

Tony García, Jr.



Hillsborough Remembers

This is an interview with Mr. Tony Garcia of Tampa, Florida. Mr. Garcia's father, Tony Garcia, Jr., was a Tampa icon known for his work as executive director of the Tampa USO and his lifelong dedication to community service. This interview is being conducted on October 19, 2010 in Mr. Garcia's office on the 18th floor of the County Center building, which is located at 601 E. Kennedy Blvd, Tampa, Florida.

Interviewer: Jennifer Diaz, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library Systems' Oral History Project (JD)

Good afternoon, Mr. Garcia. Thank you for taking the time today to speak with us today about your father. We really appreciate your participation in our Oral History project.

Could you begin by describing your father's early family life for us?

Mr. Tony Garcia (TG)

My dad was born here in Tampa in 1922 in West Tampa right off of Armenia Avenue. He was born to a family of – he was the, umm, middle son of three sons and he had a sister also. They lived all over West Tampa and that area of Old West Tampa right off Main Street just a few blocks off of Main and Howard, which was Old West Tampa. Historic West Tampa as it is known today. My dad was born during the Depression and he, uh, his family was very poor, and the family understood the importance of togetherness and sticking together back in those days. And they also understood the importance of a handshake. The importance of a handshake back in that day which was really a person's word and bond in many instances for the people who lived in that ... It was a close knit community, West Tampa was. It was incorporated

into the City of Tampa in 1925. It was its own little un-incorporated area until it was really brought into the City of Tampa in 1925. It was a cigar, you know, industry type of place – a little community where people lived in little houses around there and they walked to all the cigar factories, which was a prime source of work for the people who lived in the area.

So my dad always was one to understand the importance of an education even as a young boy. So, he always went to school and, excelled very well in school. He was the only member of his family to really have a college education – of his three brothers and his sister. So that was a very big accomplishment for him. And, he was always looked up to as the leader, the alpha male of his family. So, that was a good time for him I guess in – I get, when he made that accomplishment of graduating from the University of Tampa in 1950 with his ... He had a bachelor's degree in business. His father was still alive at the time, so I know his family was very proud of that accomplishment.

(JD) Well, that's fantastic. Well, talking about your father being something of an alpha male, I also understand that he was a very talented baseball player. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

(TG) Tampa's a baseball town. The baseball, the social leagues that they had in the 1930s and the 1940s were very prevalent throughout Tampa primarily in Cuscaden Park and in MacFarland Park, as it was known back then before all the fields that you see today. If you were to go today to MacFarland Park and see the baseball fields that are there today, it was a lot

different back in the day. But, most of the games were played primarily in Cuscaden Park in Ybor City. Dad belonged to a variety of teams. Just loved playing the sport, but that was, as I said before, that was a primary sport here in Tampa.

Tampa's cultivated many baseball players who went on to play the game professionally. I guess the most well-known is, of course, is Al Lopez, who was the first Hispanic ball player that was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame from Tampa. I think we have a couple more on the horizon, but anyway. Al Lopez was our first big baseball hero here in the City of Tampa. We had Al Lopez Stadium our baseball field that was down there off of Himes and Tampa Bay was named after him. That was our big baseball stadium, but that got torn down twenty - about twenty years ago, I guess, or so maybe a little bit more than that. But, Dad actually got taught – Dad was a catcher – and he was taught by Al Lopez.[JD: "Really?"] how to catch. Yeah, 'cause Al Lopez was a catcher. So Al Lopez taught my dad how to catch. And my dad was a bat boy for the Cincinnati Reds way back when he was a little boy. So he always had a profound love for the sport. And there's a picture of my dad holding a bat when he's three years old. That was the game to play back when you were a kid and there was ... it didn't really cost a lot of money to play baseball. You really needed to do was have a bat and a ball. You really didn't need gloves back in those days, and the team .. get some kids together and bases would be a rock or a tire or something like that, you know. And then it eventually evolved. He played for Jefferson High School and then he

played for the Tampa Spartans when he went to the University of Tampa. He played for a variety, as I told you before, of inter-social leagues. And he was a very good player. He was a very good hitter as well as being a very good catcher. He did have a promising career to try and go into the pros, but he had an accident and injured his shoulder. Unfortunately, he was not able to pursue, uh, that dream of his that he did have of being a professional baseball player. He played with Lou Pinella's father. Lou Pinella's a famous baseball player that represents the City of Tampa. Everybody knows Lou – sweet Lou, as he's known. And, Dad played with Lou's dad. Everyone had a nickname back then, so, everybody .. I think Lou's dad was a pitcher. And, Dad was the catcher. Then there were a lot of other people who went on, not to be famous baseball players, but became very prominent members of the community over here that played with Dad throughout the course of that time when they were playing baseball back in the '30s and '40s. Dad continued to play baseball, I guess. He would go into softball, but I think when I was born he played for a couple more years and then just got away from it. He actually got more into his career with the USO as that time.

(JD) Well, that kind of brings us to the next point. You talked a little bit about your father's educational background and his time at the University of Tampa. Can you talk a little bit about his military service?

(TG) My Dad was drafted in the military during World War II and served in the Army. He served for two years in the Aleutian Islands up in Alaska. And,

came back home on leave; married my mom back in 1945 – 1944-'45. Then he had to go back out, and I think he was in the Panama Canal for about another year. Then he came back home, he had done his duty there, and went to the University of Tampa. Then after that time, or during it, I can't remember exactly, he joined the Air Force Reserve. That was during ... that was after. That was after he was graduated from the University of Tampa, but because the Korean War was kicking up in the early 1950s, and, uh, so he was in the Reserve during the Korean War at MacDill Air Force Base which is where he was stationed. And, during that time, he actually got into the entertainment aspect of show producing for them and doing acts. So, as a result of that - being in the military and doing that - his lieutenant I think it was, knew there was going to be an opening for a USO director in the City of Tampa. And, he recommended my dad for the job and told my dad it would be a good opportunity. So, my dad went and applied for the job and got it. So he kept that little gig for 35 years.

(JD) I heard you saying, "And 35 years later ...

(TG) And 35 years later, but, I need to go back real quick and tell you about the entertainment thing. I didn't tell you this before, but when he was in the University of Tampa and even in high school, Dad would always be involved in skits and doing stuff on stage. Um, so he was always [JD – "Involved with the arts.."] drawn to the arts and took his shot at trying to sing from time to time, too, from old stuff that I've read when he was in high school and maybe even college. But he would .. they would write

skits, him and Jack Espinosa and Tony Dorio, which used to be a friend of his way back then, and Jimmy the Greek. So, those were the guys he would hang around with, and they would put on skits way back in the day. He always had that entertainment bug. So, he was not the kind of guy, I think, that was made up where he would actually go on stage and entertain. His calling was to be more of an emcee of the shows, and he really had a good eye for entertainment. So he would get entertainers. Which is why, subsequently, he got the job at the USO. Of course, with that, was opening up at least a USO office. Didn't really have ... It was a the YMCA on the second or third floor of the ... where the "Y" was on Twigg Street back in 1967. And where it went from there, um, was a variety of different things. As you talk about, I think.

(JD) Um-hum. Well I know your father did just tons of fund-raising and all kinds of community events over him time at the USO. But, in particular, what I read the most about were his Christmas shows and how wildly popular and successful they were in the community. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

(TG) Oh yeah. The Christmas shows were great. I remember going to the Christmas shows when I was a little boy. I probably went to - he had twenty-five of them, I think. And I probably went to a good portion of those, as I can recall. It was always on a Sunday night, and he would always have entertainment. He would have a full orchestra. He would invite all. Certain people he would invite from the regular, what we would call, I guess, the lay community. The people who were non-military personnel throughout the city here and he would

invite them to come to the theater and they would get a special pass to go to the theater on the base. And then, of course, he would invite the members of the military and the non-commissioned officers and whoever wanted to come and attend the show because it would be entertainment for people at the theater. And, he would have a full orchestra, like I said, a few singers there, then he would have, um .. There was a couple that he always used to like to have every year that got to be really good friends with him, Jack and Sally Jenkins. And they sang for my dad, not just for the Christmas shows, but for a lot of other things over a friendship that spanned probably fifty years. But he would always have a local dignitary trying to emcee the show for him. Then, maybe a local city council member or a radio personality would be the emcee of the show, or a T.V. personality. And then he would have, you know, comedians like Jack Espinosa who was very well known in the area and a Tampa icon, too, and a very close personal friend of my dad for many, many years. Jack was a comic and did a lot of shows for my dad. My dad would have entertainment come from Miami, from South America, if he could get them. Different...he would have jugglers. He would have impressionists. He would have singers from different areas. Sometimes he'd get some like really funny, off-beat acts that, I think, some of the acts were more for the entertainment of the entertainers that he had. There was also a group known, I don't know if they exist, but the Sound System for Hillsborough High School which was a group of kids that would get together like a glee .. you've got that show "Glee" today...so they would have like a glee group of kids and they would

come out and sing - a bunch of girls and guys. The Hillsborough Sound System was put together by Jerry Scoret who was the musical director then for Hillsborough High School. That was one of the groups he would have come on in addition to all the other people I told you about. The big thing was that at the end of the show, he would always have a couple of service men come up. This was the M.O. for every year. A couple of service men would come up. It would be either service, mostly NCOs primarily and it would be maybe a couple of guys and a gal or a couple of gals and a guy that were servicemen. And, they were supposed to be up there like hosts, but what they really didn't know was they had been selected, pre-selected, recommended by their division leaders to be selected for this particular show because, the idea was they thought they were just going to be up there to act as hosts and do whatever they wanted them to do during the show. But, really what it was, Dad would send two of them home for Christmas and would let them know about that later on. But he would put on some kind of ruse like 'we're going to have a dancing contest. You're going to dance with these people and whoever gets the most applauses wins, you know, a prize.' And he would .. Two of them would get sent home and then you'd have one left and it's like, 'well what's this ...' What he did was he would fly that person's family up here. So the family was already waiting in the wings. Sometimes they would even be sitting on the stage, but they would be disguised. Because he'd have them dressed up. Like he'd have like maybe a bunch of elves and Santa Claus and like that. He'd have them all made up so they'd be there the whole time. And they wouldn't know; the officer wouldn't

know, or the enlisted person wouldn't know that their family was on the stage with them the whole time. So it was real cute going when they finally found out they were there. So what they'd let them do is they would let them call him up on the phone or they would say .. or they would bring him up and the family would come up behind him. [JD: "Surprise him."] So you could actually see him, you know, the hugging, and the screaming, and the crying ...

(JD) Oh the pictures were adorable.

(TG) Yeah, yeah. They got a big kick out of that. It was really, really nice to see that .. the family. Then Dad would get them a rental car for the week and they would go to .. there was no Disney World back then, okay. When he started that back then, maybe they would have a few days at the beach together, St. Pete Beach; and he'd get them a rental car maybe a dinner at a couple of places. It was really, really nice and the families never forgot it. Dad would get letters, or Christmas cards, or something from the families for like 20 years and 25 years. They would never forget that. It was really, really nice.

(JD) That's wonderful. I really enjoyed looking at those pictures. So, in 1967, Mr. Garcia, your father opened a lounge for the servicemen in downtown Tampa's old Hillsborough Hotel. What were some of the activities that went on there?

(TG) In '67 Dad opened up the lounge. It was in the old Hillsborough Hotel located at the corner of Madison and Florida. There used to be a Frisch's Big Boy across the street. There's a credit union there today, but that was .. The

lounge, you'd have to go up a flight of stairs. It was basically like a little, you know, a little inner sanctum that the servicemen could go to from the base on the weekends if they could get a pass to get off the base. They could come down there and Dad would have movie passes for them, or he had chess sets or checker sets up there. He had a pool table and he had a color T.V. which was a big deal back in 1967, a color console T.V. And he had a ... what do you call those things? He had a stereo with a record player so they could play records, and typewriters and stationery so they could write to their family. He would mail it for them. Stuff like that. A couple actually got married up there. I've got pictures of that, but the couple actually got married. I guess they had met there and fell in love. They wanted to get married there so it was kind of interesting to see that occur. But, that's where his headquarters was at. That's where his office would be, so servicemen could come up there if they needed help, but you know, the thing about Dad it wasn't just service people he would help. He would help anyone that needed help.

If someone came in and they were down on their luck, and they needed a job or they had a cousin needed a job, or a daughter or a son that needed a job, or a brother that needed a job, or needed some kind of contact to try and do something that was an opportunity for them, Dad was always there to offer help or 'let me see what I can do'. So that was a really unique thing about him...he would help servicemen, but he would really help everybody because he came from poverty. He knew what it was like to have nothing. He always told himself if he ever got out of that situation

when he was a little boy that he was going to help people that weren't able to help themselves. And he truly, truly did that.

I've never really met anybody, I'm not saying it just 'cause he's my dad, but I never really met anybody who was so selfless that would always give of himself and always care about the other person. A very compassionate guy. Always willing to help other people, you know, that were down on their luck. Or trying to do something, trying to make a difference to help the community be a better place. He was involved in a lot of different – he was in a lot of clubs. Not a lot of clubs, a lot of boards. He was on a lot of boards to try and help make a difference.

(JD) Yes, you mentioned just his ability to social network was just incredible. In addition to his devotion to the public service as you said before, he was really great at promoting the entertainment industry and bringing different acts to Tampa. That was something I read a lot about in his career. What are some of the acts that he brought to Tampa? I know Bob Hope was here often; that they were friends and who were some of the other people?

(TG) Oh yeah, he was friends with Hope probably back in the early 1950s. He, through all his contacts in the entertainment world, Dad was able to bring a lot of different people because he was involved ... Through the USO he was able to get involved in other events, but Dad was actually involved in. When we had the Super Bowl here, the first Super Bowl, Dad was involved in that with George Steinbrenner and other

people who were here. So we got to meet a lot of people there and they brought a lot of celebrities through. Again, the cumulative, collaborative process that went on with all the different entities here in Tampa to make the first Super Bowl that we had here a success. But Dad brought a lot of different entertainers into the area.

He brought, back in the day when Anita Bryant was popular, she was a USA contestant and then she was an orange juice spokesman and I guess she was famous for a couple of other things. But, I think he brought her in here and he brought Sammy Davis, Jr. He brought Jimmy Stewart. He brought Bob Hope several times. He brought, um. When my Dad, again this is another spin off. My Dad was also executive director of the Latin-American Fiesta. So, he kept that title for about four years, I think, maybe five years. And, during that time, he would always bring a famous Latin celebrity. The first one was Ricardo Montalban. He used to say, 'Welcome to Fantasy Island,' right? And of course, he was in quite a few movies. What a nice guy and a consummate gentleman, Mr. Montalban was. We lost him recently this past year. But, he was great and it was a great success. Dad would do a dinner for them, in honor of them. Actually, he wasn't the first one, Cesar Romero was the first one. So we had Cesar Romero. People know that Cesar Romero was also an actor and a great dancer back in the day when he was in the movies. And then, he became known a little bit later in his career, as the Joker in the Batman series in the 1960s. But, Mr. Romero was very nice also. My Dad would bring all kinds of entertainment. He would have a probably an event at the Columbia and

Cesar Gonzmart would put a great show on with all of his entertainment over there and, of course, he was quite the showman himself. Cesar was really fantastic and also one of Tampa's great icons and legends. Again, it was that collaborative process and also the bringing out of the Hispanic heritage, the Latin heritage, here in the city of Tampa.

So we had Ricardo Montalban, and we had Desi Arnez another year, Vickie Carr was another year. So there were all these entertainers that came. Again, through that venue known as the Latin-American Festival, which still exists to this day in a different capacity. I don't know ... I'm really not affiliated with it to any great degree now. In its heyday, really when we used to have twelve hundred people. You would have a coronation ball and you would have an elections ball two weekends in a row. It used to be held at the Ft. Homer Hesterly Armory. It was really a premiere event. And as I said before, it generated a lot of good will. It was a lot of fun times and brought all these people into the area. It was just something that built commerce and built good will and helped to keep Tampa out there to compete with other cities across the United States.

(JD) When you mentioned, too, that he also had a hand in promoting the event that was sort of a precursor to the Italian Festival, as well.

(TG) Yeah, Dad did an Italian-American Festival around 1986, 1987. What that was just really to acknowledge, because Tampa is such a diverse city, the Italian culture which was really predominantly situated in Ybor City when Ybor City was in its

heyday. He would honor a lot of the Italian-Americans each year. I think he put on three or four of them. One year he brought Anna Maria Alberghette to sing. He would bring – there used to be a wine called Cella Lambrusco, or something like that. There would be a character known as Aldo Cella. So he got this guy to come in and so that's how they got all the wine there for that one year. He got this guy Aldo Cella to come out and he would walk in the parade with them. He would have several other Italian acts that would come in also. I can't remember – there's another guy, I can't remember his name that was a singer that he brought in also. But he would honor, like I said, he would honor Blue Eyes Villante one year it was in the produce industry. And he honored Nick Nuccio who was one of our mayors. He honored Dennis Popello who was a wonderful cardiac surgeon here in the city. So there were a lot of Italian-Americans that Dad would have honored every year for, I forget if he did it for three or four years, but I still have all the programs from when he did the shows. And he would, again, have local talent that night because it would be a show and he would have the emcee later on that night and they would do a whole showcase – do a little slide show for each one of those people that he would honor. He would honor like three people for each of those festivals. So, that was real nice and it was something that the people of Italian descent over here could hang their hat on and really puff their chests out and be proud of their heritage, which they were to begin with, but it was nice to have something like that.

(JD) Something more formal.

(TG) Yeah, it was nice to have something like that.

(JD) That's really nice. Well, in addition to his work with the USO and the Latin-American Festival, your father you said was on many different kind of boards and fundraisers. Could you tell us a little about some of the other things he worked on over the course of his career like, I know you mentioned he worked with the Chamber of Commerce?

(TG) Well, he was also involved with the United Way back when it was called the United Fund. It wasn't even called the United Way. That was in the early '60s, '70s. He was on the Georgia Ed Commission, he was on just so many boards. I think he was on the board of the Urban League. Later, when my Dad retired from the USO, he actually was able to revive the West Tampa Chamber of Commerce and which he was the executive director for several years and worked and collaborated with a lot of local groups there in West Tampa to help revive the Centro Español building, which is over there on Howard Avenue, to help assist to get that thing revived. Of course, they tried to get a lot of the businesses revived along the avenues, Howard Avenue and Armenia Avenue, which are the main drags in West Tampa. Also, he had his own little corporation which was on a Celebrity Circle. So he always had a thing about, again, the celebrity thing. So they'd be in the circle of celebrities and that's what he liked so that's what he named his little company. Basically it was a production company, promotion company. It would promote all the local shows here. Some of them, actually the majority of them, were really benefits or

fundraisers for local causes over here. He was involved in the Eddie Awards which was something done for the Hillsborough County Public School System. He came up with an idea to do an award for excellence in education in different fields and pitched that to the superintendent at that time for the school system. It wound up being something that, I forget if they did it for ten – eight or ten - years, that they did the Eddie Awards. It turned out to be a very productive thing that was really good for the morale of the employees of the school system. So, they did the Eddie Awards, and, again, he did entertainment, but they would showcase entertainment also from students and people within the schools. So that the Eddie Awards event every year was a pretty cool event and it was something that was really appreciated by and embraced by the school system. But he also put on local shows here and would call it a really 'big shoe.' He did four really 'big shoes' which was really patterned after the phrase that Ed Sullivan would have about really 'big shoe.' Which is what Ed Sullivan said – actually he never really said that – it was a parody that someone had done of him to say something like just how he used to talk. But anyway, Dad had always loved, he was a really big fan of Ed Sullivan's. So he said, 'Well I'm going to put on a really 'big shoe.' And he would get local talent here, home grown talent in Tampa, and he would put on these shows. Poor Jack Espinosa would get sucked into being the emcee all the time. Jack would never say no to Dad. They were such good close friends and so, Jack always could never say no to Tony. So, Jack would emcee the shows usually and Ted Webb, who was also a very good friend and local radio

personality over here. If Jack could not do it, for whatever reason, then Ted would be more than happy to come on and emcee the shows for Dad, too. They just really had a great time. They had fun. The entertainers that were on the show, they had fun. It was all about just enjoying each other's company and having fun and doing this all for a good cause and showing everybody a good time. Everybody in the audience would just really enjoy the singers, or really enjoy the comics, or really enjoy the musicians, because they would have a little band or something up there. It was just for everybody to go up and have a good time and enjoy the camaraderie, each other's company – all for a good cause. So Dad really enjoyed that; it was a win-win for everybody.

(JD) Yeah, it sounds like it.

(TG) Yeah, it was great.

(JD) Well, you mentioned his, the Celebrity Circle business ...That's something he started up after he retired, correct?

(TG) Yes, he started up Celebrity Circle after he retired.

(JD) When did he retire?

(TG) He retired in 1982. But, he was the kind of guy who couldn't sit still. He had to always be doing something or thinking of something. So, after that is when the Eddie Awards came into play when he would do the West Tampa Chamber of Commerce thing and would put on the 'really big shoes.' He also did a series of shows called Fiesta in Tampa, which used to be a big thing way back. I think the Fiesta in Tampa

used to be in the '40s and '50s. It used to be a show that they would do. That was a big thing back in the '40s and '50s before the advent of the T.V. social interaction was real big. So people would go to the movies or to the theater or they would watch live entertainment at a theater or they would go to dances. I mean social clubs were real big back then. That's what people had then. Social interaction was a big thing. So putting on shows and local entertainment was a big thing. Fiesta in Tampa was one of them. That was another series of shows that Dad put on; and he tried to dredge up some of the people who were actually in those shows from decades ago to actually perform. So you would have like a 75 year old guy go up there and sing. And, then you couldn't drag him off because he didn't want to get off. So, there would be instances like that. So those were another whole series of shows and a lot of benefits he would do for people – the West Tampa Chamber, the Fiesta in Tampa, the really 'big shoe,' the Eddie Awards – those were all things that happened after Dad retired.

(JD) That's amazing. So, also the community room at the West Tampa Library is very appropriately named after him. How did this happen?

(TG) Well, about a year after Dad passed, some friends of his submitted his name for consideration for the community room. One of them was former City Council member Mary Alvarez. Mary was very instrumental in trying to get the room named for Dad. Mary and her husband Manny were very good friends of Dad and always had a great relation with him. They knew just how important he was to the community.

Also Monsignor Higgins from St. Lawrence Parish was also very good friends with Dad and was also one of the proponents trying to get the library named for him. When we had the thing for him that day, there was – I'm trying to think. There were about five or six people that were really instrumental in trying to get the room named after Dad; to try and recognize his contribution and his affinity for West Tampa. So there were several other people. I can't remember right now who all of them were. I apologize in advance for all those people that I can't remember their names. But, I do remember a couple that I just mentioned to you now. E. J. Salcines gave a very nice speech about my Dad the day they dedicated the room to my Dad, which was really, really nice. I provided the picture that hangs in the library - it is a portrait of my Dad, and the mat that is around the picture is littered with signatures from many of Dad's friends. That was really from a testimonial dinner that the club Centro Asturiano had given to my Dad probably about six months before my Dad passed away unexpectedly. It was a nice dinner that we had at the Centro Asturiano down at the corner of Palm and Nebraska, which again, was a social club back in its heyday for the Latins in the area. So, in the grand ballroom on the third floor they had a really nice testimonial dinner with friends and so at the end of the evening, my Dad had that portrait there and he said he wanted everyone who was there to sign because a lot of his friends got invited to that. It was really, really nice. They said some really nice things about Dad. He was not one for accolades, at least accolades about him. He was always the guy backstage. He put the stuff together. He was always the guy behind

the scenes but he never really wanted to take open credit for anything. He just wasn't like that. He would get commendations from the city, plaques from ships and destroyers and commanders and from MacDill Air Force base for his appreciation. All these other events he contributed to ... all kinds of commendations and plaques and stuff. He would just ... When he passed away and I went through all his stuff, he would just ... He never hung stuff on the wall in his office. Those last five or six years he worked in an office out of his house. My old bedroom was his office. But Dad would never put plaques on the wall or when he had his office in the USO lounge down in downtown, which by the way was there for about 25 years from 1967 to 1992. He was never one to put pictures of himself with celebrities or plaques on the wall. He just wasn't about that.

(JD) He was just very humble that way.

(TG) Yeah, he got more out of if he could link two people together, if he could get somebody a job or if he could help somebody find a place to live or stuff like that. That meant a lot more to Dad than a plaque on the wall or being mentioned or being singled out at some event. That's not what he was about. Anybody that you would talk to would probably agree about that.

(JD) Mm-hmm. We talked a lot about him professionally and that's very interesting because it's a little more personal. Obviously that had an impact on you going into public service here in Tampa also. Can you talk a little about your relationship with your father?

(TG) Well, my Dad was a good dad in that he was a provider to us when I was a little kid. I didn't really get to see him that often when I was a little kid because he was busy trying to be out there making a living for us. I also knew, as I got older, that he belonged to a lot more people than just to my Mom and I. I'm an only child, I don't have any brothers or sisters. I grew up in an adult environment because I would go to a lot of these events with my Dad. So I was always around adults.

I guess one of the things I would have to thank him for is probably how to learn to deal with people and how people are, to be a good judge of character and to always appreciate what you have and don't be too quick to pat your own self on the back. Again, back then, he was just always there for people. So we knew he was a part of the community and we had to share him. Mom and I had to really share him because he was always busy doing this or helping people with that. He cared so much about so many people. I mean he cared about us too, then, I got to appreciate that more as I got older when my kids grew up. I got married; I had kids and he loved being around my kids as he got older. He would settle down a little bit, but it was very hard to get this guy to stay still. **[JD:** "I believe it."] He was always wanting to be here and always be around there because people gave him energy. People give me energy, too. It's an acquired trait. I love being around people and he does too, but he used to like his quiet time, too. You could walk in a sandwich shop and find him in a corner. IN A CORNER. He had a corner table with his back to the wall. That's just a West Tampa thing. You always put your back to the wall. And he'd just

be sitting there reading *La Gaceta* or reading a newspaper or something. He liked those quiet times for himself. He had those pensive moments and he really enjoyed that. But, he also loved being around people, meeting new people, finding out about them, loved kids. Just a very compassionate guy. Just a very good humored kind of guy. He was very humorous, by the way. He used to have joke books. I have volumes of joke books from either Jack Benny or Henny Youngman, stuff like that. He would always take jokes out of that and always have little liners or stuff that he would zing at people because he liked making people laugh. You know, a smile is contagious and he always had a smile going.

That's what I got from him as we got older. Our relationship really gelled very, very well probably the last 15 years he was alive. We really got to appreciate each other as father and son and as men. [It was] very rewarding for me.

(JD) As colleagues and just people working in public service.

(TG) Well I got to see how he related to all these different people and he never said anything bad about anybody. Never said anything bad about anybody, if he didn't have something good to say, he just wouldn't say it. That's just how he was. So I learned a lot; got a lot of insight from him regarding that. I hope that it has served me well. So far, so good, I guess. Knock on wood over here. I will just try and continue walking in those footsteps which are very large shoes to fill, but I try every day and am humbled by his accomplishments for a guy that came from a very poor family to achieve the notoriety and respect that

he did in this community. To this day I still hear stories from people that I've never met before that ... Okay, I have the same name so in a way it's good and in a way it's like you gotta try to live up to the name; because people would say, 'Oh, Tony Garcia. Was your Dad "the" Tony Garcia?' So I know I'll never be "the" Tony Garcia, which is fine with me. Again, that's fine with me. But they'll always say, 'Was your Dad "the" Tony Garcia?' and I'm like 'yes' and then they would proceed to tell me some story that I had never heard of before about 'Well your Dad helped me out with this,' or 'Your Dad helped me out with that..' That's the biggest present anyone can ever have, is to have people just tell you all the good things that your dad did. There's no greater reward, at least for me personally, than that, regarding my father.

(JD) Well, Tony, thank you so much. I've really enjoyed talking with you and hearing about your father. Thank you for sharing these stories with us and participating in this project.

(TG) Well it's my pleasure.

(JD) Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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