

Carlos Labastida

Interview and Summary by Nikki Davis

Carlos Labastida was born on June 13, 1947 to Carlos Aguilar Labastida and Benita Redondo. Carlos Aguilar Labastida was born in Mexico City, Mexico. He came to the United States as a *bracero* [guestworker], working on the farms and later in the mines in Superior, Arizona. In 1909, Benita Redondo was born in Tubutama, Mexico. Benita was raised by Eduardo and Rita Esquer after her biological mother died of a small pox epidemic in Mexico. The Esquer family later migrated to the United States – first to Tucson, then to Tempe, Tolleson, and finally settling in La Victoria.

Both Carlos Aguilar and Benita Labastida worked in the fields around La Victoria. In 1948, the Labastidas bought a lot in Victory Acres and established their residence at 807 S. George Drive on the corner of University Drive and George Drive. The 2-bedroom house had one bath, a small kitchen and a fence around it. According to Carlos most of the houses at the time in La Victoria were shacks, *“As I stated, some of these houses didn’t have bathrooms – they had outhouses. Electricity also was a factor; some of these houses didn’t even have regular light fixtures. They had just a cord hanging from the ceiling – turn the light bulb and light it. Some of the houses looked not primitive but pretty shambled.”* The only streets around at the time were George Drive, Maryland, Victory Drive and McArthur. Because the streets weren’t paved, it would be extremely muddy after a heavy rain or extremely dusty in the summer time. Carlos recalls his father *“oiling the ground”* to prevent the dust from flying around. *“I remember my dad used to go buy bulk oil at a gas station and he would bring it home in 25 gallon drums. He would then get a regular bucket and punch holes in the bottom of it – he would go up and down and across in a line with the bucket of oil on George Drive.”* He and the other neighbors would do the same until 1957 when the streets became paved. Street lights didn’t yet exist – if there wasn’t a moon out, a flashlight was needed to walk around at night.

As for modes of transportation, it was either by bus or car. Even though his parents had a car, his mother rarely drove around in it. At times, Benita Labastida and her son would drive around the neighborhood selling her tamales. Grocery shopping was limited to two local stores – one on the northeast corner of Maryland Street and George Drive and the other, Sunshine Mart, on the northeast corner of Victory Drive and Price Road. For other shopping, the Labastidas would go to Mesa since it was a lot closer to them than Phoenix. Carlos also remembers going down to Apache Boulevard to catch the bus to Mesa, *“We’d go downtown and shop then later on in the afternoon we had to come back. I remember when I was small I used to get tired. It was an all day ordeal to just go down to Mesa and come back – but for me it was a thrill.”*

Carlos, like some of the residents in Victory Acres, was drafted during the Vietnam War. All of his memories of La Victoria kept Carlos going through the war, *“My memories would always come back to the Acres. I swore that if I ever came back alive that I would always walk the streets again. I would remember the Acres so fondly.”* One of Carlos’s neighbors, Jules Shirley, would send him pies and treats. Carol Cabrera and members of his family would send him letters updating him on the Acres; *“I would picture the Acres when I was over there. That was my home ground, you know. That was my pride and joy when I came back.”* Carlos Labastida apparently still feels that way today. He concludes, *“I enjoy the Acres, I won’t move out. I feel comfortable here. This is my home, you know.”*



Carlos Labastida's childhood home at 807 S. George St. in Victory Acres. Photo courtesy of Carlos Labastida.



Photo by Marco A. Albarrán.