

I first met Victor Contreras when I was a Park Interpretive Specialist at Old Town San Diego State Historic Park in 2001, where I researched and taught visitors and school groups about the history of the region. As one of the original descendants, Victor was an important part of the park interpretive program and performed first person narratives as characters from his own family history. Since Victor is a teacher himself, he always managed to bring in an educational component to his performances, which elevated them above the ordinary. A few years later, as a teacher of ESL at UCSD, I invited Victor to perform his monologues for my students, who were from diverse countries around the world. They learned a lot about the history and culture of San Diego through his performances and Q and A sessions afterwards and always enjoyed his presentations tremendously.

In addition to our historical interpretive and educational connections, Victor is also a well-known actor in San Diego, so we also have numerous theatrical associations in common. As the Artistic Director of Chronos Theatre Group, a San Diego-based nonprofit organization which connects audiences with diverse world cultures and time periods, I invited Victor to help us develop a program called Our Stories, which presented first person historical narratives of the original inhabitants of San Diego at Old Town San Diego SHP and other venues. These performances were highly successful, and we always got great feedback from audiences and park visitors, and his work enhanced our educational outreach program to reach communities we had never reached before.

I believe that Victor is uniquely qualified to do these presentations with his program Early California Speaks because he possesses an ideal combination of qualities. First of all, he has a warm and friendly personality, which is important in establishing a rapport with audiences. He is always easy to work with and highly respectful of others and is a good listener as well as communicator. In addition, his skills as a performer help bring his own living history to life, and because he is speaking from personal and cultural experience his performances have an air of authenticity. Finally, his experience as a teacher and educator elevates the material to more than just a performance, because everybody comes away learning something afterward. It is always a pleasure to work with Victor and watch him perform, so I hope that he will continue to share his passion in bringing early California history to life.

*- Celeste Innocenti, former professor, UCSD, Artistic Director for Chronos Theater.*

