

## FIRST DRAFT

Tony Gomez

This interview was conducted at my kitchen table. The ever-affable Tony Gomez agreed to the interview in return for donuts. Tony is fifty-one years old, of average height, with longish black hair, swarthy good looks, and large blue-gray eyes. He owes his muscular physique to his concrete construction business, Tony's Concrete Works. Quick and decisive, Tony supervised a job, negotiated terms with a customer, and conducted other business simultaneous to our discussion.

Tony Gomez

As told to Oli Olivas Duncan April 16, 2009

My full name is Tony Gomez, Jr., not Anthony, not Antonio, just Tony. My dad, of course, was named Tony Gomez. My dad was from Walsenburg, by Spanish Peaks.

My dad was in Longmont for a while in the 1930s, when he was a kid. He said the stores had "white trade only" signs, and that that changed after World War II. Dad said this town was KKK all the way. This town was the base of the Ku Klux Klan from back in the late 1800s to the 1930s. I remember my dad said there were signs at both Johnson's Corners that said something like, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you."

Dad said that at a restaurant the hamburgers might be 25 cents, but he would have go in the alley to the back door and get them for 35 or 45 cents. They wouldn't serve him in the front. Instead of open and close signs, there were "white trade only" signs. Isn't that weird? Here in Longmont! But not at the City Café. Dad liked to go to the City Café. That's the one that Panfilo Gonzales owned.

Dad was in the army in the 1940s. I think he served in Europe. He never talked about it. He was honorably discharged. We've got the papers. He met my mom at church in Lafayette. My mom's name is Simonita Mireles Gomez.

Dad came to Longmont in about 1945. He worked for the Great West Sugar Factory. I don't know how many years he worked there, but I remember when we lived on Marshall you could hear the siren signaling shift change at the Sugar Factory, and Dad would take off for work. I think he worked in the section where they boiled down the beets.

My mom was really quiet, easygoing. She's the type who loved everybody. She was a homemaker, always in the kitchen. Ahh, I miss her cooking. She's in a nursing home now, and I tell her, "Mama, I miss you at home. Mama, you belong in that kitchen." I don't mean she belonged there; it's just that, the kitchen was where you'd see my mom. She was always cooking or cleaning up the kitchen.

I remember my sister Sarah sleeping on the couch with her mouth open. I told my mom, "Come here. See Sarah, Mama."

"Yea, *so que quieras?*"

"That's what you should be doing, Mama, resting."

I love her so much. I miss her. She's over at Applewood. Her mind's going. It hurts me a lot.

I remember that my dad used to take me to the Echo Park Sales Yard down on South Main on Saturdays. He liked to look at the chickens and rabbits. He kept chickens and rabbits in the backyard. He had some really nice rabbits. My dad used to feed them lettuce from Ideal Market. They'd throw away boxes of lettuce that were past selling; they were still good for the rabbits.

My dad liked to walk around, hang out at the donut shop. Some of Dad's friends were Clovis and Canuto Lujan and Mr. Samano.

I'll show you some pictures. My mom said we used to live in a shed behind my Grandpa Juan's house at 22 Marshall (addressed now \_\_\_ Marshall). The shed hardly had a door on it. My grandfather Juan had given the little house to my dad and his brother. We lived there, and I can't believe that my uncle kicked us out. My folks were out in the street with nine kids. We moved into the house in front with my grandparents. They lived in the back of the house, and we lived in the front of the house; it was kind of like a duplex. There was a bathroom between. We lived there from about 1958 to 1964, when I was about six years old.

They found one of my uncle's statements the other day. Just in savings it showed that he had \$365,000. He had all that money and he couldn't help his own brother to buy even a cheap trailer.

We lived up the street from the Martinez family. I remember Frankie Martinez, when he wrecked his car and all those kids were killed. He was about twenty-four, and Allison Lujan (name?) and all those girls were only fifteen or sixteen. He took them for a ride. He'd been drinking. That was a terrible wreck.

That family had so much bad luck. I think Napoleon died in the coal mines. Clifford killed himself in the car at his sister Alice's wedding. Clifford's face was always red, like he had high blood pressure or something. Anthony died in California. He died from AIDS.

I went to Columbine Elementary School until the second grade. I had Mrs. Lehman, Connie Lehman, in the second grade. The principal at Columbine was Mr. Bennett.

Then we moved to 1014 Coffman, and I went to Central School. Mr. Forgey used to be principal at Columbine, but he had become the principal at Central. He wore glasses and a brim. He was getting pretty old by then. I had long hair like this. This was in about 1967.

I remember, he said, "Come here. We're going to cut your hair. We're going to pay to have your hair cut."

He gave my buddy and me the money to go get our hair cut. We didn't, though. We came back the next day. We had tucked our hair under our hats.

Mr. Forgey said, "Your hair looks good. Take off your hats." He looked at the back, and said, "What's that underneath?"

I had my hair pinned up with hairpins.

He said, "You're suspended for three days. Good-bye. I'll call your parents and, if you don't get haircuts, you'll be expelled for the rest of the school year."

I got my hair cut. Mr. Forgey was happy. My folks were happy.

I didn't really consider myself a troublemaker in school, or a tough guy. But, I remember at Central School, whenever there was a fight it was always a brown and a white. Thompson Park. You'd see a cowboy, a farm boy. He'd want to beat you up. They were tough; they worked hard on the farm. I wasn't; I was just a city boy. I got beat up good. I learned not to fall on my back, but if I did to just keep kicking. That's the way it went.

Then we moved south on Coffman Street, across from the Post Office. I went to Longmont Junior High. I played football.

When I was in Junior High, I remember a cop killed those two guys. They had no weapons, *no nada*. I remember after that walking down the street and these white guys drove

by and yelled at me, “Too bad there weren’t more of you f\_\_\_ing Mexicans killed.” That’s what they said. They didn’t scare me. I just went [middle-finger sign].

I went to High School in Erie—the Eire tigers. I ran track. I’m running now, but I’m running to the table. I told your mom if she makes good green chile, I’d be glad to go down there and have some.

Her porch turned out good, right? Without the arches, it looks more subtle now, lets in more light. I was going to put the arches back, but in stucco. I was going to frame it out with wood, but she didn’t want to.

I went to CU. I took environmental sciences, reading, Spanish, sociology.... I was going to get two years of regular college, and then I was going to go to Oklahoma or Texas and study mortuary science. I wanted to be a mortician. So, if my business gets slow, you can go out at night and knock off some people for me. You would work with very quiet people. They don’t talk back to you. It’s good job security. If there’s one thing we can be sure of in this world, it’s death. That’s a sure thing.

I changed my mind about becoming a mortician, and got into the concrete business. I decided it would be to my advantage to have my own business instead of working for others. Everybody knows me here in Longmont. Everybody likes me because I try to be fair with everybody. I’ve had my own concrete business for about ten years, and I love it. I’m very determined and hardworking. I’ve been doing concrete work for about thirty years.

I think I look good for being in my fifties. A lot of younger guys would like to look like me. And a lot of older guys would, too. They’re old and sick because they ran the race too fast—too many parties.

I live at 423 Martin Street, right around the corner from Marshall. I didn't go far. Sometimes I think I'd like to get married, but I can't find the right girl. Sometimes the beautiful girls don't cut it. They can have all the looks in the world but their heads are screwed up. Or maybe they're not that good-looking and have it all. I like to look into their hearts.

Remember next to my mom's house. What was that? Maxine's Beauty Shop. What was their name? Gorley? There were a lot of Germans on that block.

Discussion on early Longmont: Germans, Swedes, German Russians, and how the town was pretty well settled before the Hispanics came. Discussion on Maricio Varos and his land bounty.

(Tony is going to borrow some family information from a cousin.)

Tony, this is what we have so far. I'm looking forward to reading the information you cousin has. We will incorporate some of that information and add whatever else you want. Keep in touch. Oli