

About Emma Gomez Martinez

The City of Boulder and the Boulder Valley School District built 20 Quonset apartments (steel structures) in response to an influx of returning soldiers attending the University of Boulder under the GI Bill of Rights. In 1946 following World War II, on the two empty acres of land, owned by the Boulder Valley School District, at 21st and Water streets (now Canyon Blvd).

Emma Martinez, a member of one of the earliest Hispanic families to establish themselves in Boulder; lived, studied and worked in the neighborhood and soon assumed the role of spokesperson and primary advocate for the Hispanic community in Boulder. In the 1950s, at the end of the GI rush and when CU no longer needed the Quonset village, the land was traded to the school district.

For years, Emma lobbied for the two acres of land to be converted into a park since the area was open, tree-shaded, grassy and there was already playground equipment installed for the university students' children. With no funding or assistance from the school district, Emma organized "clean-up crews" consisting of neighborhood kids and their parents to preserve the only park and play area to which they had access. During the late 50s and 60s the Quonset huts were occupied by several non-profit agencies and several of the huts were removed until, in the mid 60s only three remained.

Emma was named to the first board of directors for the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in 1965, and focused her efforts towards getting this property dedicated as a community park. Shortly after being named to the board of directors for the OEO, Emma was hired as the program coordinator, Boulder Center Director and Assistant Boulder County Director for the OEO that now occupied two of the three remaining Quonset huts. Working in her position as liaison to the Boulder City Manager's Office, she proposed that the property at 2035 Canyon Blvd. be dedicated as a community park. The property, by this time, had come under the ownership of the City of Boulder. Thus, Canyon Park, the dream and vision of many residents of Boulder, became a reality.

The request and decision was made by City Manager Jane Brautigam to rename Canyon Park to be called the Emma Gomez Martinez Park. Boulder City Council and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) supported her decision as a unanimous vote.

Dedication of Emma Gomez Martinez Park

To: Thomas, Paul, John Greg, Randy, and Susan Martinez

October the 12th, 2013 the City of Boulder is honoring an American citizen of Mexican decent by changing the name of Canyon Park to Emma Gomez Martinez Park. In recognition of the thread of Spanish speaking peoples in the fabric of the Boulder community.

I am writing this letter to my children and their families so that they will know some history of their heritage. I am writing personal stories, some of many, to bring them close to your hearts.

To write about injustice and suffering only of those that came before us, would dilute the emotional impact I want my children to feel. I want them to know the closeness of these happenings and that discrimination continues.

Is this why I became an activist? I don't know; the word 'fair' is a word I can believe in. I can work with fair; activist is a word applied to me. I like advocate. it has a softer sound. What I do know is that change can be made by active participation. So get involved in your community. Be an "American" but support those that work to maintain the rich history, the passionate music of our heritage. Be Proud.

Mom

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Mike and Adelia Gomez, our parents, enrolled Julia, age 6, and Emma, age 5, in school together because we did not speak English. They knew discrimination was strong and we could support each other. (I sure did get my hand slapped with a ruler!) My sister Julia and I learned quickly not to speak in Spanish.

In 1st grade to 7th grade, there was 50% attendance by Spanish speaking students. By 7th and 8th grade, most of the boys had dropped out either because they turned 16 or moved away. In 8th grade, there were 3 Spanish-speaking girls, one Spanish-speaking boy and my sister Julia and I. Only 3 completed high school. In those 12 years of school, not once were we counseled to higher grades.

In 2nd grade, our school had health examinations. My sister Julia and I were not examined. Instead, we were called into the office and the nurse pinned a note on our clothes and sent us home. This note informed my parents that Julia and I had lice and could not attend school until we were inspected by a doctor who said we were clean. My mom took a look at the note; she whipped off her apron and called the neighbor to watch the baby. She took us each by the hand and walked us back to school, up the west steps and through the hall to the principal's office. She then confronted the principal and the nurse and told them, "I will sit on this chair and any lice you find on my girls, I'll eat right here!" Apologizes were all over the place. I am so proud of my mom to this day.

I have 3 sisters and 2 brothers. All 6 of us finished high school. Three have college degrees. Joe has a Business degree and MBA from the University of Denver. Lucy graduated from the University of Colorado nursing school. Mike has an Accounting degree. Both Joe and Mike have taught in colleges. They are both now successful real estate agents. Lucy now owns a successful Mexican restaurant in Colorado Springs called "Señor Manuel's Mexican Cuisine". Julia ran a bilingual program in California.

My mom fought many discrimination battles. Like the 6th grade teacher who was charging 10 cents from Spanish speaking students to get their report cards. Some battles we did not win. My sister

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Susie was cheated of a good scholarship, which was given to another girl who already had other scholarships. My dad wanted to shoot the principal when this happened, but my mom wouldn't let him take the shotgun.

In 11th grade, I played volleyball. Our team won the championship. Lo and behold, there weren't enough letters for the girls, so mine was given to another girl. (I was the only Mexican on the team). My daughter wrote to Erie High School in 2012 and the principal sent me my overdue letter. What a sad experience for a 16-year old girl. I had to beg my dad to let me play the following year.

Living in the small town of Erie there weren't any jobs for kids. So we worked in the farms during summer and early fall. (Topping beets so we started school late). One summer my sister and I picked cucumbers for a farmer right out of Boulder. We picked 16 sacks and the farmer paid us for 8. My dad drove his pickup to the farmer's front door and demanded that the farmer pay for the 8 missing sacks. The farmer paid because he could see the rifle in my dad's truck.

One scary and sad day, it happened in Longmont. I was a young child and I had gone shopping with my dad. Down Main Street, we saw a parade of old cars and trucks filled with Mexicans and all their household items. Men were clinging to the trucks and standing on the running boards. They were being deported south down Main Street and out of Longmont. They were being picked up off the street if they didn't have their papers. Families were torn apart because the farmers were bringing in Anglos from other countries to work for them. My father was not molested because he had blue eyes. He told me to stand close as the many families drove out of town. I don't remember the date, but the memory is still vivid. It was in the 1930's.

Right after the Second World War, many Spanish speaking soldiers were returning home. They were aghast at the "white trade only" signs in Longmont business windows. So many had served and died. Your Grandpa John and uncle served in the war.

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In the 1960's, land developers approached the city to pass an urban renewal program. The area was the ghetto! Between 17th and 3rd streets on Water Street to Goss. In the area lived ten Spanish speaking families, four black families and Italian families. A ghetto? No! But Canyon Boulevard was designed to replace Water Street. Speculators know the value of the land.

John, J, and many neighbors contested the plan and our neighborhood was saved. Water Street was renamed Canyon Boulevard, and the train tracks were removed. The train station was moved to 30th Street.

Construction began and concrete was being poured. This is where the story kind of gets lost in print. I had to stand in cement in front of our house to make sure that the 3 feet of sidewalk that was planned was poured instead of 24 inches so our children could walk safely to school. The cement workers were a Spanish speaking crew and they refused to pour cement on me. I was kind of a celebrity, but the heroes were the crew that refused to pour the cement. Three feet of sidewalk was poured and you could walk safely down Canyon Blvd.

I was employed in 1965 by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). My position was "Neighborhood Aid and Counselor." My duties were to document the status of poor Spanish-speaking families in Boulder County. Many stories of poverty, illness, lack of education and overt discrimination were documented and presented to the OEO Board. The OEO Council acquired funds to assist the program in the OEO Centers in Boulder, Lafayette and Longmont that OEO staff developed.

1. The common system to Spanish speaking families looking for work? They were referred to the County Health Department where they were given food for the day and just enough gas money to get them to Garden City, Nebraska. Problem solved.
2. Families working in fields had housing that was worse than where the farmers stored their machines. They lived behind the nice barns in small, falling down shelters. There were either

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broken windows or no windows and mattresses on the floor. They had to use outhouses and had to bring water from the wells. Electricity? One bulb strung from the machinery barn.

Many worked as servers, dishwashers or cooks in the new Village Inn. I was contacted by staff to inquire on their short paychecks. They were not receiving overtime pay and some were actually shorted hours.

Housing? What housing? Many had to share a dilapidated home.

We had 3 Quonsets, at Water Street (Canyon Blvd.) that were used for various classes. One was a hands-on science class where volunteers brought old clocks, tools and other things and allowed kids to take them apart to see how they worked.

When President Nixon was in office, a University of Colorado professor invited Mrs. Nixon out to the Quonset to see our hands-on science program. I was the director of the Quonset and I was not informed about Mrs. Nixon's visit. Since I lived across the street, I noticed all the commotion. Police escorts and a few press persons were allowed to enter the Quonset, but **NOT** me and I was the director. The husband of the professor was a volunteer at our program. Not the city, nor the OEO Director were notified. Later I understood that the professor developed a class based on my program. The credit went where?

In 1967, I was assisting parents to enroll children in kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary. I had enrolled Susan, my youngest child and Leaha Martinez, my niece, at Lincoln Elementary for kindergarten. I looked into the classroom and didn't see the girls. I asked, "Where are they?" I was escorted to another classroom and was informed that the class was for emotionally and learning disabled children. They had first placed them in that federally funded class without testing or parent notification. Within days, the whole kindergarten class was bussed to Flatiron School.

This school was in the middle class area of Boulder; Susan Martinez Manahan earned a business degree at Denver University in 1984. She worked for State Farm as a counselor. Susan changed careers

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to be an advocate in the growing Hispanic population. She then worked as a Diversity Director at Purdue University in Indiana. In 2011, she earned her teaching degree and now teaches Spanish at Monticello High School in Indiana. Leaha Martinez Brown is employed by Hunter Douglas and travels all over the world as an instructor in the Hunter Douglas enterprise. Leaha now lives in Broomfield County. Sons Thomas earned his degree in Accounting from Metropolitan State College and then an MBA from the University of Phoenix, Paul earned his degree in Business from the University of Colorado. John Greg and Randy managed Alamos Verdes, the family restaurant.

In 1977 we moved to Arvada to fulfill a dream to own our own business. We sold our partnership in Senior Miguel's Restaurant in Boulder and built Alamos Verdes Restaurant at 52nd and Wadsworth. Our restaurant became an integral part of the Arvada community for 34 years. We opened in July 1978 and closed in September 2011.

I am surprised and humbled by this dedication. Sadly your father John died last November. He would have been so proud to celebrate this day with us. Forty years ago, many many memories. I want to thank everyone for celebrating this awesome occasion.

I want to thank Ted Tedesco, Lloyd Throne and Hank Adami for their work in the Office of Economic Opportunity programs and their unwavering support of the poor. To Euvaldo Valdez and Phillip Hernandez who continue to this day as advocates of the Spanish speaking people. To Susan Chacon and the citizens of Boulder for bringing the park story to Euvaldo and Phillip. To Ralph Chacon, Lynn Arceneaux, my granddaughter, Tom Martinez and the Parks Department for organizing the dedication.