. When you look back now and see all the wars we've been into, and what's painful for me, I was here in the monastery and some of the veterans came back from Vietnam, and I could see the pain they would feel when you go over there and you go through all that kind of garbage and then you come back here and people kind of dislike you because you were there. But yet you were part of our services and the soldiers there who suffered, he doesn't deserve that kind of treatment. You know. Wherever he was, those are respected people. That was kind of, even today, like they question our involvement in Iraq and

all that. And I can see where they, they're coming back with all these post-traumatic problems, I can see why they can have one. I just tell you because you come back and you get that kind of treatment after seeing, they don't know what it is to be stuck in a hole. Shot at and everything else and seeing people die next to you and then you come back and get a bunch of garbage from people. That's kind of hard for me to see that. So I'm not proposing war but I think you have to respect the people that are involved in it.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Yeah, no, I understand.

MARTIN GONZALES: Anyway, it's been a privilege for me to talk to you, Mike, and I'm happy for you. And I hope whatever happens it helps our own country maybe work for peace. You know, look at the whole darn thing honestly and why the heck we get involved. We went into WWII because we were pushed into it. Even the Korean War. I'm glad, you know, that's one of the things, even here locally, I was telling, they have a local church and a young Hispanic leaders there and I said, and it does me good because my generation of Latinos are kind of passive. The first Latino I saw really speak up was Cesar Chavez. And then that other guy, must have been Texas or California. But it's nice to see that they're being responsible and willing to share their gift. We're going to make this country better if we learn to share our gift and be proud of our roots. And be proud of any roots. You know, make us prayerful people and religious people and it's in our blood, you know? Anyway, that's, I'm happy I'm here and I'm glad I had a chance to share with you. I'll send you that DVD, it's interesting. And then you can send it back to me.

You want to make a copy, you're welcome. I don't know how, I think they can make copies out of it and then you can send it back to me when you get through.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay that sounds good.

MARTIN GONZALES: And give my salute to all your mothers, your mother-in-law, your wife, I'm happy for you and I hope you, I'm sure you're going to help a lot of people be better and so, pray for us.

MIKE ZAMBRANO: I will. Thank you. Let me, let me thank you on behalf of the museum and myself, of course, for you know, your service and the time that you made. I know you can get busy out there, and I'm just glad that you made the time you made for me.

MARTIN GONZALES: And don't forget the offer to come visit us!

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay, I'll remember that.

MARTIN GONZALES: You'll love the northwest. It's nice. It's like a big park. [Laughter]

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay.

MARTIN GONZALES: Okay Mike. Give a salute to everybody, okay?

MIKE ZAMBRANO: Okay, thank you. Buh-bye.