



CSRC  
ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 12, DECEMBER 2013

# DAVID BOTELLO

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS

ON MAY 21, 2009

David Botello helped found Goetz Art Studios and Gallery in 1970. In the late 1970s, Botello and Wayne Healy established Los Dos Streetscapers. Now known as East Los Streetscapers, the studio is recognized for the murals it has created in Los Angeles, including *Chicano Time Trip* (1977), as well as other forms of public art in a variety of media. David Botello is a lifelong resident of Los Angeles.

Karen Mary Davalos is chair and professor of Chicana/o studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her research interests encompass representational practices, including art exhibition and collection; vernacular performance; spirituality; feminist scholarship and epistemologies; and oral history. Among her publications are *Yolanda M. López* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2008); "The Mexican Museum of San Francisco: A Brief History with an Interpretive Analysis," in *The Mexican Museum of San Francisco Papers, 1971–2006* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2010); and *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

This interview was conducted as part of the L.A. Xicano project.

Preferred citation: David Botello, interview with Karen Davalos, May 21, 2009, Los Angeles, California. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 12. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013.

CSRC Oral Histories Series © 2013 Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Interview © 2009 David Botello. Do not reproduce without permission.

---

---

## THE CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

The CSRC Oral Histories Series publishes the life narratives of prominent Chicano and Latino figures. The life narratives have been recorded and transcribed, and the interviewer and interviewee have reviewed and corrected the transcriptions prior to publication. These oral histories are often undertaken as part of a larger research project and in tandem with archival collections and library holdings.

---

---

## CSRC ORAL HISTORY SERIES PROJECTS

**L.A. Xicano** documents the history of Chicana/o art in Los Angeles with a focus on artists, collectives, and art organizations. The project resulted in new museum and library exhibitions, public programs, archival collections, and scholarly publications. These efforts were part of the Getty Foundation initiative Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980. The project received support from Getty Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and California Community Foundation. Related support includes funding from Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, AltaMed Health Services Corporation, Entravision Communications Corporation, Walt Disney Company, and individual donors.

**A Ver: Revisioning Art History** stems from the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a meaningful and diverse art history. This book series explores the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other U.S. Latino artists. The A Ver project is made possible through the generous support of Getty Foundation, Ford Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Joan Mitchell Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

**The LGBT and Mujeres Initiative** seeks to increase archival and oral history holdings that document the Chicano/Latino presence in LGBT and women's histories, the role of women and LGBT people in Chicano/Latino histories, and the importance of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in "mainstream" scholarly research and archival institutions. The project receives generous support from the Ford Foundation and individual donors.

---

---

## ARTISTS INTERVIEWED FOR THE L.A. XICANO PROJECT

Judy Baca  
Charles "Chaz" Bojórquez  
David Botello  
Barbara Carrasco  
Leonard Castellanos  
Roberto "Tito" Delgado  
Richard Duardo  
Margaret Garcia  
Johnny Gonzalez  
Judithe Hernández  
Leo Limón  
Gilbert "Magu" Luján  
Monica Palacios  
John Valadez  
Linda Vallejo

# INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BOTELLO

MAY 21, 2009

**Karen Davalos:** This is Karen Davalos for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. I'm here today at UCLA with David Botello. Today is May 21, 2009. Now, David, I wanted to start by talking about your growing up. When you were born, and where you born, and what was your household—the people who raised you—what was that like?

**David Botello:** Sure. I was born on September 24, 1946, in Los Angeles—East Los Angeles to be exact. My parents were Miguel Oscar Botello and my mom was Eleanor Josephine, maiden name Rivas, Botello. I'm the second sibling of nine and the oldest male. I have four brothers and four sisters. I grew up in a modest setting. [I was] born at the White Memorial Hospital and went to public school—just kindergarten through the third grade. And [since then] I loved art. And, as a matter of fact, [that love began] in the third grade, I always like to say. My mural partner, Wayne Healy, and myself did our first mural in [1955, in] the third grade, for an open house. So, evidently, we were probably showing our artistic prowess at that time, because the teacher [Mrs. Helber] asked us to put [up] our paper on the long side-blackboard and do a dinosaur [scene]—we must have been studying dinosaurs. So we did our Jurassic Park rendition with crayons and poster paints. Also at the time—

**KD:** Wait, let me ask you about this, this mural that you did. So it's on poster, I mean—

**DB:** Butcher paper.

**KD:** Butcher paper. And it's about how big, can you recall?

**DB:** Well I would imagine it's four feet tall and probably thirty, forty feet long.

**KD:** You're kidding me.

**DB:** They were big rooms. Well, I was a small child, so. [*laughter*] I [think], thirty feet. But the full length of those rooms had three blackboards or greenboards. Not in the back—we had windows back there. So I always like to [say, and] tell Wayne, too: “Yeah, you did the Tyrannosaurus Rex fighting the Stegosaurus, and I did all the jungle and all the other animals all around.” He's always been real good with figures, and I'm more detail-oriented and I tend to like to fill up stuff. I remember that from way back.

**KD:** So, you remember filling up the space?

**DB:** Yes.

**KD:** What kinds of trees?

**DB:** [Palms and jungle trees.] Mountains [filled with] trees, and more dinosaurs and, you know, the bird-type creatures flying around. [But] what happened was [the state] built the Long Beach Freeway at that time [next to the school]. And my parents, [who] were raising the first four children because we're the closest together—it's like one group [of children] at that time—and we moved [a mile away] to my grandfather's property [where] they built a house there [in 1955]. Since the last time that I spoke about this, I've learned something else about that experience with the freeway. My parents got money because they were forced to move out of their property—you know how they do that?

**KD:** Yeah, for eminent domain—

**DB:** Right, that's the word.

**KD:** They'll give you the market rate for the—

**DB:** Right. [My parents] didn't own the property. They were renting. But still . . .

**KD:** To help them relocate?

**DB:** Yeah, my parents have died since I got this new information about the freeways, but they had enough money to build a house. I mean, they must have gotten a nice little chunk.

**KD:** Wow, yeah.

DB: So we had a brand new house on the front of my grandpa's property in El Hoyo Mara[villa] that's on Mari-anna and Michigan, [which is] Obregon Park now. My family had to move again, when I went to the service in '66, because [of] another eminent domain. They moved again, and then—as I'm putting these things together—my mom and dad must have gotten another [large amount] of money. Because when they moved up to City Terrace [they] bought two properties, with four houses total.

KD: Wow.

DB: So there's one for my grandfather, one for our family—my sister Roberta eventually moved into one home, and my brother Paul [also] moved into that other home.

KD: So, you lived mostly in East LA in the same area, but—?

DB: The first place and the school—just to let you know, the school [where] we did the butcher paper mural, it was Humphreys Avenue School. And we lived on Fourth and Humphreys and it was walking distance to school. And Wayne would have lived on Arizona, so he walked, and we were, like what, a half a mile apart from each other? But after moving, what, two miles or a mile away? It's like I never saw him again. He went to Garfield and I went to Catholic school.

KD: So tell me more about the household. It sounds like you lived in an immediate house with your mother and father and your brothers and sisters, but your grandparents—because you mentioned your grandfa-ther twice now—they were a regular part of your life?

DB: Yes. Ever since we lived separate from [Grandpa Mara]—I remember him, like, on Fourth Street [where] I said, when we went to Humphreys Avenue school. He'd take the bus or the streetcar from [work in] Down-town Los Angeles, [then] take the bus past his house and come all the way to our house. And he'd bring some fruit and some meat, some vegetables, to my mom. And he did that maybe twice a week or so. He really loved [his daughter and] my older sister a lot, I felt, more than me, but I loved him a lot. I know that, but he sort of pushed me a lot, you know—

KD: Really?

DB: Sort of picked on me a lot, I guess—his way of making you more manly [or] something. I'm not sure what his intentions were, [but] he'd come after me with a stick or a belt, you know, just to make his point. And he'd give money to my sister—he'd give candy to Roberta and then not to me. And she would share with me. But later when I was [older] he'd give me my little plot of land [where I] grew my first radishes. He said, "Here David, you can have this, you can grow stuff here."

KD: What was his name?

DB: Roberto Rivas.

KD: That's right, that's the—

DB: [He was my mother's father] and we'd called him Grandpa Mara for Maravilla. That's where he lived in Maravilla—El Hoyo Mara was the [gang] area there, so we used to call him Grandpa Mara because we had another grandfather, Grandpa Fresno, because . . . [laughter] he was Sal Botello, Salvador Botello, [who took us to Sanger and Fresno, California, to know his family who were farmworkers]. And ever since . . . [I did a family tree.] I should bring one or mail one to you.

KD: You did?

DB: Yeah, [the family tree had] all [my] siblings coming down [the side]. The majority of the page is my siblings and our children, but then across the top [were] my parents, and then their parents [above them], and as far back as I know: [mostly] on my grandfather Botello's side a little bit farther, because I don't know a lot about [the] Rivas [side].

KD: So, were they born here, or did they immigrate?

DB: [Yes and] no. My parents were born here. And their mothers were born in this country [also]. So my grand-mothers [and their families] were born in this country. My grandfathers came [from Mexico] as young [boys], both from the Chihuahua area, and I'm sure probably through Juarez. I found a whole lot about my Botello side of the family. But Salvador Botello, when he got to El Paso with his family and grew up there,

he married my grandmother—my Grandma Vera. Her family goes way back into New Mexico [history] and [the] El Paso area.

KD: Wow.

DB: We have a relative who was the last governor of the territories of New Mexico, and he's got a couple of books. Yeah, my last aunt, [Tía Pina]—my dad's sister—has the two of them. And she's a really good archivist.

KD: When did you start doing the family archive. The history—the genealogy?

DB: I picked it up from my Tía Pina—that's Josephine Botello Garcia. She married into [the] Garcia [family]. I've always loved [the family tree idea] in general, [so I started my own]. But she gave me a nice page that had her descendants on it, and just recently I put photos on it and I just scanned that page because there was a lot of room on it. So I plopped photos of my dad and his siblings [and] his parents [onto the tree], but I have one or two [great-grandparents'] pictures. There's not a lot of old pictures.

KD: Were you doing that as a young boy, or did that start later in life?

DB: That started later in life.

KD: Were you aware that your Aunt Josephine was doing that, though, as a young boy, or—?

DB: No, but she's always been, like, my favorite aunt on my dad's side. We used to go visit their family a lot and I've just been [recently] going to her house and going through my uncle Phil's old photos and scanning. I take my scanner and my laptop because, you know, people don't want to let go of their photos.

KD: Nope. So tell me. You're growing up. Your grandfather, Grandpa Mara—is Grandpa Mara a frequent part of your—

DB: Yes, [family].

KD: Growing-up life? Any other relatives or people who shared the home with your family—with your immediate family?

DB: Well, my Grandfather Salvador, he lived with us for a few years while he was doing—both of my grandfathers were chefs. I don't know if they're chefs [or cooks], but you know.

KD: They were in the restaurant [business].

DB: In the restaurant [business]. They worked in restaurants. Actually, my grandfather who lived with us—Salvador—he used to work at a very popular big restaurant in downtown LA, and I understand he got written up in the newspaper for dressing the windows. “Besides,” he told his boss, you know, “it's strawberry season and we're going to be making pies and doing all these desserts. Let's put some stuff in the windows.” So he was one of the originators for that particular restaurant to get the customer's [attention] as they went by to look. So I'm thinking, you know, I got some art from him, I'm sure.

KD: Sense of display, and how things were arranged, and—

DB: And my dad, he's a cabinetmaker and he used to draw his sketches for his side jobs. I mean, he was a union [member] and he worked for a manufacturer, an assembly-line kind of cabinetmaking when all the suburbs were growing all over the place. That's how he raised us. Nine kids, and he sent us through Catholic school, so he worked a lot. So then—

KD: But you remember him doing sketches?

DB: Oh yes, oh yes. I'd go out on Saturdays to help him. I've always had a male figure that had helped me—both my grandfathers and my dad taught me stuff, you know. So—

KD: And as a young boy did you play with—I don't know—model cars and things like that?

DB: Oh yeah. I made cars, and airplanes, and ships, and I painted them—plastic ones, you know.

KD: Models already, or [are] you taking things—

DB: When you buy the kit, the box. Like the Revell kits and those things. And they're all in pieces, all connected to their little plastic stem. And then you break them off, shave them, glue them together. We [also] used to go fishing. [I] used to have my fishing equipment out in my little tackle box my friends—

KD: Where did you go fishing?

DB: Well, Legg Lake. My mother would take us. That's in the Rosemead area.

KD: Legg Lake?

DB: Yes. It's right off of Rosemead and the 60 freeway. And, locally, we'd walk to Belvedere Park. They used to stock it with blue gills and little perch, and at that time, before they made the 60 freeway, there used to be two lakes. They took one of them away [to build the freeway], and it's just one smaller lake [now]. So I've seen a lot of changes in our area.

KD: So tell me about the community that you grew—many communities, [as you were] saying, if [they were] a couple blocks away [they] might not have existed [to each other]. But it sounds like your family was going downtown, and . . . You had a larger sense of LA?

DB: Yeah I did. I've always been allowed to be on the road, be it on the bicycle or take the bus downtown.

KD: You did?

DB: Yeah. Me and my sisters, we'd go Christmas shopping with our five dollars of savings that we had. We could buy our aunts and uncles, you know, fifty cents—

KD: [*laughter*] I'm laughing at the [fact that is was only] five dollars, yeah.

DB: You know, fifty cents you could find something really good, you know, like at Kress or Newberry's or those [kind of] stores. We would take the local bus, which was the Kern bus or Ford bus. [They] would go in different directions, but it went right to our corner block, so we just walked to the corner, get on the bus, [insert our dime, and it would] take us to First [Street] and Rowan. Then we'd get on the streetcar, which was electric P-Car [Pacific Electric], and that would take us all the way downtown. Then it would change to a bus when I was in high school, but we rode the electric car a lot [with our Grandfather Mara and Uncle Ray in the beginning].

KD: So, your family lived in apartments and houses that they had—that were their own?

DB: Never an apartment-type building.

KD: Oh, okay. Renting a house?

DB: Right. Or a duplex [or] something. We always seemed to be, in my recollection, [in] a little home of its own.

KD: With a yard?

DB: Yeah.

KD: Did you play in the yard, or . . .

DB: Sure, we played a lot. When we were on Fourth and Humphreys, before they dug the trench for the Long Beach Freeway—because they took I don't know how many millions of cubic feet of soil out of that land. Fourth Street used to go all the way across [to Ford Boulevard]. And now it would be sixty feet up in the air or whatever, and so far across. All those homes in that path, we used to go venture through them as people moved out.

KD: Oh, really?

DB: Yeah, we just go on adventures [with] our friend and my sisters, my brother. We'd—

KD: And the kids you're playing with, are they Mexican American too?

DB: At that time, there was a mix of kids in our area. If you look at our [class photo]—did I give you a picture of our third-grade class?

KD: I remember seeing that.

DB: Yeah, there's ten little Anglo faces in the midst of our thirty kids or so. But have you heard of Eric—I got to get his name. I went to his talk [at the Autry National Center of the American West] about the freeways in East LA.

KD: Oh, Eric Avila.

DB: Yeah, so this is where I've been getting this: during that talk. I'm flashing on this information that, because [of those] freeways, it was, like, good for my family. I mean, how would we ever have owned our home, I wonder—

KD: You're right. You're right.

- DB: Or went through Catholic school, unless there was this major step that helped them achieve it. Maybe my dad could've afforded it, but he didn't have a lot of money, you know.
- KD: Did you have a sense that other people were . . . Well, let me put it this way: did you grow up thinking you were the poor kid on the block, or everybody was pretty much the same?
- DB: Everybody was pretty much the same, yeah, because we got new clothes to go to school—
- KD: That's exactly—yeah.
- DB: I remember getting new clothes at the end of summer.
- KD: Where'd you shop?
- DB: Whittier Boulevard probably, then Sears—the old Sears. [And the Catholic school uniform store, and First Street store.]
- KD: Really?
- DB: You know, Sears on Olympic and Soto. We used to go there, and that was the place to go, you know. Six floors. And of course there wasn't a lot of shopping centers or malls, you know.
- KD: No.
- DB: They had a JC Penney on Atlantic Square—you know, that area. We used to go there a lot.
- KD: Were those adventures, going with your mother with your father, or . . .
- DB: Yeah, I think I was real lucky, and I must have been a good kid [if] I went along with them. Because I went—like, if I didn't go with my dad to do a side job, I'd [go] with my mom to do Saturday shopping. So I helped push the cart and, you know, carry the groceries and all that stuff. [She would even let me pick, sometimes.]
- KD: So, she's not driving?
- DB: She drove early.
- KD: Oh, she did?
- DB: I think she drove before she got married.
- KD: Wow. Independent woman, huh?
- DB: I have a picture of her pretty young, when my dad was in the service. She had her own car. My grandfather got her a car. And he raised a family without a woman. His wife died young.
- KD: Grandpa Salvador?
- DB: No, Grandpa Rivas.
- KD: Rivas. Really?
- DB: That's Roberto—Grandpa Mara. And he raised other children that weren't his own.
- KD: Really?
- DB: Yeah.
- KD: And they all settled in the same area? They all lived in the same area?
- DB: Maybe for a while.
- KD: When you grow up, I guess, did you grow up with those—
- DB: My three aunts—they're really not our aunts, you know. [But] we discovered [that] later.
- KD: Right.
- DB: The [youngest] of them, my Tia Gloria, [was a neighbor's child] that my great-grandmother used to babysit. I never knew my great-grandmother [nor grandmother] on my mom's side. This is after her mother died from tuberculosis, and my mom caught it also and she was sent to Santa Teresita and she recuperated there. That's why my mother never graduated from high school. But her mom passed away, and after that she was raised by her grandma and [my Tia Gloria], [who had been a] little girl they were babysitting. The father left her behind when [his wife] went back to Mexico, so they just kept her. Adopted her, [or] whatever.
- KD: Santa Teresita is a, like a—
- DB: In Duarte.
- KD: In Duarte, okay.

- DB: It's a convalescent hospital.
- KD: That's what I thought. I was trying to think of the word, a conva—yeah.
- DB: Oh, that place is full of beautiful art, too, of Vargas—Rudolph Vargas. He's a sculptor. He's one of the [only] Chicanos, Mexican Americans [with artwork] in the Vatican.
- KD: I'll have to look that one up. Tere Romo's going to want to know that. So that's what I was trying to get a sense of—that there's multiple generations of your family in the LA area and they're part of your daily life, or your regular life, and—
- DB: My weekends were filled with stuff to do. The younger brothers of my father would call me to come over [to Grandma Vera's house], and I'd wash their cars and . . . My Uncle Sal was not living there now. He was married with kids. So he picked me up, or even maybe [I'd] take a bike drive to his house. And I'd clean his yard, mow his lawn.
- KD: Is that for some extra change?
- DB: Yeah, yeah. They'd give me that incentive to work and to earn money, so that was a good thing.
- KD: Yeah. So did the family, then, this large family—when I say “family” [it's] probably [not like] what we'd say in Spanish, right? *Familia*?
- DB: Yes.
- KD: Did the *familia*, then, get together for the holidays and things like that?
- DB: Yeah, we got together a lot, [but usually separately. Botellos and Rivas at different events—except for weddings, which were all together].
- KD: Birthdays and—
- DB: Birthdays. I mean, we still do now with our [family]. My siblings and immediate family. But Christmas was always a good time.
- KD: What did you do for Christmas? What did the family do for Christmas when you were growing up?
- DB: It would be mainly with my mom's side because we lived there on my grandpa's property. So his children or his adopted children, the ones he raised. Their families would come together on Christmas and it was a whole day event almost, you know.
- KD: What'd you eat?
- DB: Always menudo [and tamales], seemed like. [*laughter*]
- KD: Was that the menu for Christmas and Easter, and, I don't know . . .
- DB: No, Easter was ham, turkey, and [potato salad, jellos, *chile* beans, and lots of other stuff].
- KD: And Thanksgiving?
- DB: Turkey and maybe a ham. [Mashed potatoes, yams, vegetables, pumpkin pie, etc.] Nowadays it is always a ham, yeah. But, like, it was different on Easter. I mean, maybe we'd go to church with the families, but then after that my parents had friends [when we were younger] —they had a lot of friends, you know, not relatives—just kids, guys they went to school with and stuck together. My dad went to poker parties. My mom would go out with the girls, and they'd go to movies or [plays], you know. They would always get together, so we would get together with their children. So I had an extended family there, because I remember Easter, a lot of Easters, we'd go up to the friends' houses. And they'd have bigger houses than us, I think, but maybe not as many kids. [*laughter*]
- KD: And they lived in?
- DB: East LA.
- KD: East LA area.
- DB: City Terrace area. I mean, to this day some of them—we almost treat each other as cousins and we're just friends, really.
- KD: But there was that much closeness and consistency and . . . And so did people, when they get together, I'm imagining there's a lot of food, maybe some drinking. Did they play music?
- DB: Always pot luck.
- KD: Oh, really? It was bringing stuff?

- DB: Yeah, [the women] got everybody to bring something.
- KD: And mostly Mexican food they're bringing, or they're bringing, I don't know, American [food]?
- DB: [Both] American food [and Mexican]. You know, potato salad, macaroni salad, hamburgers, hot dogs, [chili beans, enchiladas]. You know, that kind of stuff.
- KD: But Christmas you had menudo.
- DB: Right.
- KD: Did they play music and dance or anything, or instruments? Play music on the radio?
- DB: Nobody played instruments in our family, that I remember. Wasn't lucky enough.
- KD: [*laughter*] You'd have got a whole orchestra.
- DB: That [would have been] nice.
- KD: But do you remember them dancing to music when the families got together?
- DB: Mm-hmm. Well, especially at weddings, you know. We had lots of weddings to go to. My parents were very good dancers. They did swing, jitterbug, and all that stuff, and I have a really nice picture of them at the Bama Club, a jazz club in South Central. They used to go [to South Central] a lot to different clubs, especially while we were real small, you know. They looked very handsome, very good looking, [sitting at a table, smiling at] another couple. You know, they take your picture right there, they sell it to you, and it's in a folder [that] says "The Bama Club." [The Bama Club was located in the 600 block of North Spring Street—ed.]
- KD: So, they had an active social life, and they're encouraging that in you?
- DB: Yes.
- KD: What I'm wondering is [what] kind of music they listened to, or you listened to?
- DB: No, we hardly listened to any Mexican music. [My parents preferred Frank Sinatra and big band music]. I wasn't raised on Mexican music—it was all American. And then we got into [folk, Motown, and] rock and roll in the '50s [and '60s]. My aunt was unique—Gloria, she's the one that was left behind by her family and my grandpa raised her. She loved classical music.
- KD: Really?
- DB: So I got to listen to that.
- KD: So you're exposed to that as a young child?
- DB: Mm-hmm.
- KD: Do you remember what age [this] is, or just . . .
- DB: Oh, before—pre-teenage.
- KD: Really? Wow.
- DB: She bought the latest hi-fi before the stereos—a whole [cabinet] unit—and it said "Hi-Fi." [Gloria would say,] "Listen to this, David," and she'd sit there. "Ahh, listen to that." And she was really happy, and she wasn't very educated at all.
- KD: So there was a lesson that she was giving—it was deliberate, she was sharing that music with you.
- DB: And she gave me my first oil paints.
- KD: Really? At what age was that?
- DB: When I was in high school. She was a terrific pen-and-ink artist. And she just worked in a factory, you know. She had girlfriends and stuff. [But] on her own time she loved to do this, and I'm sure she maybe gave me pen-and-ink sets. She probably gave me watercolors. But I really remember the oil paints because she did a few pieces in oil and then she said, "Oh, I don't like it," you know. It wasn't her thing. I guess she didn't have enough lessons in it or something. But oils are hard.
- KD: To manipulate the paint, you mean?
- DB: Yeah. Yeah. And it takes so long to dry, and then you start working at it [and it can get muddy]. But she did a few pieces that I thought were really good. And later on, also, I [came to know that] my mom would color on black-and-white photos at home. So I'm sure I used to see that when I was a baby.
- KD: She'd do that for—?

- DB: Photo studios.
- KD: For a photo studio, to make some money?
- DB: Yeah. You know how they used to add colors?
- KD: Yes. So it sounds like you're seeing a lot of creative expression in the home—from the guys working with cars, and your father with wood, and your aunt actually working with what we call the visual arts, and then music . . . What about reading? Did the family read a lot?
- DB: [Yes.] My mom [and] my dad. My dad read the newspaper every day. He liked the [*Herald Examiner*] newspaper. He loved sports. But, you know, he glanced through everything else, for sure. He listened to the radio, especially [the] Dodgers, so I was raised on Dodgers—LA Angels when they were here—and the Rams. My mom read novels. Dramatic—what do you call them? Mysteries. She loved [those, and many other genres].
- KD: Now, did she go to the library to get those books, you know, or did—was she buying them at the dime store?
- DB: I think maybe the dime store, or Kress, or Thrifty's. [And even the Salvation Army stores.]
- KD: Kress, yeah. Did she take you to the library, or the children?
- DB: Yes, we went to the library [a lot]. Well, I remember when my dad let me start driving his old car and he got another car, he says, "You got to take care of it." I remember right away going to the library, getting a book on cars. Then [reading about] how it worked: "There's a carburetor—that's where the gas comes down into." So, just [by] reading all that information [I learned to take care of my car].
- KD: So, you knew that the library was a resource by the time you got this car.
- DB: Oh, yeah.
- KD: You knew that that was a place [to find information].
- DB: When we went to Catholic school and the nuns pushed us a lot, we had a lot of homework. Every day, homework.
- KD: Well, let's back up. If we're going to talk about schooling, let's talk about those public school years first. That was at Humphreys Avenue School.
- DB: Right, and I remember before that was Marianna Avenue School, because we first lived with my grandfather [when I was born]. Before [my parents] moved [and] made a house there, we lived in [my grandfather's] home for a while after my dad came back from the service. My sister was raised there, with my mom, in his house, and then he came [back]. And before he got a [good] job and all that, I came along. And then we lived there, in that [my grandfather's] house. And then my dad moved out, with his family. And let's see, [at] Marianna, I was in kindergarten there, sure. Then we probably moved a mile away, and we started going to the other school. I remember getting my polio shots right at the corner, across from Marianna. There was a little community center, and everybody got their polio vaccinations. But, okay, you were talking about school? I remember dancing, holding girls' hands. That was fun. You know, hokey-pokey and playing an instrument maybe, like a flute or something.
- KD: Yeah, probably the recorder or something. Was school fun for you?
- DB: I remember it being fun, yeah.
- KD: What about when you changed from the public to the Catholic [school]? Was there a dramatic change?
- DB: Well, at that time, I was one of the outside kids, because everybody else has been in the same class together [since first grade].
- KD: You have been in [public] school.
- DB: Right, since [kindergarten]. So I came in with them in the fourth grade. But I got a friend right away, a couple of friends. [Some were children of my parents' friends.] And I got to be liked by everybody, but [not until] the end of the year, I'm sure. Then [the next year] we get to move upstairs, because all the four lower grades were downstairs, and the four higher grades were upstairs, so—
- KD: What was the school again?

- DB: Our Lady [of] Guadalupe. It's in City Terrace, on Hazard [Avenue]. Hazard and Hammel. The church [is on the old playground] now. The church used to be a couple of blocks away, and we'd march over there, back and forth, with the nuns. And we had a bigger yard there to play on [until] they put the church there. But I wasn't around at that time. Much later, that happened. My mom always wanted us to learn religion, and she got that from the nuns, at the rest—
- KD: Santa Teresita?
- DB: Santa Teresita, I think. Because I don't . . . My grandfather [didn't go to church]. [I'm] not sure about his [mother-in-law], my mom's grandma. I don't know how religious she was, or what. But I'm [not] sure how she [my mom] got the bug of [religion]. She became healthy [at Santa Teresita]. Maybe she prayed all the time and, you know, she didn't die. Who knows? She never really spoke about that.
- KD: So the going to parochial school coincided with her coming back?
- DB: No, it was many years later.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- DB: She was a teenager when she went.
- KD: Oh right, that's right.
- DB: And she missed high school.
- KD: High school.
- DB: And then, after that, [my parents met at the piscas and started dating]. They got married, I don't know how soon. I'm not doing the math right now. And then they had us, and then I was already [grown].
- KD: So the family went to church on Sunday, or not?
- DB: Yes, every Sunday.
- KD: Do you remember the name of the church?
- DB: It was the same [name as the school]. Well, when we were younger we used to go to St. Alphonsus on Atlantic. I did my catechism there, so I'm sure we used to—probably started our catechism in public school, come to think of it.
- KD: Yeah, for your first communion, I would imagine you would have.
- DB: Right, yeah.
- KD: So, you did have the sacraments?
- DB: Right, all of them. I think [I] probably was baptized at Santuario [de la Virgen de Guadalupe], right there on Third or Fourth Street. And then I did my first communion at Saint Alphonsus. And then I did my confirmation at Guadalupe.
- KD: Was the family active in the parish, then?
- DB: Oh, very active.
- KD: Really?
- DB: You know how they had the carnivals?
- KD: Yeah.
- DB: They got involved with [the carnivals], hook, line, and sinker. We did that for ourselves—I did it, and my wife was on it for many years [when my mother gave it up].
- KD: So, when your family's going it—when you're growing up, what did that mean, being involved with the carnival? They ran a booth?
- DB: Right. Yeah.
- KD: That's what my family did.
- DB: Ran a booth.
- KD: And do you remember—
- DB: Pizza booth.
- KD: Oh really? [laughter] Was it the same every year, or just about, or . . .

- DB: Yeah, just about. And my dad would help out with the Men's Club, and he'd have two volunteers putting everything up. And then they ran the hamburger booth, which was very popular, and all the men would rotate [working there].
- KD: It's mostly a Mexican congregation, right?
- DB: I did [research and] documentation [for a monument I made there], because, when they first founded the original church, it was a wooden church. And it was during the exodus of a lot of Catholics, during the [Mexican] Revolution. And, I think the Bishop—
- KD: Cristero Rebellion? No, this is during the Revolution. It's before the Cristero Rebellion. Okay.
- DB: I mean, Zapata and everybody. I mean, there was something going on against the church, and they were killing a lot of priests, I think, and a lot of people. I think a bishop came up and he started this little congregation in East LA, in the City Terrace area. That was all Mexican. But then their generation died off and their kids grew up, and it became Mexican American, my parents' generation. They spoke mostly all English. And so now it's turning back again—
- KD: To immigrant.
- DB: Because all of their kids have moved out to the suburbs.
- KD: So, at St. Alphonsus it's mostly Mexican American. At Our Lady [of] Guadalupe, where you end up for Catholic school, [it's] mostly Mexican American [as well]?
- DB: Yeah.
- KD: English speaking?
- DB: We went to English mass. It was Latin [and] then turned to English.
- KD: And, getting back to the family's involvement in the parish, was that a fun thing for you, or . . .
- DB: I believe so.
- KD: You don't have negative memories of, "Oh God, I have to go this now." No?
- DB: No. I always liked the nuns, and the priests, and the brothers, [and the families] that were there.
- KD: Did the family pray at home, or . . .
- DB: Off and on. We never did any Bible reading, but we prayed the rosary and got blessed at night. My mom would always bless us, yeah. Tuck us in and bless us. [My mom would also ask us to pray for the poor of the world.]
- KD: That must have been very beautiful. And did your mother have an altar in the home?
- DB: No, we never did that. A cross and photos up on the walls.
- KD: You didn't—
- DB: What?
- KD: Or—just the cross?
- DB: [No. We had] Our Lady of Guadalupe, maybe a picture of the Pope, and then Kennedy, crosses. [Also] different [saints in statue and picture form].
- KD: Was it a place that she prayed, or were you aware of your mother praying by herself?
- DB: I believe so. It was not a big deal. She didn't hide it or anything.
- KD: Right, right. That's what I thought.
- DB: No, usually at bedtime.
- KD: But not before the meal?
- DB: No. We had—maybe had a little blessing before the meal, when we were smaller, but once we were bigger—once we had it at school all the time—it didn't carry over to the house that strongly.
- KD: So, let's talk about your schooling. When you start with the parochial school, you don't notice a change? You just said you felt like the outsider, but not like .. [Are they] more strict, or it's more academically rigorous, or challenging, or more art? Because I've heard a lot of people talk about how Catholic schooling [was more rigorous]. Could [it have] been any of those things that I mentioned?
- DB: It was very balanced.
- KD: Balanced.

DB: They gave you penmanship and geography.

KD: Wow.

DB: They [taught] religion, history—it really all touched the world situation—and about being an outsider. I mean the teacher of course didn't treat you that way. And then the first time you get in trouble, and they hit you and [scold you], then you become accepted by everyone. [*laughter*] Another thing I remember [is how], at that time, we had a lot of fun things as kids to do: baseball cards, football cards, yo-yos, tops, different [games where] you would compete. Besides doing the volleyball, kickball, baseball, that kind of stuff that [the school] was set up for. You know, the ground had striping and all that stuff. In the shade areas, you know, we'd do marbles. We'd do all that kind of stuff, so you made friends easily that way also. So I was always pretty handy at all of those games. And we had to do homework [too], so I know I did pretty good. My dad saved our report cards. I must have did good in elementary school because I did very good in high school. And you know, we had everything in high school also.

KD: And you were developing your artistic sense, certainly, from home. Is that happening in school?

DB: And at school, too. Yeah, the nuns right away picked up that I was a good artist, and they always asked me to do stuff, you know.

KD: What do you mean?

DB: Well, [if they needed] a rendering of something, you know, [they would ask me] to draw—

KD: To hang in the classroom, or—

DB: Right, right. We had music and we had art in [Catholic] elementary school.

KD: Wow. Those are all unusual things to me.

DB: I know.

KD: Happy Prop 13. So, I get a sense that the family is certainly supporting your religious development and, I would say—be correct to say—your spiritual development, as well, if I would include the way your mother would bless you. And it sounded like you had an aunt that was guiding you. Did they give any, I don't know, specific lessons on [what it means to be] a good person? Or, I don't know what we'd call them in English, but in Spanish there's those *consejos*, or *dichos*. When someone takes you aside and says, "This is how you should be." It might not say that—

DB: Not as a lecture, but as a little training course.

KD: Yeah, at the right moment.

DB: Yeah, there was things like that, especially if you did something wrong. Then they would correct us, and tell us how we should do, or punish us so that we could think about it.

KD: Now, you say "they," is that your mom and dad, or grandpa too?

DB: Mom and dad, yeah.

KD: Okay. And, as the oldest son, did you have to look after brothers and sisters growing up?

DB: Yes. Like I say, my parents liked to go out with their friends. So, of course we had—me and my older sister would be—

KD: Roberta.

DB: In charge, yeah. And when we went to school, we'd make sure [everyone was safe].

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with David Botello. Today is May 21, 2009, and we are on the second side of our [CSRC Oral Histories Series] interview session. You were telling me about taking the brothers and sister to school, crossing Cesar Chavez [Avenue], at that time?

DB: It was Brooklyn.

KD: Brooklyn, sorry.

DB: Well, our home was at least half a mile away from school, and we had to cross a busy street. So we would all go as a group to school, and we had to take care of the younger ones, you know, to get [them] there, and afterwards come back home together. So as far as, you know, getting lessons about life and [nature],

my dad would read to us—you know, stuff at the dinner table when we were small. He would read from the *World Book* encyclopedias. They got us a set of *World Books* [from a door-to-door salesman]. Yeah, and [we also had], I would say, maybe *Reader's Digest*. I'm not sure . . . But newspaper stories or whatever, you know. [Also] my mom was a very good role model, as far as being a loving person.

KD: So, he's reading to you over the dinner table.

DB: And he'd ask us questions about stuff. I mean even from an almanac. The months of the year—yeah—the gestation period of an elephant and that kind of stuff—yeah.

KD: So you were expected to have used the almanac, or the *World Books*?

DB: Or at least remember from what he read from the day before, yeah. He'd quiz us on it— he'd quiz us, and it was like a little competition.

KD: Oh, really?

DB: I don't know if he gave us rewards. I don't remember that, but who can remember?

KD: You would be in competition with your brothers and sisters?

DB: Right. [Roberta] would be the first one to come up with the answer. [And I would try my best to remember for tomorrow's quiz.]

KD: With this kind of . . . I don't know, I'd call this [an] academic sense of inquiry going on in the household. Did they also take you to—you said they went to [the] library. Did you go to museums?

DB: Yes, Natural History Museum for sure, a lot. I don't know about looking at artwork, but I think we went to the [Los Angeles] County art museum when it first opened.

KD: In '63, I think—no, that's the year it split, so it opened before '63.

DB: I just remember, you know, being aware of the arts, and my parents loving the arts in general. Now I wonder, "How come they never got involved with Mexican literature, or music, or arts?" I mean, they took us to Tijuana, to go visit right across the border, but that's all we knew of Mexico.

KD: Did the family have the sense—

DB: We lived surrounded by Mexican people eating Mexican foods, celebrating [El] Dieciséis. You know, seeing the parade come down Brooklyn Avenue. And we'd always be there.

KD: Did the family have the sense that you were Mexican American? In other words, did you say you're Italian Spanish, or did the family say, "We're Mexican"?

DB: I remember something about that, [wanting to be] Italian or saying, oh—pronouncing our name Botello all our lives: Bo-tel-lo.

KD: Really?

DB: [It] wasn't until I became Chicano, after the army and getting involved in Chicano art, [that] we started saying—when my siblings went to college—that it was Bo-tay-yo.

KD: So, when you were growing up, as a child, it was Bo-tel-lo.

DB: Especially the [Irish] nuns. We had [American and] Italian fathers and, you know Irish [*inaudible*] close the Irish and Italians are. [*laughter*]

KD: Before I get more into the high school, I wanted to get a sense, you know. You said your father was in carpentry, or worked constructing cabinetry. Did he get vacations?

DB: Right, we did take vacations. We went to the big Sequoia National Forest, Yosemite. We went to [the] Colorado River [and the local lakes].

KD: So, camping?

DB: Yeah, but my dad didn't like to do it on his own. It was his friends that had all the equipment and, you know, they had [it all]. My dad was not really outdoorsy, except from the army. Did I tell you he was a medic in the army?

KD: No.

DB: He was in [the] Battle of the Bulge. So he knew what that was all about.

KD: Right, he had experience being in the outdoors, but not his—

- DB: But he didn't own camping equipment. I mean, a few items here and there. And he'll take me to go get a fishing pole, but he didn't have one for himself. But his friends were all into it, and I went hunting with his friends [also], and him.
- KD: Hunting what? Deer, rabbits?
- DB: Rabbit [and squirrels]. Never went—never had a [high-capacity] rifle, just a .22. Still have that .22.
- KD: Really?
- DB: So, we went on trips locally. My mother would always love to go out. She loved to drive—drive us to the beach a lot. Cabrillo Beach. She liked Cabrillo Beach because there was a little museum there also.
- KD: Yes, yes.
- DB: And the breakwater was there. And so she'd also take us up to the local mountains, like [in the] little Tujunga area. There's a little private lake inside there [and] we'd go there and have an adventure with [family and friends. Also,] there was a creek going down. We'd go up and look for wildlife and pick some watercress along that little stream. So besides giving us the education that they always wanted us to have, both spiritually and book-wise, they took us out to learn the city and environment. And I don't remember them saying "We've got to protect the environment" at that time, you know. I mean, we just took it for granted. But they didn't let us throw stuff out. Always had to bring it and put it in a trash bag.
- KD: Oh, so they did have a sense of protecting the environment?
- DB: And when we got there, they would say, "Let's pick up everything first." We [would] clean up the area before we put new [trash] in it with our stuff. We wouldn't want to add to it.
- KD: Sounds like a very rich childhood.
- DB: I think it was. I mean, I know it was, of course. I mean, to have a whole lot of siblings —that's one reason why [we] still get together, I'm sure. We all have good memories.
- KD: And I'm trying . . . Like I said before, and you answered exactly on cue, you know. Your family wasn't poorer than the others. You had new clothes every school year and things like that. But it seems obviously very rich. Did you have a sense that your parents ever struggled economically, or . . . I don't know how you'd—
- DB: Yeah. Strikes. It was [for] short periods at the time, when my dad wasn't working.
- KD: He was a union man?
- DB: Yeah.
- KD: Yeah.
- DB: So, I remember potatoes and beans [that] we ate for a long time. And then bologna. I mean, we'd all take turns making lunches for everybody—school lunches—so the whole [loaf of] bread used to come out, all the bread was spread out: boom, boom, boom, boom. And I had to walk up to the store and buy it every day from the store. And I'd say a pound of bologna, or a pound of salami, or ham. They'd cut it for me.
- KD: And you're walking to a local—
- DB: A local, little market.
- KD: A little market, within?
- DB: Within a block's distance.
- KD: Was it a *carniceria*?
- DB: They had a *carniceria* in it, yeah. And it was just for lunch-type stuff, or anything mom needed for supper. Maybe a gallon of milk, some Kool-Aid. We'd take turns making Kool-Aid.
- KD: I guess you'd all have to be put to work, but [do] you remember other household chores that you had to do?
- DB: Besides dishes, [ironing,] and vacuuming and—well, maybe vacuuming. The girls might have done that more than me because I had to do yard work.
- KD: So, that's what I was trying to get a sense . . . Was it boys do this, and girls do that, or . . . Obviously you were in the kitchen, so . . .

DB: Well, I had to pick up the garbage. We used to keep garbage separate on the sink, and it used to go in the pail. And a man used to come and pick it up. And you'd wait for the guy to ring his bell, or do his yell or his horn, and you'd take him the garbage. And he must have had pigs to feed. I used to have to burn the incinerator. You ever seen an incinerator? There's this construction—they're like blocks of pre-fab concrete, and they are tall and they have a steel door. And at the bottom, ashes come out. And they had a wire screen on the top so they wouldn't burn the neighbors' . . . But everybody used to burn their—

KD: Their trash.

DB: Burnable stuff, you know. And the cans, we used to save them and [another man] used to pick them up. And then we had the icebox. That's right. [Now] when we'd tell somebody, "Go get me something from the icebox," [they would] turn around and go, "Where's the cooler?" "No, no, no—I mean the refrigerator." Because we used to go get ice from the iceman and put it on [the] top [shelf], and then we'd have to drain the [water] pan at the bottom and go take it to the plants. So [now] I even do that sometimes, like, we're doing dishes. "Ah this is clean water. I'm not going to put it down the drain, I'm going to go put it on my plants."

KD: You're raised in a conservationist family.

[break in audio]

KD: We took a quick break. I wanted to ask you, David, about your high school years, where you went to high school.

DB: In 1960 I started at Salesian High School, which was newly opened. I was in its third year when I started. I went there with a few of my classmates from Our Lady [of] Guadalupe. The other choices were Cathedral—and some of my friends went there—and Cantwell. But it was an eye-opener, because there were all nationalities of young men from across the city— blacks, Anglos, Asians, a lot of Japanese—because this area had a lot of Japanese—and Italians. And Middle Eastern people. And what we all had in common was, of course, we're all males. There were no girls around, so it was a unique experience. You could let your hair down a bit more. You weren't uptight because a girl was around. You could crack jokes easier.

Then you ended up making friends that weren't from your barrio. I had friends. I was lucky enough. I guess my grades were good from elementary school, that they put me straight into college prep. So, business was the next [choice] in our class, and then the trades. You had more of the shop trades, which I wish I could've got some of those, you know. They did have cabinetry. They had print [shop]. I don't think they had metal shop, [but] when my partner Wayne went to Garfield he had all kinds of great classes. At that time they had a lot of good shops, and I guess you could go from one thing to another, not just be stuck in college prep. But, right away, I got Latin, algebra, and world history. Biology. You know, good classes.

KD: And art?

DB: And art. Art was my elective, maybe the last class in the day. I think was elective. You'd do sports or band, but I did art for four years. I had an Italian priest that directed the class. He was not a teacher of such where he gave lessons, but he would talk about how to use watercolors and he would tell us to get your own. Or he sometimes had something to give us, and he made his own benches, and he arranged still life, you know. But he didn't instruct you [on] how to draw the body or anything like that. Because he was a priest, and he just had an interest. He was the most artistic guy around, I think. [laughter] Father Illio. But you know, we loved him. He was a roly-poly, short father, and with a real strong accent in his English.

KD: And you were doing all the different medium? Could you tell me, like, you did drawing with a charcoal, or painting? Watercolor?

DB: Pen and ink, watercolor, oil paints. Once I got my oil paints, I did some oil paintings. And he—right away I got used to—because of him, I'm sure—of seeing things in newspapers and magazines, and just trying to copy it, you know. As far as models, [I did] ducks, and things that you would see [in them]. And Father Illio would walk around and just give you pointers. And he'd just kept moving and going all over the room. This is where I met my friend John—John Gonzalez from Goez [Art Studios and Gallery]. Right away, we

hit it off. He was two classes ahead of me. But as far as the college prep classes, learning Latin was [hard]. Father Milan taught us that. He was very strict, and he taught [everything]. Totally all these things you needed for your mind to remember, to expand, to know where things come from. And he was always so proud to tell us, “This word in English, well, it comes from Latin, [*laughter*] and all these languages, they all come from Latin.” He’s a real proud Italian, and he always wanted me to be a priest.

KD: Really?

DB: Yeah, he sent me to retreats with the Salesian Order once a year. “Okay, I’ll go.”

KD: Oh, you weren’t—

DB: My mom wanted me to be a priest.

KD: Really?

DB: Oh, yeah.

KD: Was there a lot of pressure, or . . .

DB: No, just wishing, and talking, [and praying].

KD: Okay, and you had no interest at all, or maybe entertained it?

DB: Oh, maybe entertained it. [But] I kind of liked girls.

KD: [*laughter*]

DB: If they only let priests get wedded they wouldn’t have a problem, you know. Jesus, all this problem they have now, terrible. So . . .

KD: So, you go these retreats, and they’re spiritual lessons right? Or a quiet time for reflection?

DB: Yes, and beautiful grounds, and you meet other people from the other schools. And, you know, I always wished I had the calling, because I think I’m a very peaceful, try-to-solve-problems-between-people type of person. Loving, big-hearted. So I’m sure I would’ve made a great one. If I’d saw that in me. [But back to high school], it was good to go to the other shop class. I used to love to visit the [print] shop, because you see what they were doing.

KD: Because printmaking is in shop? Because that’s not a trade, that’s graphic arts and stuff?

DB: [No, it is a trade. Someone who runs the press may not be a graphic artist. You can learn printing at trade tech.]

KD: So you’re not doing that kind of work?

DB: No. [In high school I] only [did] my art. That was the only thing I was able to do.

KD: And you’re bringing your work home to the family, and they’re supportive, or . . .

DB: Mm-hmm. Always supportive.

KD: Hanging it up—were you hanging it up in the home, or . . .

DB: Hanging it up [on the walls], I’m sure. I mean, we have a photo of all those kids together, and [one of] my watercolors [is still] on the wall behind us.

KD: Wow.

DB: All nine of us are in that one.

KD: So your art training—like, the formal training—you’re not going to count this guy Father Illio, because he didn’t instruct you? I mean, you were very careful with your words.

DB: No, I would count him in.

KD: Okay.

DB: And that’s with [an] / . Illio. No, I would definitely count him as my first [art] teacher because, just in general, how he presented his class, you know?

KD: And he’s the person who shows you the range of media?

DB: Mm-hmm.

KD: All right. Is he doing—or anybody else in your high school years, or maybe even earlier if I missed it—are they showing you, like, art history? Are they saying, “This is Michelangelo and . . .” You know, some of the great, great works or something like that?

DB: Oh, definitely. I’m sure even in elementary school. Because the Catholic Church, it’s, like, full of art.

- KD:** And you're—when the family had the encyclopedias, do you remember looking at examples of art there too?
- DB:** Yeah, mm-hmm. I mean, [there were many examples of the masters' work and] they even had illustrations, like, of a horse. You can tell it was not a photo. Somebody drew it. I would always be amazed that I knew it was an art piece, you know. And I started collecting books. Not [novels. Soft-backs with art and photos], but comic books for sure. We didn't talk about comic books, huh?
- KD:** No, we haven't. I have it on my list. *[laughter]*
- DB:** So, I collected comics right away. If I only had those comics [that] I paid ten [and fifteen] cents [for], now I'd be a rich person.
- KD:** You must have had quite a collection?
- DB:** Yeah. But you know, along the way, especially when I went into the service, something happened to them. [My brothers must have took them. But let's go on to more about high school.] I would say it was a classical education at Salesian. You know, we learned about politics just because of the student body president, and elections, [the principal and staff]. And every year [changed]. Your whole group, your class, [dealt in hierarchy]. And all the other classes were separate, [with their own identity]. Like, I did a design for the patch of [our 1964] class [jackets]. We got those in sophomore year, or maybe junior year, and so I won the competition with the best design. And they embroidered it, and everybody wore that.
- KD:** Wow. And that was to be worn on the sweaters?
- DB:** Jackets.
- KD:** Jackets?
- DB:** Mm-hmm. So, every class had their jackets, so that's how you told the years apart.
- KD:** Right. Were you, in school, getting a sense that art is something you can go on to do [to] make a living? Or is this just, "You're really good at it, David, you're a very good artist." Are they encouraging you to go farther after high school?
- DB:** [I was in] college prep. The art was not stressed that much. It was mostly the other classes.
- KD:** So it's—
- DB:** I mean, I took drafting in school.
- KD:** Wouldn't drafting [have] been in the other? You were in [the] college-prep track. How'd you get in the drafting?
- DB:** I'm not sure, but it was maybe an elective class. But I remember designing an aquarium out of wood and glass, you know. Expand it where all the parts were there, separate. It's just like the models that I used to build, you know. And everything was expanded. [They] showed you how to put it together. So, then my dad's artwork [was similar]. So, we had chemistry, biology . . . We didn't have very good labs. They were very insufficient, you know, not funded very well.
- KD:** So, you're doing the draftsmanship for an elective. Do you do that all four years?
- DB:** Yeah.
- KD:** Okay.
- DB:** You mean drafting?
- KD:** Drafting, yeah.
- DB:** I don't think so, no. I think it was only a year. Might have had to [take other classes].
- KD:** But they're—
- DB:** Like chemistry, or do other things.
- KD:** Right, they're encouraging this college-prep line, the track that you're in.
- DB:** Yes, right.
- KD:** So, it's assumed you're going to go on to college. And do many of the young men in your class go on to college?
- DB:** Yes, we didn't go to the same college, but I went to Cal State LA with at least six of my classmates. But that was a bad experience because nobody got into the same classes. I mean, everybody [would be separated].

Just lose that friendship because you don't see each other hardly, except at the student union or, you know, somehow you meet each other. And then I only lasted a year [there]. And I didn't do good in my regular classes, and I did great in my art classes. A's in my art, and then D's and C's—and B's was the highest I got in [another] class.

KD: And that probably wasn't normal for you to get those grades?

DB: No, I used to get A's. I think I even got an A in trigonometry at Salesian.

KD: So, your memory [of Cal State LA]—it's because you were not there with your friends, or . . .

DB: It was, I'm sure. [Everything was changing.] What was going on in the world, and, you know, "What's life all about?" That was already entering our mind and I was only nineteen years old. [I was, like,] "Why am I doing this? Who knows?" In high school it made sense because, you know, it was for a reason: to go to college. Okay, now you're in college, and now what's the reason? What am I going to be? What do I want to be? I always [thought] I'd love to have been an architect [or engineer], [or] other professions besides. Art just didn't, you know, appeal to me. I love science—you know, science: biology chemistry. I loved that.

KD: But that's what I was trying to ask before—and maybe I wasn't clear—that you're being encouraged in the arts because you're so good at it. But [did] anybody [say], "Oh, you can't make a living doing that, so what are you going to do. Don't do it"?

DB: No, nobody said that.

KD: No? Wow.

DB: Well, I got a job in [the] advertising [field] when I was in high school, as a senior, and then I had a car. So that was not a good combination because my classes [suffered]. I didn't graduate [with] as high scores as I wanted to.

KD: And you got the job because?

DB: John Gonzales. Father Illio got him that job there. Then they needed somebody else, so he recommended me. But at the time we were just drivers and, then, we'd go to [newspapers]. And it was right up the street. It was an engraving company that would make plates—zinc plates—for advertising for newspaper presses. So I got to go inside the *LA Times* when everybody was setting all the little letters out of zinc, or lead, and we'd have to deliver their plates—and that'd become part of the page—and I saw how they were made. But the only art we got to do at that company was [easy enough]. We got the illustrations from the advertising departments [of stores like May Company and] the Broadway department store. [We did the] pick up. And you see how everybody worked there, you know, in the offices: the drawing tables, models, and how everything was, you know. So I'd bring [the artwork back, then put acetate plastic] over it, and then we'd trace with an opaque red the wash art that was on there. Then we'd put on another one. Then, with black, we'd block out the ink lines that was exposed. Then they'd [the photographers] do some sort of masking [with those overlays. Then] photography. And they would make gray [half-tone] dot-pattern artwork with sharp lines. So we had to prepare this for the photographers at the plant. The plant would get negatives from all of that, and they'd lay them on top of the [photo-coated] zinc plates, and they'd put them in acid, and they'd do the whole process. They'd burn it with art lights [before the acid], so . . . Then we'd wait all that time, and then deliver that to the newspapers. So I got to learn the whole process.

KD: So you stayed in that job your last year, your senior year of high school?

DB: Probably half the year, or something like that.

KD: Do you continue that work when you're in college, first year?

DB: Yeah, right, I think that might have been it. I started earning money, was interested in women, girls, cars, [but not college].

KD: You said you had your own car, yeah.

DB: [I was interested in fixing and] studying all about them.

KD: Had your own car. Did you—you didn't buy a new car?

DB: No.

KD: You fixed one up.

- DB: Until I got drafted.
- KD: Right.
- DB: Because I dropped out of college for a semester. And I was heartbroken, because one of these young ladies I met at Cal State, she was in one of my art classes, and [I] just fell in love with her. But she had other plans. And so I dropped out, but before the semester was over [in December]. I got my notice to go get my military physical, [and] within two months I got drafted. So, before that year was over, I was gone, real quick. And that was [March] '66 when I was drafted.
- KD: That's right, we talked about that. But, what I wanted to get a sense of is the courses that you did take. Sounds like one year, just about one year of college courses. You remember what they were?
- DB: You're talking about in college?
- KD: Yeah, at Cal State.
- DB: Yeah, it was biology, speech . . . Think there are three different types of things, you know: science, and then—
- KD: So you weren't taking a full load?
- DB: Not a real full load. Only like twelve units or something. Yeah.
- KD: And one of them is art, and it's a drawing class? Or is it painting?
- DB: No painting. It was crafts. It was design, introduction to design, drawing from a life model, and . . . Maybe just three [classes], probably—probably four. I might be leaving one of them out. But I loved the art classes, like I say, very much. And this is, you know, the first time I even got instructed on how to do things. We did enameling. You did leather work, you did wood work, you did carving and wood, and lots of stuff.
- KD: So, this is a very broad approach to the arts.
- DB: Right.
- KD: Was it one teacher?
- DB: No, all different teachers.
- KD: Wow. You remember any of the names?
- DB: No.
- KD: So the schooling is very positive until that time, it sounds like.
- DB: Well there's a lecture-hall class, you know. It's like, "Oh my God, it's all up to me." I had to listen to all this stuff, and read my book, and do the homework. And there's nobody there pressuring you to do it—it's, like, all up to you. [You have to] really see it, and need for it.
- KD: But, at Salesian, obviously, you were getting a lot of encouragement, and—
- DB: I mean, there's great teachers. My algebra teacher was a young brother and he [carried] his book there all the time. And he'd walk back and forth [down] the aisles, and he'd just be so excited about it. Really, everybody caught on, you know, and he was a good teacher. And there [were other] teachers similar to that.
- KD: Did—you know, I know this is a time period where there's racial conflict. Did that ever happen in the school, at Salesian?
- DB: No. No, never. I remember, earlier, we talked about Kennedy last time.
- KD: Yes, yes.
- DB: So, just the era is conflict, across the nation, you know. I remember when I was—my first year at Salesian I went out and handed out pamphlets for Kennedy, and just reminded everybody to vote. Voting day.
- KD: Yeah, we talked about that one.
- DB: Yeah, and then in '63, in our class at school, they killed Kennedy—or he gets shot—and it was a mourning all over. School shut down, and the whole weekend . . . I remember I did a project for my social studies class. He was a black teacher. I liked him a lot. I did a Seal of the President of the United States. Spent the whole weekend just drawing it, you know.
- KD: And your gesture was pretty large, it was large.
- DB: Right, and I think he kept it, because I [*laughing*] never saw it after that.

- KD:** Was that a common experience—art projects would disappear? Teachers would keep them?
- DB:** Oh yeah, yeah. I have a lot of my stuff from college. I have a few things from high school . . . I've just been going through a lot of my archives, and I took pictures of a lot of them.
- KD:** Good for you.
- DB:** Yeah.
- KD:** You don't have the mural from fifth grade, though?
- DB:** No, darn it.
- KD:** I want to hear you talk just a bit more about the community that you grew up in, this neighborhood. You said that the family spoke English at home. You obviously mentioned what you ate, and it's Mexican food. You're surrounded by Mexican Americans. Are the stores catering to Mexican Americans, or are they owned by Anglos, or . . .
- DB:** No, they're all Mexican-owned. Like, [the] closest store was Jesus's store. He was a jolly, big-nosed Mexican, white hair. I didn't mention, though, [that] we had our gang, our local gang, El Hoyo Mara. And you had to walk by them standing on the corner, just to get to the store. And so we grew up having to dress like the local gang. And we'd wear khaki pants, ironed, plaid shirts, long-sleeves, Romeos, spit-shined.
- KD:** Those are the shoes?
- DB:** Yeah. Slip-on shoes. And I even went to high school like that.
- KD:** There was no uniform in your Catholic school?
- DB:** No, no. We just couldn't wear Levis.
- KD:** Not even at the elementary school?
- DB:** We had [our] uniforms, yeah. But no, I'm talking about teenage—
- KD:** Right, when you get to high school there's no uniforms.
- DB:** Right, which is . . . The neighborhood—when we were talking about the neighborhood, [I] hadn't mentioned the gang yet, you know, and it—
- KD:** Was there a clear instruction to stay away from the gang?
- DB:** Yeah. "Don't talk to them, just go by them, be polite, don't make trouble. If they ask you for any money, you know, don't give them everything you have, but if you have to give them something give them a nickel, or a dime," or whatever. Until the time when my sister became [a teenager, and she was] so beautiful that the leader of the gang liked her. So he told all the guys to lay off David, don't bother him. So he's sort of like the protector. [*laughter*]
- KD:** You got lucky.
- DB:** Yeah.
- KD:** None of the brothers and sisters went that way?
- DB:** Joined the gangs? No. And my friends that I grew up with and I played with—nobody. No, nobody did. So at the corner store, we'd just get a few items there, you know. And then, right across the street was a barbershop, also Mexican-owned. [It was] two guys—an older man and a younger man. That was my second job. My first job was at Jesus's. Stack, clean, and sweep. And my second job was across the street, where we could get our haircuts.
- KD:** I think I asked you before, but unless you're—if I asked it this way. The money you were earning, you were saving up for things that you wanted? Or did you give some of the money to mom and dad?
- DB:** They let us keep most of it. I think they asked for some.
- KD:** And you said you were spending your money on comic books and models for airplanes, and cars, and trains, and whatever the other ones [were]. What else? Did you buy clothes for yourself?
- DB:** Not until I got older. My mom co-signed for me, [and] then at Gold's Department Store I got a stereo unit—a portable stereo unit—and I bought a suit and had tight payments, you know.
- KD:** So, you did need a job.

DB: Yeah. I earned money [by] shining shoes [when I was young]. I used to take the bus up to First Street, and stay there, and ask men—[there were always many] men. They loved to get their shoes shined. [This was before those fancy tennis shoes that are so common now.]

KD: So, you're quite the entrepreneur as a young man.

DB: My dad made my shoeshine box. And I still have it.

KD: And what'd you use, what was the polish?

DB: Shinola. Kiwi, when it came in some liquid. And brushes and rags. [Then when] I got in the army I took care of my [shoes and] clothes really easily.

KD: You looked sharp.

DB: Yeah.

KD: Did you have a sense, before you get into the service—did you have the sense that you were a sharp dresser or you—

DB: We had to iron our clothes. My mom taught us how to iron.

KD: The boys.

DB: Yeah, I mean, shirts like this, we'd iron them. And [those pleats on] the back, you'd make sure was straight. And we'd iron [creases on] the pants.

KD: Really?

DB: Yeah, so we used to take turns ironing.

KD: And there's mostly boys, right? You had four brothers. No, it's—

DB: There was five brothers and four sisters, but not all at the same age, you know.

KD: You said it was in groups. How much younger is the youngest?

DB: Eighteen years.

KD: Eighteen years.

DB: So, when I went into the service she was just born. She was like a year old.

KD: So, the family is aware of what's going on in the United States politics, and you got that from your dad reading the paper or listening to the radio?

DB: Well, we'd go vote. And the news—my mom liked to see the news, so I got hooked on that.

KD: And are they encouraging your sense of political awareness, or . . .

DB: Yeah. Especially when I started in high school, because President Kennedy was Catholic. So, yeah, that really was a big encouragement. And, you know, they voted for local politicians and, little by little you would see more and more [people] voted into office.

KD: So, you get a sense of this political involvement—democracy, obviously—in school—student council elections—and then at home, and . . . Were [your parents] ever more involved with that? Like, they were very involved with the church. Were they ever more involved in their political scene, or . . .

DB: No.

KD: Never worked on a campaign or anything?

DB: No, no. No time, too many kids.

KD: I'm going to pause for just a second.

[break in audio]

KD: While you were in high school, what did you do for a fun time?

DB: We went to dances. That was a big thing.

KD: Right, because it was a boys' school, so—

DB: Right—

KD: What was the girls' school?

DB: There was no girls around. [laughter]

KD: What was the—

DB: The local girls' school? Bishop Conaty—Our Lady of Loretto High School. And I had elementary school friends who went to all of those. [My sister went to Our Lady] Queen of Angels. And we would cruise, of course. We had Whittier Boulevard on the weekends.

KD: You'd cruise the boulevard.

DB: Cruise the boulevard, yeah. Go to dances first, maybe. Cruise around.

KD: At the dances, you're listening to what kind of music?

DB: Oh, live bands. Salesian was a great producer of live bands.

KD: Johnny [Gonzalez] being in one of them. [*laughter*]

DB: Right, yeah. And of course you had Roosevelt right down the street from us—Roosevelt High School—and we had the football games to go to. Not really that much other games—no fan base. There was no soccer at the time, and we didn't have a baseball field. So, cross-country and track, we were good at that. Basketball—

KD: And other kids went to watch those tournaments, or whatever?

DB: Yep, but we never had a—our gym was never built when I was there. We didn't have a gym, so we did basketball, you know, amongst ourselves, playing after school or during PE.

KD: And when you're—I'm sorry.

DB: And then of course, going back a little bit, even in elementary school we did all the games. All over, you know. Played catch, baseball. And there was a little field that we could go to and play some games. And of course we had the streets, mostly.

KD: You played in the street.

DB: Yeah.

KD: There wasn't too much traffic, or there was, and you had to watch it?

DB: Not that much, but yeah, normal. Nothing like it is now, you know.

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with David Botello with the [CSRC Oral Histories Series]. This is our second tape for the session on May 21, 2009. I'm sorry, you were talking about—

DB: Things we did around the neighborhood. Well, I remember making go-carts, our version of go-carts. It didn't look like a car, looked like a little flatbed scooter of some type. And we'd go to junkyards, which were up a few blocks away, and buy ball bearings from them. And they were like little wheels, steel wheels [that you would place on the carved-out ends of a] two-by-four. So you had a two-by-four across the front, where your feet would be rested on it, with two wheels on the ends. [Then you] make a bolt hole [in the middle between your feet], and have a spine coming underneath you so you can sit on another board. And you have two more wheels [on another two-by-four] on the back. And [you] would come down the street on that thing, making a lot of noise, because it was steel.

KD: And be incredibly dangerous, no? [*laughter*]

DB: Yeah, because you were way down low on those things.

KD: Did you design them? I mean, when you're talking, you're making them . . . [You] are showing the wheels [with your hands], and where the board went, so, did you design them? Did you draft them out first or did you just—

DB: Probably just a little quick sketch. But our dads would help us with that, provide us with the tools. My best friend, who lived across the street from me, his dad had a lot of tools and he liked to work on his car a lot. He even had a compressor, which you can fill our tires up on our bikes, easily. And he had other tools that you could use. But I really never got a brand new toy, as such. We made our toys. Or my uncle would get a used bike for my dad, and my dad would give it to me, and I would fix it up. Paint it, buy chrome items for it, like high-risers and bumpers and things. Fix them up. So—or we'd get those skates that you bolt onto your shoes, and afterwards you'd take them apart and make scooters out of them. So our dads would help

us build those things. So, we made a lot of our own toys, and probably got a real scooter—one, maybe, in our life, you know, and we all shared it.

KD: No accidents growing up? No broken bones?

DB: Yeah, I broke a bone.

KD: Oh, you did. Okay.

DB: Yeah, we'd get a lot of bumps and bruises and cuts. I did break my right forearm, from "a trip to the moon," is what it was called. This was third grade or so, and I was still in public school. Somebody would be on their back and cock their feet up, and you'd sit on their feet and they'd push you—stretch their legs out—and throw you up in the air. And usually a bigger guy—and we're smaller. So when I landed down, I came down on my arm. It was in back of me, and I landed on it and broke it. So, I had a cast for a while.

KD: I'm wondering how your parents react to that one?

DB: Yeah. There are so many little things that we did when we were kids, you know. I think that, one time—about the same time—we're experimenting with matches and cigarettes. [We] started a sofa on fire that was outside of the house, and the fire trucks had to come and put it out.

KD: All this time I thought you were this very calm, well behaved—

DB: It must have been my friends that got me into this kind of trouble.

KD: But these sound like the kinds of—the ways that you were allowed to have fun were very exploratory and open. There wasn't a lot of restrictions.

DB: Right.

KD: Did you have to come in, I mean—

DB: Yeah, you had to come in before it got dark.

KD: Before it got dark. But you could play anywhere in the community, it was—

DB: Yeah, right.

KD: Got your bike, and you could go.

DB: They must have trusted us a lot. And my mom probably prayed for us a lot.

KD: Were you taking the younger brothers with you?

DB: Not really. That's what my next-youngest brother, Michael, used to tell me: "God, I always was running after you, and you never came back for me." Because I had my friends that were my age, and I guess I was not a very good brother.

KD: No, but you weren't required to take them—is, I guess, my question.

DB: No. Because they didn't have their own bikes at the time, or something like that.

KD: When you get older and you get your own car, do you soup it up like you did the bikes?

DB: It was my Dad's old car, and I just cleaned it. Never gave it a paint job, except for the top of the passenger area. But I raised it high off the ground. It had a V-8, but a small V-8.

KD: What do you mean you "raised it"? So it's the opposite of the lowrider?

DB: Yeah, it never was a lowrider.

KD: It was a hotrod.

DB: Yeah, I like hotrods better. I used to get *Hot Rod Magazine*. I was into space, and I used to look at the Mercury space vehicles. When it first took off, I followed Apollo, all of that stuff. I was into *Star Trek* when it came out—you know, Friday nights—and the comic books, all the superheroes. More than, say, Batman [or] Superman, I followed other ones. Like the Green Lantern, Atom, and Flash, some more mysterious kind of ones. So the television set, you know, that was a big deal.

KD: You didn't have one, the whole time you were growing up?

DB: No. [We did get one in the late '50s] and mostly [in] black and white for long time. We could see a few hours of it, but we had to do our homework.

KD: What did you watch? Do you remember your favorite shows as a child?

DB: They were probably my parents' favorite shows, you know. And we mostly watched on Friday nights and weekends. Not during the week, not that much. When we were kids, in elementary school, we could see it

at lunchtime if we came home for lunch. Like, Sheriff John used to have a [lunch-time] program. Then after school—then Engineer Bill, or Mr. Green Jeans, or some other *Howdy-Doody* show. [They] were kind of kids' programs. But the TV had to go off at a certain time. Maybe [we would] get home quick, if we didn't want to go play, [then our parents would] let us relax a while, see something. And then we had to do our homework. And if we did our homework, then we could maybe see something else in the evening. We had to go to our rooms to do our homework—no TVs in our rooms.

KD: But, you didn't have your own room, did you?

DB: The boys' room. The girls' room—

KD: So, most of the time it was four brothers and sisters, total, right, when you're—like you said, it wasn't until you were eighteen that your youngest is born. So it's—

DB: It was me, and my grandfather was with us, too, in the same room. And then it would be Michael, and it would be Richard. Richard would be the [third brother]. So, when I was growing up, it was at the most my two younger brothers plus my grandfather. But he wasn't there a whole lot. He was there a few years.

KD: And Roberta had her own room?

DB: Roberta had Patricia.

KD: And Pat. You each getting your own bed, or you're sharing beds?

DB: There was a time we all shared a bed—even the girls. Me and my sisters—

KD: When you were littler.

DB: Right, because then there was only a two-bedroom house. My parents had one. We had [a bunk bed], and my grandfather was with us. I remember that, when we're real young. And, yeah, I remember when we moved to the new house, my sister would knock on the wall. "Come on over, Dave, come on over." Then I'd crawl over there, real quiet, because they're used to sleeping with me, and talking, and fun and everything. So, we would reminisce about that a lot, nowadays. And then, you know, more kids came. When we got older [we said,] "Don't come in here anymore." [laughter] You know.

KD: You want your privacy, you're a teenager. Is there anything else you want to tell me about growing up, your youth?

DB: Well, let's see . . . We talked about making lunches, and art, chores we had to do . . . Church—going to church—and watching TV, movies. They'd let us go to the movies on weekends, so we got to see a lot of classic old movies. We'd go to drive-ins as a family.

KD: Really?

DB: Yeah, that was always fun. Didn't do it enough, you know. But, my dad was—he liked to drink a lot, and one thing that I had to do was go into the bar to get him out, talk him [into coming] out. My mom would drive me—and this could be like a Friday night, when he got his check, so, it's payday. You know, "I'll wait out here. You get your dad out." So, I'd go in there, and my dad would already be feeling pretty good, and, "Oh, there's my son. Oh, hey." And introduce me to everybody in there playing pool, or betting, or doing something . . . He liked to bet on the races and games and stuff, so he must have had a bookie. But it took me a while to get him out of there.

KD: Was that exciting or frightening for you, to go in to get him in the bar?

DB: It was not frightening, because everybody was very nice, you know. It was exciting, and just, you know, they're all men. "What are they doing in there?"

KD: Ah, the secret world of adults.

DB: Yeah, but it was sad to me because it's like, oh, "My dad's wasting our money, and he's just drinking here, and I better get him out before he spends it all," you know. So I don't know how long it would take, you know. Half-hour, hour. Who knows how much? I had learned something of convincing—or what did I say?—to get him out, and how loudly would I say it or . . . You know, it would just [be trying something], and I [would] always be nice about it, you know, so he wouldn't get angry. I wouldn't want him to show anger in front of his friends or his son, so I was always doing a role, or something.

KD: Do you remember any of the tricks you had to get him out?

- DB: Well, give him a time limit. Like, “If I’ve been here talking with your friends . . .” Or, you know, “Can you leave in ten minutes, or fifteen minutes?” Or I would say, you know, “Mama has to go to the market and we need you to go buy stuff.” You know, “the family’s waiting,” and I mean, true things. But in a way that he would be reasonable about it. And he generally left in a good mood, jolly. Probably until he sat in the car with my mom. *[laughter]*
- KD: So, you don’t remember money being tight, just making sure he didn’t spend it at the bar?
- DB: Right. He always had side jobs. On the weekend, you know, he’d do [cabinets] for people in the community.
- KD: He didn’t rest very much.
- DB: He rested after work. [Yes,] he did. I recall him coming home from work and maybe having a beer and reading his paper and he’s in his room laying down.
- KD: Quiet time. “Don’t bother dad”?
- DB: Yeah, comes out for supper, maybe. So I did not communicate with him a lot during that time. And he would scold us off-and-on through the years. “Be quiet,” you know. He’d have this certain whistle, and we’re looking at TV, getting too loud—*sh! sh!* So we had our fear for him. He never really—I don’t remember [him] really beating me up, or hitting me. You know, just a threat.
- KD: [So that you would] have respect when your dad said “Quiet,” and he’s quiet . . .
- DB: I think he struck my older sister more than me.
- KD: What did your brothers and sisters go on to do?
- DB: God, they’re all really well. Let’s see. Not everybody. College—a lot of college, the younger ones especially. Roberta never went to college. She got married young, and then she started working and raising a family. I was the first one to go to college—went into the Army, then came back and started working. Patsy went to Northridge, but then she got pregnant young, and then she got married to a different man. Let’s see, Michael went to college the most— experimental—and he broke away from the family young and [stayed] away a lot. Mary [got a degree at Rio Hondo College]. Richard went to Long Beach [State College with Mary], but then he got married, got a job, and raised a family. Mary’s the first one to do something with her college. She’s at [a community college]. She’s a counselor and helps students with their [classes and] schedules. And then Robert is a teacher—math. Went to Stanford, and then got his master’s at Cal State [University, Los Angeles]. And then Paul got his master’s there, too. And he’s a good artist, and he’s doing some teaching. He [finally] went for his credentials to teach [high school, which adds to] his Master of Fine Arts.
- KD: Oh, he’s an MFA? An MFA? Wow, I didn’t realize that.
- DB: Yeah. And then Kristin, the youngest one, [graduated from Loyola University and] is a teacher of reading English now. She’s a vice-principal at a charter school. So nobody’s did anything really bad, you know.
- KD: But certainly that sense of—
- DB: Education was instilled in everybody. Even though my sister Roberta, who didn’t go to college—she’s very smart and she reads a lot, and she has smart children. And she works in a high school. She’s always worked in the office in the school. She’s a very fast typist.
- KD: I remember you talking a lot about books. It wasn’t just comic books, but the sense of the value of the book, that knowledge was in the books.
- DB: I have a really good library at home. Got hundreds of books—mostly art books, and history books, and photo books.
- KD: And that started at what time, creating this library?
- DB: Probably as soon as I was out on my own, yeah. Well, it started with my comic books, really, you know. I have a lot of them. [I’ve read only a few] novels. I don’t know all the classics. I was a slow reader. I had to reread a lot, even now. I mean, I buy books all the time, and I don’t know the last one I finished. *[laughter]* I start another one before I finish one, and then . . . Or I glance, or skip through it, just to get the gist of it or something. But I just love buying books. I just went to Arizona—to Clifton, Arizona—this Easter time, and I came back with books from second-hand stores, you know.

- KD: So, the collection grows.
- DB: Yep, yep. My wife keeps saying, “Well where are you going to put that? There’s no more room.”
- KD: Well, unless you want to add anything else, I think we’re—
- DB: So, we did talk about the service last time?
- KD: Yes.
- DB: And we went all the way until I went into the service this time.
- KD: Yes, and your trips in Germany.
- DB: And then we spoke about my influences in art?
- KD: That—I think it is on the other tape.
- DB: Yes.
- KD: Because, it’s after you see the world—
- DB: And the different people in my life that have really encouraged me in art. Like my mom and dad. I have a little drawing [that my dad saved]. I might have given you a copy. A little sketch my dad kept—my first drawing where he can say, “Wow, that’s art, you know”—in pencil. A stick-figure-like thing. My dad kept [important things like this, things that he liked, such as] his own report cards from Garfield. And he’s always proud to show his report cards to us. So—
- KD: And you wanted to do—
- DB: Yeah, the same, exactly. And we talked about my job when I was in high school and the other little jobs I had. I always knew the value of work. I think it wasn’t until the Army when I learned how far you could take work. The endurance—like, work all day just doing the same thing, or walking the whole day, and stuff like that. Stuff I never really wanted to do, or didn’t think I could do. Well, I guess one thing I can mention is going to the museum during the high school years—or after high school years—to that early show at the LA County [Natural] History Museum, [with] the pre-Columbian Mexican art. My friend’s mother took us to that. My mother would’ve loved to have seen, or taken us to it. But the opportunity came up, and it was, like, the first time I really saw something of value from Mexico besides crafts— mariachis or shirts that kind of Tijuana-type art. That’s all I thought Mexico was, you know. And this art was like, “How many years ago? And how did they make it? They didn’t have metal?” So, all the questions popped up there, and that’s before I went to the service.
- KD: Did that help you have a sense of pride in your family’s heritage?
- DB: It was a beginning. It sort of opened up the window. Because when I went to Europe [the art there] was like that other, more-valued history that I learned in high school. [The] Italian, European masters that I saw first-hand. And then I thought, these are just people living here, that they grow up amongst all this stuff, they live in it. We don’t have that in Los Angeles. It’s all commercial stuff. And so it opened my eyes in that way, too. So when I came back and me and John indulged ourselves with a trip to Mexico, that was when it all solidified, you know. So, you knew what your destiny was, you know. And everything else was education, I guess, and—
- KD: So, that was the moment when you said, “Ah, I can be an artist.”
- DB: Yeah, I think it was in Europe, probably.
- KD: I mean because—your childhood, it’s very rich with, you know, aesthetics. And creative spirit and creativity are being encouraged.
- DB: Yeah. And I did designing in high school, which I got accomplished for. I mean I was—
- KD: Yeah, you were acknowledged for the—
- DB: Right, acknowledged, exactly.
- KD: [For] what you could do so well there, with the patch and other things. But that’s what I can’t figure out. It’s rare to hear someone have so much encouragement—
- DB: Because, look at what I said about being in college at Cal State LA. I was asking, “What is life all about?” My only thing was art. That really was valuable to me. Then, [when I was] going to have to start a family, that’s when I was thinking about girls, jobs. Once that’s going to happen, you’ve got to have a career. But

then I dropped out, and I went to the service. And then I saw all this history in Europe. And I saw, again, my value of being an artist—because, there, I was the top artist in my [military] company. And I think I started getting the inkling then, [that] “yeah, I can do this as a living,” you know. Then, coming back, getting lucky enough to get my first job right away. “Yeah I can do this.” Nowadays I just feel so sorry—it’s like so hard to tutor young men because the opportunities are no longer there, like I had.

KD: The opportunities in the school?

DB: To be an artist. There was more opportunities before, when I was growing up. There was a lot more newspapers.

KD: Right.

DB: Ads, a lot more hand-done things.

KD: Right. Because [of] the technology taking over and, like you’re saying, the fewer newspapers actually published—

DB: Right.

KD: I didn’t think of it that way.

DB: There was a lot more hands-on stuff. Now, anybody can take a computer and a photograph and do something with it. You don’t really have to be an artist—but you still need an artist’s eye. But it’s hard to tell somebody, “Yeah, stay in school and be an artist.” I mean, I’d rather them be a scientist, because [there’s] a lot of stuff we need solved. Our environment, you know. Global warming, all this stuff. We need more scientists, inventors. I tried to do that with my sons, but they want to be artists. *[laughter]*

KD: *[laughter]* You failed, David, you failed. You made another artist, darn. *[laughter]* Do you—

DB: I should tell you—

KD: You don’t really think that that was a problem, do you—that they became artists?

DB: Oh, no, no.

KD: No.

DB: We’re going to have our first show together.

KD: You are?

DB: I think Kathy Gallegos at Avenue 50 [Studio].

KD: Oh, that’s fantastic.

DB: But she wants me and [my brother] Paul, and then my two sons. So that should be something pretty nice.

KD: Yeah, Botello dynasty.

DB: I was already thinking maybe a possible title would be “Four Brothers: Two Generations.” So, it would make you think, “Are they all brothers?”

KD: How’d it work, right. So, you are proud of them?

DB: Oh, yeah. And it’s like, you know, they’re going to be poor right now, because it’s hard to make money.

KD: Well, you found a way to do pretty well with public art.

DB: But Wayne’s having a real hard time right now, struggling. So.

KD: Because, that’s his full-time job, right?

DB: Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah.

KD: He was in [the] aerospace industry, was it? He was an engineer?

DB: Yeah.

KD: And he left that to be [a] full-time artist?

DB: Right.

KD: And you’ve always had the full-time employment, with art as your time?

DB: Right. Mm-hmm. So, the art’s been—public art has been, say, when I had energy to do it. [But] I’ve always had sort of [a] full-time job.

KD: We’ve talked about this before, but since we’re on this other tape, make it clear that you’ve always worked in creative fields.

DB: Yes.

- KD: You were able to put your art—
- DB: Even being freelance at home, I still had art jobs.
- KD: I don't think we talked about that. What do you mean, freelance?
- DB: I worked for advertising departments at Barker Brothers, the Broadway, at different other stores and manufacturers, and agencies. But then I also would pick up work at [other] places, then come home and do it at home. I did that for a lot of years, so that's freelance. They would pay me for the work I did. I'd have to do my own taxes, except for income tax. I think they always took the income tax off the check. But I had to pay my own social security. I had no insurance [or pension plan], that kind of stuff, most of times. So, yeah, that's harder and harder to do, and to find. There's more work for computer stuff, but even journalists are suffering so much.
- KD: But you have two sons, and a—
- DB: Daughter.
- KD: Daughter. And they've both gone to college, no?
- DB: Cielo graduated last year, here [at UCLA], with her masters in the library sciences, and Joseph just went part-time to PCC. And Benjamin didn't even graduate from high school.
- KD: You have the same mix as your own generation, your brothers and sisters.
- DB: Mm-hmm. Right.
- KD: It's fascinating.
- DB: And Benjamin has dyslexia. It's just so hard for him to read, and he really did bad at school, covered it up, [but then got special help] for that problem. And I tried a lot of sitting with him, and reading with him. I think when he was young, something happened along the way [and he just got upset about it].
- KD: You're proud of them, but you recognize the challenge, it sounds like.
- DB: Oh, yeah, of course. I mean, I think about my youngest son, and think, "Well, he's just not experiencing what I experienced in life. He's going to be an entirely different person." Which is true about my dad, about everybody. But it's, like, I wish I could talk to him more about what I did. Or inspire him to do this, or teach him this and that. I'm going to die, and he's not going to know [about me]. He's going to know just so much of my life, you know, and that's sad. Because his interests are somewhere else, and he's got his other friends, and I just have him for such a small time. And I just talk to him for such a small time.
- KD: And the schooling is so different now, that—I mean, you had art, and music, and—didn't you say astronomy? I don't think—
- DB: Not astronomy, but—
- KD: I mean, just the subjects you mentioned for your schooling are not—it's just all about—
- DB: We had mythology.
- KD: See. Now it's just, either math or some kind of English-language arts, and social studies—which is history—and I guess the last thing would be maybe biology and chemistry. But schooling is very—what they've considered the basics.
- DB: Basics. Right.
- KD: Reading, writing, and arithmetic. That's it. There's no creative arts, and there's no music, and there's no sense of a larger world. Because it's all about the test scores, so—
- DB: Yeah. Leave all children behind.
- KD: Yes, as I call it: Leave Every Child Behind, yeah. Well, should we end on a sarcastic note, or . . .
- DB: [laughter]
- KD: I should let you go—you've been here a long time, and I want to thank you so much for coming after work. Thank you, David.
- DB: Okay, you're welcome.



## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BOTELLO

---

### RELATED RESOURCES

#### **Publications from the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press**

“Free Association.” By Chon A. Noriega and Pilar Tompkins Rivas.

*Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 36, no. 2 (2011): 1–18.

*L.A. Xicano*. Edited by Chon A. Noriega, Terezita Romo, and Pilar Tompkins Rivas.  
Exhibition catalog, 2011.

*Mexican Museum of San Francisco Papers, 1971–2006*.

Essay by Karen Mary Davalos. *The Chicano Archives*, volume 3, 2010.

*The Oscar Castillo Papers and Photograph Collection*.

Edited by Colin Gunckel. *The Chicano Archives*, volume 5, 2011.

*Self Help Graphics & Art: Art in the Heart of East Los Angeles*.

Edited by Colin Gunckel. Second edition. *The Chicano Archives*, volume 1, 2014.

#### **Special Collections at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library, Los Angeles, California**

CARA: Chicano Arts: Resistance and Affirmation Papers, [volume I], 1985–1994

Patricia Correia Gallery Collection, 1991–2008

---

### UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER

The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) was founded in 1969 with a commitment to foster multidisciplinary research efforts as part of the land grant mission of the University of California. That mission states that University of California research must be in the service of the state and maintain a presence in the local community.

The CSRC strives to balance interdisciplinary and applied research in ways that can impact traditional academic departments and disciplines. Through all of these efforts, the CSRC exemplifies UCLA’s institutional priorities—academic excellence, civic engagement, and diversity—and remains committed to research that makes a difference.

[WWW.CHICANO.UCLA.EDU](http://WWW.CHICANO.UCLA.EDU)