

AR Rodriguez Interview (Part 2) Transcribed by Rita Sanchez, SDSU Chicana Chicano Studies Archive Committee. July 26, 2012.

**Richard Griswold:** You attended San Diego State; what year was that?

**AR Rodriguez:** That was in 1945. I enrolled in August of 1945. And the reason that I enrolled early was because I wanted to try out for the football team. I hadn't played in high school, so I tried out and I made the first string. I played running guard. The coach was Bob Breitbard. He coached the football team the whole year. We didn't have a great year. We won a couple of games. But we had a great team and a great coach.

I ended up at the end of the year realizing that at my size, football wasn't my game. Although I was on the first string all the year, I realized I couldn't do this for four years in a row. That was it. So I went to the athletic director, first to the coach, and then the athletic director, and told them that I wasn't intending to come back the following year for the football team.

Even though I had lettered, and I was on first string, I just didn't think I was big enough for the game, and the athletic director said, "Well, I'm sorry to hear that. But I have another offer for you. We want to start a wrestling team here at San Diego State. And I checked with all the high school coaches and the name that kept coming up was yours as the wrestling coach." And I said, "Yes, but I'm an undergraduate."

He said, "That's all right; we can hire you as an undergraduate, as a student, and give you some benefits that will help you through college."

I said, "Benefits like what?" He said, "Well, we can give you access to tutors on request and we can give you a schedule that will not interfere with your coaching."

So I said, "That sounds pretty good to me."

And he said, "Besides that, we have a list of tutors that you can call upon any time you need them."

So I said, "That sounds pretty good to me."

And I said, "I have an evening job at the San Diego Neighborhood House from 6-9." I said, "And I want to retain that because not only will I learn what I want to be, but it will also provide services and a little income," and I said, "And none of that hurts."

And he agreed with me. He said, "We'll fix it so that you can have study time, assistance if you need it on request, and a schedule that won't interfere with what you want to do."

So I did that for the remainder of my time and had a highly successful wrestling team. We won the Conference Championships all four years I was there, and we were invited to the Olympic tryouts in '48 and the National NCAA Wrestling Championships in '49. And. . . uh, we didn't do great, but we were respectable

And with the type of competition that we had in California, that was acceptable to me because we didn't have the type of wrestling challenges that they have in Iowa, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. They're states where they had wrestling for years and years and have produced outstanding wrestling persons, and we just did not have the training or the competition during our year to come up to that level. But we were respectable. And they told us that.

In fact, not a few years ago, I received a note and an award, from Oklahoma State because of the wrestling team that we had here at San Diego State University and I received a trophy from them. It's supposed to be here at San Diego State, but nobody's been able to find it. I turned it over to the previous president to place it. They sent me a jacket from Oklahoma as an award for my contribution to wrestling at San Diego State and . . . so . . .

**Christy Rodriguez:** (His daughter interjects) "The National Hall of Fame, Stillwater, Oklahoma."

**RG:** That's beautiful. That's quite a remembrance.

**AR:** To me, that rewarded all my effort and the salary wasn't bad. The salary was \$30 a month, but with my G.I. Bill, I was able to get married, have children, and still go on through the program.

**RG:** What did you major in while you were here?

**AR:** I majored in special education and when I graduated they wanted me to remain as a coach and I told them, "No."

I went to school to become a special ed teacher. And that's what I want to do. And immediately I had a job at Memorial Junior High School.

The principal there knew me. I was a student when he was principal there and he hired me; he applied for me to be on his staff, and I was there for four years and then the district invited me to be the visiting teacher for the district.

So I did that for about for five years and then the opportunity came for me to be the vice-principal at Gompers Junior High School, which was an experimental school headed by Dr. Stone. He developed a three teachers in a classroom, one an English teacher, a math teacher, and a social studies teacher, teaching for three periods, each one in their one hour period which they divided according to the needs.

And it worked good. And the interesting part is, my role was not just discipline, my role was community and parents of students who were in those classrooms who needed help. And so I got involved in the learning process as well as the disciplinary process. My daughter used to go over there and help me with some of the kids in reading and writing. And she's a natural. She really is. She has a tremendous talent for conveying information to people.

**RG:** So you graduated from college before you got married?

**AR:** I got married in '48. July 18, 1948.

**RG:** Well, tell me the story again; I know you've said already, but for continuity, how you met your wife and how that went.

**AR:** When we first came to the United States I was living with my cousins and my aunt and my uncle on 15<sup>th</sup> and K. Across the street a young lady named Beatrice was born about 4 years after I got here. I was six, five years old, so I'm nine years older than she is. And we met and our families were close. And I went in the service after I grew up.

One day after I got out of the service I came back. I went to a party at the Guadalupe Church, and lo and behold, I saw Beatrice. She must have been about 15 years old at the time, or 16, maybe 16. And I saw her dance, and she was a whiz dancer. She and her sister used to do dancing, Mexican dances, and so dancing was natural to her. So I went and took lessons and learned how to dance at the Neighborhood House (chuckles). And I came back one day and asked her out to dance, and we've been dancing ever since. That was 82, 83 years ago, almost.

**AR's daughter:** No, no, not 83—62, 63.

**AR,** Oh, yes 63, yeah, okay.

**RG:** You went through the traditional courtship process of visiting the parents?

**AR:** Yes. Yes. Visiting the parents and they agreed to it. And then one day I got into an argument with the priest, and I still don't know what the argument was about. But apparently, he got all tied up about it because he called my in-laws and told them that I was the wrong person for their daughter, so my in-laws called it off.

Apparently, he was upset about it because he called my in-laws and said I was the wrong person for their daughter. So the in-laws called it off.

So Beatrice and I countered it by running off to Yuma. My *padrino*, Jose Ramirez, who—he and I stood together every Friday, and with a bunch of other guys who were at State at the same time, and he drove us to Yuma. We got married.

And when we got back. . . I said, "Why don't you go over to my in-laws and tell them what happened." So he did and my mother-in law and my father in-law got all upset. They came over and said, "Okay, you guys want to get married, but you have to go through the right process and we'll go to the church and get you married. So we did that. Two weeks later, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, we got married. It was a church wedding with all those things. All in two weeks it got done. And it was a mess (laughs). It was a mess. We went off for a two-day honeymoon. I had to get back to classes.

**RG:** You were still going to San Diego State?

**AR:** Yes, I graduated the following year, in '49, in 48.

We didn't have a place to stay. My sister had a bedroom so she gave us a bedroom for a couple of days and at that time I made arrangements out here at San Diego State to get an apartment over on midway. They had some apartments for vets. And we got into the right neighborhood because all of the other guys who were there—some of them were part of my wrestling team—and some were not, but we were all vets and we were all on the fringe of poverty. But we made it work.

About four months later my mother-in-law bought some apartments over on 24th and K. And she said she would you like for us to manage it. [To his daughter, Christy]: "So that's where you were raised; right there on 24<sup>th</sup> and K Street."

**RG:** So your first child was Christy?

**AR:** Christy was my first child. And I have a son, 28—27,28, or 57, 58. (laughs).

**Christy.** (laughs) 58.

**RG:** What's his name?

**Chris.** Rodrigo. Rodrigo Rodriguez.

**RG:** So you had your family started and were teaching at Memorial Junior High?

**AR:** But don't forget by that time I started teaching at Memorial Junior High, I had special-ed classes. And I really enjoyed working with those kids—and some of them made it out of that—quite a few made it out of that—and became regular students and some of them have achieved. Jim Estrada. You know Jim Estrada? He has a national program for writers.

**Chris:** Isn't it a Marketing firm?

**AR:** Yes. He was one of those.

**RG.** In those days, as probably happens now, they put a lot of Hispano kids, Chicano kids, who couldn't speak English into special-ed. Was that the case then?

**AR:** I used to have a special-ed program where I had two or three kids who would come and read with me for me 15 minutes before school, 15 minutes during lunch time, and 15 minutes after school. Those who followed through made it into the regular programs, every one of them. In fact, one of them became a librarian that I met many years later in a library program at one of the community colleges when I was doing a review of their program. He came up to me and said, "Do you remember me?" And I said, "You didn't look like you look today, did you?" He said, "No." Then he reminded me of that. I said, "Yeah, I remember who you were."

**Christy:** At that time though, during those years, didn't they arbitrarily place a lot of children of color, Latinos . . .

**AR:** Especially Latinos. They would put them in a slow-learning program because whoever the evaluators—they had a concept that because they didn't speak well, that they must be retarded. And I got a lot of those out of those classrooms.

One way I used to get them out of the classrooms, I used to talk to their parents and have the parents insist that they read and write at home. And I said, 'If you don't do it, this child is not going to succeed in school. You have a responsibility.'

And the parents bought it. I would not argue with them. I would just tell them, 'Hey, this kid has potential.' But you can tell which kids are bright-eyed and who listen and respond to questions. You could tell that they had natural intelligence. They just needed the skills.

And I tried to get the parents to say they had a responsibility to help these kids, to give them the skills, to give them the drive, give them the time to do that. Because when they come home they put them to work doing whatever it is that they needed to do. And that wasn't bad for the kids. But what was bad was it wasn't meeting what they needed most at that time if they wanted the kids to be competitive in education.

**RG:** That sounds like a really time-consuming job, visiting all the parents.

**AR:** Well I didn't visit them all. I just selected the ones who I thought could need it and would need it. And being a visiting teacher, in one period a day instead of the classroom, I used that time to do that. But I also took care of the truant kids.

**Chris:** Why did you have me tested outside of the schools? Was it with Mr. Wick? You had me tested outside of the schools.

**AR:** Yes Mr. Wick. That's right, because I wanted to know her natural intelligence. And he said, "This one's a whiz." And I said, "Yeah."

**Chris:** Was that because you didn't trust the school district to do it appropriately?

**AR:** Yeah.

**Ricardo:** So then, at what point did you—what happened after you had your job at Memorial? Where did you go from there?

**AR:** One of the men, Mr. Wilbur Hammersly had been a teacher at Memorial when I was there. And he became the head of the guidance department in charge of the visiting teachers who handled problem kids in schools. So when he got that job he called me and said, 'I got the job for you. You've been doing it all along.'

So he told me what he wanted me to do. I said, "I'll do that." So I went to the district office. I spent five years with them. I worked primarily at seven schools: three elementary, two junior, and senior high schools. And I did that on call. I would meet with the principal and tell him how I worked.

He said, “I need someone—when you call me, I want a detailed report on each kid. So when I follow up with their parents and with them I want to know exactly what it is that I have to do based on the needs as identified by teachers.” But I wouldn’t just accept the teacher’s writings; I would sit down with the teacher and ask them face-to-face because sometimes they were reluctant to write down what their fears were.

And they had more information but they didn’t know what to do with it. So that’s how I got my training really. I got to learn how to deal with kids; I learned how to deal with parents; and I learned how to get the parents involved and be a help rather than a hindrance.

**RG.** So from there what was your next job after that one?

**AR:** One day I got a phone call from Jack Stone who was the principal of Gompers. He said, “I heard how you’ve been working with kids. I’d like for you to come to Gompers as my vice-principal.” So I accepted that position. And he made the contact with the superintendent to have me transferred to his school as the vice-principal, but soon after I got here he left. Max Miller became the principal. Well Max and I had known each other for years so the transfer wasn’t easy because he was following up with the same thing that Jack Stone did. I went over there.

So I followed—my program there at Gompers was different than a traditional school because they had English, social studies, and math teachers teaching ninety kids. Each one taking one hour, supposedly one hour, but they divided it up depending on their personal needs—the other teachers would become their helpers. And it was working really good. And one of the things that I had to do was take those kids who were not doing well and work with their parents as the vice-principal.

It wasn’t the traditional problem kids—which I liked very much—because I had a chance to work with parents, I got a chance to work with kids, and then handle the problems. And the problems were not too hard to handle if you know what you’re doing. But the other stuff I liked. I liked working with the parents and I liked working with the kids. And it worked really well. And then the principal, three or four years later, got caught in the bathroom with another male and so he got fired, of course. And then Bob Ford, who was an old time friend of mine, a Stanford graduate, and an outstanding football player, he became the principal—and then Max Miller, who was a really outstanding guy, as a principal.

**Christy:** Why were you not being considered for principal?

**AR Rodriguez:** There wasn’t a Hispanic principal in all those years. I became the first one. Soon after Bob Ford left, I got a call from the superintendent. He said, “I’d like for you to become the principal”—not of Gompers, he wanted me to be at Wright Brothers, which was right next door—a junior and senior high school.

So I kept the principalship but before I got sucked in on Monday, by Friday I got a phone call from Wilson Riles, who was assistant superintendent of schools in California. He said, “I would like you to come to Sacramento and help establish a

trouble shooting program for the state.” He would call it the ---Bureau of Intergroup Relations. I asked, “What do you do there?” He said, “I’ll tell you what the problems are and you work out how to do it.” It sounded pretty good to me, so I said, “Okay.” So I went there about two months before they made it official. They have to go through processing, budgeting, to establish a new bureau.

**RG:** Was that in 1965?

**AR:** It was ’66.

**Christy:** Why did it take you so long to become—how long did it take you to be offered a principalship?

**AR:** About 15 years.

**Christy:** So you were eligible for about fifteen years? Were you overlooked?

**AR:** Yes. Overlooked. But that was not uncommon in those days. You see, I became the first principal in San Diego.

**Christy:** Latino principal.

**AR:** Yes, Latino principal. After me came Herb Ybarra, and a couple of others. But I was the first one.

**Christy:** Were there any Black principals?

**AR:** No. In fact, I was appointed principal before the Black principal was appointed. About a week after I was appointed they appointed a Black elementary school principal.

San Diego was strictly a racist town. It really was. It changed a lot soon after that, but up until that time—one of the things that helped me was that. . . hmm, what’s his name. . . I got a memory block---uh, the minister—George Smith. George Smith came to me and . . .

I had just run for the Assembly and I didn’t make it. He came to me and he said, “I would like to run for the school board. Will you help me? I said, “George, I will help you.” I knew George. He and I had become friends. I said, “I will help you, but you have to do what I tell you. He said, “Okay, what do I have to do?”

The first thing I said is, “I don’t want your picture to come out in the paper until it’s the right time. We’re going to make some signs, all over the city—George Walker Smith For School Board—San Diego City School Board.” So we made thirty signs and put them all over the city. And he said, “How are we going to do publicity?” I said, “Don’t worry, I’ll work it out,” and so I worked it out with the guy from the Union Tribune.”

I said, “If you don’t mind I would like George Smith’s picture not to come out until the last day.” And that was fine. “Are you willing to do that?” “Yes, we’ll do that for

you.” So that’s when . . .and George Smith won by 410 votes. He still reminds me that it was by only 410 votes. But he won. And then before long it he was the state school board president. And then he became the national school board president.

**RG:** You said San Diego was a racist city. Can you remember any experiences you had that showed that kind of racism?

**AR:** Well yeah, I worked with two other fellows who established the Urban League here in San Diego. And we made contact with and got Percy Steele to come and be president of the Urban League in San Diego. Then later, I became state president of the Urban League. I was involved in a lot of those things. I think most of those are written in my book.

**RG:** Okay, so you were working as a consultant in Sacramento for the Department of Education and then what happened to get you the appointment in Washington, D.C.?

**AR:** The first thing that happened I was at a conference—I think it was Oakland, I’m not sure. It could have been San Francisco, but I think it was Oakland. The conference brought in the Secretary of Education. And I made some remarks about some of the problems in California relative to intergroup relations and then the Secretary took offense at what I said, so he made some disparaging remarks about me—not about me, but about what I said, and fortunately I chose not to answer him, but everybody else in the place answered the Secretary, and took my side. And before I knew it, a few weeks later, the Secretary was gone. He had gone to another position. I thought maybe it was my fault. So I called up and they said, No, no.” He had gotten offered a judgeship that he couldn’t refuse. And so I felt okay.

Then I got invited to a conference by Harold Hunt, who was the president’s [President Johnson’s] point man in education. And so I went to the conference and from then on, he and I became friends. And the next thing, one thing led to another, and I get a call to come back to Washington to set up the office for Mexican American Affairs.

That was President Johnson’s concept because he had been a teacher in Texas and thought all the problems related to language should be aimed at the Mexican American, because that was his primary interest. He was a Texan and that was his interest. And after being there for a while and . . . I haven’t been in Florida; I haven’t been in New York; and hadn’t been to other states, I began to realize it wasn’t a Mexican American problem; it was a problem of the Spanish-speaking in the country. With the President’s permission I had it changed from the Office of Mexican American to the office of Spanish Speaking Affairs. That’s when he and I became closer. In other words, he could phone me and it would not embarrass anybody in the office. And I got a phone call one day about . . .

They were transferring some land that had been part of the compromise between the United States and Mexico. And so he was transferring the land back to Mexico. And he wanted me to be a part of the committee that did it. So I got a medal. . .

**RG:** The Chamisal I think.

**AR:** Yes. Chamisal. Exactly. And so I received that from him. That's one of the things you guys are going to get.

**RG:** So all this was in 1968, '67?

**AR:** Yes. Yes.

**RG:** The last time you mentioned you participated in the Walk Out, a little bit more of that.

**AR:** That was before this. I was invited to a conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The conference was EEOC who was going to come in and tell us how they were performing for the Spanish speaking.

**RG:** This was in about 1966?

**AR:** 1967. And so a whole group us were invited there for the nation, and I got there on a Saturday evening or something like that and I went to where the meeting was supposed to meet some of the fellows who were there or who had recently arrived and I went and sat down and talked.

Then somebody came and told us that the head of EEOC, Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. was not coming and he was sending the new commissioner over who had just been transferred from the Department of Interior to that and he knew nothing about the program.

So everyone got upset about it. Everybody was leaving their jobs to come over there, and travel, mostly on their own money to Albuquerque--and some of the people came over the next day to say—We got together the next day—this is Sunday now, and the meeting was Monday—and said, “What are we going to do now?”

I said, “Well, I think we're going to let them know we're disgusted with what they've done and the attention we have given to leave our work or jobs, or businesses to meet for what? This person here has no authority, has no experience, no knowledge, what can we learn?”

Well, I said, “I think they need to learn something. We need to tell them how important our jobs are and how disgusted we are with their disregard for our responsibilities. We need to let them know in no uncertain terms, and then walk out and let their bosses know this.” So that's what we did. We all agreed to do this and we did it as a group.

**RG:** And you were kind of the spearhead person of the group?

**AR:** El Hablador (laughs).

**RG:** El Hablador, okay.

**Christy:** Did Charlie Erikson set up the media coverage?

**AR:** Charlie Erickson, who married a Hispanic girl who was bilingual, was there as one of the invitees—Charlie and I had worked together on a lot of activities in Southern California—and so I said, “Charlie, what can we do with the media about this?” He said, I’ll call them up and tell them.”

I said, “Will that do it?” He said, “Well, maybe not.” He said, “I’ll tell you what, I’ll visit with each one of them.” And so he did. I think I wrote about this in my book. He went to one and they said, “Well, we don’t know anything about this.” And he said, “Well the other person is going to be there. And the newspapers and the photographers are going to be there and the television stations.” Before long, everybody was going to be there because the other guy was going to be there. And Charlie worked that good. He used to work for the *L.A. Times*. He knew the media.

**RG:** The media was there when everybody walked out?

**AR:** So the media was there and photographs were taken.

**RG:** So what was the response?

**AR:** The response to that was anger by the President that this happened.

**RG:** This was President Johnson, right?

**AR:** Yes. He told Harold Hunt to get the group of us together in Washington. And he did. And from that they established a walk out program. And one of the persons who was there had contact with people in Tijuana and he got them to make a lot of little *Juaraches* and saying with a sign, “We Walked Out.”

We had an evening meeting in L.A. of all the people who had been there and walked out and invited some people from out of town, but very few people from out of town came. And when we got there everybody got their *juaraches* and it made an impression and when we went to Washington, everybody wore their *juaraches*.

And it made an impression. It wasn’t a great thing to do but what we wanted to do was to impress on the people whose responsibility it was to give us programs that we needed.

**RG:** Do you think that experience was what led to your appointment by President Johnson to the OEO?

**AR:** I think so. I think that’s what led the president to have me come to Washington and to the EEOC.

**RG:** Yes, EEOC, not OEO.

**AR:** And when I went to Washington Harold Hunt asked, “What do you think the major problem is?” I said, “The major problem is schools and learning. And our kids are not learning.” And I said, “The reason they’re not learning is not because they

can't learn. The reason is that we don't know how to teach them. And I think we have to develop a program."

He said, "What will we call it? What shall we name it? What kind of program?" I said, "What about a Bilingual Program?" He said, "Fine." I said, "You know that Canada has had a bilingual program for years. They had a problem with the French, the Indians, and now the Latin Americans." And I said, "And we can learn from them." So they said, "Okay."

So I went to Canada. And I talked to the people there, looked around, and saw what they were doing, got some ideas there, came back, and said, "Now What?" He said, "Let's get together a program. Bring people together take them around to these places and we'll select them, get them to see what the problems are, and then bring them back, and set up a program." He said, "Who's going to head it?" I said, "I don't know. Not me. My program is to organize it."

**RG:** So AR, you were the Assistant Commissioner for the Department of Education and you traveled all over. And then at what point did you move on to—can you describe your being appointed as President of East L.A. College? How did that happen?

**AR:** It happened—this was just before Mr. Nixon was going to run for office again. And I got feelers from his office about doing some photo with the President as some campaign literature. Having been a Democrat all my life—although he did appoint me to Secretary of Education—I didn't feel I owed it to him because I was in line for it before he became president. And I said to myself, "I'm not going to do that." Having been director of the Democratic Party here in San Diego County, I said, "I'm not going to do a back flip." So I started looking around. I found that Los Angeles had four community college president vacancies. So I applied. I got visits from the L.A. Community College District. And I told them my experience and they said, "Gee, that sounds pretty good." I said, "Well, I'd like to be considered."

I had a couple of fellows who worked for me who had been in the Community College District in L. A. So I sent them to LA. I said, "Look around and see what it is I have to do." So they came back and gave me a pretty good report of what I had to do. So I did it. And, lo and behold, when the time came for selection I was one of the four to be considered. And they interviewed all four of us. And at the end, I came out on top.

**RG:** This was in 1973, more or less.

**AR.** Yes. 1973.

**Christy:** Didn't you, after the photos of the White House, did you not tell the Nixon Committee to Re-elect the President that you would not use them?

**AR:** I told them that I was not a supporter of the president's election. I respected what he did, but I did not support the president's positions--which I did not.

**Ricardo:** Lucky for you cause the Watergate Scandal was coming up.

**AR:** I didn't know that at the time.

**Christy:** But he was very revengeful.

**RG:** Nixon was? What happened?

**AR:** Nothing.

**Christy:** Weren't there tax audits?

**AR:** Yes. I wasn't afraid of the audits cause I knew that I was clean. Unless, they created something and then they'd have a fight.

**RG:** The last time we talked about the East L.A. president position, you really enjoyed that. Tell us more about that being president of that college.

**AR:** That was one of the most enjoyable times I had being president of that college. The people there were just fantastic. The Japanese community just loved me and so did the African Americans, as did the Chinese. I was even asked to go visit the Keps, and I didn't go, you know, because I didn't have the time. Being a college president you don't have a lot of time—at least not in East L.A. I was being asked to do a whole lot of things—I was on a whole lot of committees. Some of those committees only became names. You don't have the time to do all you are asked to do. There's only twenty-four hours in a day. And you've got to sleep at least eight.

**RG:** And then you've got your family. They had moved to Washington and now they were back in L.A.

**AR:** Yes. My family's been great for me. Without them I couldn't do anything.

**RG:** So what would you say were some of the most important programs that you saw developed when you were president there?

**AR:** In East L.A.?

**Christy:** The Foundation?

**AR:** The Art Gallery probably was one of the most impressive things that we did. It was a tremendous art gallery. We had an art director who just loved the Hispanics. And the community loved the artwork.

**RG:** Was it Mexican art or Chicano art?

**AR:** Everything. Everything. The whole works. And then we had the L.A. Art Museum who always supported what we were doing. We became a kind of an off-shoot of them. We had a tremendous health program there. We had a nursing program there just—just as big as it could be—and good candidates for it. We had an athletic program; we became state champs one year; in 75 we became state

football champs. We had Al Padilla who was our football coach. Not only was he a good coach, but he was an outstanding person, a good human being. We had a tremendous health program. We partnered with USC in the L.A. health program at the L.A. Hospital there. We had some outstanding teachers there, really very, very dedicated, and very involved; and the student body was just outstanding.

I really enjoyed my stay there. But you know, like everything else, if you stay there too long you begin to smell. You realize it's time to leave. So, yeah . . . When the next presidential election came, by that time Mr. Nixon was gone and Mr. Ford had taken over; President Ford took over the presidency and Jimmy Carter came into the picture. So I invited both of them to come to the 16<sup>th</sup> of September Parade that we have in East L.A. every year. And the president of the college is the head of the program. So I did all the invitations. So I invited both of them.

Carter accepted; Ford did not. My assumption is that Ford looked at the registration list and saw three-to-one Democrats. There wasn't much for him to pick up there. So being a wise man he won. Not being a wise man he lost.

**RG:** President Carter showed up?

**AR:** President Carter showed up. We invited him all over. He got to be friends with everybody around there. Everybody liked him. And he liked what he saw. And he told me he liked what he saw. Then about a week later after he got back to Washington, I got a phone call from his staff asking if I would like to be considered for a position in his Administration. And I said, "Yes I would like to consider it—but something I could do." A couple of months after he was in office, I got a phone call from his head staff asking me if I would like to come to Washington as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

I said to him, "I can't even keep my book accounts. I said to the Secretary, "I have absolutely no background in that area, other than spending and being over spent." I said, "If you have any other openings, call me and let me know." A few months later I got a call. "How would you like to be Commissioner of Equal Opportunity?" "I know about that." I said, "Okay. I will take it. I will accept the opportunity to become . . ." So I went through the whole process of filling out the their forms and everything.

Then I got a call from the head of the EEOC, which was Eleanor Holmes Norton. And she says, "The President's going to select you to be a candidate for EEOC." I said, "Okay." She says, "I would like to come out and visit with you. I said Sure, Anytime. She came out. We had a good long talk. We became good friends almost immediately. She's a nice, bright, wonderful woman. So we became friends and she said, "When you get sworn in I want to be here." I said Okay. So I was to be sworn in by a judge who became a friend of mine—I was sworn in by Eleanor Holmes Norton. It was held in a court. The court was filled with mostly my family. But it was filled.

**AR:** (To Christy): Do you remember that? You were there. Remember that? Where were you at that time?

**Christy:** L.A. No. I don't know where I lived. I think I lived in DC? The Bay Area? Oakland. I don't know where I lived. But not here.

**RG:** By now you had left the nest. So, explain what the EEOC does for those who don't understand.

**AR:** The EEOC is an agency that resolves conflicts when the plaintiff considers that he has been—or demonstrates—discriminated against by the employer because of race, religion, or national origin.

**Christy:** Or gender.

**AR:** Usually there are court hearings on that. The offender is represented by EEOC if they think he has a case. Or of course the other person has an attorney or the company has an attorney. So that's how they are resolved. However, at the time, EEOC there was limited information on Hispanics. And it was my job at that time as I saw it to create basic information about Hispanics so that they could be used in determining if there were any cases against them that implied race, religion, or national origin.

So I hired me an attorney, to be on my staff. Segismundo Perez. Segismundo was a Cuban. He came to this country and got a law—he was an attorney in Cuba, came to this country, went to school, got a law degree, passed the law exams, and became an attorney in the United States. And so I said, "This guy has enough training in the law in other countries as well as this one. So he can probably recognize the difference between traditional discrimination and discrimination because of race or nationality." And so he became a member of my staff.

And then I had my writer, Dean Bistline who—he and I had been teachers here in San Diego—and friends for life. He died about 3 or 4 years ago.

**RG:** So, together you produced this Report, *EEOC And Hispanics*. What was in that report? What was that about?

**AR:** It really was there to clarify what could be considered as a road to create or understand where discrimination was, based on non-traditional concerns toward discrimination by nationality, by religion, or by appearance. And so that's what Segismundo was good at doing. And we won so many cases based on his concept. Because, you know—he was a white man, but he was not (laughs). He had resonance that was unbelievable--intelligence that was there—and the same thing with Dean Bistline.

**RG:** At what point did you meet Randy Hearst--Randolph Hearst, Jr.? Was that during this time or was that before?

That was about this time. I was at this conference where we were getting people together to talk about developing a bilingual program. The commissioner decided to bring all his staff together and spell out this problem because we have to get

through the legislation in order to get funded. And so he wanted all of the information that he could get from his staff. What I've described is what was seen as our review of the country and the problem. One of the former superintendents of schools in California raised the question. He said, "What you need, you need some foundation to provide the monies to do the. . . . excuse me" (coughs).

**Christy:** When you met Randy Hearst was when you were in the Office of Education. You had been talking about EEOC before. And that was in Jimmy Carter's, so that was in the late '70s right, 80s, okay. You met Randy Hearst when you were in the Office of Education, which was in the late 60s, early 70s. So we're talking '67 '68.

**RG:** So that was before you came to Washington. Okay. We'll talk about how that related.

**AR.** Okay. At these meetings, the former Superintendent of Schools in California suggested that the Hearst Corporation had a foundation that specialized in education. So I said, "Great. How're you going to get them to fund this?" He said, "I'm not. You are." I said, "Hey, you're talking to a dude who never had two dimes to rub in his pocket. I'm going to talk to a rich dude like that? You're crazy." I went. I was selected as the person to go.

So I said okay. I went to San Francisco. Rented a car. Got his address. Got directions on how to get there. Got there. Rang the bell, thinking that, you know, a servant or something was going to come to the door. And it was Mr. Hearst. He greeted me. Invited me in. Introduced me to his wife—first wife. Walked into his Living room. Sat down on a chair over there. And I sat in a chair across from him. And I said to him in Spanish:

*"Bueno, aqui hoy a platicar con ustedes sobre unos problemas que tememos en Los Estados Unidos y quiero que nos ayuden. Cinco problemas . . ."*

I told him that children were not learning because they didn't understand what the teachers were saying. And that there was a need for us to have a national bilingual program that taught the children their learning and as they progressed they could become a part of the learning process. But they are not going to do that until we provide a program that will bridge the understanding of children in one language until they learn the other language—and that we have to find a way of doing this. There's nothing to it—and I was telling him all this in Spanish—and there's nothing to it because they're doing this in Canada everyday.

And we are supposed to be the leaders of the nation in Education. But we're not. And the reason that we're not is that we need somehow to bridge that knowledge so that our language understands—that is, our school system understands that we are not fulfilling the promises that we have made in this country.

**RG:** So how did he respond to listening to Spanish for a half an hour?

**AR:** Well, he got red in the face. And as soon as I saw he was uncomfortable, I stopped. Then I explained to him the strategy and why I had done this. I said, “What I just did was to show you what happens to a lot of those kids the first day they walk in school and a teacher starts talking to them in a language. . . . They don’t understand what’s going on. You just felt for a few minutes what those kids go through for three, four, five hours—going through the same process, not the four or five minutes that you went through.”

He looked at me and said, “How can we help?”

I said, “Well, we can help you by using your foundation to help us provide information that we can give to Congress so that they can fund a program to cure these ills. And we can use your television, your newspapers, and your magazines to help in this process.”

He [Randolph Hearst] said, “Well, how do we start?”

I said, “Well first, I want you to see what’s going on—not just you, but people who could help us develop the program. And we go through the country and see what’s going on, and you realize that it really exists; then you can provide a service to this country that will be important to the whole nation.”