

Washington County Museum
Oral History Interview with Carlos Perez
At: ??
Date: ?? 2000??

Informant: Carlos Perez
Interviewer: Michael O'Rourke (?)
Transcriber: Ellen Rogalin

C = Carlos
M = Michael

M: Carlos, why don't I ask you to start at the beginning and, when and where were you born?

C: Sure, in fact, my birthday's coming up. I was born on April 9, 1951, in that town at that point of New Hall, California. And although I was born in New Hall, I was basically raised for most of my life, my young life, in San Fernando, the city of San Fernando, California.

M: OK, great, and what did your family do in California?

C: Well my parents were, for most of their lives were migrant workers from the time they arrived from Mexico in the United States, they worked the fields in Arizona and in California, primarily. At the point at which I was born, in 1951, they had decided at that point to settle out of the migrant stream. And so out of the seven children – I'm the youngest of seven – I was kind of able to reap the benefits of their labor by not having to experience the migratory life. My father, once they settled out, became a construction laborer and my mother basically a housewife at that point.

M: And that's what they were doing during the entire time you were growing up then?

C: That's correct.

M: And you went to school in California, did you?

C: Yeah, I attended school in the city of San Fernando, graduated from San Fernando High School back in 1969.

M: OK. And, was your first language English or Spanish?

C: My first language was actually kind of a mixture of both because we spoke both in the home. The children spoke English since for the most part they all had, uh, some amount of schooling. My parents were primarily Spanish-speakers, so I had a combination of both and the acquisition of English, full English, came in grade school.

M: Ok, so that's when you really learned English a little bit better.

C: That's correct. Right.

M: And what was school like for you as a young boy?

C: Well, actually it was, it was – I actually enjoyed school. Keep in mind again that I was the youngest of seven – I had five sisters and one brother – and only one child besides myself – one sibling besides myself – ever finished high school. So the others had varying degrees of schooling from elementary school to some had junior high school opportunities, but for the most part they all kind of quit pretty early. So I was one who really enjoyed school going to class. Obviously the social part also helped, but I enjoyed the opportunity to learn. And that was one of the things that my parents tried to continually instill upon me, to stay in school, to be successful in school, to use my head and not my brawn, as my father used to say.

M: And your father came originally from Mexico, is that right?

C: That's right. He was born in 1910 in the kind of a country town of **El Pomo Sonora**, Mexico, and he migrated to the United States illegally around 1920 and then came back and forth over the course of several years, but eventually wound up settling in Arizona.

M: And is that where he met your mother?

C: He met my mother in Arizona, that's correct, yeah.

M: And was she a U.S. citizen?

C: She originally came in as a resident alien, my mother did. She was born in 1914 in **Caborca Sonora**, Mexico, and wound up meeting my father in Arizona and they got married quite young, I believe.

M: But then so she entered the country legally then?

C: That's correct. And she eventually, in the sixties, wound up getting her citizenship that she had wanted for a long period of time, so in the 1960's. My father, interestingly enough – and I know that this is an aside to the question, but he just recently became a citizen as a 90-year-old after all of those years.

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He had always had this this belief, this desire to want to go back to Mexico and his life there, basically, finish up his life there in Mexico but came to realize that that country, after being gone so long, was no longer his country; that this was and so he finally at the age of 90 in 2000 became a U.S citizen.

M: When you were growing up, did the family make trips to Mexico?

C: We did. We made several trips all by pick-up truck and camper kind of trip that were very, very hot and very long. I had an opportunity to visit with relatives in Mexico. Most of them lived on small towns or little ranches and I got to experience some opportunities of being out and being with them as they tended cattle or crops and those kinds of things. Most of their homes were very, what's the word – rudimentary -- in the types of materials that they used to build them. Dirt floors, earthen fire pits, that kind of thing. But that was again when I was still around eight or nine years old in the late fifties or early sixties you know, so . . .

M: What did you think, as a child, of the differences you saw in the two cultures?

C: Well, in a way, it, it, I kind of, I was pretty excited by the quaintness, I guess I've always, even as a young person, have enjoyed reading history and historical text and so the whole idea of the more simple life, the adobe house, the dirt floor, the ranch, the horse riding, tending cattle, all of those kind of things kind of attracted and were attractive and appealed to me, so I enjoyed going there for that and I enjoyed that whole kind of more rustic lifestyle. Now, whether I could sustain it for a long period of time besides the week or two we might be there would have been a different thing, but for the periods of time for me it was something that was similar to something that I'd read in a book and I really enjoyed the opportunity. Now, one time when I was about 13 or so, I went down and I was with some cousins and I was riding behind one of my cousins on his horse holding on to him, and that was right after the Beatles first came out, and so one of them said to me in Spanish, I want you to sing me a song, a Beatles' song. I said I wouldn't do it and so he whipped his horse and we galloped a little faster. He goes, are you going to sing one now? And I said no and he whipped the horse again and we started going a little faster, but I was bound and determined that they weren't going to intimidate me to the point that I'd have to go ahead and sing something to them because, again, they were just kind of ribbin' me since I was there state-wide relative versus being, you know, one of the kids there on the farm, so that was there way of kind of getting after me . . . Never sang.

M: You never sang?

C: I never sang. (laughter) I would have fallen off the horse first.

M: But you didn't fall?

C: I didn't fall, either, no.

M: You were riding bareback?

C: Yeah. I was holding on very tightly to him

M: Can you describe the community you lived in as a boy in California? Was there a large Hispanic presence there?

C: Yes, there were. The city of San Fernando has always had a large Hispanic population. At that time it did even though now it's predominantly Hispanic, there was a significant Hispanic population. So going to school, whether it was grade school, junior high or high school, there was always a Hispanic presence and I think it was partly to that Hispanic presence that allowed my father, for most of his life, to be able to get by speaking only Spanish because he could go to the post office and there'd be a Spanish-speaker.

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C: Our church would do mass in Spanish, people he worked with, his bosses and so forth and likewise in school, so . . .

M: Did you ever experience any feelings of separateness or discrimination as a kid growing up in San Fernando?

C: Well you always, there's always a little bit of that element when you are growing up and you are still, you're from a different ethnic group. I think sometimes, some of, some of the instances when I sensed a little discrimination – I don't even know if that would be the right word, but a sense of different-ness – is when you would, we'd go shopping and again the cashier might perhaps, again in their haste to move the line along, might ask my parents something or this is the amount that we owe and then they wouldn't catch it right away and so then they'd become irritated and agitated with them, so. And I didn't see that kind of curtness being displayed with non-Hispanics So that was a situation. I think also when I first started school – my name is Carlos David Perez, Carlos David Perez – and even though there were a number of Hispanic kids in school the teacher took it upon herself to say well from now on we should call you Charles. And so my school records are listed under Charles David Perez instead of Carlos. But again that was a time of more assimilation and mixing in rather than being separated apart, so I grew up as Charles Perez.

M: In school, anyway

C: In school, public school.

M: And then did high school bring any changes?

C: Well, high school, when I got in to high school at that point I was, as I mentioned to you, I graduated in 1969, we graduate in February, we were the last winter class, graduating winter class out of that particular high school. But at that time, during '67, '68 and of course in '69, we're starting to get issues of ethnic pride, of issues associated with, kind of, promoting your culture and self-determination, and so those kind of things start cropping at that particular point. The high school I attended was basically about 40 percent Hispanic, 30 percent Black and the other percent White and Asian. And so people became a little more concerned about their ethnicity and being accepted for who they were and standing up for who they were and during that time we wind up having some cultural strife at the high school. Black kids, African-American kids, all of a sudden saying we're being discriminated against, we don't want to be treated this way. Hispanic kids also saying those same kind of things and bringing up those same kinds of issues.

M: So then it was during high school that you slowly started to . . .

C: It was a little different and of kids I might have associated with that might have been Anglo or Japanese and even African-American kids we wind up becoming a little bit more detached and we wind up kind of clustering on ethnic lines basically based on these issues that are being brought up. I for one never personally went ahead and broke off relationships with kids based on ethnicity, but I saw that happening and I saw kids also trying to gravitate more toward ethnic minority teachers and staff as opposed to staff of a different cultural group. But again those were I think that was current with the trends that were going on in the nation at that particular time.

M: Was there friction between ethnic groups also, aside from the . . . well, it wasn't the dominant culture any more . . .

C: There was considerable friction at that time with some of the African-American kids. Basically, I mean, here we were, I mean, as is the case in a lot of situations, the school leadership was

predominantly White or Asian, but the predominance of the population was either Hispanic or African-American.

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C: So the African-American kids certainly felt that they needed to have a voice. Hispanic kids did the same. Oftentimes what happens is you don't end up attacking or confronting the group in power but it's the, you know, a dog-eat-dog kind of a thing, the two who are at the bottom scrap for the bones. So we both wound up having conflict with one another. Sometimes if African-American kids were after a White youngster or so forth, Hispanic kids intervened and so it also put one into conflict with African-American kids. So there was, there was some friction between those two groups, I guess is what I'm saying.

M: And how bad did it get or how serious was it?

C: Well, at San Fernando High School, probably from 1969 when I graduated to '70 and '71 there were quite a few riots, actually, that took place at the school which led to police intervention and arrests where the school was curtailed as a result of the ongoing friction, so it wasn't just a one-year thing but over a series of years that it took place that I kept track of as I moved on into other pursuits. So it was a friction that continued for a period of time and, again, I think it was basically the fact that when you have two significant ethnic groups that are both vying for some respect, for some equal status, and the only ones that they could kind of pull or tug at was one another was what led to the friction amongst the two. Because the other groups that might have been the power base or the groups that might have had the more influence over the school were really not reachable. They were not accessible to us. So . . .

M: And then, after . . . Were you beginning to get some ideas of what you wanted to do with your life in high school or . . .?

C: Well, in 1969 you must remember that Vietnam was really looming right there on the horizon. It was hot and heavy in Vietnam, and so I had already registered and so the whole thought was that basically at some point I was going to be called up into the service. I had thought at one time about college, but college was not something that I had really taken, had done a lot of research on or knew a lot about, so essentially what I decided to do was to try to get a job and I wound up working for the LA Unified School System as a custodian, and, with the idea in mind that if I worked for them for about six months I was under the information that I could then join one of their apprenticeship programs and look at becoming an apprentice carpenter. So that was kind of my long-range plan around that time.

M: Ah, Ok. And did you wind up serving in the military then?

C: Actually, I did not and that's another story, a whole story, but what happened was as I mentioned to you I wound up working as a custodian. I wound up, while doing so I was invited to a meeting by a social service agency. They were just starting up a kind of youth leadership group and they asked me to attend a meeting. One of the persons that attended those meetings asked me to come and take part in it and said that this would be really good and you could meet people and you'd learn some leadership skills and so forth and so on. So I started to attend those leadership groups, those youth leadership groups, and and it was the director of that program, Irene Tovar, who wound up convincing me that I had the capacity to go to college and that she would help me register and get all squared away since again this was kind of foreign or alien to me. And so I wound up going to college at Cal State Northridge. Used to

be called San Fernando State College at that time. And I entered school there and so what would have been my 1A status that would have put me eligible to go into the service became a student deferment and I wound up being on student deferment from the military up until the lottery. And when the lottery came out, my lottery number was high so I was never subject to serve.

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M: Never called?

C: Right.

M: And then you did go on to college in California?

C: Right. That's correct.

M: And from there you – well, first of all, what was college like?

C: You know the interesting thing about college was – well, there were a lot of interesting things about college. First and foremost, living away because what we wound up, what I wound up joining up with in going to college was, I wound up being part of a program called the equal educational opportunities program, the EOP, essentially, program, and and, and, and in that particular program they wound up getting 50 Hispanic kids and 50 African-American kids from poor, urban neighborhoods, essentially, and they said we will provide you with this free tuition or tuition and some low-interest loans for you to attend school and help kind of, you know, help diversify our student population. And this is what that particular director, Irene Tovar, was able to get me involved in. So they put us all together in a college dormitory in the summer for an orientation realizing that some of us may not really know what college is about. I mean we all had our diplomas, but again there's something different there somehow. We went through an orientation process and part of that process was to familiarize us with the whole college scene, registering, textbooks, what classes might be like, sitting through some orientation session such as that, plus getting to know one another because again we're coming from two different orientations, two different cultures, not only between the Hispanics and the Blacks or the African-American kids, but also some of the Hispanic kids were from the city of San Fernando or the San Fernando Valley and some were from LA and there were some rivalries there too between neighborhoods, so we had to really kind of learn to get along, and one of the means that they used for us to try to get along was to build our social/political awareness of the plight of all minority people and kind of saying, hey you, support one another. You help one another. You're all kind of in this together and it was that social/political consciousness of realizing there's something to be proud of for being a Hispanic student or an African-American student, and something to be proud of for being an Hispanic and so forth that brought us together and congealed us in a way that we were able to move ahead. Now going into the classes and so forth, we had resistance from Anglo kids, from White kids, because they really knew we were there on a kind of preferential program; they really didn't want us there. The school had kids with high economic means and they saw us looking different, acting different, and that we were kind of an intrusion into their space. And you saw that in their faces; you saw that in some conflicts that occurred between kids in school; you saw that in student council meetings that took place that wound up . . . we became aware of through the school paper and those means.

M: And what did you study in college?

C: I was, initially I was a history major at Cal State – again, San Fernando Valley State at that time – it's been changed to Cal State Northridge now.

M: And then when you graduated you went to teach school in Idaho, was that the first thing?

C: Well, what happened was I wound up not immediately . . . at Cal State Northridge I didn't graduate from college. During that time, and I mentioned the whole thing about social and political awareness issues, I got very actively involved in the anti-war movement in Vietnam and, and as a result of that effort and then some social justice issues in our community I wound up working in a Chicano community center in the city of San Fernando. So, again I was involved in some social justice kind of issues. I didn't pay as much attention as I could have to my studies

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C: And I was in school there for about three years and with all of those efforts . . . with all of my efforts being devoted to those kinds of issues – again, that was my focal point as opposed to my schooling – it was at the point I realized that in order to attend to my schooling I would need to make a split that I looked at an additional program, another program called teacher corps and wound up joining the teacher corps which led me to Idaho State University to finish my degree. And that was in Pocatello, Idaho, so I went from Cal State Northridge sight unseen to Pocatello, Idaho, got my degree in elementary education with the idea of going into teaching.

M: Now, Pocatello was a little bit of a culture shock compared to San Fernando . . .

C: Very difference because, again, my image of Idaho had been one of tall mountains, green trees and if you're familiar with southeastern Idaho it's nothing but flat, dry, farm, wheat, so forth, and it was very, very different from what I envisioned and again I had never been there. My first winter it was probably about 35 below zero and as a southern Californian I had never experienced anything like that before, so

M: But otherwise how did you find it at school in Idaho that first year?

C: It was a good change for me, because again it was able to bring back focus to me – not to say that the other things were a lack of focus, they just were a different focus, and it was now time to kind of look at what I wanted to do with myself in the long haul. So it gave me an opportunity. My whole goal at that point was to become a teacher and I felt that by becoming a teacher I could help all kids, but I could also specifically help Hispanic kids. And that was something that I was very interested in, so going to school in Idaho – it was a stark contrast than going to school at Cal State Northridge. There wasn't that elitism that I had seen previously and part of that probably also had to do with my own personal maturity – that kind of helped things, too.

M: And, I guess maybe the Vietnam War was starting to wind down by that time, but what about your activism against the war? Was that still something you were . . .

C: Not at that point. I went ahead, as I mentioned, and it would have been about 1972 that I was in Idaho. Basically, the whole issue of the Vietnam War I wish I could say had to do with being a conscientious objector but I wasn't. My whole issue with the Vietnam War was the fact that in proportion to population more Hispanics were being called up into the war. We didn't have the

opportunity for the kind of deferments that we, that kids with means had. The U.S. government was buying the surplus grapes that the farmers couldn't sell because of the Cesar Chavez boycott. I mean there were a variety of issues that seemed injustices for us to then have to turn around and put on a uniform and go fight in a war when we weren't being supported here in the United States. Now, had they called me up and summoned me to serve, I probably would have gone as opposed to go to jail because I wasn't a fool in that respect, but

29:01 [end of first tape]

C: On the other hand, I could see the ongoing injustices that were happening to the Hispanics and other poor people, and that was the whole root of why I was involved in that activism. The activism didn't continue in Idaho because by that time that whole movement – and it was called the Chicano Moratorium Movement, it was specific to Hispanics in the LA area although branches had come up in Arizona and in Colorado and in Texas. I felt a sense of disillusionment; we weren't accomplishing what we wanted to and it also kind of helped me decide to go to Idaho and at that point I was just ready to move on and get on with my life and help kids the way I thought – or help my group, my cultural group, by helping kids, I guess was that I'd decided to do and I'd do it as a one-person show rather than by group.

M: Looking back at it now, what do you think might have been influences that shaped this idea of yours that you wanted to do some work to help the Hispanic communities initially?

C: Well, I think, you know, first and foremost, I think the fact that some of the things that were ingrained in me by my parents; all of the trials and tribulations that they encountered in their lives – the hard work, the cold weather all kind of led me to the idea that other kids should be able to benefit, just as I had benefitted from their labors in my brothers and sisters, my siblings' labors. Also that fact that I because of my involvement in anti-war activities and also in the issue of cultural awareness – role models, heroes like Cesar and Chavez and others influenced me greatly to want to be able to give something back to the community; to be able to help people. The lady that helped me, Irene Tovar, to get into college said to me, "I'm helping you so you can help another." So it was that kind of influence on a very personal level and more on a philosophical level from people who were activities, you know high-powered activists like Chavez who kind of influence me to say, well, you can make a difference, you can impact some kids, you can, and those kids can impact other kids, so it's kind of a ripple effect and it just ripples out. You impact one and the ripple gets bigger and spreads out.

M: And then how long were you in Idaho?

C: Well, I wound up finishing my degree and I wound up then teaching in Idaho Fall, Idaho, and taught there, taught -- came back to Pocatello and taught in Pocatello and taught in Nampa, Idaho, near Boise, so I was there around five years.

M: OK, altogether?

C: Altogether.

M: And then you came to Oregon next?

C: Came to Oregon in 1977 to get my master's degree at Oregon State University in counseling.

M: OK. And how long did your studies last at Oregon State?

C: One year.

M: One year.

C: I finished the degree in one year and in 1978 I applied for a position with the Hillsboro School District, which is right here, and and got a job as a counselor at J.B. Thomas Junior High, at that time, and took the position and I've been here since 1978.

M: OK. And when you came to Hillsboro, when you got that first job, that first counseling job, was it primarily interacting with Hispanic kids?

C: Actually, it wasn't. I had a case load of two hundred and thirty some odd kids. They were across the board, all kids, and that time . . .

05:00

C: So I didn't take that job specifically because I was going to be working with Hispanic kids, but I came to Hillsboro or I applied to Hillsboro because I knew Hillsboro had a sizeable Hispanic population. Although at that time, back in 1978, most of the population was migratory – they came, they worked and then they left – with very few people, Hispanics, residing here year-round. It still appealed to me because it did tend to bloom up in the summer, in the summer months, and that kind of gave me that substitute opportunity to work with Hispanic kids, so I used to work summer programs and that kind of thing. So no, my first, the counseling job, was working with all kids, some of which were Hispanic.

M: And I imagine, well, you'd already been to Pocatello, that must have been a change, too, but it must have been a bit of a change to be here without . . .

C: Very different in many ways and in some ways it was a relief to be in Oregon, and partly because Idaho was so conservative and the particular communities, specifically Idaho Falls, where I worked in for a couple of years there was a very, very strong LDS influence on the school because the predominant influence of the teachers was the LDS faith. So, and I don't mean to slight Mormons, but I mean with their religion they bring a very conservative feel to the school and that wasn't something I really felt real good about – that conservative sense. So coming to Hillsboro, to Oregon, really kind of broadened that out and kids could be kids more than what I saw them being in Idaho. And I could be more of myself than I could be in Idaho.

M: And how did you find that counseling job – was it something you enjoyed?

C: I did, I did. I enjoyed it quite a bit, but after about three years I decided I wanted to try something different. Actually, I was there for three years and then they opened, they were just finishing up Evergreen Junior High, so I applied to be transferred to Evergreen, wound up going to Evergreen as a counselor for one year. Joe Rodriguez who is our current superintendent was the principal slated for that school, so I went there as a counselor and soon thereafter I became his assistant principal.

M: So you've been with as a team for Joe for a while then?

C: Right, since about 1980.

M: In the meantime, I guess the Hispanic community was really starting to grow here, as well. Can you tell me a little bit about your own observations of that growth of the community and what it meant to you and to the other people around here?

C: Well, I think the growth has been over time that fact that people . . . We've always had, I may have mentioned to you, a significant Hispanic community. In the late 70's it was a migrant population mostly coming from California and Texas, a strong influence from Texas. Families that would come in, maybe come in the spring, work the strawberries, then move on and work on some of the other crops during the summer months and stay for the cucumbers and so forth during the fall and then leave. But they would be here from about spring to fall. And they brought a kind of a richness of their experiences in Texas and California and so forth, but they were always viewed as migrant. Oh, they're going to go away, they weren't going to come back and stabilize to what our community is. That has changed. The populations have continued to settle out and settle out and settle out to where now most of our migrant workers are unattached males. They come and work on some of those crops. But the families with kids are now settled out over time and it's really kind of changed the complexity of our schools to the point where we have instead of enclaves of schools with Hispanic kids we have Hispanic kids in all of our schools with some very significant numbers in certain schools.

M: I imagine that you took note of the development of some of the cultural institutions out here, too? I'm thinking of places like Centro Cultural. Were you involved at all with Central or any of the other organizations?

10:00

C: I can't say that I was. I mean I've attended some meetings at Centro Cultural but never was really actively involved in their formation or their development. It's done a wonderful, done wonderful things for the community at the Virginia Garcia Clinic and other organizations, but again my focus has been primarily education. The one program that I did have some involvement with is the Boys and Girls Club which, although it's not primarily focused at Hispanic kids, it serves a majority of Hispanic kids based on our community, and that I was actively involved in developing.

M: And what was your involvement there and what was the idea to begin with with the Boys and Girls Club?

C: Well, the idea had been circling around that really in the after-school hours there wasn't a lot to be made available for kids to be involved in positive pursuits, positive activities. And especially in the 1980s we see emerging in our community this element of gang influence and so what we were doing was looking at how we could get kids involved in positive kinds of programs where they could be doing studies, recreational activities, instead of perhaps being on the street learning some negative things, getting involved in gangs or getting involved in drugs or getting involved in weapons issues and so forth. So community members continued to meet, continued to meet. We would up getting a person, Randy Graves from the Boys and Girls Club chapter in Portland and he came out and we set up some preliminary centers in Thomas Junior High when I was principal there to run his programs. So again, they had kind of exclusive use of our facilities and the after-school hours to start bringing in kids to some more positive kinds of experiences as opposed to being out doing negative things, and then from there

that emanated to other groups which ultimately led to there being funding and their own center being created on third street.

M: And you said you were principal at that school at the time?

C: At that time, right.

M: I guess I should ask you how your career progressed from your counseling days.

C: Well, I started as a counselor at Thomas, went to Evergreen Middle, Junior High at that time, as a counselor; became a vice principal there. Then I went to Poynter Junior High and was a vice principal there and was a one-year interim principal at Poynter. From Poynter I went to David Hill Elementary School and became an elementary school principal for a while. And from David Hill I went to J.B. Thomas Junior High and was the principal there for four years, and it was after that fourth year that I was asked to the District Office to come as Director of Secondary Operations. I did that for a couple of years, then became Executive Director of K through 8 operations. I did that for one year, then I became Associate Superintendent for one year and now I'm Deputy Superintendent presently.

M: And I wonder if actually, I have another question about the Boys and Girls Club, too. You formed it here at a time when there was beginning to be signs of gang activity out here, and I wonder if you could tell me just what was the magnitude of that problem within the community at that time?

C: At that time the magnitude was not severe by any means because it was at that time that it was forming or starting. We had a couple of gangs that were identified by the Hillsboro Police Department and essentially their activities ranged in intimidating graffiti, I would assume some involvement in drugs, but again I don't think it was anything organized as you hear with the more pervasive big gangs that have existed nation-wide. But, you know, there was some illegal activity that they were involved in. Our big concern was their influence on other kids in our schools and the impact that that could cause on kids' perception of safety.

15:00

C: If kids come to school and there are kids that are intimidating them or blocking their way or putting up graffiti, they're not going to feel as comfortable in coming to school, and that was the whole issue that I was, that I as a school administrator at that point was trying to focus on, number one at school. Number two was trying to get involved, to get kids involved in some activities outside of school, so perhaps avoid that potential of other kids getting involved in gang influences on the after-school hours. So, it was kind of a two-pronged thing – keeping them in check at school; getting them involved in something after school.

M: And I guess that even though you were making your efforts and probably others were as well, that the gang problem did grow somewhat then, through the mid-90's or somewhere?

C: It did, it did. Yeah, it became pretty significant, the number of gangs existing here in the City of Hillsboro and some pretty significant impacts have occurred as a result of their influence here in the community, but, again, it did lead us to pay attention to what kids are doing. It got us to work to get parents more actively involved in their kids after school, and I think as a result of those efforts, the

combining of everybody coming forward and together, we've been able to kind of reduce that issue down once again.

M: And, I wonder also if you, well, I mean another issue that maybe is a flip side, we're getting a ways away from education here, I realize, but the flip side of this was the racial profiling kind of issue. Is this something that you've seen out here?

C: You know, at that time – I'm sure that it occurs, I'm sure that it occurs and I think we've had a pretty good relationship with, administration with Hillsboro Police and they probably would attest to the fact that it probably has occurred. After that whole gang phenomena began, it wasn't unusual for any Hispanic groups, kids, that were clustered in groups of three or four or five to be pulled over and to be searched and so forth because the perception was that they might be up to no good, but that did occur. And, you know, the thought behind some of the actions that were taken back then were, you know, you walk and talk like a duck – I remember this being a quote – you walk and talk like a duck, you're going to be treated like a duck. So if you're acting like a gang member, you're dressing like a gang member, you've got graffiti like a gang member – maybe you aren't, maybe you're just kind of sympathizing to them or friends with some of them, you're going to be treated just like they are, and so there was some outward attempts to dissuade them by using those kinds of tactics or approaches.

M: And, uh, you said that there'd been, there started to be a peak of the activity, some significant impacts of gang activity here. What would you say were the impacts?

C: Well I think there were, I couldn't give you specific dates, but it was during in the 80's and certainly in the 90's, I think we had some gang-related fatalities. We certainly had gang fights or gang conflicts that resulted in serious injury on a number of occasions. We had property damage as a result of that. And I'm talking community-wide, I'm not just talking about schools.

M: Right.

C: And graffiti and threat and that kind of thing, so those are all very significant impacts on our community which cast a negative light on our Hispanic kids by the predominant community and so that's what I view as significant.

19:58

M: And did you personally have to, I mean, were any of these problems your own personal problems when you were at these various schools

C: Well, you know as a school administrator at junior high, and at that time our students were from seventh grade to ninth grade, there were kids who had gang affiliations in the schools. And parents by, through their children, or by profiling kids themselves, none – Anglo parents particularly – they would see these kids and they'd say, "Why are these kids in school? Why are they attending school and what are you doing about them being in your school?" And my approach or take on it was if they're not, if they're not breaking the rules, if they're not violating any kind of rule that we have, they're entitled to be here in school as much as your child is. And my job is to make sure that the school is safe and secure for your kids and for them, and as long as our policies are such that dress code is not impact and so forth, they were, they were entitled to be there. So I did a lot of having to talk to parents about certain kids being in school. I certainly talked to Hispanic parents about what I knew that their kids were

involved in. I was involved in changing some of the rules so some of things that kids wore they would not be permitted to wear in school, so kind of enacting some dress code issues so again they wouldn't be so pervasively sticking out so to speak. One of the things that really tended to intimidate kids was heavy, big, broad giant coats – those oversize coats that they liked to wear, and it was the kids' view, everybody, most kids, that these individuals wore these coats because they liked to hide things in them – weapons or paraphernalia or what have you – and the idea was that because they're so bulky that it's hard to detect. So one of the things that we enacted at Thomas was that we did not allow them to wear those coats during the school day. We couldn't keep them from not wearing them from home to school because, again, that may be the only coat they have, it's cold, it rains – so they could wear them, but it had to be stored in their locker or, if they didn't, the coat, the parents would be called to school. This was a rule. Now, if they had a weapon the whole idea was behind it if you're, if I've got a coat on and I've got a weapon inside my coat and you say something negative to me, well maybe my inclination might be to draw that weapon right then and there and use it instinctively or automatically – automatically, probably, not instinctively, I don't like that word myself (laughter)—but in a reactive way, in a reactive way is what I was trying to say. But if it's in your locker and somebody says something to you and you say I'm going to get even, just the act of walking to the locker gives the kid an opportunity to think and let common sense prevail, and have that kid think twice before they act impulsively. And that was part of that whole rationale behind why I enacted or was involved in helping to institute that change, because again I wanted to give kids that breathing space from not just making decisions out of anger. So those are some of the impacts. You know I had parents – we talked a little earlier about discrimination – who basically would come to me, in one case said to me, you know, it's because people like you that have come to Oregon, people like you have come to Oregon and you're ruining this place just like you ruined California. I leave California, I come here, now you're here and you're ruining this place just like you ruined California. Where do I have to go to to get away from you people – Montana? And before I could respond to that particular person, he spun around and he left. But you know there was a strong sense of folks saying "I don't want to be around you." And I think part of that had to do with that whole issue of fear of the unknown and having to deal with those issues at school, which is what you asked me about – did I have to deal with some of those issues.

M: Right. And so it sounds like even you were experiencing some prejudice from the community at large, then.

C: Well, it was hard for people to accept the fact – some people, and a very small minority at that – to accept the fact that an Hispanic could be the principal of a twelve hundred-student school, I suppose.

25:00

M: What, I guess in your career here at working for the Hillsboro School District in all the different positions you've held, can you comment on what sort of issues there are that are relevant to education that Hispanic community face now as opposed to when you first got here and how things have changed over the years . . .

C: School related or community-wide?

M: Education related, mostly.

C: Well, you know, we, just here, in the fall, well the summer of this year of 2000, summer of 2000, we just adopted a strategic plan that's going to carry us for the next five years, and part of the strategic plan

has one specific strategy that talks about working with the Hispanic community and building relationships and partnerships with the Hispanic community to help student, Hispanic student, success. And the motivation for getting that particular strategy in was the belief, my personal belief, that some of the things that Hispanic kids are facing in our schools today existed in 1978 when I started here in Hillsboro as a counselor. At that time there was a La Guardia needs assessment that was done and those issues that were there are still here. We don't have a lot of Hispanic role models for kids to look at in terms of our staff, our licensed staff, there aren't Hispanic role models. We didn't have programs at that time that addressed their specific educational needs. We weren't really reaching out to the community and making parents viable members of the community. We had a significant Hispanic drop-out rate. All of those weren't always bad all of the time. We would concentrate efforts, we'd improve, we would concentrate efforts and then we'd move on and then all of a sudden a year or two later it pops up again and it becomes a significant issue. And so the whole purpose of putting this into the strategic plan was saying once and for all, let's focus attention on all of the issues related to our Hispanic kids. Let's develop a program that's comprehensive enough that's going to address all of their issues, all of their needs and let's put it in place and keep it in place so this thing doesn't crop up any more, this thing doesn't pop up here or there, our drop-out rate stays low, we know what works and we can follow that consistently from this point on with minor tweaks and refinements. And that was the whole impetus for that for that strategy to be put in our strategic plan which we'll be working on for the next five years.

M: And, specifically, I imagine that probably, well, are there issues that relate to education that are different for different segments of the Hispanic community, like the migrant community I suppose, for instance, sometimes they can't even attend, they only attend a partial school year or maybe not at all or working here they go back to a partial school year where they came from.

C: Well, one of the things that impacts all of our Hispanic kids is the fact that for the most part many of them have gaps in their educational experiences because at one point or another a lot of the kids have had migrant experiences and as a result they're behind grade level or lagging. I think that's a very significant issue. I think the biggest issue that we experience right now between the two, between groups, is the fact that there exists a little bit of friction between kids, Hispanic kids that were born in the United States and kids that are, kids that were born in Mexico, and they, again, it's kind of like that dog eat dog thing that I described between the African-Americans and the Hispanics . . .

29:30 [end of second tape]

C: But again it was, it's the continuation of that dog-eat-dog where Hispanic state-side-born kids and Hispanics born in Mexico are now kind of a little bit at odds because they're, they again can't really impact, don't know how to access the power of the schools so they can only access themselves and as a result of accessing themselves that's the only way that one can climb over the other. Educational issues between the two groups, if this group of kids is, let's say, underachieving because they lack some of those educational basics, well, the kids from Mexico are probably experiencing the same thing in probably a little more severe degree because oftentimes many of them come with very limited educational experience from Mexico. So not only are we dealing with non-English literacy, we're also dealing with a total sense of illiteracy or a lack of literacy on the part of some of those kids. So bringing them up to a point where they can then move on is a daunting challenge.

M: So you're saying that they don't even have literacy in Spanish then.

C: That's, many don't, many don't, that's correct.

M: Well, my next question was going to be whether or not you face a bilingual education challenge.

C: Well, one of the things that we do, we do with our primary kids, our Hispanic primary kids, is we try to teach them in their native language. If they come in and they're non-English speakers, we try to teach them in their native language and get them up to at least a rudimentary level in their native language, building those skills, and we have found that by having them be somewhat literate in their native language allows the transition into English language fluency to proceed at a much quicker rate. And so we are in some ways unofficially doing some bilingual education. Now, again, going back to our strategic plan that I mentioned to you, our strategic plan calls for the development of two bilingual programs at two of our elementary schools that we are hoping to have in place if not this coming school year, the following, with the idea that we would start at the K-one level and work up and gradually we'd build and certainly we would then move on into the secondary level and expand it out to other schools if successful. And again, it's to build a literacy base for kids so they're, while they're learning English, they're not losing on content in other subject areas, so they can be taught social studies or science or what have you in a bilingual setting and still be learning their English. So rather than teaching, just focusing primarily on English acquisition, English language, and foregoing the sciences and social studies and so forth and so on.

M: OK, well I've used up some of your time here this afternoon, but I'm coming to the end of my list of questions. I was wondering if there are any other issues that we haven't talked about that you think would be worth a word or two.

C: Well, the only two additional things that I would want to say are that are very important to schools has to do with making sure that we involve parents, and that is something that we all need to work on, involving them, making them part of our educational experience. Oftentimes, the Mexican institutions of school, parents are expected to leave school to the professionals, to the teachers, because they know best, they're trained to do it, so it's not because they're complacent or they're, or they don't care, it's just that's the way the system works. So they come here and they believe that's kind of the same way things have to operate. In reality it's not; our school systems are very different, but since they don't know that we have to reach out to them, we need to involve them, we need to get them interesting in attending school conferences, school programs; asking the right questions, knowing about school budgets, curriculum, and so forth and so on, to make them into viable members of our school community. And that's again an issue that we want to be sure we emphasize and carry out in our strategic plan. The last thing is that – and this is just a personal commentary – that I think that all of the experiences that I've had over the course of many years from the kinds of things, and I guess I'll focus on some of the negative experiences, but whether it might have been discrimination as a young person or having my name changed or when I was a teacher in Idaho and a youngster being pulled out of my class because the parent thought I spoke with an accent and so having her child transferred or even the parent in junior high saying we're ruining the state or, all of those experiences, including the social/political stuff and everything that I've experienced, have only made me, I think, a better person in terms of being able to deal with people because you wind up persevering through adversity and it's given me the opportunity to see the individual positions from the different sets of shoes and I think that there's inherent good in everybody and all I strive to do is to work effectively for everyone, and by working effectively for everyone helps me continue to focus my interests and my personal goals towards Hispanic kids. And I think that's a key thing for me and something that's very important for me and will

continue to be important for me as long as my career continues and probably in my retirement pursuits whenever those may come.

M: OK Carlos, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to do this today.

C: Thank you.

6:49

SEARCH TERMS

African-Americans
Agricultural Laborers – History
Agriculture
Agriculture – History
Arizona
Asians
Beatles
Bilingual education
Boys and Girls Club
Brothers and sisters
Cal State Northridge
California
Children
Centro Cultural
Cesar Chavez
Cities and towns
College
Communities
Counseling
David Hill Elementary School
Discrimination
Dwellings
Dwellings -- Mexico
Dwellings – California
Education
Elementary school
Equal Education Opportunities Program (EOP)
Evergreen Junior High
Families
Families – History
Farms
Farms – Idaho

Farms -- California
Gangs
High school
Hillsboro Police Department
Hillsboro School District
Housing
Idaho
Idaho Falls, Idaho
Idaho State University
J.B. Thomas Junior High
Joe Rodriguez
Junior high school
La Guardia Needs Assessment
Labor
Labor – United States
LDS
Migrant labor
Migrants
Minority students
Mormons
Nampa, Idaho
Oregon State University
Pocatello, Idaho
Poynter Junior High
Prejudice
Profiling
Randy Graves
San Fernando, California
San Fernando High School
San Fernando Valley State College
Schools
Teachers
Transportation – History
Transportation – passenger traffic
Travelers
Vietnam War
Virginia Garcia Clinic
Women
Work

