Robert (“Bobby”) M. Galvan, Sr.

Interviewed by Tabitha Adkins

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Transcribed by Tabitha Adkins

**Tabitha Adkins:** All right, this is Tabitha Adkins, and I'm here with Bobby Galvan. We are at the Galvan Music Store and Ballroom, it is the 22nd of June 2019. And do you give permission for me to record you?

**Bobby Galvan:** I’m sorry, Yeah.

**TA:** Yes, okay.

**BG:** Yes ma’am.

**TA:** Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and don't hesitate to go through and stop I can pause if a customer comes up.

**BG:** Yes ma’am.

**TA:** All right, so (long pause) I guess the first question would be, um, what was it like growing up in the Galvan family?

**BG:** Well, it was exciting because there’s a total of nine children.

**TA:** Wow.

**BG:** And I’m the youngest. And I’m the only one left. The rest of them have already passed. So it was (unintelligible) they were wonderful brothers and wonderful sisters. All of them, wonderful in-laws, I mean I have absolutely no complaints about any of them. They were all absolutely wonderful. That’s all I can say.

**TA:** Okay. You said you had nine brothers and sisters, from them how many nieces, nephews, how big do the family get?

**BG:** That’s it. Nine. Nine children and my dad and my mom.

**TA:** What was it like growing up here in Corpus [Corpus Christi, Texas], when you were a child?

**BG:** Well, I tell you what, it was very, very pleasant. Because um, we were always involved in music and studying so it was, it was a good experience growing with the Galvan family. We enjoyed it. It was very wonderful. All of my brothers and sisters, they all studied hard and did their best.

**TA:** So, education was important to y'all?

**BG:** Very, very important.

**TA:** Can you tell me the story about how your family began on this musical journey?

**BG:** Well the way the family began on the musical journey, my father went to a concert and he heard Bernabe, Don Bernabe Alvarado, playing and he hired the man to pick us up from school and take all of us. And my dad fixed a room where we could all study music in one of the rooms in his house.

**TA:** Oh wow.

**BG:** That room was strictly a music room for all of us.

**TA:** Oh wow. Okay. So, what was your earliest memory of here in the music store or in the ballroom?

**BG:** I’m—I’m sorry?

**TA:** The—your earliest memory of stepping foot into the music store or into the ballroom. Um, how old were you when—

**BG:** Well, I’m eighty-nine. I’m going to be ninety this next July the 10. We had a wonderful, wonderful time. With all the family it was—we all enjoyed music, so uh, all the brothers and sisters, Mary Margaret’s mother *era* [was] Mamie Oliveira Galvan and her dad—when her father died, I think she was one year old. Mary Margaret—

**TA:** Oh—

**BG:** —therefore they all moved to Corpus, and uh, my folks raised all the children. And the Oliveira family *también* [also] was wonderful people.

**TA:** Okay, um, so what was the—your favorite band growing up?

**BG:** My favorite band?

**TA:** Um-hm.

**BG:** Growing up, well, pos it was the time of the big bands—

**TA:** Um-hm.

**BG:** d—Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and not knowing that they all would come over and play at the Ballroom.

**TA:** Wow.

**BG:** So that was exciting.

**TA:** I bet it.

**BG:** (unintelligible) orchestra from Mexico, and uh, there was a lot of good musicians at the time. Wonderful musicians.

**TA:** All right. So music was obviously such a large part of not only your life but your family's life. How did being such a musical family impact your life?

**BG:** Well it impacted my life because we were all involved in music and therefore we never gave it a second thought you know that we were going to enjoy music because we liked it. So we all went to Del Mar [Del Mar College] and from there, I went to Saint Mary’s University, my brother Eddie went to A&I-Kingsville [Texas A&I University-Kingsville, now Texas A&M University-Kingsville], and brother Rafe too, Sam, they all went to college. And it was an exciting, exciting thing growing up with my brothers being so talented. They were all wonderful.

**TA:** Okay, um, your niece Mary Margaret mentioned that you had a hand in the development of the jazz festival [Texas Jazz Festival]. Uh, can you tell me more about that?

**BG:** About the jazz festival?

**TA:** Um-hm.

**BG:** The jazz festival started, um, goodness, when it started, Beto Garcia was the drummer so we had a concert, then we had another concert in jazz and after that the festival grew. And it really developed fantastically.

**TA:** Okay, uh—

**BG:** So the jazz festival, we enjoyed it. We’ve been preforming every single jazz festival. Beto Garcia who was one of the original organizers already passed, Eddie Olivarez too, Senior, and the only one left is Joe Gallardo who was in Germany he comes over and plays once a year. And all of us were very involved with promoting the Jazz festival here in Corpus Christi and it's still going strong, in October.

**TA:** Okay, I will say jazz isn't the first, like, music that I would think of coming here to Corpus, but it is—it's exciting that it's still going strong from when ya’ll started it.

**BG:** Oh yes, it’s really, really going strong. A lot of people are very involved. They enjoy, not only hearing it, but also playing it and teaching it you know.

**TA:** Yeah. I know there at A&M Corpus [Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi], we have the Galvan family papers.

**BG:** Yes.

TA: So, what was the approach that ya’ll took to preserve it?

**BG:** I’m sorry what was the question?

**TA:** What was the approach ya’ll took to saving—the saving and preserving the papers that y'all have? The memories, I guess you could say.

**BG:** Well different people have come by and done a lot of work, a lot of research. Kreneck, Tom Kreneck, he really, from the university came by and interviewed all of us. And they have a lot of the history there at the university of the Galvan family. But the greatest impact were my parents they really were wonderful. They educated us, and all of us. You know, we’re grateful to them for all their support and their encouragement. And so, I mean we have nothing but praise for my parents because they are really the ones that did it—

**TA:** Yeah.

**BG:** —my dad and my momma.

**TA:** So what was it like to learn and then find out that the Galvan Ballroom and Music Company were—was becoming a historical landmark?

**BG:** Well, first of all the ballroom, my dad decided he wanted to have a dance hall, right here in the neighborhood, so my older siblings, they thought well that maybe the south side would be better or other locations. But my dad said no, this is where I want it and this—

**TA:** —that's where he was going to to get it—

**BG:** —and where he was going to get it. So, he built this ballroom here in ‘49, and then in 1960 my brother Eddie and myself, we decided we wanted a music store so we got going and working hard. And we built a store, first we had a little location, at a property my dad owned at 705 Southport and then when this became open we moved over here, which was great because I got a chance to meet my wife—

**TA:** Oh wow.

**BG:** —and she’s already passed. I lost her, in February of this year. But she was a real impact for all of us, well that’s enough playing, but no but they insisted that we continue playing. And now my son, who is a district judge and my daughter-in-law, a county judge, they want us to continue playing. So, he plays the sax too.

**TA:** Oh wow.

**BG:** So, we, we we’re enjoying it, we really, really enjoy.

**TA:** All right. So, how did when your dad opened up the ballroom and then later ya’ll opened up the music, you know company, both over there, then here.

**BG:** Yeah.

**TA:** —impact the community both here and abroad?

**BG:** Well, I tell you what, it really impacted the whole city, because we started selling instrument to uh, made them available to all of the schools. And then we would get a certain percentage of the school kids and we are grateful to those teachers and parents and kids that went to buy from us. We are still selling band instruments to kids in school.

**TA:** Okay, well now that you mention the instruments, your niece said that you donate some instruments as well.

**BG:** Oh, yeah, we’re always donating, instruments to the museum—

**TA:** Um-hm.

**BG:** In fact, we have several instruments that we are hope they come by because we want to donate more instruments. The bass fiddle that you mentioned, that belonged to Bernabe Alvarado, who was our teacher, our first teacher and it's over a hundred years old.

**TA:** Wow.

**BG:** So, we’re still going at it, enjoying it.

**TA:** So, what was your approach back when y'all first started and I guess the change to now on promoting the ballroom and then the music company?

**BG:** Well the ballroom pretty much promotes itself, because people want it for *quinceañeras*, weddings, parties and what have you. And it’s a venue that’s available to everybody. One thing my dad made clear, we were going to rent it to everybody regardless of ethnicity, what have you. And therefore we, all of us still, rent the ballroom to anybody who wants to rent it.

**TA:** Wow, that's—I guess for the time from the ‘50s and the ‘60s. That's a huge time of racial segregation.

**BG:** A lot of racial segregation, but my father said no. This place is open to all, all the people who want to rent it.

**TA:** That is amazing.

**BG:** Yeah, and so we rented it to everybody.

**TA:** The final question. So how did the building of Crosstown when it came in, impact y’all’s business and this area?

**BG:** I tell you what, it’s unbelievable. It had a big impact on the local community because, we, the ballroom was built right here in the center of the Mexican people. And nobody cared where it was located, and really, we were very, very grateful for accepting it like my father wanted it.

**TA:** Okay.

**BG:** —my dad and my momma.

**TA:** Are there any other stories that you'd like to share before we close up?

**BG:** Well, the only thing I can tell you was that we had a lot of big names. Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, and a lot of wonderful musicians played in the ballroom. And they weren’t as concerned where they played, they just wanted to play.

**TA:** (laughs) Who was your favorite?

**BG:** Ofall the artists? Tommy Dorsey.

**TA:** Tommy Dorsey. (laughs) Okay.

**BG:** When they came in, boy, that was fantastic band.

**TA:** All right. Thank you so much.

**BG:** Thank you. You’re a lovely lady, and your mother too.