

**Notes compiled from interviews in  
October 2024 through January 2025  
and a summary of his recent  
writings**

Mr. Rivas (hereafter referred to as Salvador) grew up in a tiny rural community in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. During his youth, he worked on his family's farm and studied as much as he could. He built a strong relationship with the local indigenous people and learned to speak with them in their language. He was a young man, still working and studying, when his cousins wrote to him about Colorado and invited him to visit them. He came as a tourist and found it much to his liking. "I fell in love with the law here in the US," he said. He returned in 1969 and initially settled in the San Luis Valley. He met and married Elva Garcia there and his daughter, Bernadette, and son, Salvador, Jr. were born in Monte Vista.



In the San Luis Valley, Salvador was a foreman for 15-16 years, working for California-based companies that cultivated lettuce, cabbage and carrots. He also helped farmworkers with access to medical care and other basic needs. Workers that he supervised asked to come to Palisade to pick peaches, as Palisade growers had a reputation of being good to work for. He agreed to bring a group to Palisade. One of the growers invited Salvador to stay and not return to the San Luis Valley. He initially resisted, but two weeks later was introduced to Mike Martin, who was living in Germany and needed a trustworthy foreman who could help run his orchards. The two worked out the details and Salvador moved to Palisade in the early 1980s. Once in Palisade, Salvador knew he'd found his true home. He was able to have his family join him about two years later.

## Peach production in Palisade

Salvador was the foreman for Mike Martin's peach orchards supervising workers like these at harvest.

*(Courtesy Baisinger Family Collection)*



Upon arrival in Palisade, Salvador was not familiar with peach production practices, but Martin's neighbors helped him to learn "the things that need to be done and the right time to do them." He worked for Martin for about 12 years, until the place was sold. His work brought him into

contact with other local fruit growers, including the Clark family, Marvin Tillman, Ball Fruit and the Deckers who had orchards near Mike Martin's. He could have accepted a foreman position with a prominent Palisade fruit grower when Martin's place was sold but decided to instead try out the landscaping business. He found it to his liking and continues to work in landscaping to this day.

Salvador with his flower garden at this house near Clifton



## Early Growers were critical to success

Salvador emphasizes that first in importance in Palisade's peach production has been the growers' investments of money and land. Second is the contribution of farmworkers, who provide the manpower to get the job done.

Initially, growers and workers were working the same hours and sometimes the growers worked even more than the laborers. They lacked transportation and many other conveniences that we have today. Workers didn't have decent housing, so fixing up housing was a priority. Now the housing for workers that was built is continuing to benefit the community.

Salvador attended meetings of the local peach growers and was encouraged by his employers to do so. He witnessed how they collaborated in a spirit of harmony to find the best approaches (fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural techniques) and worked together in unity.

The results of their efforts are still evident today, he strongly believes. "Palisade is a super special community to me because of its good people." He noted two instances in which local gas station operators extended kindness and respect and helped him out. The first occurred when he paid for gas but was called away and didn't get to put it in his vehicle. When he returned the next day, the station's operators allowed him to pump the amount he had already paid for with no questions asked. Another time, he unknowingly left his wallet with money and important documents in it at the gas station. The next day he returned to find that the management had kept it for him and were happy to give it back to him, its contents untouched. "Honest people mean a lot to me." Brooklynn Woerner, the gas station attendant who found the wallet, noted that Salvador is "so kind and thankful and always asks how my day is going." He offered to pay her \$20 for the wallet and she refused, saying she did it out of the kindness of her heart.

Growers tried to help their workers with their needs and especially to fix up housing. They paid wages when due and "I never heard of someone not getting his paycheck."

### **Support and assistance for workers and families through service organizations**

Salvador knew Margaret Talbott, who played a leading role in the establishment of two sister organizations, the Mesa County Migrant Ministry and the Child and Migrant Services (CMS). He felt she was a truly beautiful person in many respects and admired her efforts, including how she organized and hosted a mid-day meal for migrant farm workers. This involved getting food and enlisting



migrant community women to prepare traditional, homestyle dishes. Mrs. Talbott started this practice, and other growers soon followed her example. She did not do it out of pride or for publicity, just out of generosity to benefit the community. “It was a special blessing for all of the workers to have their food ready on the tables and prepared with much care and affection by all who joined in and collaborated.”

In the early years of fruit production in Palisade, there was no formal help with housing or medical services for farm workers. Margaret Talbott and those who worked with her built it up little by little. She and the women who helped her started the hospitality trailer and later established a childcare center and other services. Salvador’s children attended the HeadStart housed onsite and continued their studies at area schools. His daughter has had a successful career as an educator at Colorado Mesa University and later at other academic institutions.

**Editor's note:** In an era when it was rare for women to be outspoken, Margaret Talbott continued to fight until she was able to make projects to help workers and families a

reality. Vera Foss, Dorothy Power, Ruby Toothaker and other like-minded women joined in the work. CMS was renamed La Plaza in 2023 and continues to operate today. The Migrant Ministry Thrift Shop offers low-cost clothing and household items to workers and the community at large.




Margaret Talbott, left, and Dorothy Power, right,  
at the early Migrant Ministry hospitality trailer  
(Photo courtesy of Child and Migrant Services)

For six to eight years during the 1990s, Salvador provided volunteer support and assistance to Jamie Alexander, the Health Services Coordinator at the CMS “Hospitality Center” in Palisade.

Salvador attended the 1993 National Farmworker Conference in San Diego, CA as a Farmworker Representative on behalf of CMS. Cesar Chavez was the keynote speaker at that event. He impressed Salvador as a person of humility who held tremendous respect for the farm workers. The two spoke and one of the things Chavez advised Salvador was that “workers will not ask you for things, you will have to look for their concerns and desires.”

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Salvador in San Diego at  
Farmworker Conference  
in 1993



## United Fruit Growers' Association

Salvador worked closely with Cutter family relatives, who were members of the United Fruit Growers' Association. He delivered loads of peaches to that Marketing Cooperative to be packed, sold, and shipped to markets outside Colorado. He worked with a long-time friend, Bill Beckwith, who worked at the United Fruit Growers' Association. Salvador provided him with reports of quantities delivered.



Trucks with bushel baskets of peaches in line to unload at United Fruit Growers' Association's west platform in 1946. East packing shed in the background. Mike Martin later identified the first truck as belonging to Bill Cutter, the third one as Carl Hampton's 1935 Chevrolet and the fourth truck as belonging to Vernon Griffith. (*Courtesy Bowman Family Collection*)

Salvador admired this effort and the unity among the growers. Much changed after the marketing order was voted out in 1991, which led to the United Fruit Growers' Association being dissolved. This meant growers not only had to grow



but also market their produce and other products independently and arrange for shipping.

### **Composer of Ranchera music**

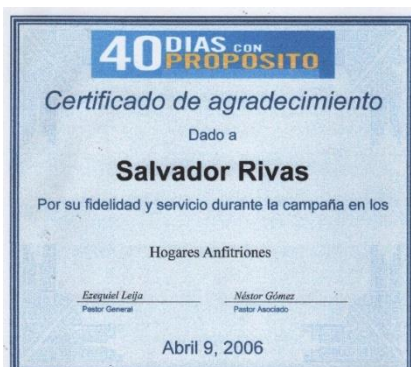
Salvador has enjoyed music throughout his life and for 30-40 years has composed gospel songs in the Ranchera tradition, which he performs *a cappella* (unaccompanied singing). A number of Salvador's original musical compositions and his work with horses may be viewed on video recordings that he has made.

### **Skilled Horse Trainer**

As a youth Salvador learned to work with cattle, horses and other animals on his family's ranch in Mexico. His ability to work with horses is outstanding and he could be described as a "horse whisperer." He has trained both domesticated horses and an untamed stallion from the Little Bookcliffs area with superb results.

At one point he owned five acres of land in Clifton and maintained a small arena where he trained his three horses, named Silver, Walker and Champion.

Elva and Salvador with horses, Champion and Silver



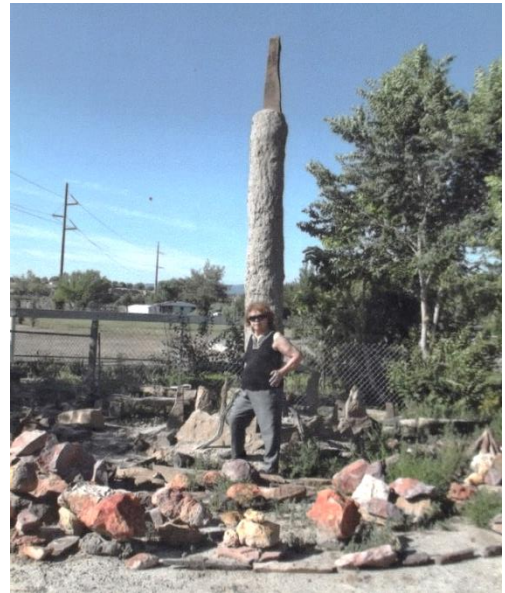
Religion is important in his life, and Salvador also taught Bible study classes at a local church

## Artistic Skills

Elva in front of the monument

Salvador's son used his creative artistic skills for this clay monument – topped by rock - and statue at their house.

**(Editor's note)** The Palisade pioneer family which Salvador is closest to was the Cutter Family. George W. Bowman and his wife, Nancy Cutter Bowman, lived in Redcliff, Colorado and bought 40 acres west of Palisade in 1893. George was raised in Iowa and came to Colorado with the silver boom in the 1880s. He learned how to grow fruit and invented a fruit gathering bag in 1900 and an orchard heater to lessen spring frost. He also became president of the Palisades National Bank for 32 years starting in 1910, and helped start the United Fruit Growers' Association in 1923 which was a member-owned marketing cooperative to help growers with the marketing and shipping challenges.



Nancy Cutter Bowman's father, William Cutter and his sons owned the Glenwood Nursery in Junction City, Kansas, which supplied Palisade growers with fruit stock in the early 1900s. Seeing how successful George was in growing award-winning fruit, William, and his sons Charles and John, also moved to Palisade and became fruit growers, as well. Nancy Cutter's sister, Charlotte, married Archie Rait. Charles Cutter married Ethel Lawrence whose sister's grandson was Mike Martin. Salvador worked for Mike Martin, taking care of his 30+ acres of fruit for 12 years.





George W. Bowman, center, and William Cutter, right, with the fruit gathering bags in an orchard in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Courtesy Bowman Family Collection*)

Principle interviewer, Karalyn Dorn, with Ralph Branch and Priscilla Walker

**A summary of Salvador's writings on his experiences follows**  
**with his words in italics:**

*This historic narration begins in the years 1880-1890 and is made with the assistance and approval of the inheritors who to this day conserve and cultivate this great project that their forefathers established, which is called Project of Planting Fruit Trees Throughout our Community of Palisade, Colorado. With much respect and appreciation, we will present information about the many families who participated and continue the project so that it continues flourishing and providing an abundance of fruit, may it be a blessing to many people and all has been and continues to be by the grace of God.*

*The honest and hard-working men who started the project decided to invest their savings and it was no small undertaking. To begin with, there was no system to*

*irrigate the trees other than to use horse-drawn wagons to carry water from the river, with six to eight water drums in each.*

**(Editor's note)** The first successful irrigation canals to serve Palisade fruit orchards were the Stub and Price Ditches starting in 1904 and the Orchard Mesa Irrigation District which diverted water from what was the Grand River in 1910. Before then, horse-drawn wagons were used to carry water from the river as described above.

*Now I'll speak of the manpower that this great project requires. It was a necessity in the beginning and continues to be today. The work of the laborer is very important to the project and immigrant and migrant workers, honest and hard-working men and women, have had the privilege and opportunity to work in this outstanding project. The immigrant laborer provides a very great part of the work this project requires. The migrant worker presents himself for work respectfully because it is his only resource to sustain himself and his family. When his boss gives him work, he is disposed to work hard and do the best job possible in order to keep his position.*

*The growers observe and feel the fatigue of the workers because they themselves are working long days (sometimes longer than those of the workers) and at day's end, a deep tiredness overcomes them all.*

*But now we will look at some of the differences and circumstances that come about, which by the grace of God and nature, and we say with gratitude, have always occurred and continue. Growers have much better places to live and rest and do not face the same discomforts that the workers do.*

*The nature of the work may make it mostly impossible for growers to provide many comforts to the workers. They often share cramped living quarters. For example, there may be a small two-room house for six to eight men with one tiny stove for all to use to prepare their meals. Workers are disposed to work hard and under difficult circumstances as their goal is to keep their jobs and remain employed.*

*Growers and their wives in Palisade (some, not all) began to think about how to improve the living conditions of their workers, particularly in relation to their housing. Margaret Talbott, wife of well-known and much respected grower Harry Talbott, began, with spiritual love, to voluntarily form the Second Project, which arose from the First Project. She deeply desired to help the immigrant and migrant workers and their families in Palisade. The beloved and respected Margaret Talbott found four keys*

*to open four doors that had not been opened previously in our community of Palisade. She took the keys into her hands and began to form the project.*

*I, Salvador Rivas Molina, was personally present in the meetings with all of the growers and members of this Project of Planting Fruit Trees Throughout our Community of Palisade, Colorado. I was present as foreman and manager of the orchards of my boss, Mr. Mike Martin, who was absent because he lived in West Germany. I saw that Margaret Talbott got up from her chair, stood up and presented her project. It was nothing easy to develop it and make it a reality. Some growers liked the idea, but many, almost the majority, did not. They said that the workers and families were fine as they were and there was no need to improve their living conditions.*

*Mrs. Talbott and the ladies who helped her volunteered much time and effort, supporting one another with goodwill and cooperation to develop the loving and generous project. The four doors opened were:*

- 1. Improved nutrition and housing*
- 2. Clothing*
- 3. Education for the workers' family members*
- 4. Medical care*

*Mrs. Talbott saw that the workers could not purchase enough food for themselves and their families with their earnings, nor could they save money for other necessities. She saw that their housing lacked many basic comforts and needed improvement. Her efforts later helped to purchase a building for the project, which exists and serves workers to this day. She was able to get donations and paid for much herself. A pantry and a dining area was created and still provides food and meals to workers and families now.*

*I was a foreman but at the same time one of the immigrant workers who ate the abundant meals served at the place Margaret Talbott established. She would come in and say hello and observe the meals and how the people enjoyed them. She seemed very content and satisfied with how the project helped the workers and their families. It was like a tree she had planted had flowered and provided an abundance of fruit as a blessing and benefit for the community of Palisade.*



*The second door is that of clothing. She and others collected clothing and offered it to men, women and children who benefited from having more and better-quality clothing, especially for the winter cold, available at no cost to them.*

*The third door is Education, primarily for the families of the workers. Small schools were opened for the children and Mrs. Talbott also organized programs with local churches to make religious education available to workers' children.*

*My own children, Bernadette Rivas and Salvador Rivas, Jr., were able to benefit greatly from the education offered. At that time, there was little hope or opportunity for the children of immigrant workers and many of them faced difficulties in the school system. Workers often did not have enough money to buy their children decent clothing for school. My daughter was able to work hard, sacrifice and achieve much success in her education. She now has the privilege of serving the community as an educator, a university professor.*

Summary and translation of Salvador's writings, originally in Spanish, by  
Karalyn Dorn"