

Oral History with Ralph Arriola

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SESSION 1 (September 26, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino. I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando, and today's date is September 26, 2013.

Thank you so much for giving me your time. I'd like to start with what you can tell me about your family history, your grandparents or your parents, whatever stories have been passed down to you.

[00:00:23]

ARRIOLA: Well, I never met any of my grandparents. Our grandmother died early here in Los Angeles, and so I never met her. I was born on December 25, 1934, in Camarillo, California, was delivered by a *viejita*. Her name was Mercedes. She did a lot of midwife at that time in Camarillo and that whole area. It was a farming community.

The big boss of Camarillo, if you were going to call him a boss, was Adolfo Camarillo, one of the original dons. They got the property from Spain. He was a very generous man. He gave a lot of properties for the high school, for the mental health hospital that was out there, which eventually has become College of the—and the waterfront's out there. What's the name of it? I forget the name of it. Anyway, it's a university. It's another state college.

ESPINO: Channel Islands, Cal State?

ARRIOLA: Yes. His thing was—well, it wasn't just one thing. Every Christmas the old man would, in the town square—and it was a round circle where you came into Camarillo, you had to drive around it—a tree would go up. Then on Christmas, the fire

engine would show up with Santa Claus, and we all got candies and marbles and little stuff, but it was something.

ESPINO: Do you know about your mom, where she was born?

[00:02:58]

ARRIOLA: My mom and my dad, they didn't meet until they were here in the United States, but they came from Las Cruces and one other little town in Chihuahua.

Interesting that they never met over there. When all the revolution, all the problems were going on in Chihuahua, I think we were on the opposite side, because my grandpa—and I'm not sure if it was by blood or just someone who married my grandma, and we called him—well, I never met him, but he was Grandpa. He said, "Get out of here. Get out of here now," gave Mom and my grandmother some money and says, "Head for the border. Go to the United States." So they both came across in Arizona. They ended up in—oh, god—in a small mining town, Jerome, Arizona, and Grandma opened up a little *cocina* where she fed the miners and met Dad, or Mom met Dad. It's interesting because the other day I was sitting here at night and I was thinking about her. [cries] How old was she when I was born? So I did a little math, and she must have been about twenty-eight.

ESPINO: Oh, she wasn't young, young young.

ARRIOLA: No. But she had had Con [phonetic] and Rachel and Gloria.

ESPINO: Oh, you weren't the first?

ARRIOLA: No. Then there was myself and then there was George, the youngest, about four or five years later. When Dad died, George was about two or three years old.

Anyway, they met there, and then Dad met Mom and eventually they ended up getting married, but what happened was that Dad was one of four or five miners that got

out alive, out of a mine disaster. He lucked out. The five got out, but there were a number of them that died in the mine explosion. So he ended up in the hospital for some time, and when they got out, he said, "*Nos quedamos o nos vamos*. We're not going back. Let's go to California."

[00:06:21]

So they ended up in L.A., right downtown, and they were there during the Depression, up until '32 or '33, I don't know, and then Dad said, "I can't take this anymore," because everything was given to them. You had to go stand in lines to get bread. He said, "To hell with this. I'm going. I'm going. I'm going to go look for work."

So he came out to Camarillo and met a very loving gentleman, John Velarde. He was a mechanic at the only garage in Camarillo, and through him he made contact with farmers and he went to work for the Camarillos, the old man, and then eventually it was some of the others as the different seasons came along. When the spring was over and all of the crops that were picked up, the alfalfa, the lima beans, sugar beets, then came the walnut groves, the winter stuff.

So that was how they survived. I mean, you're talking about a week's pay of maybe ten, fifteen dollars. Eventually built a house on the Camarillo ranch, I think it was, and like all the little farmers, we had chickens and we had rabbits, and we, I guess, fed off of them. My mom was a good one for going out and finding mustard greens and all the natural stuff. She was very good at that. She cooked on a woodstove, which was great.

I used to follow my big brother around. I must have been about five to six years old, seven years old, and I had a job. I would set gopher traps, and as I caught gophers, I cut the tail off. They were dead, but we got 10 cents a tail. [laughs]

ESPINO: What did people use the tails for, do you know?

[00:09:23]

ARRIOLA: No. It was proof that we caught them, for the farmers. But we also had friends who irrigated alfalfa fields. Well, those suckers would float up whole, so they'd cut the tails for us too. [laughs] We never got rich on that, but it was some.

ESPINO: What about school? Did you attend schooling in Camarillo? Did you attend elementary school?

ARRIOLA: Yes, eventually I attended school. My teacher, my first teacher was Miss Lauterbach.

ESPINO: Wow, you remember her name.

ARRIOLA: Yes. She used to take us up in Camarillo Heights, take us to her place once a year to pick boysenberries. There was another teacher, I forget what her name was, Miss Jones or something, that was first or second grade, where in her classroom, you didn't speak any Spanish. "No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no." *Cabrona*.

ESPINO: Pull your hair? [laughter]

ARRIOLA: So we're there till 1942, the beginning of '42. There was a war, the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, and my brother by that time was—let's see. He must have been about sixteen, seventeen. My dad wasn't feeling good at all, so we moved to L.A. to my uncle's house, and there Con went to work in a defense plant, because dad was pretty sick. He had asthma. He had been affected by the mining.

You know downtown. You know how you come off the 10 from Pasadena, right down to the bottom? We lived right on the side there, Bernard Street, 508 Bernard Street, and I went to Castelar Street School, which was just down on College. It used to be Castelar. It's now Hill, I think.

[00:12:18]

So my brother went to work in a defense plant. My sisters were both—well, Rachel, the older one, was still going to Lincoln, and her closest friend, Henrietta, ends up marrying my brother eventually. [Spanish word]. Oh, I love my sister-in-law.

ESPINO: What's her last name?

ARRIOLA: Her last name was Williams.

ESPINO: Henrietta Williams?

ARRIOLA: Yes, William or Williamson, I don't know. I'll find out.

So we were there during those war years. It was really interesting for me because then I was nine, ten years old. Do you know where Little Joe's is?

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: Well, that was one of my hangouts. I used to sell gardenia corsages, gardenia corsages in front of Little Joe's. You know, we had the war going, so military guys and their girlfriends all used to go down to Chinatown to Little Joe's, and right across from Little Joe's was a nightclub with girls with cigars trays, and I'd stand in front of the place and I'd sell the guys gardenia corsages. I worked for a guy on the corner, Italians. They were marvelous. I always had ham, French rolls, Italian pastries. [laughs]

Then in 1945, my dad passed away. Those were the days when the deceased was brought to the home. So we had Dad home overnight, if I remember right. And what I

did all that time, because I used to get around the neighborhood all over, [unclear] for everything, there was a bakery right in front of us, not a little bakery, but a large bakery that produced bread for hundreds of people. It was a large bakery. But I got to know the guys in the back, so when Dad died, two or three times that night, Mom says, "Go back to the bakery. Get some more stuff." And I'd get coffeecakes. We had that. [cries]

ESPINO: Do you want me to pause it for a second?

[00:15:53]

ARRIOLA: No, no. Dad was buried at Calvary Cemetery. Eventually when Mom passed away in 1970, I had him brought to the Valley, and I put Mom and him together.

ESPINO: Oh, wow.

ARRIOLA: So they're here at Mission Cemetery.

Well, right after that, we moved to Van Nuys to move with some friends, because if you go by Castelar Street school on what is now Hill, but right next to the fence, a big Chinese church, that was a duplex there. That's where we were. My first job was on the corner at a grocery store. They knew me, so they hired me. *¿Cómo se llama?* They were Italian. So right after that, the Chinese bought out the area. They started buying, and so we moved with some friends to Van Nuys, and we were there maybe for about a year, yes, maybe a little longer. I don't remember. But it was a tight fit.

ESPINO: So there were how many siblings? How many brothers and sisters?

ARRIOLA: Well, they all kind of split up, went with different relatives.

ESPINO: After your dad died, your mom had to farm out your brothers and sisters?

ARRIOLA: Yes and no.

ESPINO: Where did you go?

ARRIOLA: I never left Mom.

ESPINO: You never lived with your mom?

[00:18:04]

ARRIOLA: I never left her. [cries]

ESPINO: Oh, you never left her. Can you maybe tell me who went with who and how many brothers and sisters you had?

ARRIOLA: Okay. When the family split up, Rachel went with a girlfriend. They opened up their own space. She worked for a bank. Gloria went with one of our cousins, with an aunt. Con, I don't know, he was out there someplace. He was such a *cabron*. [laughs] He never saw a girl that he didn't want to know. [laughs] Anyway, because he would work in a machine shop during the day, and then at night right on the corner of College and Hill now where the French hospital is, which is now the Asian Community Hospital, there was the Standard station, and we would work there at night. I would work with him. Yes, he was always hustling.

Eventually we got our own place and came back to L.A., and we lived over on Downey and Telegraph Road, right where Olympic and Telegraph cross each other. Anyway, I went to Ford Boulevard Street School.

ESPINO: I'm going to pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. You were telling me about your brother and who went with who. Your aunt took your sister?

ARRIOLA: Yes. So we went to live in East L.A. I went to Stevenson [phonetic] Junior High, and I was actually on the line between Kern and Stevenson. From my grammar

school, there was only two of us, myself and a girl, that went Stevenson. They all went to Kern. That year I was selected to be Joseph in the school Christmas play. I was so excited. On the twenty-fourth, I went home, I started throwing up green. I had a surgery for my appendix.

ESPINO: Oh, no.

[00:21:15]

ARRIOLA: Yes. So actually it was a couple days before that, and I ended up with appendix. So it's when they used to put ether in you. [unclear], "Papa, Papa, what's that scar there?"

"Oh, that was on Corregidor. I got bayoneted by the Japanese." I mean, I've got a scar on there.

ESPINO: Did they take you to the county hospital? Is that where you went?

ARRIOLA: Yes, and I was in there about a week, because they kind of monitor you pretty closely. Well, at that time, it was a pretty crude operation.

So then I went to Stevenson and I had [unclear] between El Barrio Nuevo and Little Valley and Mednik, all the gangs. I never got involved with any of them.

ESPINO: How did you avoid getting involved in gangs?

ARRIOLA: I just played it cool with everybody. There were a couple incidents where I got kind of close. We were having lunch, and this one guy had a homemade gun, just a pipe with rubber on it where you grabbed it. It had a—off a regular play gun. Anyway, we're eating and he's showing off, and it slipped out of his hand, and the gun went off. "Here, Ralph. Here Ralph." What am I [unclear]?

The coach, [unclear] Rizzo, Coach Rizzo, that guy must have been about ten foot tall and wider than a house, “What’s going on here, fellows?”

“Oh, knucklehead had a firecracker, Coach.” But luckily it didn’t hit anybody.

So I was a big guy, I was a big kid, and I was always getting picked on, but I never, never got into it with them. I was always able to stay out of it.

ESPINO: Did your mom talk to you about that, about staying out?

[00:24:25]

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: How did you know to stay away from them? You didn’t have your dad around.

ARRIOLA: No, but my brother, he grew up in the middle of the Alpine gang when the Alpine gang was big time, when Dog Town was big time, and he took care of all of them with gas stamps. [laughs] So he played it cool.

ESPINO: What is that? Gas stamps, did you say?

ARRIOLA: Well, during the war you couldn’t have anything unless you had a stamp, government stamp. You got so many stamps for gas every month, so many stamps for shoes, so many stamps for milk, so many stamps for bread. It was crazy.

ESPINO: Where did he get them from, do you know?

ARRIOLA: The federal government. I don’t know. There must have been a store or something.

ESPINO: To get the stamps?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: He wasn’t taking them and then selling them?

ARRIOLA: No. He'd be in Sing Sing. [laughs] He always ended up with one or two.

ESPINO: Oh, okay.

ARRIOLA: I think you could get like three or four gallons with one stamp, so he'd take care of them.

[00:25:54]

But it was just Mom, George, and myself. So Mom was very limited in her English, but eventually she learned some, enough to work in a factory. But I took care of everything, everything, from the time I was in sixth grade. That was one of the things that I hated the most. We ended up on welfare. I hated it. Ninety dollars a month, that might have been okay money in those years, but I hated it because I had to negotiate with everybody.

That affected me when I got out of high school. There was a social worker that said, "Ralph, I can get you into college." Even though in the eleventh grade when I went to sign up for one of the classes, the teacher looks at me and she says, "Ralph, what are you doing here?"

"Well, I want to find out about history."

"Yes, but you're not supposed to be in this class."

"Why?"

"Well, you're an M.R."

"What the hell is an M.R.?"

"Well, you're mentally retarded." *Andale*. Oh, it's always stuck with me. I figure somewhere along the lines in Camarillo, I was basically Spanish speaking that I got labeled. [cries] I didn't want to see Mom suffering anymore, so when I graduated

from high school, my brother out here in the Valley had a machine shop, so I came to work for him. I got the hell out of L.A. and came out here and worked. The Korean War was on, so we were producing stuff for the war, bomb ejector hooks.

[00:28:31]

We moved. We moved and we came out here, and for about five or six years—no, not even that long, about three or four years when another recession hit us, I went to Valley College, it had just opened up, and went there for one year. Then I said, “No, this is going to take too long,” so I went to Trade Tech.

ESPINO: I’m sorry for interrupting. So all those years, you didn’t know you were in special classes? Were you in regular classes with other kids?

ARRIOLA: I was in regular classes all that time. She was the only one that brought it up. Or maybe the—no, no, never. No.

ESPINO: What did you do? Did you go tell your mom?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Or did you just keep it to yourself?

ARRIOLA: No, I just kept it to myself, and it’s still with me.

ESPINO: Yes. Do you remember when you were in Camarillo, were the schools segregated there?

ARRIOLA: No, no, we were integrated. But Spanish speaking, no, no, no.

ESPINO: Not even with your first teacher?

ARRIOLA: Not even with anybody.

ESPINO: Nobody.

ARRIOLA: You had to get down and—and then there was a problem with me because as a child, I was three or four years old, I fell and almost cut my tongue off.

ESPINO: Oh, my goodness.

ARRIOLA: [unclear].

ESPINO: You couldn't really communicate because of your injury.

[00:30:28]

ARRIOLA: Maybe that's when they said I was mentally retarded. [laughs] I don't know. But it was there sometime.

ESPINO: It's not uncommon. Rudy Acuña told me that they wanted to classify him also as mentally retarded, but that his mom took him out of the public school and put him in private school, because she said, "My son's not retarded." So maybe your mom, I don't know if they did it without her permission, they just did it, they didn't even—who knows what happened.

ARRIOLA: Yes, they would do it without permission. So I came out to the Valley, went to work and went to Trade Tech. I spent two full years, and when I say two full years, because I went summer school, too, tool-and-die design and tool-and-die making, which was top of the grade of machinists, 3.90 an hour. [laughs] *Aye yai yai*, man.

At that shop, when I went to work at Poly Industries, it was organized by the UAW, and I became very involved with labor. But when I got out of high school, my brother was very involved in politics. 1956, I think it was, when Stevenson and Estes Kefauver ran, and he was for Estes Kefauver. He just went out to the gas company one day, there was a public meeting, and he liked what he heard and he got involved. So I got involved with him and stayed involved, always been involved in politics.

Then because I was working in the plants, well, politics and the union, they were all part of what I liked. Then my brother got involved with Sam Yorty. You know what Sam said? “Con, as soon as I can. I’ll put you on staff.” For the term of Sam Yorty, Con was a field deputy. My sister-in-law, Hank [phonetic], was the financial—everybody went for a pencil or whatever, but she controlled the money for it.

ESPINO: Before we keep moving forward, I’m wondering if you could tell me a bit more about your family life. Say, for example, what do you remember about your father? What stands out about him?

[00:33:55]

ARRIOLA: Oh, god, my daddy.

ESPINO: I know it was a short time.

ARRIOLA: I know when I was a kid, I followed Dad around all over the place. See, you’ve got to imagine only rows of trees around the crops and nothing else. When I walked through lima bean fields, that was a joy. When I walked through alfalfa fields when I went to see him break horses, that was cowboy time. [cries] He worked his ass for those fifteen bucks. Oh, he would talk to me all the time. I was at the age where Con had grown and George hadn’t come around yet, so I had Daddy to myself. It was working out there with him. Well, I wasn’t working, I was playing, but being with him. He used to work damn near all the ranches in Camarillo. When one wasn’t producing something, he’d go to the next one.

He’d get around and talk to people, and he was very trusting. All he would talk about was his years as a young man, because I think the family history could be that Dad’s mother, she got hooked up with one of the guys close to the family or kind of a

distant relative, and she had that, but she was, like, ostracized. She was an embarrassment, I guess, so Dad was kind of an orphan. Tio Melchor took him under his wing and acted as his dad all those years. But then when Dad reached an age of, I guess, maybe fifteen, somewhere in there, he went to work for sheepherders, and they would come all the way to the U.S. So he became kind of a loner. I just remembered he was born in 1893. So he'd be more than 100 years old right now.

ESPINO: So was it Miami in Arizona, Globe or one of those towns?

[00:37:28]

ARRIOLA: No, no, no. It was—

ESPINO: Morenci?

ARRIOLA: Jerome. And I went there one year with my mom, and she showed us where she had lived, and as we drove, started to come into the town, she said, "*Para, parate. Te voy a ensena. Mirá, ya no está la casa en donde vivíamos.*" Because it was a two-lane road up a hill, up a hill, coming down, over, up another one, and where the mines were. They were closed by then, but it was an 1800 town. It was everything that you would see in a John Wayne movie about it. It's still there. And I never heard them fight. I never heard them argue.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: Dad was about—well, let's see. Let's see. Ninety-three, that's seven, and six—thirteen years older than my mom. She was born in 1906.

He had learned to cook with the sheepherders. During the war years, he would cook big chunks of *lonja* to get the lard for cooking and stuff for people. They'd come over and they'd sit there, because it would get around that he'd do all this stuff.

Epifanio would come over on Saturdays, a real close friend, and we would play 21, and I always won. [laughter]

ESPINO: How about education? Did he talk to you about school or about—

[00:40:12]

ARRIOLA: No, never went to school, but I'd buy him *La Opinion* every day.

ESPINO: He was literate.

ARRIOLA: Yes. So was Mom. Mom learned to play the cards, and ladies would come over to the house. [laughs] *Aye*, Mom.

ESPINO: So did you feel that—because you mentioned the owner of the ranch, Mr.

Camarillo or Don Camarillo. I can't remember his first name, but—

ARRIOLA: Adolfo.

ESPINO: Adolfo. Did you see him as Mexican, or how would you describe him? Or Spanish, like from Spain?

ARRIOLA: No, Mexican. He might have been—I don't know. I never identified him that I know of as anything else. All he had were daughters, had two or three daughters.

That's where they get the story like the Dominguezes. I don't know how true it is. My mom says, "*Los Dominguez eran parientes de nosotros. Cuando nos venimos para California, una de ellas ve y visita la familia Dominguez porque ellos están.*" At that time, they were big land owners. But we never did. She never wanted to hook up.

But Adolfo, no, he was Spanish speaking Mexican. I don't know him as anything else. One of his famous things was he raised white horses.

ESPINO: White horses?

ARRIOLA: Famous for raising white horses in the Rose Parade all the time. Dad would help break them when they were colts. It used to be that in front of the ranch house—this would go back to the Indians, but *habian molcajetes*, around kind of decoration of the front of the house. Well, these things are stone. I'll show it to you one day. We ended up with one.

ESPINO: From that time?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Wow.

[00:43:15]

ARRIOLA: I keep holding it. I keep wanting to go back to the ranch and give it back.

[laughs] That was Mom's. She made everything out of that thing.

So, yes, the old man was very generous, very—I mean, he was a big deal to me, so he was kind of a scary old guy, but he wasn't scary.

ESPINO: Do you remember indigenous people? Indigenous people are known to have worked some of those big ranches, like Indians.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: Did you grow up with them around?

ARRIOLA: No, no. It was mostly there were—yes, we knew a lot of them but never got close. The one that was the closest, well, my *padrino*, [unclear], came from Mexico [Spanish phrase]. He's a little guy. And why? Because he would take from the bigger peaches, he would take the bone and make *changitos*. How he knew how to carve that? It looked just like a monkey, you know. God, I wish I'd have known him better. Mike Ceballos, the next closest to him, his wife, Adelita, they were very close, very dear.

Around 1941, '42, sometime in there—do you know that restaurant right on the corner of Broadway and Sunset, the Mexican restaurant?

ESPINO: El Cholo?

ARRIOLA: He went there to eat one night, and some sort of [Spanish word] shot him and killed him. He was ready to leave within days to Mexico. He was a Yaqui Indian. He was a big son-of-a-gun. I remember Mike. He was big. [cries]

ESPINO: It makes you sad when you think about that. Can I turn it on?

[00:45:58]

ARRIOLA: Yes, go ahead. Adelita, his wife, she's a little lady, used to make the best damn beans in town, but they had so much damn lard in them, you know, when they're refried—oh!

ESPINO: Yes, they taste like cream. They taste like cream, like butter.

ARRIOLA: We'd get together. Usually on a Saturday night, they'd slaughter a pig and they'd all take and cut it up and share the lard and share the meat. There'd be a bed with about six or seven kids laying there in ten different ways. [laughs] They'd be playing music out there and drinking their beer and eating. It was wonderful.

ESPINO: Sounds beautiful. Were you sad to leave? When you had to come back to Los Angeles, were you sad? Was your family sad to leave that lifestyle?

ARRIOLA: Sure, sure, but, you know, they had to go from—I don't know what they got paid, but I can't imagine that maybe they were making two bucks an hour, even in Lockheed and other places. But it was great. I mean, as a kid it's great, but for your parents, why, that's a hard life. I mean, Mom, every morning Dad would get up first and start the fire in the woodstove, and then she'd get the oatmeal going. We all lived on

oatmeal in those days, with goat's milk, no refrigeration, just ice in the icebox if you had an icebox. They'd make sausage from the blood, blood sausage. They just knew. I mean, they came from Mexico. That was all their life. So they cooked a whole damn pig. It was delicious.

ESPINO: Sounds incredible. Sounds wonderful. So many skills that people don't necessary value, but it takes a thinking person to be able to know how to do all that and figure things out and make ends meet.

[00:48:46]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: So when you were growing up in Camarillo, do you remember any issue about race, about being Mexican, and how—

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, there was. There was. The sheriff, his name was—I don't know what the hell his name was, but "*Hay viene manos secas.*"

ESPINO: "*Manos secas.*" [laughter]

ARRIOLA: But he was in the community all the time, so I never heard of too many problems, other than guys getting drunk on Saturday night and having a little fight. Whenever there was a fight, there's usually a knife someplace. When I was maybe nineteen years old, I got put in jail.

ESPINO: When you were in Los Angeles?

ARRIOLA: No, at a fiesta. I was with Roy, my closest dear little friend, an *Americano*, and his dad was from India. There was a grandpa and his dad and El Shorty, and Shorty was a very close dear friend of our family, but he liked to fool around. So it was the sixteenth of September, the queen and her girls were on the stage, you know, and we

were walking through underneath, and he got a stick and started poking it. [laughs]
“Hello, young men,” we were 8 or 9, “I want to talk to you.” So he got us by the hand,
and they had a little jail set up. You know, it was just enough for a kid to be worried, but
they would charge a guy a dollar for doing something, and they raised money going to
jail.

[00:51:00]

Oh, my god, I remember it so clear, there’s an old store in Moore Park [phonetic],
the Mexican store, and the old man there was kind of the big-time guy with the fiesta.
Dad would take me and we’d stop by the store, and I’d go in and I could look at the guy
and know what he was thinking. [laughs] But those fiestas, it was just a community.
They closed the street off.

ESPINO: Wow. There were that many Mexicanos living there? Because 16th de
Septiembre is a very big holiday.

ARRIOLA: Well, they’d come in from other ranches, too, you know. But it was the
same with the Christmas. Everybody came there. It looked like a big crowd to me, but I
don’t know. I don’t know how many, three, four hundred people.

ESPINO: You said you were nineteen. Were you nineteen or nine when you got arrested
at the 16th?

ARRIOLA: Nine.

ESPINO: Nine, okay.

ARRIOLA: Nine years old. Well, it was a make-believe arrest, you know.

ESPINO: Right, right. What did you see as the biggest differences when you moved to
Los Angeles? What do you remember were the biggest changes for you?

ARRIOLA: Well, going to school right there at Castelar School, we were Mexican and Chinese, because there were a lot of Chinese there then too. We had very well-known Chinese actors, three or four of them. I don't know if you ever saw some of the war movies from World War II. There was a boy—the kid's name was Ducky Louie. He appeared with John Wayne and one of the more famous actors, Latino, in a war movie, and he was part of our class. My best friend across the street was Chinese, Donald, and I used to see him every once in a while when I went downtown, I'd go by Chinatown and he'd be working in Chinatown doing things. So I kept in touch till about nineteen, twenty years old.

[00:54:08]

When I worked at the gas station with my brother, there was a Chinese gentleman who had a vegetable farm in San Gabriel, and we went there. It was all Chinese vegetables that he raised. But I went and it was just fun, just fun helping him. I didn't get paid, but just going out there was a long trip for me. And working on the farm, wow, that was fun.

ESPINO: How about the teachers?

ARRIOLA: I had a wonderful teacher. One of them, I don't remember the others, but this one—what was her name? Walnuts, hell, we used to pick them by the hundred pounds, you know, no big deal. Well, for that Christmas, I said, "Mom, what do I take to the teacher? What do I take to teacher?"

"Ay, mijo, no tenemos. [unclear]. Llevale nueces."

"Walnuts?" [laughs] A bag about like that, full of walnuts. My god, she was just elated. I mean, [Spanish phrase]. I'm not sure she made cookies to bring them to school,

but she would just—it was a big deal. Yes, walnuts are a big deal if you try and buy them, especially now. Oh, it surprised the hell out of me. “Oh, okay. Next time I’ll bring you a 100-pound sack.” [laughter] Yes, she was great. I always had good teachers.

ESPINO: So you don’t feel—some people that I’ve interviewed talk about even in the elementary school, at the elementary level, felt discrimination, felt the racism towards Mexican people. You don’t remember—

[00:56:55]

ARRIOLA: I don’t remember any of it, I really don’t, except for, “No Spanish. No, no, no, no, no.”

ESPINO: But that even seems more gentle than being whacked with a ruler or swatted with a paddle.

ARRIOLA: I always got along well with teachers. I don’t know. I’ve always been able to win people over. I just had that kind of personality. In the third grade, I had Mr. Denny, and I got so much talking-to from him that I think back, was he kind of weirdo? No, not that I—you know, just very friendly. I’m trying to think if there was anything that ever happened that I felt discriminated against. No, no.

ESPINO: Did you have any African Americans in your elementary school?

ARRIOLA: We had one little boy, [Spanish term], one little chubby guy. I felt so sorry for him.

ESPINO: Because he was chubby or because he was the only—

ARRIOLA: Yes, he was a little chubby and he always had a runny nose, and the teacher would bring Kleenex. He was suffering. I often wonder whatever happened to him.

ESPINO: Yes, I bet.

ARRIOLA: I mean, yes, there must have been a few families in Compton, *pero* around Echo Park and around that area, Hollywood, they were the only ones.

Then there was the issue with the shoes. You had to have stamps to buy shoes. Well, we didn't have stamps to buy me shoes, but the teachers had a pile of shoes that they got donated, just people got rid of old shoes. So my brother took me over there, "Hey, he needs a pair of shoes." So we looked around. I end up with—what do you call the black-and-white ones?

ESPINO: Oxfords?

ARRIOLA: Oxfords.

ESPINO: Or wing tails?

[01:00:21]

ARRIOLA: Well, oxfords. And I'm not going to wear these shoes to the school. I got the guys from Alpine and from [unclear] and all over. I can't. I hid out alongside of the French hospital in some bushes. I hid out all day, and finally at three o'clock, I went home, but I went home crying. Mom said, "What the hell? What's going on?"

"I can't go to school in these shoes, Mom. I just can't go." [laughs] So I painted them black and dyed them, so it was okay.

ESPINO: That's clever. Oh, jeez. So did they dress different? How would you recognize a gang member back then? Do you remember what they looked like?

ARRIOLA: Sometimes the kids would have—what do they call them—the *pachuquito* pants, but not often. But you just knew. You just knew where they came from.

The old Alpine Theater is still there on Figueroa and Alpine. It isn't used anymore, but it's still there. We used to go to the show there, and one day this guy walks up to me when I was in line, and he's got a knife in his hand and he says, "I need 15 cents. Do you have 15 cents?"

"Oh, man, I only have enough for my show."

"Why don't you look again. I need 15 cents."

"Let me look around. Oh, yeah, here." The Alpine gang used to sit on the concrete deal across the street on Figueroa, they would sit there all the time, so we knew who was and who wasn't.

ESPINO: So there was nothing distinguishing about their hair or—

[01:02:59]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, ducktails.

ESPINO: They had ducktails?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Tattoos or anything like that?

ARRIOLA: Purple shirts. Maroon shirts.

ESPINO: Oh, really?

ARRIOLA: Yes, khakis and maroon shirts were the thing. Everybody wanted to wear that. I even bought some.

ESPINO: Then you get to Stevenson Junior High School, so you move?

ARRIOLA: Yes, we moved out to East—well, from Van Nuys we moved out there, and, luckily, in that one little area where we lived there wasn't that much gang activity. Like I

said, Ford Boulevard actually split us from some of the area beyond Ford going into Mandick [phonetic] and up into the other areas, the projects and stuff.

ESPINO: Was your mom very religious? Did she have or practice any specific religion?

ARRIOLA: No. My sister Rachel, she would take me to the Placita Church. She'd baby me. Eventually, when she moved to her friend's house, I would go along every Sunday to the Placita Church. As you walk in—you've been there? You know, as you walk in from the side into the church, there's like a little bench on the—that's where I would sit.

ESPINO: Do you remember what you liked about it? What drove you to the church?

[01:04:56]

ARRIOLA: Just Rachel, she worked across the street from us there on Castelar in a nun's nunnery where they had children born to unwed mothers, and Rachel worked for them. She was just a wonderful person, very loving. Gloria was the athletic type, but Rachel was very loving.

ESPINO: Do you know why your mother didn't go to church?

ARRIOLA: Well, she would. She would encourage us, but I don't know. I just don't know. I just don't know.

ESPINO: Did she ever remarry?

ARRIOLA: No. That's what kind of brought it to my mind the other day, why didn't—she was thirty-eight when Dad died. Actually, she was a young woman. I know there was two, three guys around, just friends of the family that would have. There was Epifanio, Dad's best friend. I don't know that he had any intent, but just the name Epifanio. Then this other one that I think had an interest in mom, Epifanio. Strange name. But she never did marry. She was young. Wow.

ESPINO: Then what high school did you go to? Remind me again.

ARRIOLA: From Stevenson, again there were only two of us that went to Garfield. The rest went to Roosevelt.

ESPINO: Does anything stand out for you about your experience at Garfield?

ARRIOLA: The thing that stands out the most is how my coach in my eleventh year, how he screwed up at the ball game with me. With me, not the rest of the goddamn forty-five guys, only me. We're beating the hell out of Roosevelt, which is a big deal, right? He's calling the guys, "Come in here, guys!" He turned around and he looks at me and he says, "Ralph!" The game ended. He said, "Jeez, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Next year." That was a hard one. That was a hard one, as you can tell. [laughs]

[01:09:01]

ESPINO: But were there any classes that you enjoyed?

ARRIOLA: Well, because I grew up with my brother in machine shop, drafting. I think at one time I wanted to be a draftsman because I understood prints. If I was going to manufacture the bottle here, I had to read prints and do a layout. What do I do first? What kind of material do I use? So I had all that. When I went to Trade Tech, the teacher made me the class foreman, because I had all of that in the workplace.

ESPINO: So you liked working with your hands, you liked drawing.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: What about math?

ARRIOLA: That wasn't my favorite. We never had the early, early education into math. I mean, my brother was using it all the time. I don't know where he picked it up, but he was doing shop math but also trig and geometry. He was pretty good at it.

I don't know if I talked about the incident with the pellet gun. I was at Stevenson. I had come home one day. I was sewing a button on a pea coat that I had, and I had bought a pellet gun without telling Mom and left the damn thing loaded, quarter-inch pellet round BB, about this size.

ESPINO: Quite a big one, not a little tiny BB.

[01:11:29]

ARRIOLA: No. And my brother walks in and he says, "Ralph." I mean, he was five or six years old. "Put your hands up." Pow! And it hit over here, but he was over here by the doorway. It hit me and it went underneath. It's there, underneath my nose there. It's still there. But it blinded me right off the bat. I still remember watching that eye just go. You know what? In that Castillo book, the hospital or the doctor's office is in there. It's a picture of the area, Whittier Boulevard.

Then from there I went to—they called a neighbor and he took me to the doctor's office. Then they took me to General Hospital downtown, and they put me in a little room, probably no bigger than the doorway, with a restroom, a closet restroom, to about here. There was a window, but they covered it with black covers, and the door. For two weeks, 243, 240-some penicillin shots every three hours. My arms were killing me and my butt was hurting. At the end of that, they said, "Well, you're okay. You're going to be okay, but you're going to be blind." So that was always a problem with me, come to think of it, especially when it came—

ESPINO: How old were you?

ARRIOLA: Fourteen. It became a problem when it came to being aggressive with young women—I don't mean aggressive. Just being friends. Through the lack of use, this eye pulled over this way, so, you know, it was—

ESPINO: So it made you self-conscious?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: How about with your studies? Did it affect your—

ARRIOLA: You know what? It's been more lately that when I'm reading, I usually can only see about that much, and that affects you because when you read, you can usually see the whole thing and read, but I have trouble doing that, and it's been something that I have to slow down and take my time with that.

ESPINO: How long do you think it took you to adjust? Because you're right, before you would see a wider parameter and then you're only seeing part.

[01:15:10]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Well, it was my high school coach, Coach Thomson, and he said, "Ralph, I need a doctor's permit for you to be able to play football because you only have one eye. What if you lose it?" On a football team, in those days, nobody wore a mask. I was the only guy with a mask. So he says, "You have to get a permit from the doctor."

So I talked to Dr. Crawford. [cries]

ESPINO: Do you want me to turn it off, pause it?

ARRIOLA: No. "Dr. Crawford," I told him, "I want to play football this coming year. I'm on the team, but he won't let me play."

"Well, that's good."

"Okay, *cabron*." [laughs]

When he went in the other room, I got a doctor's *chingadera* [unclear], wrote a note, signed his name, gave it to the coach. He said, "Okay, but you got to wear a mask."

I put on there, "Must wear a mask." [laughs] So I played.

It was a terrible year for us, because Coach Thomson had tried so hard that last year. We had one hell of a team. But the rest of us, two years—you've got three years in high school, and two years we were kissing ass to the seniors. We lost the game, the big game with Manual Arts, we lost it, and that really hurt him. So the next year, we might as well have been tenth graders all the time. We never had the coaching that we should have. So halfway through the season, half the guys quit. They quit. We lost the goddamn game to Roosevelt, those bastards, seven to six. *Aye yai yai*.

ESPINO: You weren't worried about losing your other eye?

[01:18:00]

ARRIOLA: No, no. Probably should have been, but I was playing football. [laughs]

ESPINO: So then you didn't have a girlfriend in high school? Or did you?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: You think it was because of your eye?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Actually, the girl that I took to my senior prom was somebody from Van Nuys, part of the family, more or less.

ESPINO: Did you ever think about going to college when you were in high school?

Because you had mentioned that your—

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, sure, I did, but because of being on welfare, I mean, those four or five years that I took care of Mom or the money for Mom, I didn't want to go through that bullshit anymore. And the social worker, "Ralph, I can get you into college."

I said, “No, I’m going to work. I’m going to make some money.”

ESPINO: What was the worst thing about being on welfare? You mentioned that it wasn’t enough money, but what were some of the other?

ARRIOLA: All the crap that you had to put up with.

ESPINO: Like what, for example?

ARRIOLA: Every time you got a different social worker, you got, “Well, how are you spending your \$90? Can you show me how? How much did you spend for food?” I mean, even then, ninety bucks. You had gas, water, and whatever else. I didn’t want it.

ESPINO: Would they come to your house?

[01:20:06]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Then Christmas, east of Ford Boulevard, which was more or less the dividing line between everything going toward the Latino area, Ford Boulevard and that area of East L.A. was [unclear]. There were Anglos. So Christmastime, Bobby and his mom—Bobby, Bobby, Bobby, Bobby. [cries] They would come and leave us, I don’t know, maybe a turkey and all kinds of goods, you know. Well, he was my classmate, and it was embarrassing. It was hard. So I didn’t want Mom to go through that. I wanted something better for her.

When I came out here, I was working in the machine shop, and this guy says, “Buy my house, Ralph. I got a little house in San Fernando, two-bedroom, man. Buy it from me.”

“Well, jeez, how much do you want for it?”

“Thirteen thousand. Just give me 500 and you can take it over.” And the guy went to Reno. So that became Mom’s house. It was Mom’s house. [cries] I gave

Mom—what Dad couldn't do, what my brother couldn't or wouldn't, I did it. I was about maybe twenty-five.

ESPINO: You were young. That opportunity just fell in your lap like that?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I worked with the guy and we were friends. He was anxious to get out of the Valley. He was fed up with it. He was an older guy. So he left.

ESPINO: So you gave him a deposit and then you paid him—

[01:23:04]

ARRIOLA: Five hundred bucks, that was it.

ESPINO: For the whole house, and then monthly payments?

ARRIOLA: Yes, and then I paid like \$110 a month. After Mom died, it was my sister Gloria, it was hers, but then she got married and then moved someplace, and then all hell broke loose. I had gotten married by then, and we were in the middle of a divorce, and I sold it for \$60,000, which was pretty good.

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: I'm taking care of Gloria and I took care of Mom. I don't give a shit what my brother thinks or—oh, crazy things, that stuff. When I say crazy things, that's for a psychologist or psychiatrist to ask. [laughs]

ESPINO: Right, right. You said your mom started to work in a factory. Did she get involved in any union activity?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Was she involved in, like, local politics, voting?

ARRIOLA: No, nothing.

ESPINO: Roybal campaign, those kinds of things? Community service organization?

ARRIOLA: No, nothing like that. Nothing like that.

ESPINO: You mentioned last time that you—I think I’m remembering correctly—that your brother got you into politics very early because he was always involved.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Can you remind me of that story?

ARRIOLA: Well, Estes Kefauver had come to Van Nuys to the gas company. The gas company had a community room, so he came there to speak about his campaign. So my brother went over there, and he liked Estes, so he got involved with his campaign. Then when it came time to go to Chicago for the national convention, he went, and he went as a Kefauver delegate. But when they came back from Chicago, we were not involved with Adlai Stevenson, because he won the nomination. So Stevenson became our guy.

ESPINO: That was the first political campaign you were—

[01:26:21]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Did you work for him, or what kind of things did you do?

ARRIOLA: Oh, community volunteers, you know, at headquarters.

ESPINO: Can you describe your responsibilities?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, it was a different time. You didn’t have the big consultants. Like now, politics hasn’t got a—they don’t give about people in the community. I mean, they really don’t give a damn whether they’re involved or not. Everything can be bought. But then, then a campaign for assemblyman was run for about \$15,000 with hundreds of volunteers. We all worked our ass off for them. Now you’ve

got to have a million dollars to be a halfway decent candidate for Assembly, and all the other campaigns are outrageous.

But it was a wonderful time, because we were involved with Helen Greenberg, “Mrs. Democrat” in the Valley at the time. Her old man was Sam Greenberg, who had Sam’s U-Drive [phonetic], multi, multi, multi rich. My assignment was to watch over Helen. When there was a party or a convention, I was a bodyguard. I got orders to make sure she didn’t get overly drunk. [laughs] Don’t put that in there.

ESPINO: It’s already in there, but you can take it out of the transcript. I mean, if you want to delete it, you can delete it from the recorder.

[01:28:21]

ARRIOLA: What a lady. We used to damn near live in her house for everything. There was always meetings going on in Helen’s house around politics.

ESPINO: This was closer to the seventies, are we talking?

ARRIOLA: Well, it started in the late sixties through the seventies.

ESPINO: Can you walk me back then when you moved back to the Valley? Was that when you’re going to Trade Tech, you’re still living in Los Angeles?

ARRIOLA: No, I was traveling in the morning all the way to Trade Tech, in the mornings by car.

ESPINO: From here, from the Valley?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Okay. Because your brother opens a machine shop, and is that in—

ARRIOLA: That was earlier, yes.

ESPINO: Then you moved back here to work in the machine shop with him?

ARRIOLA: Well, the machine shop, when I got out of high school, I went to work in the machine shop. I did that, worked there till the Korean War ended, and then I went to school, to Trade Tech. I was living here in the Valley, and then in maybe 1960 I went to work for Poly Industries, and that's when I got involved with the union. Then I was working in the machine shop, and I got to know a lot of people and I was able to build confidence in people in politics—because I learned the politics real quick, and the guys especially in labor trusted me. So when it came time to get an assignment with the UAW, I was not always the most liked guy in things. First of all, I came from a very small company, 100 workers, and I had to deal with Chevrolet, 2,000, and Body Fisher, another 1,500, and all these guys at the local union didn't like me. "What the hell do you think you're going to do? You've only got 100. You don't mean anything."

[01:31:18]

"Oh, yeah? [Spanish phrase]."

A couple of times I pulled in about sixty of my people and we had a meeting around some issue, and we beat them all because they didn't pull out their people. So that made them even madder. [laughs]

Then I started the Chicano Caucus, and that really pissed them off. It wasn't antiunion. It wasn't anti our caucus. It was a Latino thing. I mentioned before, there was 1,046 staff positions, 150-some blacks, and five Latinos. That just wasn't acceptable for me, so I did—I found it the other day—I did a paper on the UAW. It's so simple, I mean, but it was all of the words of Walter Reuther. So I wasn't going to create something new, it's already been said, and pushed it to the point where it actually met

with us because we threatened them. I found the telegrams that said, “Meet with us or we’ll picket you.”

ESPINO: Oh, I’d love to see that. I’d love to see that.

ARRIOLA: Let’s go to my garage.

ESPINO: You want to stop and stop it here? Because I’d like to get more into the UAW next time and focus on that.

ARRIOLA: I’ll prepare everything for the UAW.

[01:33:06]

ESPINO: Also I do want to ask you just a couple of things about the war before we move on, and that is if you remember having some sort of position or your family having a position on the war, about the Nazis, about the internment? Do you remember what the belief was in your home growing up during that period?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, they were all American. My cousin Ralph Arriola landed at the landings that took place—I can’t even think of it right now—the landings that took place at Omaha Beach and all of that. He’s still alive. I really would like to talk to him. But he was there. He was there. The war, we were all Americans. My brother Con didn’t get taken because by that time Dad had gotten very sick and then passed away. Because he was only the adult male, they let him stay. They wouldn’t take him.

ESPINO: Did he want to go?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: He did?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. We were all stupid. [laughs] Out of high school, six or seven of us ended up—well, they wouldn’t take me, only one eye, but I went to register.

ESPINO: You did?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Yes, that's in the body of the young man. I don't give a damn who you are. I mean, look at Eddie [phonetic], that little bastard. All the tattoos he's got on his body, they're all Marine. [cries] He was a sergeant, got killed. He was a very popular guy, very popular, even in the Marine Corps. When he got killed, we had a big, big—the church in the Valley but out in—I can't even think of it right now.

ESPINO: I think it's maybe you're getting tired, because we've been talking for an hour and a half.

[01:36:25]

ARRIOLA: So, anyway, I went to the funeral.

ESPINO: So he was local. His sergeant was from California?

ARRIOLA: Yes, but he was really loved. Jeez. [cries] [unclear]. You know how they stick the rifle in the ground for a fallen forward. Sergeant, Sergeant—I can't think of what it right now—he's got a cross on his back, one love only, Marine Corps. [unclear].

ESPINO: So how did you feel when he decided to join when he wanted to join?

ARRIOLA: I got so angry.

ESPINO: You did?

ARRIOLA: Yes. He was still in high school. He said, "Dad, I'm going to graduate in a couple weeks, but I've got to tell you, I signed up today for the Marine Corps."

So I went to the Marine Corps and I argued with them. I said, "I don't want him to be a damn—." There's a term used for a Marine when he first goes in. "I don't want that. I don't want him put in. I want him to become a mechanic, helicopter mechanic."

"Oh, man, we don't know if he can pass the tests."

“Well, I don’t either, but you’re going to give it to him and see.” Well, he passed the test, so that’s how he went.

The way it happens, the Marine Corps picks up the guys. Three o’clock in the morning, a wagon pulls up. Knock, knock, knock. “Andrés Arriola, are you ready?” We were all sitting in the living room at three o’clock in the morning waiting for them.

[cries] Five, six years, I would sit here and look out the window, waiting for a goddamn Marine Corps to show up. Luckily, it didn’t. He ended up with a Costa Riqueno. What a marvelous young man. He still calls me Dad.

ESPINO: Sweet.

[01:39:24]

ARRIOLA: He almost became part of the guard of the president. This guy, he’s something else. We just took him in the family. He’s part of the family. He’s something else. It was a hard six years.

ESPINO: Oh, I’m sure.

ARRIOLA: What is it you end up with when you get too nervous and your body, you break out?

ESPINO: Hives?

ARRIOLA: Not hives, the other.

ESPINO: A rash, you mean, when you break out in a rash?

ARRIOLA: It’s advertised in the TV now.

ESPINO: Not shingles?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Shingles, you got. Oh, that’s painful.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: My dad had that.

ARRIOLA: It was hell. I was very involved with the Antiwar Movement.

ESPINO: You were showing me those pictures, so I'm wondering how it must have been for you. You didn't agree with our involvement. He was in the Middle East?

ARRIOLA: No, hell, no. Hell, no. [cries] I mean, 58,000 guys died, almost 10,000 Latinos.

ESPINO: But you didn't try to convince him not to go?

[01:41:22]

ARRIOLA: Oh, it was too late. He was already signed up. It was already too late.

Now, my son Victor, he's a bloody goddamn fascist dog. [laughs]

ESPINO: Oh, no.

ARRIOLA: A member of the NRA. He's a goddamn—he's still a Democrat, but I think he votes Republican. [laughs] I don't talk to him about politics. He's so damned conservative. I swear to god, I think just to be anti Ralph.

ESPINO: Jeez. Well, I want to talk more about this next time, but I also want to talk about—I don't think that we really got to how your parents became patriotic. How did they embrace the United States during World War II and then the Korean War came?

ARRIOLA: I just figured Dad came here because there was nothing for him in Mexico.

A little thing on that, I always thought that Pancho Villa was a goddamn bandit and a murdering son of a bitch. Why? Because we left Mexico through the backdoor. He was looking for him. [laughs] I use that as a joke, you know.

ESPINO: You didn't have any romantic views about the revolution or Mexico?

ARRIOLA: No, no, no, no. Mom and my grandma and grandpa, Mom says, told us and gave us money to get the hell out of Mexico. When they got to the border, you know how they used to pay a penny to get across, they paid their penny and they become citizens. [laughs]

ESPINO: And they never took you back? You never went back to travel or to see relatives?

[01:43:32]

ARRIOLA: I've never been to Mexico itself.

ESPINO: Never.

ARRIOLA: I mean, I've been to TJ and the coastal crap.

ESPINO: Yes, Baja.

ARRIOLA: Yes, Baja. I think Helen and I went to one of the other fancy places.

ESPINO: So you didn't grow up with a strong pride in being Mexican, is that what you're saying?

ARRIOLA: No, oh, no.

ESPINO: Can you maybe help me understand that?

ARRIOLA: No, I grew up with a love for my favorite three songs: the National Anthem, our National Anthem, the French National Anthem, and the Mexican National Anthem.

Those are my three. [laughs] I grew up loving Mexico. How? Because of my mom and dad. Oh, yes, they were patriotic, but not in an open patriotic way, no.

This is just a very dear—I hope he's still alive—dear friend of mine, my brother's best friend, Ramon—anyway, "Jigs," we called him. He stayed with us after World War II. He was in the Navy. "Ralph, don't you ever forget who you are. You're a Chicano."

[laughs] So I had this guy giving it to me through the late forties, yes, through the late forties and early fifties. He stayed with us for about ten years. But he was all Chicano. I mean, I would loved to have seen him with the goddamn Navy guys, because he'd have kicked ass if anybody— [laughs] So, yes, I had that kind of influence from him and never a nasty word about being here in America. My brother put the Navy suit on, Jigs' Navy suit on, and from there always he always wanted—he became very patriotic, only he couldn't get a suit because the girls liked it. [laughs] That's how far my brother's patriotism went.

[01:46:27]

ESPINO: That's funny. Okay. Let's stop it here, and we'll pick it up next time.

[End of September 26, 2013 interview]

SESSION 2 (October 7, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 7. I'm interviewing Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando, California.

You were remembering some incidents of racism from your early youth, childhood and youth. Do you want to talk about that? We can start there.

[00:00:18]

ARRIOLA: You know, you asked me if I was aware of any racism last time we talked, and at that time I really didn't remember kind of any of it, but as I thought about it the last few days, there was. There was racism, and it was pretty open. I mean, just starting out with the biggest was the Zoot Suit Riots. I mean, was in the middle of the Alpine gang, not as a member of it, but as a kid in the neighborhood. I mentioned to you before that when my brother had a night off from work and he wanted to go to the show, we ended up at the Hawaii Theater in Hollywood and I remember this sign on the damn ticket office, "Mexicans, Tuesday night only." And we didn't show up on a Tuesday night, so we couldn't get in. So there was incidents, and we go along, we'll talk more about it, but, yes, there's more to that than I put it all together yet, but I will. I will have better comments and more memorable stuff that I can talk about at a later date.

ESPINO: Do you remember if it impacted you then at that moment, or is this you looking back at what you remember?

ARRIOLA: This is looking back. I don't know that it impacted me at all at the time. I can think about it, why are we being—why not us? Why is that sign up for us? "Don't worry about it, Ralph. Just forget it," my son said.

ESPINO: Your brother said.

[00:02:54]

ARRIOLA: Yes. But, yes, I think I mentioned before that there was one black kid in our classroom, and I said I wish I knew where he was, because he went through a lot of stuff at school.

ESPINO: You mean racist things?

ARRIOLA: Yes, comments. And he was such a sensitive kid that I'm sure it really bothered him. Yes, I'd like to talk about all of that later on.

ESPINO: Okay. You mentioned somebody last time that ended up living with you. You said he became like part of your family.

ARRIOLA: Jigs. That's Ramon, my brother's best friend. Ray. They called him Jigs. I've tried to find him, and he lives in Oxnard. I found a picture of him.

ESPINO: That's not far away. That's pretty close. But you said something about he told you to be proud of who you are.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, he was always saying it to me, even back then, "Remember, Ralph, remember you're a Chicano. A Chicano. And don't ever forget it and don't ever be ashamed of it." And I never forgot those words from him.

ESPINO: And he used those words?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: I didn't realize that people—well, I know some people used "Chicano" back then in the forties and fifties, but other people referred to Mexican Americans as Spanish Americans or Mexicans. It wasn't common to be—

[00:04:53]

ARRIOLA: Not him. “You’re a Chicano.”

ESPINO: How about the impression you got from the *pachuco* culture? Do you remember anything from their dress or their behavior?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, my brother, he didn’t run around with the groups. He was always a big lover boy. I mean, he went to all of the nightclubs that were in town at that time. I can’t think of them, but I thought about them the other day. So Con was very involved. Like I mentioned, we would run the gas station on College and, at the time, Castelar, but now it’s Hill, and the little gas stamps, he always managed to find a few extra ones, and all the guys would come in, “Hey, man, can you help us? Have you got a stamp?” So he would help them out. So he had a lot of buddies. He had two or three that would come over and they were always dressed in baggy pants. I forget what they call them.

ESPINO: The zoot suit?

ARRIOLA: Yes. They wore these silly hats sometimes too.

ESPINO: You thought they were silly?

ARRIOLA: Well, the whole thing was a little funny. [laughs]

ESPINO: Okay. So is this you talking about looking back or at that time did you think they were silly and that—

ARRIOLA: At that time. At that time. Look at the guys, you know. I thought they were a little funny. [laughs]

ESPINO: It wasn’t anything that you aspired to become or dress like the *pachuco*?

[00:07:00]

ARRIOLA: No, no, no. I've always stayed out of groups. Maybe I was a bit of a loner, but I stayed out of groups. I think part of it was my sister Rachel, my older sister, she kind of advised me, "Be careful who you mess with, who you get involved with." I was her baby.

ESPINO: Did they seem like they were trouble?

ARRIOLA: No. I mean, there were guys that came in and out and we saw in the neighborhood, because basically that area around Figueroa and Alpine, it was all Latino, and they would be out there and across from this theater that we used to go to, but, no, there were just more Latinos.

ESPINO: Do you recall the tensions between the naval base and the local community?

ARRIOLA: I was aware of it. I was aware of it. In fact, there's a picture of me somewhere—the wrong kind of picture. [laughs] My sister loved taking me for a walk. She used to show me off. There's a picture of me in a Navy uniform, a baby uniform, naval, with a hat in front of the Federal Building in L.A.

Gloria and my sis were two beautiful young women, and Gloria was still kind of young, but Rachel would meet a lot of them, yes. Duckie—why do I remember Duckie—was an Air Force pilot, and he would come to the house and visit. But then he flew away after some time, but I remember Duckie.

ESPINO: Was he white?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: How did your family feel about that, her dating a—

[00:09:44]

ARRIOLA: Rachel's best friend going to Lincoln High School was Henrietta, my sister-in-law, and she's white as they can get. So that was never a problem with us. My best friend in that neighborhood was Chinese, living across the street from us. No, I never felt any kind of racism coming from the family. I was going to use not a bad word, but I was going to use a word—it was an integrated neighborhood. Well, yes, it was, but it wasn't socially integrated. I mean, like I mentioned before, we had Little Joe's and the restaurant, and we had all our friends. There were quite a few Chinese and a couple of the kids were with the movie industry. They made a—and, see, now the word "Duckie" comes up again. Duckie Louie was kind of a famous young Chinese actor. He acted with—came out with Walter—I'll remember later—and was part of our grammar school, and so were some of the other kids, because they used them in scenes where Chinese children were trying to stay out of trouble—not out of trouble, out of dying when the Japanese were attacking their towns in China, that sort of thing, those kinds of movies.

ESPINO: So it was integrated in the sense that you lived in a diverse community in your neighborhood. It wasn't all 100 percent Mexican, Mexican origin. But then it sounds like there were certain places you were not allowed to go because you were Mexican.

ARRIOLA: Well, yes. That's where, I guess, if we had decided to walk Hollywood Boulevard, we probably would have been told to go back to Broadway and Ninth.

ESPINO: But did you ever witness any encounters between—well, because people talk about that period as being very tense between the white military and some of the white establishment, police officers, a lot of police brutality. Did you experience anything like that?

[00:13:12]

ARRIOLA: My brother got his butt beat by the police one time because he was with a bunch of other guys, and they got confronted by them, but other than that—now, my cousin Ralph, who ended up in the Army, he was an active *pachuquito* with Hollen—what’s that community in East L.A.? Hollenbeck?

ESPINO: Hollenbeck?

ARRIOLA: Yes, Hollenbeck. They lived right around there. There was a lot of there, but there was still partly Jewish and Anglo. But he was involved with them. But he ended up in the Army and was at the landing of Omaha Beach during the war, but he came back, came back alive.

ESPINO: Did he continue that lifestyle when he returned?

ARRIOLA: No, no, he changed. He changed.

ESPINO: Did your parents warn you about—or your mom, would she let you dress that way if you wanted to?

ARRIOLA: Oh, no, no. My sisters would have [unclear]. No, no, no. Rachel was always ahead of the game, wasn’t looking to—no, it wasn’t her thing.

ESPINO: So we talked last time about the values your parents placed on education and what they thought, but now it seems like your sister had a huge influence on you and your education.

ARRIOLA: Rachel. Rachel. [laughs] Why do I laugh? A few years later when I’m about thirteen, fourteen, she sits me down one evening and she says, “I want to talk to you about sex.”

ESPINO: Oh, wow.

[00:15:48]

ARRIOLA: She started in, “Well, I want to tell you the—you know what? Go play.”

[laughter]

ESPINO: She never finished?

ARRIOLA: She never finished. She chickened out.

ESPINO: That was brave of her. How much older is she than you?

ARRIOLA: Oh, she’s about eight years. I even laughed. [laughs]

ESPINO: Well, she attempted to. That’s important.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Then what other kinds of things did she do that maybe shaped your—

ARRIOLA: Well, she really started me out going to church on Sundays. We’d go to church, go to church. Then later when she moved out and went to live with her girlfriend, she was working for California Bank. That’s what it was called back then. I don’t know what it—it changed. And I found a picture of her at a bank dinner. I don’t know why I say that, but she did. Anyway, so then it stayed with me. I would go to church by myself, and I was just a thirteen, fourteen-year-old kid. I didn’t know all the sacraments and all the stuff.

That’s another funny story. I didn’t make my first holy communion until the day that Marie and I were going to get married at the church. She said, “You’ve got to make your first holy communion right now, Ralph,” da, da, da, da, da. [laughs] The priest, because I told him— [laughs]

ESPINO: That day. That day. Oh, my goodness. What a nice priest. What a nice priest. Did you keep that faith?

[00:18:07]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, yes. I've never been a real churchgoer until I think it was 1982, I went to the San Fernando Mission, and I would take my son Victor—well, yes, he was about two, three years old—and sometimes Johnny. I went and the priest got up and he says, "By the way, we're starting a new Mass," because there was only one Mass, nine o'clock. He says, "Somebody to do the readings."

So I don't know, I said, "Hey, I can do the collections." One of my favorite scenes in a movie was Gabby Hayes. Do you know Gabby Hayes?

ESPINO: No.

ARRIOLA: He's an old-time actor, and he would go collecting the money, "Time to put your donation in, brother." [laughs]

So after the meeting, I went out and I talked to Monsignor Weber. What a guy. I said, "Hey, Monsignor, I want to do the collections."

"No, Ralph, you're going to do the readings." [unclear] [laughs]

For two, three years, every Sunday morning I was at a corner over here. You know where the power station is next to the mission?

ESPINO: No, I'm not very familiar with San Fernando.

ARRIOLA: Well, anyway, I would go there and park, I'd be there by six-thirty, and I'd practice and practice and practice and practice so I wouldn't goof up.

ESPINO: Wow. Every Sunday?

[00:20:16]

ARRIOLA: So I did that for about two, three years. Then the store, my brother and I had a store. The weekend, I would do the Sunday, and I was the guy that made forty pounds of menudo every day, every Sunday, and took it to the store. [laughs]

ESPINO: To sell it. You made it?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Wow. Your family, in their own way, takes care of each other.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Is your sister still alive?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Rachel. You want to talk to her?

ESPINO: Where does she live?

ARRIOLA: Santa Maria.

ESPINO: Santa Maria, that's kind of far.

ARRIOLA: No, you could talk to her on the phone.

ESPINO: When did she move there?

ARRIOLA: You know, Rachel had a very, very tragic marriage. I remember her leaving and going to a western—what do they call them—dude ranch, and he met this guy Richard Buckner. Before you know it, they were married.

ESPINO: Her first husband?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Anglo, Buckner. Her mom was a teacher, her husband was the principal—no, was the school—

ESPINO: Superintendent?

ARRIOLA: —superintendent at Pomona. But Richard became very, very, very physical and [Spanish phrase], and she took it all.

ESPINO: She was in love with him.

[00:22:23]

ARRIOLA: And she had Rodney. Rodney was the first one, and then she had twins, a boy and a girl, and they both died tragically in separate automobile accidents. Pammy had just had two twins, two girls. Anyway.

ESPINO: Oh, jeez, I'm sorry to hear that. Yes, I would like to talk to her. I can call her.

You said something also last time when we were interviewing, about how your parents were all-American. You said they were all-American.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: But I'm wondering, because I could say all-American and I might mean something completely different than what you mean, and I can ask Henry Lozano what does he mean by that. So if you could just define what *you* mean when you say that.

ARRIOLA: Well, yes, I mentioned to you that Mom and her mother came across the border, paid a penny apiece to come over across and get straight with DDT. But for some reason, the guy wouldn't DDT my mom. He just let her go by. Anyway, that's what they did with them. How racist was that, right?

They ended up in Jerome, Arizona. I've been trying to remember Jerome. Jerome, Arizona, which was a copper mining town. Grandma started by cooking meals for the guys. They'd come by and pick up their lunches for the day. And Mom met Dad. Now, he was twelve, thirteen years older, but eventually they got married. Then some years later, I don't know when exactly—I could probably figure it—but there was a mine explosion, and Dad and four other guys were caught in it alive. The other guys were dead, but they got them out. So it affected him, affected his lungs.

What was the question, *mija*?

ESPINO: If you could define all-American.

[00:25:00]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Because Dad had come across as a younger man, I think I mentioned, because he always was like an orphan within the family, and there's a lot of story to that I really don't know for sure, but I think it was an uncle that took him under him, kind of adopted him. Then at I don't know what age exactly, but he came with some shepherders from Mexico, Spanish shepherders, was here in California doing that, and then eventually went down to Jerome, met Mom, they got married.

Then when the accident took place, after the doctor hospital visit, he was in for a short time. The question was to Mom, "Do we go forward or do we go backwards?"

Mom said, "No, we go forward." So they came to California. They were always—yes, they were Mexican, yes, they loved their country, but they were here now. That's where they were. I never got back. None of us ever really went back to Mexico. Even though Mom went back a couple of times, he didn't.

ESPINO: How about voting and that kind of thing? Did they participate civically?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, I'm not sure where we picked up the politics, but it was basically, I think, through my brother that I did. I'm not sure if Rachel voted. I just don't recall. But from the time—I can't even remember when—no, we were Americans of Mexican descent, obviously, but red, white, and blue was our colors.

ESPINO: So celebrations of Mexican independence or Cinco de Mayo or any of those type of things, did you celebrate those too?

[00:27:38]

ARRIOLA: Oh, well, yeah. Everybody likes to get drunk. [laughter] "What are we celebrating today?" "Oh, I don't know." [laughs]

ESPINO: How about language? Did your parents speak to you in Spanish or in English?

ARRIOLA: You know, just because Nora [phonetic], my daughter-in-law, she works with the kids on Spanish, and the kids understand quite a bit of it. But every evening, my dad had a little book like that, a little book, with all the basics of the Spanish language, and we could sit and *a, b, c, d, e, f*. [laughs] Yes, and we went through it, and he taught us, or he taught me anyway. Then the girls picked it up and Con picked it up from Mom and Dad.

ESPINO: So would you say that both cultures were valued, or one was valued more than the other?

ARRIOLA: Oh, no, they were both valued. Yes, we did all the Latino thing, Mexican thing, but the others were also very important.

ESPINO: Are there any U.S. holidays that stand out in your mind that you celebrated as a kid?

ARRIOLA: Christmas. That was my birthday. [laughs] [unclear].

ESPINO: How about, for example, Fourth of July or Labor Day? I know Labor Day's an international holiday, but what else can I think of? Thanksgiving, those kinds of things that are typically associated with U.S. culture and identity?

ARRIOLA: Yes, maybe we didn't understand it too well, but yes. We were in school when all those dates came up, and we responded. Then, especially, there was a war on, and John Wayne needed us. [laughs]

ESPINO: Who?

ARRIOLA: John Wayne. [laughs]

ESPINO: John Wayne.

[00:30:32]

ARRIOLA: We got all of the propaganda movies you wanted to see. It was the right time for me.

ESPINO: Was he a hero for you, John Wayne?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, sure, yes. I can probably go through every movie he ever made at that time.

ESPINO: That's a powerful medium, that's for sure, to politicize you. So then we talked about Nazism a little. I think I asked you how your parents felt about the war, and that's when you said they were all-American, but did they have feelings about communism? I know your father had passed away by the time the Red Scare happened.

ARRIOLA: Yes. You know, I think they just picked up through the Spanish media that Nazis were badass. [laughs] So were the German. Of course, Rachel's children are half German. [laughs] We've got half Germans, we've got Puerto Ricans, we've got everything. In fact, my own are Filipino with Helen, half. Her mother was Mexican. Johnny's mom is Mexican and Italian. So it all kind of blends in.

ESPINO: Right. A mixture. How did you all define yourself? Did you consider yourself—if people would ask you what are you, would you say Mexican, Chicano, Mexican American? Spanish?

[00:32:48]

ARRIOLA: Yes, Mexican American. No, that was never a—and then there was Jigs. I was always Chicano. [laughs] I'll find that picture of Jigs.

ESPINO: Yes, I would love to see it. I would love to see it. So then what drew you out of East Los Angeles or out of downtown L.A. to the Valley?

ARRIOLA: Well, first of all, my dad, we came from Camarillo during the beginning of the war, '42, and we lived across from Chinatown. Then when that place started to get organized, the places we were living in, they were going to take them out. I mean, these were buildings from the twenties, I think, to the nineties. So we found the place next to the church—I mean, next to the school. And then after that when Dad died, that place was sold where the Chinese church is there now. We went to live with some friends in Van Nuys, so Van Nuys became for about—maybe we were there close to a year.

Then Con found a place in East L.A., which was closer to work. I went from Ford Boulevard Street School to Stevenson Junior High to Garfield High School. As soon as Garfield was done, I moved. We came right out. Actually, the last year that I went to Garfield, every day after school I drove to Van Nuys and worked till about ten o'clock at night in a machine shop, and I went home. And he bought me a car to do it. So from then on, we stayed, we stayed in the Valley. We're coming up this next two weeks, on Saturday, the twentieth or something, we go to Helen's fiftieth reunion at—she went to—oh, what's the Catholic high school?

ESPINO: Here in the Valley?

ARRIOLA: No, no.

ESPINO: Mission or Scenic Nations?

[00:35:48]

ARRIOLA: San Gabriel.

ESPINO: Mission. Mission San Gabriel.

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: No?

ARRIOLA: No. It was a—

ESPINO: Let me pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: [unclear] Catholic school.

ARRIOLA: Yes. So the fiftieth anniversary.

ESPINO: That should be very interesting.

ARRIOLA: Then the next week, on a Saturday, we're having a luncheon, Garfield's sixtieth anniversary.

ESPINO: That's for you, your sixtieth high school reunion. And that's when?

ARRIOLA: The week after the twentieth. I think it's the twentieth.

ESPINO: This month in October. Wow. So when you left, how did you find the Valley area? It sounds like you moved here for work, out of necessity, but did you like the area? Did you like the difference?

ARRIOLA: Well, it was different. It was different. For me, being in those early twenties, I knew a lot of people in—not a lot of people, but I knew people in San Fernando, but those people closest to my family were in Van Nuys, and I lived in North Hollywood. So even though guys didn't go around shooting each other in those days, there were gangs. There were car clubs, you know.

[00:37:44]

There was a young lady I was really interested in, and one night at Santa Rosa over here, this buddy of mine I worked with, he said, "Come on, let's go. They're going to have a dance at the gym." We were there for a while, and then he came back and he

says, “We’d better leave, and we’d better leave right now.” [laughs] He said,

“Otherwise you’re going to get your ass kicked.”

ESPINO: Because you were flirting with the girl or just—

ARRIOLA: Well, it had gone on for a while, through phone conversations and stuff. So I did. But you know what? A lot of my time ended up being spent in San Fernando, because then I took over a youth club in Pacoima out of Santa Rosa, so I was active, but I was active in running a club.

ESPINO: How did you get involved in that?

ARRIOLA: You know, I don’t remember, but I think it might have been through one of the priests, because I got friendly with the priest, and he asked me, so I did. What was the name of the club? Something like the Valley Kings and Queens.

ESPINO: So it was a coed club.

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes.

ESPINO: What was your objective? What was the purpose of the club?

ARRIOLA: Basically during the summer was to keep them busy, and I worked days, so evenings we’d have some things going, games and stuff, baseball. My club was from Pacoima, and San Fernando had others, but we had teams, but we didn’t have a team like San Fernando had, hats and uniforms and gloves, you know, full uniform. I remember one year we had a game at the park here in San Fernando, and one of the guys got cleated twice. Oh, he picked out the kid, and boom! So we had a little riot going on. What I remember about that most was that our girls were in the stands saying, “Get ‘em!” to the Pacoima guys. [laughs] So they were fun.

[00:41:18]

I had a panel truck, of all things, that my brother had given to me, and it was pretty new, and I would take, you know, maybe a half dozen or more to the beach, which is crazy, but I did.

ESPINO: Those were the days where you could ride people in the back of your truck. So did you enjoy that kind of work?

ARRIOLA: Oh, I loved it.

ESPINO: Because it sounds like that wasn't something you had originally got involved in yourself, that you were asked to do that kind of work.

ARRIOLA: Yes. I had been in the Woodcraft Rangers, and I never joined the Boy Scouts, but I had been in a club like that. I just received a letter from the Woodcraft Rangers.

ESPINO: Oh, they still remember you?

ARRIOLA: Yes, because I took Johnny into it.

ESPINO: I'm going to pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Here we go. Okay. So the Woodcraft Rangers, you were involved in that.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Those things sound very, like, typical U.S.—

ARRIOLA: Anglo, yes. [laughs]

ESPINO: —upbringing, when you become involved in those kinds of organizations.

[00:42:52]

ARRIOLA: Yes, it is. And they had just built, then in the fifties, just built a clubhouse here in Mission Hills. And because I had been in it, I wanted Johnny to be part of it, and he really did enjoy it.

ESPINO: What did you get out of it?

ARRIOLA: I enjoyed being there with my son.

ESPINO: No, but I mean when you were first in it as a youth.

ARRIOLA: Just the knowledge of a lot of little things that the Woodcraft Rangers teach children how to be children, how to enjoy, how to have hobbies and work together with other kids and just being kids. So it was enjoyable, to the point that about six months ago I found this strap of leather with all the names, Indian names to the kids, and Johnny and whatever Johnny and I were called. I forget what we were called. But, yes, it sticks with you, and, like I said, that was back in the mid-seventies.

ESPINO: With Johnny.

ARRIOLA: With Johnny.

ESPINO: And you, your participation was in the fifties.

ARRIOLA: Yes. Wow, it was still in—no, it was in grammar school.

ESPINO: In the forties.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: At Castelar Street School.

ESPINO: Wow, through Castelar. Do you think that you took some of those skills that you learned into your activism later on?

[00:45:07]

ARRIOLA: Well, yes. I never hesitated being with a mixed group of kids or leading them or monitoring them or being their leader. No, kids were kids.

ESPINO: But I mean when you become active. You did say that your brother introduced you to politics, but did you learn anything from that experience with the Woodcraft Rangers? Did you take any of that knowledge and apply it later on?

ARRIOLA: I think I did. The fact that everybody was assigned different tasks and at different times you were the group leader, you know, stuff like that sticks to you, especially as a kid.

ESPINO: Right.

ARRIOLA: And they still take my \$25 every year. [laughs]

ESPINO: Wow. What was your first union involvement, your first involvement with the union, and who were you working for?

ARRIOLA: My first involvement with the union was not in a job; it was in politics. We were very involved with the Democratic Party. At that time there were a lot of clubs. Everybody had a Democratic Club, every community, and within that there were a lot of union people. So I just learned about the Teamsters and the UAW and all of them. They were all part of it.

Then in the early fifties, sixties, I went to work for a small company here in Pacoima, Poly Industries, and by that time I had learned the machinist trade pretty well, and the UAW had organized that plant there. Then I just kind of stuck along with the—well, first of all, I already knew a lot of the UAW guys. Then I was always a *metiche*, so I ended up being the company unit chairman.

ESPINO: Can we just back up just a second? So you mentioned these Democratic Clubs. Are you talking about here in the Valley or on the East Side?

[00:48:08]

ARRIOLA: All over California.

ESPINO: What campaign was it that you were involved in?

ARRIOLA: Well, the first one was with my brother with Estes Kefauver, that was in the early fifties, and then after that with Adlai Stevenson. Or maybe it was the same time that Adlai and Kefauver ran against each other for the nomination, but we ended up with Stevenson. Then from then on, it was just all the time.

What had happened was that during that time, every community had one or two Democratic Clubs, and you called yourself a Kefauver Democrat or a Stevenson Democrats or, you know, UAW Democrats, that kind of thing. So you were always part of it. They would have local meetings where it was very—those were educational. You learned parliamentary procedure. You really learned how to screw people. “You’re out of order. Sit down or I’ll have you taken out.” [laughs]

That’s a lesson I learned was when I became the unit chairman, the guy in charge of—the leader of our union in the plant, my first meeting to become the unit chairman, and sitting in the room were two international reps, Clyde and Howard. We were friends. So I get elected, so I feel I’m elected. So I take over the meeting, and the first hand that goes up is one of the reps, with a smile. How was it he put it? “Are you the unit chairman?”

[00:50:31]

“Well, I was just elected.”

“Oh. Have you ever had the union pledge?”

“Well, no.”

“Well, then how can you run the meeting?” I mean, they were teaching me a lesson. Everybody was laughing, but I was—I learned. I learned parliamentary procedure, and I learned it.

ESPINO: [Spanish phrase].

ARRIOLA: [Spanish phrase]. I was a *carbon*, too, especially in the union. A union, the politics of a union are tough, they're strong. I don't know about teachers, but I know about industrial. So you really have to know what the heck you're talking about; otherwise you're liable to get punched in the nose.

ESPINO: Did women participate in these meetings as well?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. One of my mentors is Nellie Parra, what a wonderful lady. She'd been in the union a long time, so she really knew it. She was one of the first tool-and-gauge inspectors in the aeronautic industry. She's a tough lady. I kind of became one of her—

ESPINO: Her protégés?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I was telling [unclear] a joke, because I going through some pictures, and a picture of this gal came up. She was active in the plant, red-head [Spanish word]. I guess she said something to the effect that, “I'm going to take this guy and really teach him what it's all about.”

And Nellie says, “You don't go near him.” [laughs] She was so wonderful.

ESPINO: Is she passed away now?

[00:52:58]

ARRIOLA: Yes. So I had a lot of people on the way that were there to push me in the right away. The first time she really twisted my fingers was at a meeting with a company, and [unclear] and goddamn company superintendent where they don't tell me shit. [laughs] So the president of the company's there and the superintendent, and us three over here. And the other guy was—anyway, was there, and he was also a guy that really taught me a lot about unions. They started mouthing off about the workers and this and that, and I said, "Wait a minute. You don't do that to my membership."

Nellie, the first thing she had told me was, "You keep your mouth shut. You sit there. This is your first meeting. You don't say nothing." She was right next to me, so she was—I forget whether she was pinching or what the hell she was doing, but she shut me up. [laughs]

After the meeting, "Didn't I tell you to shut up?" because after I made my little speech, everybody just kind of looked at each other and went on with the meeting. [unclear]. [laughs]

ESPINO: Do you remember what the issue was?

ARRIOLA: I don't know. Something about—I don't remember. It was just something that annoyed me.

ESPINO: But in those days, what were some of the big conflicts? You say it was tough to be in the union and you needed parliamentary rules in order to keep people in check. [00:55:15]

ARRIOLA: Basically, well, it was for the plant, too, but any kind of meeting that you hold, parliamentary procedures, you need to know it. But it was mostly for the union, relationships with the guys in the union, because, remember, all these guys were blue

collar. If they had high school education, they had education. But they all learned parliamentary procedures. So you had that kind of a group.

ESPINO: But what would be some of the points of contention?

ARRIOLA: Within the local union it's usually about who's going to be president and what kind of guy is he, and there's always opposite groups within the group, and they're always fighting about something. Issues with the union reps, the officers of the union, were around finances and who's using all the money for going out of the shop. You went out of the shop, you got paid. Some guys used to take real advantage of that, so somebody would always challenge it. They kept everything straight.

ESPINO: Right. But when you represent—okay, so you're talking about when you were working for Poly Industries.

ARRIOLA: Right.

ESPINO: What is it that you did? What was the plant used for?

ARRIOLA: We made the Little John ground-to-air missile. It was a missile that was maybe about 10, 15 feet long, and it was about 18 inches around, and it was towed around by a truck or a Jeep, and then they'd name it, and it was almost like—I don't know how they shot it. I never got to see that. But they would just drop. But they were [unclear].

ESPINO: *¿Hay alguien afuera?* Should I pause it? So can you repeat what you said?

Did you say they named it? Did I hear you correctly?

ARRIOLA: The—

ESPINO: The missile.

[00:58:07]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Little John. That's what they called it. I don't know why. They called it Little John.

ESPINO: How many would you make?

ARRIOLA: Oh, we were knocking them out pretty rapidly.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: That was during the Korean—no, not Korean.

ESPINO: Vietnam?

ARRIOLA: Vietnam, yes. Oh, yes, a lot. It was probably ten a day.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: We were knocking them out. At first I was working a big old lathe and machined the ends of it. Then later on, I became an inspector and I would check them out. I kept this going for quite a while. Eventually the plant changed to industrial farming equipment.

ESPINO: After the war?

ARRIOLA: Yes, and moved, moved out to Riverside.

ESPINO: What would a typical day be like when you were on the line? So I'm assuming you were on the line, on the assembly line?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Can you describe what that would be like, a typical day?

[00:59:49]

ARRIOLA: Well, the morning, it was usually seven o'clock, and first there was always a night and a graveyard shift, because they were producing them too. We could actually—there was maybe four or five lathes that were big, so that we would knock out like one

and a half missiles in our machining shift. At first I was working the regular night shift, three-thirty to eleven or twelve, and then later I switched over to graveyard, which was only six hours, six and a half hours, and then eventually I just shifted out to inspection. It allowed me more time to visit my membership. I got to walk all over the place.

ESPINO: So how soon after you started working for Poly Industries did you become a union rep?

ARRIOLA: I think it was probably about maybe two years, because I was also going to school full-time at Trade Tech. So the night shift was good because I had to get up at five and then I'd drive. There were no freeways then. It only came to Universal City. That's as far as the freeway came. So I would drive into L.A., and it was a six-hour school day, six and a half. I would leave there and then I would come home, grab something to eat, and then I was at work at three-thirty—

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: —and worked till eleven-thirty, twelve o'clock at night. I did that for two years. Actually, it helped me a lot because I was looking to learn more about the trade itself, which I did, tool-and-die making, actually tool design, and that sort of stuff was there. And because I already had about eight years to ten years' experience on the machines, the teacher made me the shop foreman, which meant I was teaching the guys basic stuff, watching that they didn't screw up a machine or, like I did, catch a guy riding a planer, a planer back and forth.

ESPINO: What's a planer?

[01:03:22]

ARRIOLA: And you learn that you don't bullshit people, because if you do, they're liable to do something crazy, which I did one time. I thought that guy was putting me on. And grinding, when you're grinding something, you can only take off maybe half a thousandth. That's like taking your hair and dividing it up into tenths' pieces. And these guys are older guys but never had any training. So I said, "Oh, you can take off a ten-thousandth." Well, they came back in a little while, there was no more grinding wheel left. [laughs] A pile of dirt. "What did you guys do?"

"Well, you said take off ten-thousandth." [laughs] A learning experience. Don't play with the people. If you're teaching, teach. Don't horse around.

ESPINO: Don't joke.

ARRIOLA: So it was good.

ESPINO: But you said somebody was riding on a planer. What is that?

ARRIOLA: Well, it was a plane that—here's the tool. The table was big, so that as you put the part in, it would plane. It was cut. So they were on the end over here, riding this thing. That's crazy, you know.

ESPINO: How dangerous was the work?

ARRIOLA: It can be pretty dangerous, because, first of all, you're nowhere near the shutoff. He got on. One of his buddies turned him on.

ESPINO: Did he get hurt?

[01:05:21]

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: How about speed? Because I know that at that time that was one of the issues for unions, is how fast you were expected to work.

ARRIOLA: You know, on the day shift you would knock off two Little John, the main body, machining the main body. You could get two of them off, and you were expected to do at least one and a half on the graveyard shift. Well, hell, you know, I could do both of them in four hours. I mean, you learn how to use tools. Yes, there was always production problems, but it was never really—unless you were really messing around, unless we weren't even getting one out, then they'd get a little upset.

ESPINO: It sounds a little bit different than the automotive industry.

ARRIOLA: Oh, it sure is. Those poor suckers. It's like Lucille Ball when she was [unclear].

ESPINO: Oh, the bonbons or the candy on the assembly line, yes. [laughter]

ARRIOLA: Oh, god. Yes, production, yes, some jobs where it can really be a—but production, unless you were scared or not willing to, I don't know, just lazy, had to go to the restroom every half hour or something.

ESPINO: Did women work in those positions?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

ESPINO: Did you see any difference in how they were treated as far as promoting or leadership or—

[01:07:52]

ARRIOLA: They were able to operate punch presses, but as far as lathes, grinders, big grinders, and some of the heavy equipment, they didn't let them. They could be really dangerous. So they were careful about not putting women in really dangerous—although they could have been trained for it, but that's not where the [unclear] were.

ESPINO: What about the union? Would the union advocate? Because was there more money in those other jobs?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, yes. "More money." When I left the trade in '66 as a tool-and-die maker, I was making, tops, 3.90 an hour. Oh, my god. We thought we were making money. [laughs]

ESPINO: But what were you able to buy with that? Were you single or were you married yet?

ARRIOLA: I was married.

ESPINO: Could you support your family?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. I was always helping Mom and Gloria.

ESPINO: So remind me, again, 3.75?

ARRIOLA: Three-ninety, 3.94.

ESPINO: So almost \$4 an hour.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And with that you were able to support yourself, your wife, your mother, your sister?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Gloria was your sister?

[01:09:50]

ARRIOLA: Yes, I helped them too.

Something happened that was really interesting, is that I was working with a guy who said, "I'm leaving, Ralph. I'm leaving. I'm going to Reno. I've got this little house

over here in San Fernando. You buy it from me. Come on. It's only 13,000." He said, "Hell, give me 500 bucks and you can have the house."

I did it in perfect time, because that became Mama's house. It was two bedrooms. It was an older house, but it was a nice little house. Marie and I had an apartment over in Sherman Oaks near her dad. You know, if you made 120 bucks a week, that wasn't bad. Milk was 25 cents a quart. It was different. It was cheaper. Gas was only, what, maybe 20 cents a gallon.

ESPINO: Why did you leave?

ARRIOLA: The plant closed and moved to Riverside. Then I went—where did I go? Then I went to work for Curtiss-Wright Corporation, a big company. They built a lot of the fighter planes, Curtiss. You've all seen the Flying Tiger movies. Well, those were the planes that they provide a lot of the parts for. Then from there where did I go? Someplace else. But, you know, there was always a problem for me because of one eye, insurance problems. So I worked in a lot of little companies. They were afraid I'd get hurt.

ESPINO: You were a liability.

ARRIOLA: Yes. But then, you know, the handicapped legislation came through, and they couldn't do that anymore. Then there was no real problem with the eyesight. You become very, very aware that depth perception can be a problem, but I became aware of depth perception in high school playing football. I told you about that. I found the doctor's note and—

ESPINO: Changed it yourself.

[01:13:07]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: You were talking about being in Local 645. When was that? This was before we started recording.

ARRIOLA: I went into the local in the early sixties.

ESPINO: So that was when you were with Poly Industries?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Can you tell me about that? Because you mentioned—and this is before we started recording—was that it wasn't considered a powerful plant because it was small in numbers.

ARRIOLA: It was a small plant.

ESPINO: Can you explain that, why that's important?

ARRIOLA: Well, first of all, we were making different things for the war. Lockheed had the Electra, and we made parts for the Electra, the engine itself. We made deicing units for aircraft. We made the Little John missile. We made some other stuff that would come in—we need just a thousand of these things, and usually they were castings of either aluminum or steel, and we would have to machine them to whatever they wanted. So it was a variety of stuff. We had our own furnaces to heat-treat the materials. It was a pretty good little shop. It had a lot of stuff. So once the war ended, it all ended.

ESPINO: But you were talking about how—I think you were referring to representation and how even though you had a small plant, you were able to deliver votes, but you didn't specify what you were talking about.

[01:15:35]

ARRIOLA: Well, when I talk about votes, see, there was Fisher Body; they made the cars themselves. There was Chevy; they built the Chevrolet. Each one had a different car they were making. There was a parts warehouse. They provided all the parts and stuff, separate buildings, everything. So each one of these companies had about 2,000 employees, and here we are over here with 100, 125. If you don't get the vote out, whether it's politics or otherwise, you're going to lose. So I was used to getting the vote out. So we were very competitive, and a couple of times we outvoted everybody, which really teed them off, but it was all right.

ESPINO: How did you convince people? What would you say?

ARRIOLA: Well, I was always able to talk to people and make them understand that we needed them that night at the union hall, and they would show up. We had a little plan. I also did other stuff that none of the other guys had ever done. I had an annual picnic. We've got pictures of that too. I'd go out and I would find sales at the markets for steaks, and everybody in the family, except children, would get a steak for the picnic. I'd do a count and we'd always come out good. We'd have piles of corn and stuff. They'd have games. So we kept our people pretty tight, pretty organized. And I guess I had a knack for being a nice guy. So we had a good group.

ESPINO: So they were loyal to you.

[01:18:10]

ARRIOLA: Yes. See, there was a unit chairman and then there was the committee chairman. We were a committee. I was chairman of the plant, but there was a committee chairman. He did the negotiating. Lee Heibert and Nellie. Nellie, Lee, and I, and we kept them—Christmas, we put on stuff. We'd have a Christmas party at the hall and get

stuff for the kids. So, you know, it was just stuff that if you look back, if I look back, I always did stuff like that for groups, come to think of it.

ESPINO: That's something that you came up with on your own, or did you see it happen in other places?

ARRIOLA: Well, I'd seen it happen at other places, but seeing something, not having the people that want to take the time and effort, I mean, I had to visit five or six stores for them to allow me to take thirty, forty steaks, but we did it, and we'd always have a good time.

ESPINO: What did you think the principal objective of the union should be?

ARRIOLA: Well, to represent the people, to protect them, to make sure that they had halfway decent working conditions and money. Money was always one of the problems with just having somebody that they could go to to complain about something that the bosses were doing. That was something we did all the time, and even that, you build a confidence in your foremen and in your superintendents. If you're an asshole, they're going to treat you like an asshole. Can't do it the hard way.

So politics, I had already been in politics. I already saw what works and what doesn't outside of the union hall. We'll talk about how I felt being a rep in the union. I was a little black sheep.

ESPINO: Of the union or of your factory?

[01:21:43]

ARRIOLA: Friendly to everybody, everybody loved me, but I had what most of the guys didn't have: I had the love of the secretaries. I took care of the girls. I never needed any [unclear]. But I still have one that calls me all the time. I mean, we've known each other

all these years, never had anything personal to do with it. Starts with “*Oye, cabrón*, you haven’t called me in six months. Where in the hell have you been? All right. Call me again, you son of a bitch.” Lita [phonetic] is a character. But I helped her when I first went into the UAW. There was Henry Gonzalez. Henry Gonzalez is one of the city councilpersons at city of Maywood. We’re still good friends. But he had a feeling for Lita that wouldn’t quit, and he kept bugging her, bugging her, bugging her to where it got kind of crazy.

So two of the girls called me, took me out for coffee, and they said, “We have a problem with this man. Nobody will listen to us, our supervisors. What do we do, Ralph?”

I said, “Well, let me talk to the assistant director.”

Paul Schrade was the assistant director. I said, “Hey, you guys, I have a problem. One of the girls is going to file a lawsuit against the UAW for harassment, sexual harassment.” So I had a chat with them and they took care of it, never had a problem again. Saved them a lot of money. They were really teed off. I mean, this guy was really getting dumb about things. Lita’s not a beautiful woman, she’s kind of chubby, but she’s got that kind of chubbiness that looks like everything’s in place. [laughs] She’s just great. She truly is. So there was always an attraction toward her.

ESPINO: You mean a lot of men were attracted to her?

[01:24:58]

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes. She lost her husband very early, too, got sick, cancer, boom, [Spanish phrase].

ESPINO: But you never talked to him directly?

ARRIOLA: I wouldn't talk to any—no, that wasn't my job. Director's job. As long as they knew what was going on then and how serious it really was.

ESPINO: She worked within the union or she worked in the plant?

ARRIOLA: No, she worked at the regional office. She worked at the region office. That's where all the international reps and Paul and the hierarchy were located at.

ESPINO: Where did he work?

ARRIOLA: Paul?

ESPINO: Hank, at that time.

ARRIOLA: He was an international rep and he represented Local 216 and a couple of others. I don't remember all the locals, but he would go there, meet with the shop committee, find out what the problems were, then sit in, call a meeting together with the company and the shop committee and negotiate the settlements. He was good at it.

ESPINO: Did you witness that a lot, sexual harassment towards the women?

ARRIOLA: No, no, I wouldn't say that, but it would go on. I've maintained—like I said, we have a luncheon maybe every six, seven months and Lita isn't invited. [Spanish phrase]. "Why didn't you tell me?" [unclear] the last meeting. But Carmen, Carmen [unclear], she isn't a pretty, pretty lady. She's very friendly, but she's so damn effective. She took over business. She took care of Paul and the organization. Then there was a black lady who was Paul's personal secretary there, she took care of all of Paul's stuff.
[01:27:51]

Then there was my secretary, black, and she took care of us. There was three or four guys that she took care of. She's the one that I asked to cut all the newspaper clippings of the Ruben Salazar thing, and she did it, and that's what I gave Lizette

[phonetic]. You can get it through the computer, but if you're doing something and you have all of them, you can look and pick and choose.

ESPINO: Yes, absolutely, and you want to see those original clippings. There's nothing like seeing the—I've seen *Requiem 29* a million times, but to actually see the original reels, that's emotional.

ARRIOLA: See, Paul Schrade said something to me after he appointed me, because I told him, "Okay, Paul, but just remember if you don't want me working on the Chicano Caucus thing, you know we're loyalty. It's not about you; it's about us. So if you don't want me doing that, don't offer me the job, okay?" I said, "I'll maintain a distance so that I'm doing my job and not imposing on the time that I need to spend with you."

He said, "No, Ralph, you're okay. Just keep me posted."

But there was resentment with the blacks that I was getting a little special consideration, but, shit, they were getting all the appointments, too, you know. I came in at the end of when a lot of things were happening. I was one of the last guys appointed, so naturally I was one of the first ones that got knocked off.

ESPINO: What are you referring to exactly?

[01:30:19]

ARRIOLA: The strike with the General Motors that was in the process. The UAW took General Motors and the whole—yes. See, when they struck, they wouldn't strike all of them at one time. They would pick one. And General Motors was picked that year, and it was costing the UAW \$13 million a week, 13 million, and they worked out a deal with the Teamsters where they—I'm trying to find the term. You get older, you get dumber.

[laughs] Mortgaged. They mortgaged all the locals to the Teamsters to meet the thirteen

weeks that they were on strike, so for a while they were all local Teamsters. But there was also the layoff. Everybody got laid off.

Anyway, prior to that, to kind of show you that even Paul was even a little maybe not too happy with me, Marv Brody and I were working on some campaign or something, and he came up, "I've got this struggle. I've got to talk to one of the candidates." And he looks at me and he said, "Give me some advice. What do you think? You're a rep now." I mean, the way he did it, it was, "Oh, fuck you, too," you know. And Marv said, "Don't get excited. He's just nervous." But there was a little bit of resentment all the way around. That's why the girls, they kept me attuned to a lot of things.

ESPINO: You felt they were loyal to you?

ARRIOLA: Yes, especially with Latinas. They were right in with the Chicano Caucus.

ESPINO: So you mentioned the strike against—

ARRIOLA: UAW against General Motors.

ESPINO: —General Motors. You mentioned the strike against General Motors. What year was that, do you remember?

ARRIOLA: It was 1970, because right after that, 1970 was when Walter Reuther flew into Black Lake Michigan. Black Lake Michigan is a training center for the UAW. It's a beautiful place.

ESPINO: You've been there?

[01:34:04]

ARRIOLA: Yes. And flying in, the plane crashed and killed him and his wife and some other people.

ESPINO: We're kind of skipping a little bit ahead. Do you want to go into that strike and then the Chicano Caucus, or do you want to back up a little bit and talk about the— did you work for JFK's campaign or just Robert's?

ARRIOLA: No, as a young volunteer, I was in it. I was in it, yes, in the Valley, and because of my brother, you know. I told you about being in the parade, coming in from the airport. It was a fun campaign. A lot of young people, a lot of young people in it. He really turned out the kids, the young people.

ESPINO: Do you remember what you did, what your role was?

ARRIOLA: Well, for me it was always everything: opening the campaign, cleaning it up mornings and nights, and, you know, it was a little bit of everything. I learned it that way.

ESPINO: Did you have a chance to meet him?

ARRIOLA: You know what? No. No, I didn't meet him. He was in and out and we saw him. I mean, everybody wanted to meet Kennedy. Everybody wanted to meet him, so it was hard.

ESPINO: Did you have any feelings about his run against Lyndon B. Johnson? Did you remember some people, Mexicanos, Chicanos, favored Lyndon B. Johnson over Kennedy in the very, very beginning stages.

[01:36:37]

ARRIOLA: Yes, especially the Texas people. There were Lyndon Johnson. There was a little incident with the Lyndon Johnson folks. During the campaign, they'd come out of the Biltmore, and we'd parade in front of the Biltmore. This one time, myself and this girl, an old friend, we had "Texas is big for Kennedy." You're looking for a fight, right?

It was on a two-by-four. [laughs] We went up and then we came back this way to get in the side of the Biltmore, and a couple of guys on that side of the Biltmore—it's kind of a little hill—they came running down. I had the sign here. I just closed my eyes and actually broke the two-by-four as they pulled it down. I'm glad there was a big knot in it. And a police officer saw it all and he came over to me. He says, "You asked for it."

[laughs] Yeah, okay.

ESPINO: That's funny.

ARRIOLA: Because these guys kept running with my sign, "Texas is big for Kennedy." That was the fun of the campaign. [laughs]

ESPINO: Were you known for doing things like that?

ARRIOLA: Yes. [laughs] Sniping. Before, sniping was a lot of fun.

ESPINO: What is sniping?

ARRIOLA: Where you got—you know that campaign sign of Kennedy that I showed you, that one I got?

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: We used to go out and plaster those things with paste, sniping, they called it, putting those all over. Put ten of them at one time on the walls. Everybody did it.

Sometimes you were lucky and you'd see the opposition go by and put their signs up, and then you'd go over there and put our signs up, stuff like that.

ESPINO: On top of them?

[01:39:18]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. [laughs]

ESPINO: So was everything pretty much fair game?

ARRIOLA: Everything was fair game, and people didn't really get that mad. You knew it was all part of the game.

Had a real dummy rich Jewish guy with a lot of money in Beverly Hills, he came and asked my brother if we would do the sign painting, the sniping, and he said, "I'll pay you guys \$1.25 a sign." We'd been doing it for nothing.

"Hell, yes, bring all the signs you've got." [laughter]

ESPINO: That's funny. Was that for John F. Kennedy?

ARRIOLA: No, that was for some Jewish guy in Beverly Hills. We did it for all kinds of campaigns.

ESPINO: That's funny. That's really funny. So what about other local campaigns, like Pat Brown?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure. Pat Brown, that son of a bitch. My brother and Sam Cordova and the Latinos had a—and I asked Sam the other day, "Sam, what did you guys call yourself?" I forget what the group was, but it was made up of some of the old-timers, including the guy from MALDEF.

ESPINO: Mexican American Opportunity Foundation?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Dionicio Morales?

[01:41:07]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Dionicio, he was a regular. This was a group of young Chicanos, maybe thirty-ish, a little older, Con and them. There were so many of them that were a part of it.

ESPINO: Was it the Mexican American Political Association?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Or was it the Congress of Mexican American Unity?

ARRIOLA: Something like that.

ESPINO: Or was it a Democratic Club?

ARRIOLA: No, no, it was a Mexican American something or other. I forget. You know what? I found a list of them.

ESPINO: Oh, I'd love to see that too.

ARRIOLA: I found so many lists.

ESPINO: You were telling me about Pat Brown and his election.

ARRIOLA: Oh, Pat Brown, yes. So Con and Sam, and I forget who the other guys were, there were two or three of us, about four or five guys that met with the campaign, the campaign manager of Pat Brown. They wanted more and they wanted greater appointments, typical stuff. They said, "You guys have to be happy with what you've got. You're not getting any more. What the hell do you want? You guys never vote anyway." Shit like that. I mean, the guys came out ready to kill.

ESPINO: So what did you do next after that?

[01:43:03]

ARRIOLA: I don't know. The guys kept—I was pretty young at the time. They kept working for him.

ESPINO: They did?

ARRIOLA: Yes, they did.

ESPINO: I recall, for example, in talking with Grace Montañez Davis, she worked for Pat Brown. She speaks very highly of him as far as—

ARRIOLA: What he did for us? Sure. But the guys were looking for more.

ESPINO: Then Margarita Cuaron, her father, Ralph Cuaron, did you know Ralph Cuaron from—

ARRIOLA: No, I don't remember.

ESPINO: —Boyle Heights? He also spoke very highly of Pat Brown. So did you like him, though?

ARRIOLA: I liked him. I mean, I was young. They liked Pat, but it was a political thing. They wanted more. It was at a time when we were just waking up.

ESPINO: So maybe this is a good place to stop. You're seeming a bit tired, and we'll pick up on some of those other—there were a few other elections, like Phil Soto [phonetic]. Do you remember Phil Soto?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: Or John Moreno?

ARRIOLA: Soto I remember. The other?

ESPINO: John Moreno.

ARRIOLA: John Moreno.

ESPINO: That might not be Southern California. Anyway, okay, I'm going to stop it right here.

[End of October 7, 2013 interview]

SESSION 3 (October 16, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 16. I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando Valley.

I wanted to start today with a reflection back on the 1950s. We talked a bit about your growing up and the schools that you went to. Now that I'm thinking about it, we didn't talk about your junior high and your high school, the schools that you went to. Can you maybe go over that first and then we'll move on to—

[00:00:40]

ARRIOLA: High school—

ESPINO: Can we start with—you told me about your elementary school. You told me you went to Stevenson.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And then after that?

ARRIOLA: After that I went to Garfield. Actually, out of Stevenson, there were only two, myself and one of the girls, that went to Garfield. The rest went to Roosevelt. It took us a while to settle. We'd see each other for nutrition and breaks. Because most of the kids came from Kern Junior High and some even came from Montebello [phonetic].

But it was—gee, I'm trying to remember. Well, my biggest interest was I joined the football team, which I did, and that first year was okay. I was basically in the junior varsity. Garfield had a lot of really good players that year. The next year a coach questioned my problem with my eye. Actually, he done that that first year, and he

insisted that I get a letter from the doctor to say that I would be all right if I wore a mask.

So I was the only player that wore a mask.

ESPINO: Let me pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay.

[00:02:48]

ARRIOLA: So I said, “Okay, I’ll go see my doctor. I’ll get something from him.”

Well, my doctor did not want me to play football. He said, “You only have one eye. What happens if you hurt it?” Okay. So either in that same apartment or a later one, he stepped away for a little while and—

ESPINO: I’m going to pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay.

ARRIOLA: He stepped away for a few minutes and I tore off a—

ESPINO: I remember you told me that.

ARRIOLA: I took it to the coach and said, “I have to have a mask.” So I was the only— at that time, they didn’t wear masks, but they got one for me.

ESPINO: What are some of your other memories? Who did you hang out with?

ARRIOLA: So I got on the team, and that’s where I met a lot of the guys. Oh, by the way, this coming Saturday or Sunday—no, no. It’s next week we’re having the sixtieth anniversary of Garfield, our class.

ESPINO: A reunion, right?

ARRIOLA: This week is Helen’s fiftieth anniversary from high school.

So anyway, you know, Garfield at that time was really an integrated school. We had Japanese; we had Armenians; we had just everything. It was really a great school to go to.

ESPINO: Did you feel a sense of—because some kids—well, when you had the walkouts, the students were talking about how they didn't feel they were getting a proper education, that the education was substandard to what white kids in the Valley were getting or on the Westside. Did you feel that at that time it was like that?

[00:05:00]

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, I never felt—well, yes, I did. When I went to see the counselor, I had already been operating all kinds of machines, mills, lathes, everything at my brother's shop. He had contracts with [unclear], a big company out in the Valley at that time, and we made bomb eject hooks, of all things. The Korean War was on. So I wanted to follow up with drafting, and it took a bit of a fight, as I remember. "Oh, no, Ralph. We think you ought to become a carpenter, a cabinet maker." Cabinet maker? No way! So I did take it that first semester, but then the following semester I fought like hell for it. I said, "No, no, no, no, no. Don't give me that. I'm already a machinist. I know all about prints. I read them all the time."

ESPINO: Drafts. I mean—what are they called? Drawings. The drawings?

ARRIOLA: Draftsman.

ESPINO: Right. When you said prints, what do you mean by that?

ARRIOLA: Blueprints. So I got in. Then even that first semester, one of my first big fights was with a teacher and a student. We looked at a print and I said, "This is what it is."

“Oh, no, you’re wrong. That’s not what it is. That’s not the way you draw it.”

We argued and we argued till I told the teacher, “Stop. I run prints. I work with them all the time. I machine things, so I know what that is. Take a little harder look at what it’s saying.” And after he thought about it, he says, “You’re right.” [cries]

ESPINO: That made you angry that he wouldn’t believe you?

[00:07:22]

ARRIOLA: But that happened. Whatever. So anyway, I got into the drafting class for the last two years. When I stop to think about it, I think a lot of the Chicanos were being pushed into classes in cabinet making and all the other—electric, become electricians, mechanics, because at that time we had a lot of the vocational departments were big. They were teaching us how to become everything from cabinet makers to mechanics to whatever it was. We weren’t being pushed into the academic classes. Maybe we were aware of what was going on, but we didn’t identify it as a push out of academic classes, you know, that vocational was where we belonged. So that was a bit of a problem.

ESPINO: But the teachers’ treatment of you directly, did you feel like they encouraged you, they supported you, or did you feel the opposite?

ARRIOLA: I mean, overall, they were very supportive. We had some good teachers. I can’t deny it. Only one of them really got out where it really made me angry. When I walked into her class in the eleventh grade, I forget what the class was, history or some dumb thing, and she looked at the paperwork and then she says, “Ralph, you’re not supposed to be here.”

And I said, “Why not? Why am I different?”

“Oh, you’re in M.R.”

“M.R.? What the hell’s M.R.?”

She says, “You’re mentally retarded.”

ESPINO: Oh, my goodness.

[00:10:12]

ARRIOLA: And then I think about all the battles that took place during the fifties and sixties, especially in Santa Ana. I say that because Herman Ciaz [phonetic] was an old buddy of mine, and he fought like hell in Santa Ana to get the classes integrated. So, yes, I guess there was some, but it wasn’t too obvious. It wasn’t too obvious.

ESPINO: Were you involved in any clubs at that time or any groups?

ARRIOLA: No, I never did get involved with any clubs, but I did take—and she passed away a couple of years ago, our teacher, a Latina, Mrs.—I forget her name. She started a cultural class, one of the first, learning about Mexico and other countries, teaching us music. We even put on an assembly. Our class, we danced. I mean, here I am, one of the football players, and they all knew I was one of the football players, dancing to “Tehuantepec” with my little partner. [laughs] I mean, we got the laughs, you know, but we did it. We were determined to do it. And maybe that goes back to the guy that I told you about, Jigs. “Ralph, you’ve a Chicano. Be proud of your heritage, okay? Don’t back off with anybody. If they say something, just respond.” So I did the whole class—

ESPINO: You don’t remember any—maybe you can find out when you go to your reunion.

ARRIOLA: I have the high school—

ESPINO: You have your yearbook?

ARRIOLA: Yes. She was the cutest little thing.

ESPINO: I bet.

ARRIOLA: She was a doll, she really was. Miss Jimenez. I forget her first name, but Miss Jimenez. God, she was determined to teach us a lot about ourselves as a group, as a Mexican.

ESPINO: Was that a class you chose to take?

[00:13:05]

ARRIOLA: Yes, that was an elective. You know, we were a pretty good group of Latinos, we really were, because we found ourselves having to deal within the Japanese and the Armenians, and our guys held their own. So high school was a good experience. I enjoyed it.

ESPINO: And you're saying that you met a lot of kids, or boys on the football team. Is it because they traveled in different circles that you had different classes with them?

ARRIOLA: No, we were a football team and we were together. That's the way it is with sports. When you're on a team, you're one. I'm hoping to see my one guy, Francisco—oh, god, I'll remember. But Cisco was a tackle, big guy. You know, my own son was 230 pounds when he went to Kennedy High School. Our biggest guy, which we thought was big, maybe 220, maybe. [laughs]

ESPINO: That's funny. Yes, the football teams then, when I look at photographs, are much leaner than the high school kids that play today.

ARRIOLA: Leaner, hell, they were smaller than the guys now. [laughs] I looked at my grandson this morning, Matthew. He's twelve. I'm picking up my grandchild. She's two years old, three years old. She's going to Poverello over there. It's a Catholic preschool. Matthew came out and, my god, the kid looked like he's already six-foot and

he's only—he'll be out of there next year, I think. He goes to a Catholic school. Yes, they're big.

I'm going to tell you something. I had to do something I've never done in my life—well, with that age group. My grandchild, Ava, “Grandpa, I have to go to the bathroom.”

So I go to the teacher at the Catholic school. “She's got to go to the bathroom.”
[00:16:24]

“Well, the bathroom's right around the corner. You've got to take her.” [laughs]
So I had to help her through the whole thing, which was—you know.
ESPINO: That's so sweet of you to do that.

ARRIOLA: You know, I looked at her and they're pretty smart little people at that age. I didn't have to pick up her dress. She just wore it with a dress on and did the whole thing. When we went back in the classroom, I told the teacher, “Boy, this is totally new, because all I ever had was boys.” [laughs] She laughed. She laughed.

ESPINO: Anyway, yes, that's sweet. That's interesting, because we talked about that last time, how you didn't put your kids in public schools.

ARRIOLA: No. No. I was determined to try to get them the best possible education. Now, Victor went on and became an electrician. Andy, through the Marine Corps, became a helicopter mechanic, but he hasn't followed through in getting the little bit of education of one or two semesters at some of these—a place like L.A. Trade Tech or one of the other centers that's where from L.A. Unified. He said, “No, I'm going to concentrate on getting Norma her degree.” Okay. I'm not going to jump into it. So she's got about a year and a half to get her B.A.

ESPINO: That's wonderful.

ARRIOLA: And then I told him, "You're not going to stop there. You're going to go ahead." She's a bright lady.

ESPINO: Yes, I bet.

[00:18:26]

ARRIOLA: She's a wonderful mother. And Andy says, "I'll go, Dad. I'll go," because he's a Marine Corps veteran, you know, the whole thing. He's got points that would benefit him. I said, "Andy, you might be making almost \$25 an hour, but these jobs run out. By the time you're forty-five, you're going to find out that there's no more fighter planes."

ESPINO: That's a good point.

ARRIOLA: They're all drones. I mean, they're talking about drones totally, you know.

ESPINO: Things are going to change in the next ten, fifteen years.

ARRIOLA: It's like when I entered the machine shop, all the machines were the old style, the lathe, that sort of stuff, and then slow, slowly I saw a change and it all becoming automatics, you know. So I'm trying to get him to go on later.

ESPINO: When you decided where to put them when they were in kindergarten—

ARRIOLA: Preschool. We sent them to Poverello. Do you know about Poverello?

ESPINO: You told me a little bit about it last time and how wonderful it is.

ARRIOLA: It's a beautiful place. You've got to see it. Before you leave, one day I'm going to take you by there and you can look at it.

ESPINO: That'll be great.

ARRIOLA: The mother, the nun, she didn't start it, but she came in after that and she really built it. She really built it. The original—well, that's another story.

ESPINO: But is it true that the schools out this way are better than the schools you'll find more closer to Los Angeles and the urban center? I'm talking about the public schools.

[00:20:28]

ARRIOLA: Yes, I know what you're talking about. Initially during that time, yes, they were, they were better. I mean, we were still dealing with Lincoln Heights and the old gangs were there and all that goes along with that, the old neighborhoods. I mean, housing was forty years old, some of them more. I came out of there. I lived right across from Chinatown. I had to walk to school between the Alpine gang, the *barrio* gang, Dog Town, you know. They were all there. There weren't the gangs that exist now with automatic rifles and that sort of thing, no, but there were gangs, and the concentration of the Valley was—it's a new place. It's like Santa Clarita. Even like [unclear] Valley, where you have new schools. Why do you have new schools? Because you have the families and the parents that are making the money. They're professionals, you know. Even the Latinos, they're not staying in San Fernando; they're getting over to Santa Clarita. So they got the better deals. They just got the better—

[interruption]

ESPINO: So you were saying that the money goes to where the better neighborhoods are, the better houses, the better schools.

ARRIOLA: The thing that you have downtown, what kind of jobs can you get? Out here, all the major industry was here, major. Lockheed, you know, all of them,

Radioplane, North American. I mean, they were out here. So the housing of the fifties, that house, this house, this one has more because the old man built all of this on extra.

He was a contractor. [unclear] they bought it for \$12,000.

ESPINO: Wow!

[00:23:13]

ARRIOLA: Twelve thousand dollars! [laughs]

ESPINO: What a deal. That's so inexpensive.

ARRIOLA: But that was. The guys coming out of World War II, so they were demanding more. Yes, we fought the war. We want more.

ESPINO: That's right.

ARRIOLA: And did. So now the Valley, Pacoima, San Fernando, Van Nuys, Reseda, [unclear] Reseda, from there on, from north of Devonshire, south of the Ventura Freeway, all of that area has become the new area. We're becoming the old area. We have to fight harder. This fight that we're carrying on with Mission College, one of the originals on the President's Club, there was only about twenty-five [unclear] put up a few bucks every so often for Sam Cordova [phonetic], but we finally got Mission College. No, they wanted us to go to Valley. They wanted us to go to CSUN, draw more money to that area, but our guys had to take a bus or walk or have a car, and it was difficult for them, so we got Mission. That's why right now we're fighting to get more classes in there that they can take locally without having to go to CSUN and—that's the only university up here right now. So, yes, things were better.

ESPINO: But my original question was, in making decisions about your children's education, did you reflect back on your own experience?

ARRIOLA: Absolutely. They're going to college. I think I told you once before, I lost my opportunity to go to college when I graduated from high school because all I could think of was I was tired of the \$95—what do you call it?

ESPINO: The welfare check.

[00:25:59]

ARRIOLA: The welfare check.

ESPINO: Right. You did tell me that.

ARRIOLA: I had to give Mom more and my sister. But my social worker kept saying, "Ralph, you can go to college. I'll get you in."

ESPINO: So you decided not to go to college, to start working.

ARRIOLA: I never lost the thought of—

ESPINO: Pursuing?

ARRIOLA: Yes, continuing my education, and I did. I went to Valley College for two years, and two years L.A. Trade Tech.

ESPINO: What years would that be that you were in L.A. College?

ARRIOLA: In the late fifties for Valley College and also L.A. Trade Tech. Valley College kind of swung into '61, '62. L.A. Trade Tech was pre-'60. Yes, there was determination there. I had to be in L.A. at seven o'clock in the morning for L.A. Trade Tech, and then after that, I had to work at the little hot dog stand. I ran it till eight o'clock. About two months ago I was in L.A. and I decided to stop and go in there and look at it. [laughs]

ESPINO: What street was it on? The hot dog stand, what street was it on?

ARRIOLA: It's still on—they expanded it a little, but it's still there.

ESPINO: What street?

ARRIOLA: It's right on the corner of Venice and Hill.

ESPINO: There seems like there's a period before you actually start working in the plant that's called Poly Industries.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: What are you doing during that time before you—were you involved in any—
[00:28:12]

ARRIOLA: Actually, I started in Poly Industries while I was still going to Trade Tech. Valley College kind of came in a little later, I think.

ESPINO: But by that time you had graduated from high school already by—

ARRIOLA: Fifty-three. I worked and then there was a recession, a big recession in the fifties, late fifties, so I went to L.A. Trade Tech. Then when I finished there, around '51, '52—I just remembered something I found from it, an old check for 38 cents. [laughs] I was there from, I'd have to say, '60, because I would go to school, get out, get home, maybe rest an hour, have lunch, and then at three-thirty in the afternoon I had to be on the night shift at Poly Industries. So it was a task, but I did it.

ESPINO: What was your first experience with the union? Is UAW the first union you ever encountered?

ARRIOLA: No. You know, by that time, from the fifties I started in politics with my brother, so I learned and met a lot of the union reps already. I mean, at that time there was the Valley Labor Political Action Committee, VALPAC. Were you the one that said I love membership lists?

ESPINO: Oh, yes. [laughter]

ARRIOLA: I found some more.

ESPINO: I am that person.

ARRIOLA: I want to go through there and find them all and put them on the side for you.

ESPINO: Okay. Great.

ARRIOLA: I even found the list of the members of the Chicano Caucus of the UAW.

ESPINO: Wow.

[00:30:42]

ARRIOLA: And a picture I got somewhere of a Latino from back east someplace with the Chicano Caucus sign. That's just stuff that I'm finding.

ESPINO: All these treasures. So, VALPAC, that's another interesting—I mean, Valley Labor Political Action Committee, that was [unclear] in the fifties. Was that an organization that was multiethnic or was it mostly Mexican American, Chicano?

ARRIOLA: If you were a labor guy, you could join, and we had everybody. But again, at that time there wasn't a really heavy black population. Pacoima was just starting to develop an area for the blacks, and they always kind of thought they were the whole valley. [laughs] Good people. And I have VALPAC's list. I'll get those. You'll find them interesting.

ESPINO: Did they come from different unions?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, every union. At the time there was a lot of very active unions because jobs around here, the semi-skilled production jobs, the machine shop jobs, you know, were building armor for Korea. In the sixties was the beginning of Indochina, so we were starting to produce more and more fighting weapons. I mean, it wasn't a big

deal they talked about, but we knew we were producing stuff, but all these were war. The the other unions had also built up. I don't even know if VALPAC still operates. I looked through the list. I mean, hell, 90 percent of those guys are dead, I'll bet.

ESPINO: So what were the very active unions at that time in the Valley?

ARRIOLA: Well, the traditional. In the Valley, the UAW, the machinists union, the Teamsters, but they'd always been kind of a distant group within labor. You always looked at them as like a bunch of goons. They liked to operate like that. I told you about the meeting with the leader of the California Teamsters. I forget his name, but I'll find it because I found the picture. And Paul met with him to negotiate, "Hey, man, just back up. Stop. Leave the farm workers alone. Cesar's trying to organize the farm workers." They wanted to move into the whole agricultural thing. I went there with Paul, and I guess I was supposed to be his goon, but when I looked, there were five guys [unclear]. [laughs] It was funny.

ESPINO: Did they have the reputation of using—

[00:34:17]

ARRIOLA: Force.

ESPINO: When you say "goon," you mean like—

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Or did they really strongarm people?

ARRIOLA: You didn't screw around with the Teamsters, no. What they organized were places where they needed to say, "We're here. We want to organize. We're the Teamsters. We will protect you." I mean, whatever their tactics were, it's always been a rough group.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: But there was the others. There was the carpenters. Good group. In that picture with the supervisor, “Red” Martinez [phonetic] that we talked about, he was a carpenter. He was like me. Anybody could beat you up. [laughs] Yes, and they were large. At the General Motors plant had like 3,200 members, the Local 645.

ESPINO: The General Motors plant here in the Valley?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Where was it located?

[00:35:35]

ARRIOLA: Right on Van Nuys, right below Roscoe [phonetic] Boulevard. Then there was the machinists. The machinists were big. Lockheed, Rocketdyne, NASCO [phonetic], North American, Radioplane, these were all big aircraft plants, and the carpenters, because the Valley was expanding, you know, so they had a lot of work, a lot of workers.

ESPINO: Did it seem like there was an economic boon going on?

ARRIOLA: Something really didn’t get started until things really opened up, as I remember, when we finally said, “What have we been doing for the last five years?” 1965. “We’ve been killing Vietnamese, and now they’re killing back. So we’d better get with it.” And then finally Nixon stopped the war after massive demonstrations. By that time we had lost 58,000, and over 8,000 were Latinos. [cries] That’s what the moratorium and all these things were.

ESPINO: But in those early days before the moratorium, did you have—because you told me that you were making bombs for the military. Did you have a position against the war at that time or did you later on—

ARRIOLA: At that time it was just—you know, we didn't look at it as a war. It was like a military action, you know. We were supporting the South Vietnamese. We were protecting the good guys. That's all we were doing. We were just sending in a few guys to help them. Before you knew it, it was a wide open situation and it was crazy. Too many guys were dying.

ESPINO: Do you remember when you realized that?

[00:38:24]

ARRIOLA: By 1965 we realized that we were in a war and that our guys were dying. And, you know, the [unclear], the parents stuck their kids in college. If you went to college, you didn't have to go to the war. You didn't have to get drafted. The rest of us all got drafted. All right. I went, but they said, "Get out of here." No, the blacks and Latinos and poor whites, those were the guys that ended up in Vietnam. The others went to college.

ESPINO: Right. Right. That's so true. That's so true. Well, before we move on to the whole antiwar movement and the UAW's role, I'm interested in what the culture before that, because we're talking about a time when, like you say, World War II vets, primarily Korean vets are getting these great union jobs, building houses, big houses, compared to what was possible in East Los Angeles, say, for example, the houses out here are big, bigger. Did it feel like it was a time of economic prosperity?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure. I mean, things started happening. I've told you that my brother and Sam Cordova and some of the other guys had the Latin American group that they had going. Somebody gave me the name the other day, but I forgot. And they were talking about getting better jobs for the guys. They came back from the war doing the same thing they were doing before, you know. They weren't good jobs. And, you know, around that time is when all the G.I. Forum, LULAC, all these groups started organizing. Texas, California, maybe even Colorado or some of the groups building these Latino organizations, because, yes, they wanted more. They learned a lot going to the war.

ESPINO: Were you involved in any of those, the League of United Latin American—

ARRIOLA: You know, there again, too, the guys came back and they learned a lot, just learned a lot from the war, and so they were going after the good jobs, and even within our own group, we were assigned to build a middle class of Latinos, you know, so there was a little [unclear] there, you know, the American G.I. Forum, LULAC. You were talking about guys being doctors now, lawyers, [unclear], you know, so there was a change taking place there, good change, but there was a bit of, "I'm a professional. You're just a laborer."

ESPINO: You felt that?

[00:42:42]

ARRIOLA: Sure.

ESPINO: There was a snobbery?

ARRIOLA: Sure. There wasn't an open thing, but it was there. You felt it. You felt it. I mean, go back and look at the leadership after the war, going from the fifties, middle fifties going on. We were starting to get a lot of professionals, a lot of attorneys, a lot of

doctors. Some of the leaders of these organizations were all professionals. They were guys that had gone to college and furthered themselves, yes.

ESPINO: When I interviewed Congressman Torres, he said that in the early days around that period, 1950s, that there were many union activists who were educated, who left their professional lives to be involved in the union because they believed in what the union could do and the possibility of the union, so they were maybe lawyers or they had college education, but instead of becoming professional, they became union organizers. Did you meet anybody like that?

ARRIOLA: I don't recall that. The ones that did come in were guys that were hired by the union to do legal stuff, to do the professional stuff, so, yes, they were there, but they weren't rank and file, you know. They were pros. That's why I tell you that there was a little bit of a change, you know. They were a little more middle class. They weren't making a top salary of \$3.94 an hour in a machine shop; they were making a little more. When I went to work for the UAW, let's say four hours for \$40, 164 bucks a week, 164 bucks a week. I figured it out one day. Anyway, that was 700—for whatever that was, I went to 18,000 with an air travel card and a union business card. I was thirty-five, first time on an airplane. [laughs] First time in Washington. Duh. Wow! [laughs]

ESPINO: That's seductive. Why would you ever want to go back to the rank and file when you have those kinds of privileges and luxuries?

[00:46:03]

ARRIOLA: It changes you, yes. Except when you have—

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay, we're back.

ARRIOLA: So working for the Assemblyman taught me a lot, a lot, a lot. I used it with all the influence that a political position has. I beat people with it to get stuff that we needed, and I went on the Head Start board, was on it for about three years, and I saw what the present director was doing or not doing, and I was saying, “Al, what do you want me to do for you? What do you want on the board? What do you want? What do you want?” Never got much. He finally got put—incompetent bastard—he got put on as one of the directors of Head Start for the company. Jesus.

One of the things that really annoyed me was the thing I would ask him before the board meeting, “What do you want? What do you want to do? Put it on.” I had friends from the board.

“No, we’re okay. We’re okay.”

“Okay, guy.” We weren’t okay. He’d been there already twelve years, thirteen years, and only 600 kids. Every year you had a chance to get more, but he didn’t want any more. I took over Head Start and within three years I was up to 1,600 kids.

ESPINO: Wow.

[00:48:15]

ARRIOLA: I extended. I’d go out and look for centers and everything. I had to retrain the whole staff on—I’m trying to think of the program. It was a brand-new program and they all said it was going to take three years to train them all. We did it in a year. We ran it hard. I went through every center and I’d tell them, “You guys are going to clean up this place. You’re going to get rid of all this junk.” Because teachers love to save, you know.

ESPINO: They’d been hoarding.

ARRIOLA: Boxes of half cartons of milk and the rest was cockroaches.

ESPINO: Oh, my goodness.

ARRIOLA: I mean, they were a mess. They all had their little corners of junk. We cleaned them all out. I mean, we cleaned them all out. I'd go in there on a Saturday with a bunch of the guys and if I had told them to clean out and they didn't, they found out on Monday that the place had been cleaned out. I just wouldn't put up with it.

ESPINO: So were they angry?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure.

ESPINO: Or were they happy with your—

ARRIOLA: At first they were angry, but then we replaced it with new stuff. That's the way I operated. We had thirteen kitchens. You know how many mothers know how to cook? Other than a pot of beans. It was a mess. It was a mess. I got rid of them and I took over—Pacoima Hospital had just quit, so I took over—I was on the board of Pacoima. I told the guy that was running it—he just died here recently, a wonderful man, John—I'll think of it. "I want the [unclear]." They weren't using it anymore.

"Ralph, everything's filled with the old hospital beds and stuff."

[00:50:22]

"That's okay. We'll take care of that."

"Well, if you can do it, you're welcome to the kitchen." We paid so much.

So what happened was, I told the grantee, "We have a place for a central kitchen. I want to open it up. I want new equipment." Every center had an old stove. We got brand-new stoves, everything.

The grantees, they were always a pain in the ass. “I’m going to show you the letter from the woman who used to be my monitor.”

“How about [unclear] for what you did?”

They said, “Well, by next Saturday if you have the place up and cleaned, our guys will go there and do some repairs.”

I said, “Okay. So you show up, we’ll be there.” We had cleaned it out, taken everything out, put it in other areas. I mean cleaned it out. They were surprised. I took guys out of the street and paid them so much, and that’s what you do. “Here’s a mop, here’s a bucket. There’s the trash cans.” We cleaned up.

Had training sessions for the women to cook. I got the best damn cook. She was very mild but knew her stuff. She was a college grad, but her thing was cooking, wanted to be a teacher in high school, but she came to us and we retrained them all and then just taught them how to work as a team. We did a lot of training, a lot of training. So that’s why I took it, because I knew I could do a better job. I mean, just think about it. Sixteen hundred kids a day.

ESPINO: Is it all day from, like, nine to—

[00:52:56]

ARRIOLA: In thirty centers.

ESPINO: It’s not run like a preschool, correct?

ARRIOLA: It’s a preschool.

ESPINO: But I mean as far as it being a daycare kind of preschool.

ARRIOLA: Yes, but it’s only for four hours.

ESPINO: Oh, so it is like a preschool.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: It's not a daycare.

ARRIOLA: No, no. No daycare. Training classes for the parents. We put on a lot of training classes for the parents. I mean, I really changed it. I just kind of burned out. Then [unclear].

ESPINO: Well, before we get to that part, can we go back? I'm going to pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. Do you know Soledad "Chore" Allatorre?

ARRIOLA: My mother. [laughs]

ESPINO: She's your mother? Or your mother knew her? She's not old enough to be your mother. Is she?

ARRIOLA: [laughs] I just saw her the other day. We had the reunion of the moratorium. But I used to see her all the time. I was close.

ESPINO: She did live out here in the Valley in those early days, and she talks about her work with Bert Corona and the Longshoremen. Did that kind of intersect with what you were doing?

[00:54:36]

ARRIOLA: See, by that time—

ESPINO: With the Valley Labor Political—

ARRIOLA: By that time he had left the Longshoremen as a worker for them, as an organizer, and concentrated on his organization, which was—

ESPINO: Was it the Mexican American Political—

ARRIOLA: Yes, Mexican.

ESPINO: Hermandad, yes. So this was later. I'm thinking about, say, for example—

ARRIOLA: Well, he started coming out early. He may not have incorporated the thing, but he was—

ESPINO: Like United Farm Workers? Maybe work with immigration or immigrant rights, Lyndon Johnson's presidency, the War on Poverty, all of those things happen in the early sixties. Walter Reuther becomes the president of the UAW. Did you cross paths with Soledad and Bert?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: How? How do?

ARRIOLA: Well, I had thirty centers. Much of my membership was his.

ESPINO: Thirty centers of what?

ARRIOLA: Of Head Start. Well, that was later. When he was coming in organizing, he also got involved with us, so he had a lot of support. The other years he was just involved in so many things. I mean, where didn't they know him?

ESPINO: I don't know.

[00:56:28]

ARRIOLA: He organized trips to Washington, D.C. He had a house, a two-story house with a two-story garage. I went on those trips and he took people right out of the community. They'd never been to Washington, you know, and when they were there, they organized themselves. "Some of you are going to get up and cook and some of you are going to wash dishes," and da, da, da, da.

When I went with him the time he took me, right after I left Head Start, I went with these—"Come on, Ralph. Go to Washington. You need to get out of here." So I went. And I've always been kind of a silent type, but I was always the first one in the kitchen, washing dishes or doing whatever.

It was the final night when we were going to head back after two weeks, and we had a play. "Okay, we're going to play immigration officer and you guys," doing a little play on being on the farm and being picked up and taken to jail and thrown out of the country. I was sitting in the car. "We've got to pick a—." What do you call the officer from—

ESPINO: *Migra?*

ARRIOLA: Yes. *Migra*. And they all talked to me in English all the time, and I never really got around to talking much Spanish with them. "*¿A quién vamos a sacar para que sea el Migra officer?*" They all turned around and looked at me. [laughs] They gave me a club. It was so funny because I never expected it. And that's when they found out I could speak Spanish, you know. Because they left and I stayed another week.

But it was really interesting. We organized in little groups. I mean, Bert made them get up at—what was it? Six-thirty, get to breakfast, make your lunches, and get ready to get down to the bus to the Capitol," and by eight, eight-thirty, we were at the Capitol and the groups were put together for different offices.

ESPINO: Different issues or offices?

[00:59:15]

ARRIOLA: Offices and whatever the issues at the time were. Oh, he was very organized.

ESPINO: Sounds phenomenal.

ARRIOLA: It was.

ESPINO: How did you first meet him? Do you remember when you first met him?

ARRIOLA: Just in politics all the time. He was always around.

How did we get here? What were we talking about?

ESPINO: Well, I was trying to see how your paths crossed in the sixties with Bert Corona, because that story is much later. It's more like in the eighties, what you're telling me, or the late seventies. It was the eighties.

ARRIOLA: He was around. Well, maybe so, but I knew him from the middle, late sixties, maybe even earlier. I don't really recall exactly. I knew he used to go to the VALPAC meetings. He was always involved in the sixties. I found the certificate they gave to this Republican, Hank Arklin, endorsing him for the Assembly. Sotello—four guys that I never expected, who were very involved with MAPA, were using MAPA to endorse a Republican, and that's when I told you that we were picketing outside and the farm workers were driving by on their bus and they stopped, they got out and helped us picket. [laughs] And Cordova was on the other side, you know. I knew why they were doing it and I supported it, but I had a job to do for labor, so that's one of the things that happened.

[01:01:22]

That's why I also told you that later on there was a fiesta at the church and I brought Negri in to get some recognition, but they cut us off, and that's when Sam came up to me and says, "Ralph, it's okay. We had to do it. You know we had to do it. So

we're not against you. We just have to do this to this guy," because he double-crossed them dirty.

ESPINO: I think that it would be great to start—my computer battery's going to die, but that's okay. I have my notes on my paper.

[interruption]

ESPINO: So if you can, maybe draw me a diagram of the different organizations that were starting to become effective politically in the sixties. So you have the Valley Labor Political Action Committee and then you have Bert Corona's organization.

ARRIOLA: Hermandad.

ESPINO: Let me see if I have a date when it actually is—like a founding date for MAPA.

ARRIOLA: MAPA, that was in—

ESPINO: 1960.

ARRIOLA: Yes, that's when this old guy took us—I told you he took us to Phoenix, and [unclear] and MAPA got together there. I was there. I was a young punk, you know, and I got to see all this stuff. They formed MAPA and they became not only MAPA locally, but Arizona, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico. That brother of mine could tell you more about that.

ESPINO: So he was involved in MAPA, your brother?

[01:03:42]

ARRIOLA: Yes. And it was those guys, those young guys that came out of World War II that were doing this. Sam, my brother, didn't go in the service because he was the only adult that was left. My dad was sick by then, black lung or whatever it was, and then

passed away in '45. So they hadn't drafted him. He had to stay and help the family.

But, yes, locally it was MAPA, it was LULAC, it was LACA. I have a book that's that thick, a big one, a big book of LACA, of all the people that were involved with it.

ESPINO: Greater Los Angeles—

ARRIOLA: Latin American Civic Association, LACA.

ESPINO: Because GLACA is also another organization, but that was more in downtown Los Angeles. Latin American Civic Association, LACA.

ARRIOLA: LACA was Miguel Montes. Have you interviewed him?

ESPINO: No. He was the one who went in 1965, '64, to Washington, D.C., and screamed and hollered about Head Start coming to the Valley. He brought Head Start to the Valley. They had just formed LACA. That's the one I took over, the Head Start Program.

ESPINO: So here in the Valley, of these three organizations, which one had the most membership?

ARRIOLA: At that time it was LACA. See, but these were educators.

ESPINO: In LACA.

ARRIOLA: LACA was educators, you know.

ESPINO: So then the Valley Labor Political Action Committee was also popular and powerful at the same time.

ARRIOLA: Which one?

ESPINO: Valley Political Labor Action.

[01:06:10]

ARRIOLA: That was labor. That was strictly workers, labor. Those were the business agents, the presidents of locals, you know.

ESPINO: They didn't have their hand in politics and political campaigns?

ARRIOLA: Oh, god, yes. That was all politics, all politics.

ESPINO: So I'm thinking it's kind of like a sister organization to LACA, to LULAC, to MAPA. Or am I wrong?

ARRIOLA: No. Because a lot of the guys in these organizations were also part of VALPAC. And I've got that list. I have so much crap. [laughs] It's there.

ESPINO: That's wonderful. That's wonderful, because these people should be recognized for, like you say, Miguel Montes, for bringing Head Start to the Valley.

ARRIOLA: And he finally retired. He's a dentist. But he's getting really on age. He's around. In fact, I just had a discussion with Rudy Acuña and he said, no, he's still around. He should be—he was in politics, he was in state, he was appointed to one of the state commissions on education, was on it for a long time. He had all kinds of appointments. He was a Mexican's Mexican. [laughs] Really, really it ought to be done right away.

ESPINO: Okay. So we were talking about how these organizations were all pushing. And which one was your favorite, the one that you spent most of your time—

ARRIOLA: My favorite was always at that time really being a member of the Labor Movement. That's where I was, because that's where when the elections came around, I was out there as a director of the headquarters, so I got to talk to all of them.

ESPINO: What was your first election campaign that you worked on?

ARRIOLA: Well, we're going back to the fifties.

ESPINO: Oh, right, right, right. But as a UAW member.

[01:08:44]

ARRIOLA: It had to be in the early—yes, for the Kennedy campaign, President Kennedy. I was in that one full, but I was a young guy. I mean, I was part of the Kennedy youth. We had our own big book. [laughs]

ESPINO: Did you get release time from work to work on this?

ARRIOLA: Yes. When you got put out of the plant, you got lost time. They paid you what you would have been making in the plant, plus you had expense money and stuff, and if you were running the headquarters, well, I had the kitty. [laughs]

ESPINO: So you were in your early twenties.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: You were running campaign headquarters?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And what were your primary responsibilities? What were the kinds of things you had to do?

ARRIOLA: Organize and keep volunteers. At that time it was volunteers, and organize. Toward the end of the campaign, the last four or five weeks, we would have breakfasts. We would take over the carpenters hall, which used to be on Van Nuys Boulevard, a big one, and we'd have 300, 400 people there, volunteers, just a little bit of everybody. We'd feed them breakfast, give them a pep talk, give them their walking sheets, and get the hell out and go.

ESPINO: There was a lot of knocking on doors at that time?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: What about phone calls? Did you do phone banking?

[01:10:28]

ARRIOLA: We had phone banks going all the time. I just found—there was a guy, son of a bitch, John Tunney. Everybody was pissed off at him because he didn't support the farm workers, but he was a good legislator and Democrat, but he had hesitations about it. So that's the one where they put me out for the last three weeks, maybe four weeks, and I had to get all of the vote out from Indiana all the way out to Pico Rivera. We had to do it in three weeks. I had fifteen units of guys, their cars or trucks. They'd go out at noon every day with loudspeakers, and we distributed over 100,000 pieces of information and we walked the hell out of that and we got all that area for John Tunney.

Corky Gonzales, he was having a convention in Denver, and I had just gotten into a fight with—what was his name? He just died. Great guy. You'd know him if I mentioned.

ESPINO: From California?

ARRIOLA: Yes. He was the director of the Democratic Party effort for Tunney and the rest of the Democrats, congressional. He was the one who overseen our—we ran Soto [phonetic] and Brooklyn [phonetic], and I had these thirty guys that were out working for me and they'd been all out of the plant. They had to get paid. I called them up and said, "Hey, I need the money," something like 16, 17,000 dollars. "I've got to have that. The guys have got to be paid Monday or Tuesday's election."

"Oh, Ralph, they'll wait."

"No, they won't, because I won't. I want to pay them now." This was a Thursday.

And he said, “Well, I’ll call you back.”

He didn’t call me, but I told him, “If you don’t call me back, I’m shutting the office down. I’m closing the campaign office until I get some money.”

[01:13:49]

Well, he didn’t quite believe me. When he called, it was either Friday night or Saturday, the office was closed. They went looking for me all over. [laughs] And they found me and they delivered \$17,000, cash.

Well, these little bastards show up, the Brown Berets, about six of them. “Mr. Arriola, Ralph, we need at least \$500. We want to go to the convention in Denver for Corky.” [laughs] First of all, they were young, they needed gas money, so I gave them 500 bucks, but they were going to milk me for a lot leaner.

ESPINO: You mean at that moment that he had just give you that how many thousands?

ARRIOLA: Yes, that Saturday afternoon.

ESPINO: They came that same day? That’s funny. [laughs]

ARRIOLA: So they were happy and they took off, and I was glad they were gone because the election was that Tuesday coming up.

ESPINO: So who lost their \$500? If that \$500 was supposed to go to somebody’s salary—

ARRIOLA: No, it was just bulk money, bulk money to pay the guys through Tuesday. No, I had it padded. I had enough money.

ESPINO: You had it padded. [laughs] So okay, so everybody got theirs, and then there was always some extra, is that what you’re saying?

ARRIOLA: It was an exciting campaign. I wish I had that—I had that picture of her and my wife in a picture with a couple other guys at a meeting. Both of them were so beautiful at the time. Nancy was the cutest damn blonde. She was really, really a doll. And then Helen, she was more beautiful. The little blonde at the beginning, she was working for J.J. Rodriguez, who was the director of the County Federation of Labor. For that area, he was the main guy. At first he gave me such a hard time, so I just played it cool, played it cool. By the end of the campaign, she took me out to dinner. [laughs] But we worked our fannies off. She was really good. She [unclear] politics, too. So we put on one hell of a campaign.

[01:16:52]

I found some brochures of John Tunney which were really interesting for somebody like me doing some work.

ESPINO: So you're saying that he was not a friend of Cesar Chavez, but he was a friend of labor.

ARRIOLA: Yes. We finally got him to come around. He was scared. He was in trouble. He was a dumb fool.

ESPINO: Tunney?

ARRIOLA: Yes, Tunney. He wasn't the brightest guy in the world. His dad was John Tunney the boxer from the sixties, early American. They said, "We need [unclear]. You've got to go out and get it." And they were putting up everything for me to do it. I was lucky.

ESPINO: But was that a conflict for you?

ARRIOLA: No. I enjoyed that one.

ESPINO: But I mean as far as supporting this person who wasn't in support—

ARRIOLA: No. Sometimes you turn your—you do what you have to do. You're part of labor, you're part of the Democratic Party. I mean, that's who you're working for, so you've got to do what you've got to do and cuss at 'em as you go along. [laughs]

ESPINO: That's such an interesting interpretation, because some people who look at Cesar Chavez as the symbol of the Chicano Movement say he never identified as being Chicano. He wasn't really part of the—he was a labor person, and here you're saying that you had to take a strictly labor line and associate yourself with this person who wasn't endorsing the UFW or Cesar Chavez.

[01:18:45]

ARRIOLA: Yes. We needed the vote. We needed the vote. We had to get him elected. Sometimes you do things that you have to do.

ESPINO: What was his issue?

ARRIOLA: I'd have to go back and research a little bit, but it was farm workers. I think we even got farm workers to come out at the end. That's how serious that election was.

ESPINO: I see. What about Cesar? Did he—

ARRIOLA: I never talked to Cesar, I mean, for that one. No, I just worked my own—I worked with Paul. Paul was the best for Cesar, but the rest of the guys were too. Rodriguez.

ESPINO: J.J. Rodriguez.

ARRIOLA: He was the president of the butchers, always dressed so—he was a real gentleman, first of all, he really was, J.J., and Nancy was—he worked with J.J., and

whatever J.J. said, she came back and told me, “That’s what J.J. wants.” *Ai yi yi*. Women in politics. She was wonderful. She and Helen were drinking buddies. [laughs]

So we got the guy elected. We did our part. We had that whole area east of the river.

ESPINO: What was the pushing point? What were your bullet points as far as when people would knock in doors, how would you convince them to vote for him?

ARRIOLA: See, the resentment was within some Chicanos. Most other people didn’t know about it. So you went out and you’d talk about why we needed him as a Democratic—I’ll show you the papers.

ESPINO: The brochures from that time.

[01:21:24]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: But, I mean, somebody who only was born in, say, 1990, when they’re listening to this interview, they might want to know why this guy was so important that the UAW would put you and all of these other labor organizations would support him and put money behind his campaign. Why him?

ARRIOLA: Because he was a selected candidate for that area for that office. So that’s where to go.

ESPINO: But he was a friend of labor.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And did he prove—was it worth it?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, because of the key votes on key issues for labor, which are key issues for us, the Latinos, he was there, and just that he had said some things that aren't kosher.

ESPINO: Like what?

ARRIOLA: I'd have to go look, but there were issues that he got in trouble about.

ESPINO: Afterwards, after he was elected?

ARRIOLA: Before. That's why it was so hard. See, what the guys would do in the morning, they'd come in, they'd get their car, their truck or whatever ready, make sure the sound system was working, get all their brochures, and then they'd go around and they'd go to the markets, every district. Where I put that was an area within—whether it was Montebello or Pico Rivera, they only stayed in that area. That one car stayed in that area, and it was up to them to hit every market, every place where people would get together from 11:30 to 8:00, and they had to get all their material out, and they'd have to go back to that market, you know. People kept moving, so we had to be with them. We got it done. We got it done. And I'd check on them. I'd drive out there and look around for them.

ESPINO: Gosh.

[01:23:59]

ARRIOLA: They called me a lot of names. [laughs]

ESPINO: So were you considered someone who was strict in their management style?

ARRIOLA: Someone, you know, who knew what had to be done and got it done. I mean, yes, they knew I was kind of a bastard, but I was a good bastard. [laughs]

ESPINO: So what year would this be? I'm not familiar with him as a candidate and I didn't realize he was so important to labor.

ARRIOLA: I'll show you the paper, but this was maybe the mid-sixties, somewhere around there.

ESPINO: So after Kennedy was elected?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: So getting back to Kennedy's election, were those same tactics used? How did you run your office?

ARRIOLA: The same. Because now I don't know, you know, I don't see that much activity with precinct walkers.

ESPINO: No.

ARRIOLA: They'll pick one little precinct and that's what they walk. We covered the district. You'd talk to people, talk to all of them. That's where the vote is. You've got to convince them. But now they've become so select, they're going to run their own party. Why don't we have more voters? Because elected officials don't give a damn. They don't. They don't give a damn. They just want to get elected, so they only go for people that they've identified as being theirs.

ESPINO: Were you satisfied with the Democratic Party during that time, during the Kennedy election and some of the other elections?

[01:25:59]

ARRIOLA: The only time I felt we had a problem with the Democratic Party, but we still supported him, was Papa Brown.

ESPINO: Pat Brown?

ARRIOLA: Yes. His staff told my brother and the other guys, “Hey, what the hell do you people want? We’re giving you everything. No, we don’t have no money to give you.” They wanted money to organize. Oh, that was a terrible meeting.

ESPINO: You were at that meeting?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: To organize—

ARRIOLA: The voters, the Latino voters. Takes money.

ESPINO: So to organize the voters to vote or what was the purpose of the—

ARRIOLA: Yes, get them out to vote, Get Out the Vote campaigns.

ESPINO: And he didn’t feel it was important to have that vote?

ARRIOLA: Well, his people. No, it was important and they knew it was important and they knew that they had us anyway.

ESPINO: So Pat Brown was very popular among Mexican Americans.

[01:27:13]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: So he didn’t feel like he needed to—

ARRIOLA: Yes. It was a different time, you know. They took us for granted, really did, but it was a time when we were waking up too. In a community in the old days, if they came here and they wanted the area, they picked five or six guys that were active, that [Spanish phrase]. [laughs] That’s what it was.

ESPINO: Gosh, that’s so fascinating, because you wonder how all of this organization took place, and you’re saying that certain people were targeted, people with economic

power. A lot of those people don't ever make the books, the history books, those people who—

ARRIOLA: No, they were just local guys, like I said. What the heck was—one of the very active guys, the guy that really supported me and he was my brother's best friend, Bill Garcia, had a *tortillería*. Well, it wasn't a *tortillería*; it was a butcher shop in a small store in the *barrio* there in San Fernando. How did he eventually become one of the district workers for Antonovich? He got a real good job because he was active.

ESPINO: Back then.

ARRIOLA: Yes. My brother, he was just an active bigmouth, you know.

ESPINO: He never got any big appointments or—

ARRIOLA: He got appointed by Mayor Yorty. He was a field deputy in the Valley. He and one other guy kind of did the whole Valley.

ESPINO: For Yorty?

[01:29:35]

ARRIOLA: For Yorty.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: And my sister-in-law was the treasurer of the campaign. So they were very close.

ESPINO: That's interesting.

ARRIOLA: And I got a letter from Yorty, thanking me for the campaign.

ESPINO: Did you like Yorty?

ARRIOLA: He was all right. I mean, he was all right, but he was always a bad Democrat. He never played the game with the rest of the Democrats.

ESPINO: What about with the ethnic communities?

ARRIOLA: When I got appointed by Jim Keysor as one of his key field deputies, it was Tom Montgomery—I keep forgetting his last name—a black guy. We were close, and he and a couple others, when Sam pulled them together and said, “Hey, man, we’ve got to push Ralph to become the deputy for Jim Keysor,” they pushed the hell out of Jim Keysor, you know. I still see his wife every once in a while. He passed away about ten years ago, Tom Montgomery. Very close. [unclear] too. [laughter]

ESPINO: I think I’m going to stop right here. You can take me out to see some of those lists.

[End of October 16, 2013 interview]

SESSION 4 (October 23, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and I'm interviewing Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando.

I just showed you a book by Kenneth Burt, and it looks at Latino civic participation, and I was just wondering if—

[00:00:15]

ARRIOLA: I'm in it.

ESPINO: I want to show you some pictures. You're in it. Let me just pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We're back. Let me start. Okay. Well, I was just wondering, when I showed you the book, if you recognized or if you could talk to me about some of the union activists that you encountered when you were initially with the UAW. There's a picture here of Tony Rios, who was an important union person in the forties and, I'm assuming, fifties and sixties.

ARRIOLA: Yes, he was.

ESPINO: Much more is written about him in the earlier period.

ARRIOLA: I was kind of a youngster at the time, but I was hanging around with Cordova and my brother. I'm trying to come up with lists, lists of all these guys that were around. I mean, they were part of the group that ran around together. I'll find those lists.

ESPINO: Okay. That would be great.

ARRIOLA: I'm concentrating on finding those lists more and more. Yeah, Tony, he was a big-time guy in my eyes.

ESPINO: What do you think his importance was? What role did he play?

[00:01:38]

ARRIOLA: His role was kind of everybody looked to him. Everybody respected him. Everybody, they didn't take him for granted, so he was an important guy within the group. I'm trying to think of what they called the—I'll find out from Con. If I have to talk to him just to find out the name of that [unclear], I'll talk to him. [laughs]

ESPINO: That's funny.

ARRIOLA: Ah, my brother.

ESPINO: What about—we talked a little bit last time about Bert Corona, and do you remember your first encounter with him?

ARRIOLA: God, you know, it had to be just an ongoing during the late fifties and the sixties, the sixties more, though he wasn't around the Valley that much until later. He was more downtown and then he moved out here. From then on, I mean, Bert was always all over the place.

Then in—let's see. In '68 or '69 he invited me to go to Washington with him because he had a place there already, and I knew about it. He had bought this two-story house and a big garage and an upstairs where he took twenty, thirty people and they stayed. These were just neighborhood people, and he gave them an orientation and told them what they were going to do. He was very strict. "You guys going to have to form teams, teams to clean up the place, take turns making breakfast, take turn making dinner, take turn making the sandwiches and the lunches that we'll have to you at the Capitol."

[00:04:02]

Then at night he'd have a session about something, something political, something to do with the laws that we were there to push. I can't even remember what they were at the time, but all immigration stuff. On weekends, we'd go out for a ride, he and I, and he took me to—is it Williamsburg? One of the old—

ESPINO: Battlefields?

ARRIOLA: No, this was one of the first settlements. I'm not sure if it was Williamsburg, but one of the first settlements. It was like it was when they put it together. The people that were there were now people that were part of a theater group, but they actually oversaw the place during the day and let people visit, and they would take them to the houses, the barns. Everything that was there, they showed. Then they would have a lunch, and that was really interesting. So I got to talk to him a lot. I mean, we just talked about politics. We talked about everything. I got a good education from him.

ESPINO: There's controversy about him. I'm not sure why it's controversial, but some people say he was part of the very Left, part of the Communist Party, or wasn't Communist. Then other people say that he never was, that he just had very Left politics, but he was never actually a Communist or in the Communist Party.

ARRIOLA: You know, all of the truly active liberal activists, they were always given the title of, "You're a Commie. Hey, this guy's a Commie. Be careful." Bullshit. You could call me a Commie. So what. I can call you Hitler, you know. [laughs] So take your pick. It's just that way.

[00:06:51]

I mentioned before that one of my key—not one of them, *the* key mentor for me was Marvin Brody from the UAW, old-time activist. He and a couple of other guys, I think there was something like maybe five guys, would get together every year and take a trip to Russia.

ESPINO: They would go to Russia?

ARRIOLA: They would go to Russia and meet with the different groups, get to know them, you know. So, yeah, so everybody would say, “Oh, married to a Commie.”

I will mention something that he said to me one time that kind of scared the hell out of me. Not scared, but surprised the hell out of me. Every day after five o’clock, I’d go out at the regional offices on Ninth and Hill—not Hill. Ninth and Alvarado, right near there. I’d go get a couple of beers apiece and some something to munch on, and we’d start talking, and he’d start telling about how he got involved.

One day after all of that, he says, “Ralph, I can’t tell you, but you’ve got to decide what you want to be.” And it was almost like an invitation into the Party.

It surprised me, but I said, “Well, I’ll have to give it some thought, Marvin.” I mean, that set me thinking for days. [laughs]

But he was such a knowledgeable man. Oh, my god. I wish I could find that article on him, and maybe you can get it from the *Times*, an article, obituary on the death of Marvin Brody, B-r-o-d-y. There was Marvin Braude, who was a city councilman here, but this was Brody. And they just praised the hell out of him, really praised him.

Tragic in his life. He and his wife—she was an activist labor person, very active in her time, and his son, he had one son. He had got taken off the—no, he didn’t. He left the country when they started going after the guys that didn’t want to go to Vietnam, and

he went to England and he went to the—there's a University of Economics, a very famous school on economics in England, and he was going there, and then he became a writer for one of the papers on economics, sort of a young guy, but he was really bright.

[00:10:40]

Marvin had bought a small vineyard up in just about San Francisco, and he and his wife were using it. He would spend most of his time in San Francisco. I visited with him at the place that he had there. Tragically, though, when—I'm trying to think now—when he came back from—and I think he was a Harvard graduate, too, or one of the big schools—he was out in the vineyard doing whatever you do in a vineyard, and they got nervous because they hadn't heard from him for quite a while, hours. So they went looking for him, and they found him. He had had a heart attack and passed away. Young guy. [cries] That drove Marvin up the wall. That really—

ESPINO: It broke his heart?

ARRIOLA: It may even pushed him to his heart attack eventually. I don't know.

ESPINO: His own heart attack?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Yes, he died during that time, like about the middle seventies, sometime in there. I don't remember. But he stayed very active with that Leftie Labor Movement crowd. But I don't know what he [unclear]. You couldn't argue with Marvin and win an argument because he had so much knowledge.

ESPINO: You respected him?

ARRIOLA: I loved him.

ESPINO: How did you feel about—were you interested in going that direction towards more of an ideology of a Communist philosophy?

[00:13:16]

ARRIOLA: No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. Ideology, to become a Commie, that never entered my mind. Learning about the Left side of things, learning about some of those leaders, whether they were the Walter Reuthers or whether they were the John P. Lewises or other people, it was more about learning about them, about what they had to say, because everything that they had to say had to do with the poor, had to do with for the poor. They were the fighters. They were the ones that pushed labor here in the United States. Social Security and every other major program was part of their doing. [cries]

You know, along with Marvin, there was this little old man—I wish I could find his daughter—Lester Balog, part of the local. I told you I met with CSUN the other day. I haven't met with them since, but I mentioned that they really had an interest in everything I have about the UAW there, and I have found a lot.

Did I tell you I have pictures of Judge Chargin in San Jose? I have two sheets. I'll show you them before you leave. And I'm struggling. Do I give it to the guys with the UAW local that they want to do so much to preserve their history, or do I give them to Lizette, which is part of the marches and the demonstrations? So I'm separating them. Lizette called me. I didn't get to talk to her about it, but she called me and I got the message. I'm still going through stuff, and I'm more determined to make a decision on those. It's not easy.

ESPINO: Yes, it's hard. It's hard because you have two loyalties. You have two loyalties.

[00:16:03]

ARRIOLA: Well, loyalty with Ruben, that was downtown, there was the march, that was the moratorium nationally, that's something. Locally, this was a local union that, my god, I look at the paper, the proof sheets of Local 645, man, every damn politician that ever was went by there, and I got pictures of most of them.

ESPINO: I think, to me, just looking at all of your photographs, they all tell of your history. They all tell something about you. So at the same time that they tell a larger picture of the UAW of East Los Angeles, of the Chicano Movement, it also talks about all these other things, like the pictures of your sister at the Tuberculosis Institute and the pictures of you with that Japanese American. Well, you're not with him, but the Japanese American. So it's true they have these different themes, but they're all part of your life, which is really interesting.

ARRIOLA: So maybe I'll give them both.

ESPINO: Oh, doubles.

ARRIOLA: Doubles. [laughs]

ESPINO: That's interesting. That's a hard decision to make, I'm sure.

ARRIOLA: I know Lizette and you guys would prefer UCLA, and I know that Rudy and these guys, when they saw what I had about the UAW, they started asking me, "What else do you have about the local?" Well, hell, that was my local. I had a lot of stuff, and whenever there was a political thing, I was there. So there's loyalty to these guys out here too. I mean, they're trying to show a history of the Valley, the guys that were active, they're still trying, with all the membership lists that I have, to sit down with a bunch of guys and say, "Okay, who's the guy in that picture? Who's the guy in that picture?"

ESPINO: And who else has pictures? Who else has stuff, fliers, maybe leaflets, those kind of things? Anyway, we should probably get—I should have paused it because we're talking off the topic, but, okay. The reason why I—I mean, I'm not trying to—

[00:18:33]

ARRIOLA: I have no problems about the Commie stuff.

ESPINO: Yes, not—it's important because when I look at the McCarthy era, I look at what you said about even if you were just a person who cared about progressive politics, you were labeled a Communist. There was a lot of red-baiting. So that's why it's important, and maybe some people are afraid to say they were. They really were, they really believed in that ideology, but they were afraid because of what happened during that period. So that's why I think people are wondering about Bert Corona, was he, was he not? And in a way, it kind of does matter because it was an important philosophy for thirties and forties Leftist organizers.

ARRIOLA: He may have—how do I say it? He may have moved into it a little bit to learn about it, but it was all part of his learning about it. It was all about learning more about them. Who the hell—you tell me, what's a Commie? You can't tell me.

Everybody would have a different opinion. During those years, the fifties and the sixties, there was tremendous involvement by everybody into politics, and you learned from it. Everybody was calling each other “goddamn Commie” if you went out too far at these club meetings, but that's okay. Everybody called you a Commie, but it wasn't a mean thing. It was just a part of the—

ESPINO: Let me pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay, we're back.

[00:20:37]

ARRIOLA: One of the guys that really represented himself was this guy—I think it was Kushner.

ESPINO: Sam Kushner?

ARRIOLA: Yes. He was part of the group. We'd sit and talk, and I was never afraid of him. He was a nice guy. He had different views, maybe a little more liberal.

There was a *Times* reporter—what's his name? Cole [phonetic]. I think it was Cole, but I'll find out. One of the old-timers from those times. We would meet at the Biltmore now and then. My brother would go to meetings down there, and I'd go with him, and then after that, we'd sit and talk to him, and wow, what a character. He was an outspoken guy on everything, but that's where you learn. If you're just going to sit and listen to a Cruz—what's his name?

ESPINO: Ted Cruz?

ARRIOLA: Ted Cruz. My god, how can you believe any of that crap they tell? So, no, it was—god.

ESPINO: Well, I guess my question would be were you worried about having an ideology that was so hated, that was dangerous, that could land you in jail, that could land you in—

ARRIOLA: But, see, of all the guys that were really liberal, I never heard them talk about hating the U.S. or about bombing the U.S. or being way out. No, they had a philosophy about being more liberal, about being—god, you know. What are some of the things they might—just social stuff.

ESPINO: Like welfare, like—

[00:22:46]

ARRIOLA: Yes, welfare, politics, that sort of stuff. That never scared me. You've got to open up your mind. You've got to take it in. I mean, my own dad and brother, like I told you, were involved in the sugar beet strikes. He ended up as a kid on the stand, being questioned by the government about what was going on, what did he see. It was never discouraged by Dad, and my brother never was part of that, but as more time spent with Sam Yorty, he became more of a stinkin' Republican. [laughs]

ESPINO: Well, when you look at, for example, your politics at that time, how would you describe what were the changes that you wanted to see or what were the policies that you wanted to see happen?

ARRIOLA: Well, oh, my god, [unclear] comes into mind. "Cap" Hardy [phonetic]. Cap Hardy was an old-time liberal Democrat. I sat and had a lot of coffee with him and saw him at conventions, and I loved Cap. I loved Cap. I mean, it was those kinds of guys that I kind of grew up knowing. The Greenbergs [phonetic], Sam and Helen, owners of Sam's U-Drive. Mary—god, a couple of Jewish ladies that we knew real well within the Club Movement.

I was always one of the guys that set up and cleaned up after everybody, but I got to meet a lot of people. I was young, so I would do things, but was always involved with—you could learn a lot if you were in a political meeting because you're going to hear a lot of different stories. But that all died. That all died. These guys nowadays, all they're looking for is getting reelected, meeting the term limits. "What office do I run for now?"

[00:25:59]

We had a very interesting meeting this Saturday. Helen says, “Ralph, you’ve got to get up early. You’ve got to get up early because we have to go to the office. I’m having a meeting and I’ve got to be there to set it up.” They have a big boardroom. So I went over and I sat over in the corner at a table and a bunch of kids came in, high school.

ESPINO: Oh, high school?

ARRIOLA: High school, and they’re talking about the health—

ESPINO: Obamacare?

ARRIOLA: Obamacare. They’re all Latinos, and the sponsor was Bocanegra, the assemblyman, and he came over and he said, “Hey, Ralph, I’m glad to see you. You’re here, you and Helen.”

So they split up. They had breakfast together, the—you know, what do they call a quick breakfast? And, my god, Helen gave a talk. Stupid me. She sees all this all the time, and she really spoke out and set them up for what they were going to get into the conversation. She’s so good. And Bocanegra spoke a little. But these kids were already primed. These kids I would call the cream of the crop. They’re in school. They’re involved in all kinds of stuff. The girl that became the chairman of the group is in four, five different groups on the inside and outside, and I think she’s Syrian, but must be Syrian *Americana*, because she [unclear] in Spanish too. She ran for the position of president for the group.

There wasn’t one or two that wanted to run for the offices; there was, like, four, five for the presidency and every other one. I mean, these kids are ambitious. And they went from nine o’clock until one o’clock, and they took up the issue. When they took up

the issue, they broke up into groups. There was about seven groups, and each group was assigned a different part of Obamacare. And they had material, and, my god, they read the stuff. I kind of listened in to their conversations. These ain't dumb kids. They were very good. They were exciting.

[00:29:28]

ESPINO: So how did you feel when you think about your involvement from these early days? Do you think that's part of the legacy of the Chicano Movement, what you witnessed?

ARRIOLA: Oh, absolutely. Oh, my god. Again, going back to the Club Movement, the Republicans had them, too, I don't know what they were like, but I know what Democratic Club movement discussions were. Everybody had an opinion. I mean, you really got down to it. You really got down to the nitty-gritty, and then they would vote on where they were going with it. I mean, generally, there was a lot of discussion about whatever it was, but they eventually all came to a conclusion and voted together as one.

ESPINO: Can you describe your first involvement in the Club Movement? I'm not too familiar. There's not a lot written about the—you're talking about the clubs, the Democratic Clubs, right?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And you're talking about these clubs that formed out of different districts? Or was it regions? How were they—

ARRIOLA: Generally, they were all over the place, and if you were in the 22nd or the 24th or the 19th—those were congressional districts—you kind of identified with them.

But here in the Valley, the Latinos are very strong. They're very involved in that sort of stuff, to the point where they'd get pissed off.

[00:31:05]

You saw the picture when I mentioned Negri and Rayford Johnson [phonetic]. Negri committed himself to appointing a Latino as his administrative—no, what as it? The top position in the club, in the district, for the assemblyman. It was whatever it was called at the time. It wasn't chief of staff or anything like that, but that's what it was. To a Latino.

Boy, you know, I got stuff out there that showed the Chicanos, some of the key Chicanos in this area, went for Arklin. Sam Cordova was one. That's why I told you Sam, when I took Negri to Santa Rosa for the fiesta in *No lo dejaron hablar*, after it, he grabbed me and he said, "Now, listen, you know why we're doing this and I know why you're doing it, so don't get mad and don't seek vengeance. Just understand it, Ralph. We can't let them do this to us. They can't screw around with us. They can't promise us something and then double-cross us. So we're going after them."

Negri was only in one term, and then Arklin got the Assembly seat. That one, another little side story to this. Whenever Jesse Unruh would see me, he'd say, "You son of a bitch, you lost the 41st. It cost me the speakership." [laughs]

"But I tried. I called you and I told you what the problems I was having with Negri, and you finally, the last month, sent me this young guy to come out." And that young guy became the director of the Jesse Unruh School of Politics at USC. I'll try to think of his name. But every time, he says, "Son of a bitch." Because we lost that 41st, and Moynihan took over the speakership, the California speakership.

ESPINO: I didn't realize the San Fernando Valley wielded so much power in the state political arena.

[00:34:06]

ARRIOLA: Oh, they'd get pissed off and they'd go—I was a labor guy. I went where labor went. If labor says, "You stay with Negri, you fight for him," that's where I stayed then, whether I agreed with the guys or not, which I basically did, but the Negri people were not that bright. They had a fundraiser in Hollywood at the castle. What the heck's the name of the—anyway, it's a [unclear] little place.

ESPINO: El Capitan?

ARRIOLA: No, no, no, no. This was—they call it the castle. It isn't a big open place, but it's a place where you can have activities. What happened? Election night, all the people that were coming, it was the wrong address. They'd screwed up the fundraiser so bad. I called Jesse. I called Jesse and I talked to him. I said, "We're having real trouble. Take over the campaign. They won't let me. You've got to say it, and you've got to demand it, or no money." It was too late. The last month, they were trying to organize a mailer. A mailer! A whole damn mailer. It was just too late. Then that's when Keysor decided to run.

I go off on too many inside stories.

ESPINO: No, no, no, no. They're great. They're great stories.

ARRIOLA: Keysor decided to run, and the first thing we all told him, we said, "Don't pull the bullshit you pulled or that they pulled on us with Negri, because it'll cost you."

Well, *cabron*, he had the intention. He was part owner with a family of Century [phonetic] Keysor. They produce a lot of records for the military, and they were well off,

well off, millionaires, but the company didn't want him around. It was a family thing. They wanted their son to run politics and get the hell out of the company. He screwed things up. [laughs] So he ran.

[00:36:52]

It was interesting, because the night of the election, Marv Brody called me at about five or six o'clock in the morning, the next morning, "You won, Ralph! You won!" [laughs] We won the seat. We beat Arklin.

So in the process, who's he going to appoint as the administrative assistant, the top job? We had this old man that had come out of the—I think it was one of the big national campaigns, either Stevenson, but he was retired, wonderful, bright old guy, really [unclear]. But Keysor was all—[unclear] this old guy, and he didn't really want the job. What Jim says, "The guy who's going to be my administrative assistant, whoever I appoint, is going to wear the title."

So, okay, *cabrón*. I walked out, just ignored him. He came to visit me at my house over here on Brand Boulevard one Saturday morning right after the campaign. He said, "You don't seem to understand what I said. The guy that I appoint is going to be the administrative assistant."

And I says, "Well, you don't seem to understand what we're trying to do. If you appoint me, I'm not looking for a job. I'm working for the UAW. Appoint me and I'll take all the glory and everything, and then the Latino will love me and you'll be okay."

"Oh, no, no, no, we don't have to do that. No, no, no."

"Okay, Jim, don't do it."

It was a big living room, and Johnny was about yea tall. So I got up, walked out the back door and played with Johnny [unclear]. [laughs] And he sat there for a while till he said—I guess I wasn't going back in. He walked out and left.

[00:39:15]

Oh, the night before, he had given me a lecture at his house. He had a little party for everybody that was in the campaign. He took me to the back and he gave me this, "You don't seem to understand." What was his name? I forget his name. "He's going to become the guy. Now, if you want to be a field deputy, fine, you can be a field deputy."

I said, "I don't want to be either." So I walked out of his party too.

The next morning, he shows up at the house, same thing. Well, word got around. Labor heard about it. The party key heard about it. The blacks and Latinos were screaming about what he was going to do. "You're turning into another Negri."

Well, interestingly enough, he gave me another call. This call was, "Come. I want to talk to you. Please come. Okay? I'm asking you. Please come."

I said, "Okay, I'll see you." So I went.

He said, "Okay, you got the job. You got the title."

I said, "Okay, Jim. Do you know why it is? We just want you to say you made a commitment, you got to keep it. You can't play with people. They'll screw you."

So I became—"But I can't pay you."

"Well, I'm not asking you for any money. I'm getting paid by the UAW, so what do you want?"

"Oh, no. I'll tell you what I'll do. You get the state car," because they get a new car every two years. "You get the new car and the gas credit card."

[00:41:12]

“Well, I don’t know about that,” smiling on the inside. [laughs] I said, “Well, only if you insist. Okay.” Was I being a little corrupt? [laughs]

So for about a year, I was a big shot, but they did all the work and I just rode around in a state car. I took Maria downtown one day, and we’re on Second or Third Street. No, it was Third. I went across the street in the car, and all of a sudden, I got the cop car behind me. They’re all excited. “Do you know you’re not supposed to paint your license plate? Here it is, AB with 41. You can’t do that.”

“Well, I didn’t do it.”

“What do you mean, you didn’t do it?”

“No. It’s an Assembly car. I’m the Assembly’s chief of staff.” By that time, I was the chief of staff.

“Are you sure?”

I said, “Didn’t you guys get any education on stuff like that?”

Twice it happened. The other time, I was coming back from Sacramento. It was about one o’clock in the morning, and I’m barreling down the 5, and off of one of the ramps comes the Highway Patrol. He says, “Come on now. I know how hard you guys work in Sacramento.” He thought I was the assemblyman. [laughs] Whew. So I slowed down.

I’m sorry for the side stories.

ESPINO: No, no, those are great. Your memory is really clear when you tell those stories. You have a lot of detail.

[00:43:16]

ARRIOLA: Where were we?

ESPINO: Well, I guess my principal focus would be on the issues that you were trying to address when you—okay, so you had your work in the labor and the UAW, and then you had this political activism or positions with politicians. But what were you actually concrete—what were you doing?

ARRIOLA: My first real important position was being unit chairman of the company where I was at. The unit chairman was the guy that was the overseer of the union contract and keeping the members informed and, you know, being their guy. But I was lucky because I had Nellie Parra and I had Lee Hebert. She'd twist my finger and he'd say, "Shut up." [laughter]

ESPINO: That was your first in-house position within the union?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And then what? Were you ever a shop steward?

ARRIOLA: We had to worry about the contract, representing the people, and negotiate their—every time they got some kind of a—

ESPINO: Disciplinary action?

ARRIOLA: Yes, disciplinary action. You know, all of that, that went on.

ESPINO: But you weren't a shop steward, though? Were you a shop steward?

ARRIOLA: Well, I was a committeeman.

ESPINO: What does that mean?

ARRIOLA: There's a shop steward, and then there's a committee. The committee is made up of usually three people, and then you have shop stewards that represent each department. So, no, I was a committeeman. But we were such a small plant that between

Nellie and Lee and I, we did the whole thing. He took one part of the building, I took another, and Nellie did the other.

[00:45:31]

ESPINO: Did you principally work within the plant, or did you do work outside in solidarity with other—

ARRIOLA: I was an inspector, one of the top-level inspectors, a senior inspector, a floor inspector, so I took care of this one department that had all the punch presses and basically most of the women working in that area, assembly and all that sort of stuff. Lee had the main area of manufacturing. Nellie was in the inspection department, but she was one of the first women as a tool-and-gauge inspector. There weren't many at the time. She was one of the first, so she got out and she could walk around all over. They loved Nellie.

Another side story?

ESPINO: Fine. Please.

ARRIOLA: Lee Hebert's five-year-old ended up being the ring boy when Maria and I got married, and Maria's niece was a little older, and she marches him down the—"Come on. Let's go." Has her finger on his back. "Come on. Let's go that way." People laughed. The little boy was great. [laughs]

ESPINO: That's cute.

ARRIOLA: Anyway, so you took care of the shop first. You always take care of the shop first, because if you don't get reelected, you're not there. So that's prime. And out of that, I was involved on the outside with labor, even though being a committeeman

gave me a little more drive with the labor guys, and I was still involved in politics. When the elections came around, I got pulled out of the shop by the union.

ESPINO: Just you?

[00:48:00]

ARRIOLA: Just me.

ESPINO: In your shop?

ARRIOLA: Yes, but for election day, I pulled out a bunch of them to work in the get-out-the-vote.

ESPINO: What are some of the issues that you would witness within your shop?

ARRIOLA: There was everything that ever came out in the last—during those years.

ESPINO: But I mean the issues in the shop, like, for example, did you have experience with sexual harassment or harassment in general, or—I don't know what kind of grievances would the employees have with their management.

ARRIOLA: It was basically about being absent or screwing up or ruining work. They would write you up for that.

ESPINO: But did the employees themselves have grievances against management?

ARRIOLA: Oh, once in a while, but there were never major ones. There was usually stuff that eventually got straightened out.

ESPINO: You think people were pretty happy working there for Poly Industries?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure. They were. They were. Small company, but they were a good company.

ESPINO: How well did you communicate with the owners?

[00:49:27]

ARRIOLA: Oh, very well, except I learned a lot from the first meeting that I told you where Nellie was twisting my arm and Lee was stepping on my foot. And what was interesting, what I really learned was you've got to learn to keep your mouth shut, because after you're through making your speech, everybody continued doing what they were doing before and don't give a shit about what you said. [laughs] That was a putdown. "Well, what did you learn today, Ralph?" Nellie said. Oh, god.

ESPINO: What about when it came to—because when I've talked to other people about, like, for example, Congressman Torres and Henry Lozano, they mentioned—well, we talked a little bit about speed, how fast you had to work, and those were some of the issues, danger, and then also about promoting Mexican Americans within the factory or plant and also within the union.

ARRIOLA: Well, in the shop, now, there's a difference between where Henry came out of and where I was. I don't think Henry was ever a machinist. He may have been involved in manufacturing of some stuff, but when you worked in a machine shop like I did, and we were producing the Little John Missile, this was very—it had to be very, very, very—*como le digo*—accurate, accurate stuff. I mean, you were working within a half a thousandth. If you take one of your hairs, that's usually about three thousandths. Well, if you take half of one of those hairs—so it's pretty damn accurate. I mean, if I was to ruin one of those tubes, I mean, that was a lot of money, a lot of money gone to hell. So you had to be very careful, and they held you to it. So that's the kind of manufacturing we did.

[00:52:09]

When they manufactured the exhaust of the missile, not only was that accurate, you had to be scared of the damn machine. I mean, that machine was probably taller than this. There was an incident where this old man decided he wanted to become a King operator—the King was a machine—a Jewish old guy. “Okay, *cabrón*, but you’ve got to be careful.” They had a big casting of iron that he had to shape it into the exhaust of the missile, and that machine was nothing to play with, and if you didn’t know it really well, you end up doing what he did. He jammed into it and it tore it right off the deal, and luckily he didn’t get killed, because it threw two hundred pounds of steel off the machine, and that was just like here to that corner over there.

ESPINO: Wow. That must have been frightening.

ARRIOLA: It was. It could be really—I was offered the opportunity to work on that machine. “No thank you.”

ESPINO: Was there more money for—

ARRIOLA: Yes. It would have been maybe a couple of more bucks, but I saw it as a—because when the tool, you’ve got a big tool that’s cutting, okay, it’s cutting. Well, if you move the wrong one and it shoots into it, it jams it and it throws it. There’s just so much—the machine is damned powerful, it just kicks it. So I never took that job. My lathe was about the size of that thing there. It was a little bigger than that. And the thing that I took off was about that big in diameter, and it was a tube where the fuel went into.

ESPINO: Why do you think there were so few complaints?

ARRIOLA: Well, you always find out who the god-damn crybabies are that bitch about everything. So you sit and you listen and you tell them if they have a case or not.

ESPINO: Is there anything that stands out, any cases that stand out for you?

[00:55:05]

ARRIOLA: Well, cases of other employees bugging them, if they have family problems, they kind of lose concentration of what they're doing and maybe screw up. In the department I was in, there were only small punch presses, a couple of big ones, so you put it in and the machine does it all, but you had to be right on it too.

I told you the story about this one gal that lost her husband and went bananas on me, Elvira. One of the girls came up and says, "Ralph, you got to do something about Elvira."

I said, "Why?"

"Well, she's got this big leather thing with three big one-inch nuts," and they were big old nuts. She was mad at one of the *gueras*, and they teased her. They would tease her, and she was a big Latina. She was tall, she was big, not heavy, but slender and big. [laughs] So they said, "Why don't you go over and take that thing away from her before Caz [phonetic], the foreman, sees it and does something."

So I went over and I started checking the parts, checking the parts, checking the parts, and I said, "Elvira, what the hell's that?"

"None of your business, Ralph."

"Elvira, I don't like what I see. I see the leather and the nuts tied to them. Are you planning to use them on somebody?"

"It's none of your business, Ralph."

I says, "Elvira, you need to let me have those. I'm asking you to please give them to me."

"No, I won't." But then she got them and she tore them off, one by one. [laughs]

[00:57:46]

Then one other incident, I forget whether it was before or after, she had a gun.
The foreman, Caz, [unclear]. [laughs]

I went over, “Elvira, what the hell are you doing with that?” because I knew her.
I was friendly with all the people there.

“It’s none of your business, Ralph.”

“No, on this one, I’m insisting. You’re going to have to give me that.”

“No.”

“Yes, I’ll call the cops. You want me to call the cops?”

“No.” So she let me have it, but, luckily, we found that the firing pin wasn’t
working. Those were some of the more serious things. I never had any fights between
the guys.

ESPINO: Do you know why she was so angry or why she was so upset?

ARRIOLA: The loss of her husband, it flipped her.

ESPINO: He died?

ARRIOLA: Yes. It really did flip her.

ESPINO: You didn’t think she was a danger?

ARRIOLA: Well, we thought she was a danger, but she’s covered by contract. It’s one
of those things when sometimes a contract can work against you too. She took a couple
of weeks off, but came back, came back tight-lipped, wouldn’t speak to anybody, kept to
herself. I mean, she really flipped out. It was stuff like that.

ESPINO: What do you mean that’s when the contracts—

ARRIOLA: Huh?

ESPINO: What do you mean about the contracts?

[00:59:32]

ARRIOLA: Well, the labor contract between you and the—have you ever seen one?

ESPINO: I was with the union.

ARRIOLA: Oh, okay.

ESPINO: A teachers union. I'm not a labor historian, but I know that there's a—well, when they talk about the teachers, they talk about—and I've had this conversation with a couple of people that I've interviewed—just the idea that sometimes the labor contract protects—

ARRIOLA: Overprotects.

ESPINO: —or overprotects, yes.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: How do you feel about that? Do you agree or do you disagree?

ARRIOLA: It's between the company and the union, and if the company or the school district allows certain sections of the contract without protesting them or changing them, they have an opportunity to stop it, because once you gain a little, you want more. That's the way—both sides. Government contracts are a farce, because on the other side of the union you have experienced negotiators, so they get screwed.

ESPINO: Right. Whereas on the government side or, say, for example, the school district, they have—

ARRIOLA: The union side, that's all they do.

ESPINO: So in that case, did you feel like you had to protect someone who was a threat to the security of the plant?

[01:01:28]

ARRIOLA: Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no. Stuff like that affects the whole membership, so you've got to—there are limits. “Okay, well, Johnny has a machine gun. Do you think we ought to allow him? Well, just shoot the supervisors. Don't shoot the membership.”

[laughs] Can't do that, because Johnny's going to shoot you too.

ESPINO: But it sounds like that like her fellow employees were trying to protect her from getting in trouble.

ARRIOLA: No, they were scared. They were scared of her. They were scared of Elvira. She scared everybody. She was a good lady, and as the death of the husband went on, she lost some weight and she became muscle-y. [laughs] You'd have to be [unclear].

ESPINO: To appreciate what you went through.

ARRIOLA: But those were all your problems you had to solve. Then the foreman, Caz, came over and he said, “She's got a gun now, Ralph. That's your job.” [laughs] And I didn't have any problems going over, because I knew her, and just talking to her and not horse around trying to be a soothsayer. You've got to address the problem and take care of it, and as you discuss it, you've got to get tougher, not weaker, because you've got people to protect.

ESPINO: How far did you get climbing up the ladder in Poly Industries?

ARRIOLA: Well, I was with them for about six years or so, but, again, remember what was going on all the time during the election. So I'm not sure exactly what I did that said to Paul Schrade, “I'll appoint you.” There was something. I wasn't a crybaby. I put together a paper on the UAW that in terms of the Latinos, they were not addressing our problems. I didn't call them a bunch of goddamn racists, but—you know.

[01:04:22]

Yesterday at the reunion, this guy I had known, a high school buddy, Richard Cisneros, we were talking about the unions, and he said, “Yeah, I met Walter Reuther and I talked to him about the caucus.” I didn’t know Richard had joined the caucus. I had people joining it from all over the U.S. And what did Walter tell me? He says, “You know what? You people got to get organized. You people have to show a little power.”

Well, *cabron*, we did, unfortunately, and I believed him that he would have helped us put more Latinos. Like I mentioned, there 1,046 or 47 people on, 150-some blacks, and 5 Latinos—5! So I did that, and I told Paul Schrade, “If you’re going to appoint me, Paul, you’ve got to know that I’m going to continue pushing this issue of our representation in the union.”

He said, “As long as you don’t turn against me or against the national caucus, keep it clean, Ralph, and go.” That was Paul. Paul was okay.

ESPINO: Can you help me understand the structure? So you’re saying that at that time what you’re talking about, you’re talking about the UAW in the 1960s when Walter Reuther was the president of the UAW, and Paul Schrade was—

ARRIOLA: A regional director.

ESPINO: Regional director for the Southwest?

ARRIOLA: For Arizona—I’m not sure if Utah was also included—Nevada, and then we went California, Oregon, Washington. I can come up with a more—I think even Idaho was part of our area, but there was nothing happening in Idaho. Washington, there was. There was a couple of parts plants in Oregon. There was a total of thirteen locals in Region 6.

ESPINO: And Region 6 are the states that you just mentioned?

[01:07:12]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: There were thirteen. What was your local?

ARRIOLA: My local was 645, a GM Local.

ESPINO: GM, General Motors? No.

ARRIOLA: Well, at the time that I joined it, we had Fisher Body, we had Chevrolet, we parts warehouse. They were all right here in Van Nuys. Then in outlying areas, we had other parts warehouses, because those parts were coming in, being manufactured in different areas. We had North American, Rocketdyne, 148, which was the aircraft company down in Lakewood. We also had, besides Chevrolet, we had Ford, big Ford plant in Pico Rivera. Down south we had, with Convair, we had a plant there. We had a local there, and they had a couple of smaller places. Then up north we had a Ford plant, I think there was a GM plant, a GM parts warehouse plant, GM Fisher Body, Fisher Body and Chevrolet. I'd have to get the old book out. I'll find them.

ESPINO: Wow. That's pretty extensive.

ARRIOLA: There were thirteen, thirteen locals. They were big. We had how many people? I'm trying to think how many. Our membership in California was maybe 13, 15,000, as compared to the national of 13 million.

ESPINO: Wow. Did you have opportunities to meet all as one UAW contingency, or did you just generally meet in your areas? Like, for example, all the Van Nuys UAW members met, and then all the Pico Rivera?

[01:10:13]

ARRIOLA: Yes, all the other plants. Well, see, my job was citizenship, so we were the political arm of the UAW, so we had to go to every local and talk to them and keep them going. Then when our dollar collection started, I'd sell tickets for a dollar to pick up more money for politics. When things were happening politically, Marvin and I would go up to San Jose. I never got to go all the way up to Portland and the other local in Washington, but in California and Arizona, there was one small plant, but it was mostly California.

ESPINO: And your job was primarily to fundraise or to—

ARRIOLA: Talk about the campaigns, talk about who we were going to support that year for whatever office, get the local citizenship committee working and moving, and on the offseason of an election, we would go to Sacramento and politic, push whatever legislation there was that we were pushing at the time.

ESPINO: What about any kind of grassroots organizing? Were you involved in that?

ARRIOLA: Well, we always supported the Democratic Clubs. We never gave the Democratic Clubs money directly. We passed it on through their local elected official, an assemblyman or state senator.

ESPINO: I guess I mean like, say, for example, actually building membership of the UAW.

[01:12:28]

ARRIOLA: No, that wasn't our—we had an organizing staff.

ESPINO: Was there a hierarchy of these kinds of responsibilities? Like, say, for example, was there more value placed on your role versus people [unclear]?

ARRIOLA: No, they were pretty able. The reps representing the membership in the plants, the negotiators of contracts, that was the one group. The guys that were involved in citizenship like we were, they didn't screw around with us. We knew what we had to do. We had our own people in Washington and in Detroit that said this is what's going to happen nationally. You know what to do locally.

So Paul Schrade was the director, he had an assistant director, and then the reps. The union, the international reps were the rest of the staff. And within those groups, there was the leadership. The old guys were the guys that taught the new guys what to do and knew the history of the contracts and what they should be going for.

ESPINO: Wow. They had an incredibly powerful organization with these members, and each local broke down the way that you're talking about. Were you experienced in your plant? Poly Industries was happening all over the United States, all the—

ARRIOLA: Yes. You know, I think at that time we were the third largest union in the U.S. There was always the Teamsters and us, and then there was the—I think it was the Longshoremen. Then, little by little, SEIU started raising the government unions, and now they're pretty much one of the top, yes.

ESPINO: Did you participate at the national level with the national organizations like the AFL-CIO?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: And what did you do?

[01:15:08]

ARRIOLA: Because locally we were working with them. I'll show you that Valpick [phonetic]. I found the Valpick list, and you'll see there's every damn union in there. Every damn union's in there.

ESPINO: So what did your week look like, as far as the—because I'm sure that you were working at the plant all day. And then your evenings, was that when you were going to these meetings, on the weekends?

ARRIOLA: Sometimes, yes, yes. We would have conferences. We would have activities where we would get together, dances, and, you know, just kept the membership together. There was all kinds of stuff, barbecues and lots of group meetings—

ESPINO: How much of your life do you think was spent on this, with your union during those early years? I'm saying in the sixties.

ARRIOLA: Being a rep, you spend more time, but I probably put in 60 percent, yes.

ESPINO: Wow. You weren't married yet?

ARRIOLA: No. I didn't get married till I was thirty-two.

ESPINO: So you had a lot of free time to—

ARRIOLA: No, there were campaigns to organize. I wasn't married or a girlfriend.

[laughs] “You got another damn meeting?” “Yeah.” Whew. Got away. [laughs]

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. So you're saying you were thirty-two when you got married.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Then you mentioned that when Paul Schrade appointed you, what did he appoint you to?

[01:17:09]

ARRIOLA: To the citizenship staff.

ESPINO: To the citizenship. Oh, okay, so you had to be appointed by a high-level official?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: That wasn't a vote in?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Did you attend any of those schools that were out—there was a retreat, and the name is escaping me right now.

ARRIOLA: Well, interestingly enough, we didn't make a lot of money, so taking a trip always costs, so Maria and I planned getting married the weekend that I had to be at a weeklong conference in Monterey. What's that famous Monterey—right along the ocean. Asilomar. I got all my lost time, which was payment for being away from the plant and to travel, and so that's where we went. We got a place right outside Asilomar, and we were lucky because I had the check from the local union for about \$250, which at that time was pretty good.

I went to the bank to cash it, and they said, "What are you doing here?"

I said, "Well, I'm at a conference, we just got married, and this is my—."

The guy looked at me and he asks me a couple more questions, and he says, "I'll do it." Lucky, you know, because we were running out.

ESPINO: Did you get married up there?

[01:19:05]

ARRIOLA: No, we got married down here.

ESPINO: That was your honeymoon with the union, with the local?

ARRIOLA: Yes. [laughs]

ESPINO: So was she also involved in the union activities?

ARRIOLA: Well, to a degree, yes.

ESPINO: And what did you do there? What was it like? How did they have it organized?

ARRIOLA: Well, it was all-day sessions on everything, and we had visitors from the international that came out and spoke on issues and where they were going and what's the union doing. It was very interesting.

ESPINO: What year was that? Let me just pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Then I asked you—okay. So the Chicano Caucus, you were telling me that—no, it wasn't the Chicano Caucus. It was the—when you got married, when you got appointed to Paul Schrade—

ARRIOLA: You know, the way they handled it for so much of that stuff, "Oh, man, look at that. We got another black appointed. Man, that's really great for the blacks. Oh, god, yeah." Well, we got it because—well, we don't know why, but he got it. Nothing to celebrate, except for the girls, Carmen and Lita and the locals. They had a little party for me at one of the places on Olympic and just below Soto [phonetic]. Anyway, they came. We ended up with about twenty, thirty people that came to celebrate the appointment.

ESPINO: And you were saying that you felt like there was not solidarity between the African Americans and the Mexican Americans.

[01:21:34]

ARRIOLA: Not when it came to jobs, no. There just wasn't. It was a time for the blacks to move in the South. You know, there was a lot of stuff going on down there, civil rights, voting, all of that. I mean, the UAW poured money into them. The fight over the Watch Labor Community Action Agency and TELACU, ask Andy Torres who got in those \$20,000 that he needed to keep TELACU alive, and only one time did—what's the chairman of the TELACU right now?

ESPINO: Lizarraga?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: David.

ARRIOLA: Only one time that I was at a meeting there, he said, "And I want to introduce Ralph. He's the one that saved TELACU." That's all he said.

ESPINO: So you were there in the beginning with the TELACU, even though it was on the Eastside, and you're over here on the Valley. Did you go down there and drive down there to—

ARRIOLA: Well, there was a manpower program that was started during those years that were building up for Vietnam, and I got appointed. The manpower program was about thirty guys, and there was about four or five whites, and about another six or seven—there's that many Latinos, the rest were all black, because there was a board member who was a black, very nice, one of the originals, one of the old-timers of the UAW. So he had a lot of drag.

[01:23:33]

They didn't particularly like me, but they didn't particularly want to take me on either, because I was a non-caring damn son of a bitch. I mean, I did things that had to be

done, and I didn't give a damn what would happen, because I always had the plant to fall back on. That's the way it's always been.

ESPINO: I want to come back to that TELACU struggle the next time. I think they probably want to have their dinner, so we'll stop it here.

[End of October 23, 2013 interview]

SESSION 5 (October 31, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 31st. I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando.

I'd like to start with last time we talked about some of the union activists you worked with, and you were going to start explaining the Chicano Caucus and how that formed. And if I remember correctly, in my notes it said that it started between 1967 and 1968.

[00:00:32]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Are you not sure which year or—

ARRIOLA: No, I'm not, but I have paperwork that I found that we can eventually give it a date.

ESPINO: Okay.

ARRIOLA: I think that's approximately the time.

ESPINO: Okay. So how did the idea come to you? What was happening? This was when you were still with Poly Industries.

ARRIOLA: You know, first of all, politics has been very educational for me, especially at the time that I started coming in and working with the different groups. Primarily, yes, there was Latinos, like I mentioned, Sam Cordova and my brother and others here in San Fernando. This was where the Latinos kind of originated from. Then the other sides, there was a lot of everything, and there was a lot of Jewish participation, and I got to meet some wonderful guys, like I mentioned before, Sam and Helen Greenberg, owners

of Sam's U-Drive, a rental place, a big rental place, big. I learned a lot from them. They were all basically professionals, doctors, you know, just a whole professional group of people.

ESPINO: And this was before the Chicano Caucus you met Helen?

[00:02:19]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, we're going back to the early sixties.

ESPINO: So what did you learn from them?

ARRIOLA: Wonderful conversations about everything. I think so many of them had been associated with people who had just come in from Germany and Europe, and their families had left there because of what was happening in Germany with Hitler. So there was a lot of social politics discussed.

ESPINO: Like about civil rights?

ARRIOLA: Yes, human rights, civil rights. It was just a whole different group of people. Yes, you'd have a meeting, then you'd end up at a coffee shop talking till two o'clock in the morning. It was all very—I just met a lot of really interesting professional people. It was a real education for me.

ESPINO: So it was like a community of people involved in social issues?

ARRIOLA: Social issues, yes. It was just a wonderful time for me.

ESPINO: Were they in the Democratic Club? Is that how you met them?

ARRIOLA: Yes, basically Democratic. But there was also a time when I met a lot of Republicans, because there was Democratic and Republican Clubs, and we'd get together and have a discussion about something. There was always a big fight about what was right and what was wrong in politics.

[00:04:17]

So that kind of brought me out, and I just became more and more involved in it. Maybe that was one of the things that made me so prepared to get into the arguments of labor. You know, I think I mentioned to you I was kind of a loner within the group because I was so open and argumentative about things in discussions, but it also was the reason that I got selected to do things in organizing the political campaigns in the Valley. I think the one thing that I can say is that they trusted me. How do I put it? Maybe you don't like me, but you trust me.

ESPINO: Maybe your style, they didn't like your style, but they knew maybe you'd get the job done?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I was pushy. I got called down on things a number of times, but they were friendly call-downs. The guys were trying to help, "Hey, shut up, Ralph. You don't know what you're saying. I'll talk to you later." [laughs] So those were the interesting—like Marvin and [unclear] and others that weren't part of the Labor Movement. So many members are coming back as I go through all that junk I got out there. Jeez. I found stuff that I'd forgotten. I was separating stuff for you, and then this thing comes along.

ESPINO: The Halloween—you had to put it all away. That's okay.

ARRIOLA: I'll get through it. And Lizette called me, "When are we going to get together?"

I said, "Well, give me a couple of weeks, two more weeks." And I'm still struggling with all of that, because I'm not sure exactly where it's all going to end up.

ESPINO: Right, right.

[00:07:22]

ARRIOLA: But that's another subject. We'll work that one out later.

ESPINO: Yes, and you have to follow what you think is best for your stuff, who's going to take care of it. But over the long haul, when they accept it, they're making a commitment for forever, perpetuity.

ARRIOLA: Yes. But going back to politics, it was always so darn interesting. It was interesting at the time because politics isn't so money-hungry as it was then. You could run an Assembly campaign for 12,000 bucks. You can't even buy a mailer for—and people would get together and put out mailers together, you know, stamps or writing letters, addresses, and there were all during the week little parties, mailing parties, campaign parties. So you got to intermix with so many people.

ESPINO: It sounds like a real community existed.

ARRIOLA: It was.

ESPINO: And not just people from one ethnic group or one union or one church. It sounds like it was really diverse.

ARRIOLA: When you mention diversion, I was running the Bobby Kennedy campaign, and we had headquarters in Sepulveda. And Mary Munson [phonetic], another one of my mentors, she was involved in everything. She was a public relations person at Pacoima Lutheran Hospital at the time. It had just been built because of the airplane crash at the junior high. You're aware of that one?

ESPINO: I vaguely remember something about that.

[00:09:36]

ARRIOLA: Yes, the plane that killed two or three kids, and there was no place locally to take them real quick. They had to go, I don't know, wherever they took them at the time.

So Mary was another very influential—so during the campaign, this guy—and I knew him—he was a leader within the black community, and he wasn't a doctor but he was an administrator of a convalescent hospital. He came to me at the headquarters and he says, "I need to have—." He didn't even say, "I want to do some precincts. I want to get out the vote." But the way he came in, he looks at the thing, he says, "I want that one, that one, that one, that one, and that one, and I want all the material that goes with it, so I can get the people out."

And I said, "I don't know who the hell you are. I'm not going to give you anything." Oh, we got into it.

So up shows Mary Munson, who says, "Hey, Ralph, what the hell's going on with you two guys?"

"Well, he just came in, wanted to take the whole damn building. I wasn't going to give him shit." Oops, excuse me.

So we sat down and we talked and we were okay. I gave him what he wanted. It was only five or six precincts, but I only gave him two or three. I wanted to see if he could really get them out.

So there was a lot of mixing, a lot of mixing of all the groups, especially the Democratic side. You just had to. There was no other way. We had breakfasts on Saturday mornings where you had two, three hundred people that would show up for the breakfast, and it would be a full breakfast. The labor guys would cook the whole darn

thing. It would be at their halls. There was a camaraderie where hundreds of people would go out for three Saturdays, four Saturdays to get the people out to vote.

ESPINO: You're talking John F. Kennedy?

[00:12:03]

ARRIOLA: Whatever candidate it was. Well, in the Valley it would be out of there, you'd send them out for congressional Assembly, depended on where we were going with them. So, for me, was my training ground. And my brother was always involved into he got into the Yorty thing, and then he became a—

ESPINO: A Republican?

ARRIOLA: —a Republican. [laughs]

ESPINO: And he stayed a Republican?

ARRIOLA: I think he was still a Democrat but a Republican. So politics was a training ground for me.

ESPINO: But we started this conversation when I asked you how did the Chicano Caucus—

ARRIOLA: Oh, the Chicano Caucus. Okay.

ESPINO: —when the idea came to you.

ARRIOLA: Well, it came out when I started looking at the UAW, and I'm not sure exactly how I got all the information, but when I saw the statistics, 1,047 or 46 positions with the UAW of international representatives, 157 or something of like that blacks as international reps, and five Latinos. I hadn't met Eddie Torres at the time yet, but once I started researching it, I got to talk to him, but he was away. He was a rep that they used

in South America. Eddie has got such a wonderful history to his life. So when he came back, he came back to organize TELACU.

[00:14:04]

Around that time, I had already begun to do a paper on the UAW and organize a group here locally of a Chicano Caucus. I had some buttons made, and the guys were ready for it. They really liked it. And we weren't against the administration caucus. We weren't trying to bring down the UAW. We were trying to get their attention about the lack of recognition.

ESPINO: What was your first move when you decided to form a Chicano Caucus?

ARRIOLA: Just to talk to some of the other guys. They all said, "Yeah, let's do it." They all belonged to the administrative caucus, but now that we had a little caucus, we weren't separating ourselves from it. We were in part of it, we were part of it, but we were a group within the UAW, the major caucus of the international. I think that's the only reason that Walter Reuther met with us, Paul Schrade and locally. Some of the presidents were in the caucus, Henry Lacayo and some of the other guys who were presidents of local unions, big ones.

So our cause was a just cause. We needed to get recognition. We got that, but Walter got killed in that airplane crash, and the UAW went into I don't know how many years of austerity because they spent—they had to borrow. Every local was mortgaged—well, money was borrowed by the locals, by the international, from the Teamsters. I mean, you know, it was \$13 million, around that, a week that had to be paid to the workers, strike benefits. I have a book, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, about Walter.

ESPINO: Oh, right, about Walter Reuther.

ARRIOLA: You've seen it?

ESPINO: I've seen it, yes.

[00:16:56]

ARRIOLA: It was a gift that was given to me by a friend.

ESPINO: It doesn't talk too much about Los Angeles, California.

ARRIOLA: No, that was the problem. We're out here on the damn West Coast and everybody else is east of the river, Mississippi. So, you know, "What do these Mexicans want now?" The same attitude.

We would meet with all the vice presidents of the board, of the UAW board, when they came out. We would get together with them, and I'd come out with my paper and I would talk about it, and we'd always have twenty-five, thirty or more guys that would show up and support what I was doing.

ESPINO: What was their response?

ARRIOLA: Well, they became aware of what we were all upset about. At that time, all these guys had come out of the plants. These guys weren't—the only one that was really heavy in education was Paul Schrade. What is it when they go to England?

ESPINO: Rhodes scholar?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: He was a Rhodes scholar?

ARRIOLA: He was a Rhodes scholar. He was being groomed for Walter's position, but things happened.

So, well, how far did we go? We got Walter. We sent telegrams and threatened to take our problems to the street, the year of that convention. We were going to picket him.

ESPINO: Picket Walter Reuther?

[00:19:17]

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes.

ESPINO: That was bold.

ARRIOLA: You'll see the telegrams. I see them now, I said, "Boy, you were really stupid, weren't you?" [laughs] But we did it, and then we met with him. It was a wonderful meeting.

ESPINO: Did you have the support of UAW board or were they trying to—

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, they couldn't screw around with us too much. They could have gotten heavier, really, because of the West Coast and the Southwest, Texas, Arizona, wherever we had the locals. They had to play it cool, and they did.

ESPINO: So you were able to recruit from throughout the Southwest for the Chicano Caucus?

ARRIOLA: Yes. We were on the verge of really, really growing when Walter got killed, and we ended up with a strike. I got laid off and left the UAW. I didn't want to go back to it. I went into politics, and I just—it's a hard life in the Labor Movement, but I was happy where I was, where I ended up.

ESPINO: How often did you meet, were you able to meet?

ARRIOLA: Well, the caucus met at least every month in L.A.

ESPINO: In downtown or—

ARRIOLA: Yes, downtown, right there—

ESPINO: Did you have a special meeting place?

[00:21:26]

ARRIOLA: Well, it was a restaurant on Olympic and Indiana [Spanish phrase]. There was a restaurant that the girls at the office had set it up, had very good support from the Latinas in the office.

ESPINO: So you would meet about once a month?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Did you have officers within the caucus?

ARRIOLA: No, no officers. We used the regional office. All the girls would print up the meetings and do all kinds of stuff for us.

ESPINO: I mean officers. Like did you have a president or that kind of thing?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Well, I was the chairman or whatever they called me, of the group, and then we had a little board. We had bylaws. I don't know where—I might have a copy of the bylaws. They were simple. We weren't trying to over-organize that way.

ESPINO: So what would you say your gains were? What did you achieve?

ARRIOLA: Well, our gains went up to the death of Walter Reuther, because I was gone after that. Nobody wanted to take it over. These guys were nuts-and-bolts guys. You know, their job was to make a car. They were production guys. They were on-the-line guys. You know, that was their life. Most of them had no real education, even if they had a high school. There were more coming out that were going to school, but it just—nothing that they wanted to take on.

I think because of my political training, I was willing to take it on. I mean, it really was something for me. When Brody and Santiestevan took me to Washington and kind of kicked my butt, walked around all night just thinking about what had happened. I found a picture of the staffer for the Washington office. I kind of forget her name, but I got a picture of her when she kept saying, "It's going to be all right, Ralph. It's going to be all right. Just listen. Listen, listen." [laughter]

ESPINO: What were they trying to tell you?

[00:24:26]

ARRIOLA: "Slow down, kid. You're getting out a little too far."

But I'd just say, "I've gotten this far, I'm going to keep going." [laughs]

ESPINO: What did you think? It sounds like you felt there was something at stake.

What was it?

ARRIOLA: Well, sure, sure. It was getting more people, getting more people on staff, Latinos. Shit, they haven't gotten any more. There's still only about six, seven guys. Here I am, almost four or five years later, you know. We finally got a young woman out of college on the board of the UAW. I'm going to send her some of this stuff.

ESPINO: Well, can you explain why it was important? I think I'm sure I know intuitively, I understand what you're saying, but for the record, if you could explain why it was important to have—because sometimes today people will say, "Well, what difference does it make? Look at Antonio Villaraigosa. He's Latino. What has he done for us?" You know, they'll say things like that. So why was it important? Was it just because they're Latino? Was that the only reason?

ARRIOLA: Well, first of all, just bringing to the attention of the international officers that we were being left behind, that we were not given any credit or attention to our participation in the union, and how many we were, because I put there in one spot, we contribute so many hundreds of thousands of dollars in dues. We're all over the Southwest. Just bringing it to the attention of the membership.

[00:26:40]

I mean, we had all the Puerto Ricans in New York. We had all the Latinos in the Southwest. Oh, my god, we had Pancho Medrano. He's the champion. He's wonderful. He was—I don't know if he's alive. He was a wonderful guy, a real organizer. But he was very—he was not an educated guy, but he was a very good organizer, and they used him all over, all over. I mean, it was like Eddie Torres. These guys were the, "Here's our Mexicans." I mean, lord, it still pisses me off.

ESPINO: You think they were tokens? Is that what you're saying?

ARRIOLA: Yes, tokens. We all were tokens. *Ai, yi, yi.* So now we have our token young lady, which is great. I mean, at least. What happens when these five guys die off? Maybe they're all gone now.

ESPINO: So that's one thing that Chicanos contribute, or Mexican Americans, Chicanos, Chicanas contribute dues. What else do they contribute? Is there anything unique about the Southwest that was important for you to make known to the leadership of the UAW?

ARRIOLA: Well, first of all, politically we were Democrats, and we contributed a lot to the union. Our political contribution was the most important, not just the membership, but the entire Southwest, the vote for elected officials for congressional offices, those were always very important. Politics was very important in the UAW. Getting the right

kind of guys elected was important, and we were there, but we didn't get anything out of it.

ESPINO: So there wasn't a lot of pushback from—what about—I found something relating to—did you know there was a Black Panther Caucus in the UAW?

[00:29:40]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Was there a conflict between blacks and Chicanos for power or recognition within the union?

ARRIOLA: No. Blacks had the recognition just by their numbers in the East, in Michigan, in Illinois, all through that northern area, the states in those areas. Black Panther Party, that was a small thing like the Chicano Caucus. It wasn't a major thing, but they get the recognition. If it hadn't been for Ruben, we never would have had any, any kind of recognition.

ESPINO: Ruben?

ARRIOLA: Salazar. He did a couple of articles—I've got them out there—and he was going to do more, but, you know, we lost him. Then the Chicanos that made it, I love Eddie, but, you know, he was up here and we were down here. I mean, hey, he became UNESCO ambassador, he became a—shit, what didn't he become? So he had to watch where he was at, politically watch himself. So he couldn't be the ground force.

Henry Lacayo, he wasn't Latino. He was, I don't know, Guatemalan or something, his background was, even though he identified a lot with us, but he was also "I'll take care of myself first," you know. Couldn't find too many guys that were in strong positions to fight for us.

ESPINO: Do you feel like, for example, with Congressman Torres that you saw change in him when he became more well known and entered those institutionalized, like, government positions?

[00:32:42]

ARRIOLA: Well, he had to. I mean, in order to—just to have him there with a title was a major thing for us, to put him there with the titles, and then he couldn't do it, you know. It was just a very, very difficult position to be in and then be a rank-and-file, it just doesn't work that way. It could be the same with you. I mean, you've climbed, you've climbed, you've climbed, and you've gotten to a place where you're making a difference, but you can't go back and throw rocks at the administration, right? [laughs] Well, I could do it, because what did I have? What did I tell Paul Schrade when I took the job? "Paul, I appreciate what you're doing for me, I really appreciate it, but I'm not going to change, Paul. I'm going to continue on my own time, in my off hours, I'm going continuing pushing the caucus."

"Go ahead, Ralph." You don't find too many guys that will do that for you.

ESPINO: But then looking at your successes, so the caucus was short-lived, just a few years, if a year, a year or two.

ARRIOLA: When I left, I left. The caucus went with me. There was nobody else that would want to take it.

ESPINO: Okay. But what did you achieve in that time, do you think? What would you say your gains were?

ARRIOLA: Well, our achievement, what did we achieve, recognition, sure, of our group, the Latinos, but I was never in a real strong position to be able to—when I died, it died.

When I moved, it went with me. It wasn't easy.

ESPINO: Yes, I bet. Just a second. Let me pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: So you were saying it was the same way?

[00:35:17]

ARRIOLA: It was the same thing when I took the position with Jim Keysor, the assemblyman. What did he say to me? "Ralph, you can do whatever you want. Just don't put me in jail." [laughs] That's what he said.

"Okay, Jim, I won't put you in jail."

Every Sunday, Helen and I go have breakfast at the—I keep forgetting the stupid restaurant over here. It's a restaurant bar, but you can have a steak and eggs for nine bucks. It's a really nice place, really nice. And who goes there every Sunday? Dr. Klinger, Otto Klinger. He was one of our doctors that was so involved with Jim Keysor. He said to me one day, "Ralph—." Helen was with me and somebody else, and he said words to the effect, "You guys are with somebody I knew years ago. He was a real fireball and a pain in the ass for everybody." [laughs] Because I did take people on, especially in this stupid town, but everywhere. Mission College.

ESPINO: Well, if I ask you to maybe remember what you would have said to Walter Reuther or what you did say to him when you had your first chance to speak with him, you had your first chance to meet with him, what did you tell him?

ARRIOLA: Well, first of all, we met with him and his wife. There was about twenty of us together. He said, "Okay, Ralph, it's your turn."

I said, "Okay. Okay, brother Reuther."

[00:37:40]

He says, "I read your paper. It's interesting. Now, what do you want to say?"
How was it he put it? He says, "It's your turn. Tell me what you want me to hear."

I said, "Well, brother Reuther, it's about us, the Latinos. We have no recognition from the rest of the UAW that we exist, even though we produce—," and then I went into the paper, the money, the politics, the votes that our community provides for the Democratic Party, which is for the unions.

So he listened and he listened and he listened. I had prepared myself pretty well with the paper and some other statistical stuff that I did, and he said, "You know, okay. I really appreciate what you said. Now, I got this strike coming with General Motors, and I won't be able to do anything until sometime in March, April, because the strike's going to last quite a while. But we'll get together again and we'll start planning stuff." I mean, he made a commitment. I would like to talk to Henry Lacayo. Eddie wasn't there, but, see, part of that meeting was also about TELACU.

ESPINO: It was?

ARRIOLA: Because at the time AFL-CIO had a department that dealt with social issues, and Watts Labor Community Action Committee was a community union. The AFL was promoting community unions. Only WLCAC and TELACU now exist. I don't know about there were a couple more back east they funded. Now, that year things were getting really tight for Eddie to keep it going. He needed twenty-grand. At the time,

twenty-grand was quite a bit, and they came out with their contributions, and WLCAC got something like about fifty-grand, sixty-grand. TELACU, I don't know what they got, ten, fifteen something like that. Eddie wanted 20,000 more. So part of the meeting—and Eddie and I had met before that meeting, and he kind of prepped me on what I should say and everything. I wish I could remember all of that, but maybe it would be interesting if we'd get a statement from him, what's his name at TELACU right now.

ESPINO: David.

[00:41:40]

ARRIOLA: Yes, David.

ESPINO: Lizarraga.

ARRIOLA: David made a statement once before a group that, "I want you guys to meet Ralph Arriola. You guys all know him, but you don't know him as the guy who saved TELACU." [cries] That was his statement.

ESPINO: But he wasn't around in those early days. Was he around in those early days?

ARRIOLA: Huh?

ESPINO: Was David around in those early days when you were—

ARRIOLA: He was just coming on. He was just coming on. This thing took some years later. So we got the twenty-grand for Eddie.

ESPINO: Did you want to be involved in TELACU? You didn't want to work with—

ARRIOLA: Well, I did work for TELACU through a union grant. We ran a manpower training program on Mendick [phonetic] and Brooklyn. At the time, the war was getting on in Vietnam, and so—what was the name of that company—Norris [phonetic] Industries, one of the big ones, they needed hundreds of people all the time. So we had

our training program set up—"training program." [laughs] Yeah. We were teaching them basic stuff. These guys were older men, eighteen and above, to sixty-five, that had come out of prison, and we were teaching them addition, subtraction, I mean just the simplest things, you know, and then making them—whenever I got the call, "Hey, we need twenty guys tomorrow. Can you have them ready?"

[00:44:08]

Well, I always asked them to give me about a week for the groups. "Give me a week to recruit them." *Madre*, I had them drinking milk and water and anything to clear their damn system so they could make the— [laughs]

ESPINO: Pass the drug test?

ARRIOLA: Yeah.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: And then I'd take them over there.

ESPINO: Did they succeed in what they were doing?

ARRIOLA: A lot of them made it. A lot of them stayed, you know, or stayed during that period. It was basically very simple assembly work, and they weren't going to operate machines, but assembling other stuff that they could do, because it was such a major, major company, just cutting metal, some simple stuff.

ESPINO: Whose idea was that, do you remember?

ARRIOLA: Well, the UAW had started a manpower training program nationally, and, again, out of our group or out of that manpower training program itself in Detroit there was one white guy who was a former UAW treasurer, so he kind of watched, handled the money, and the other fifteen, twenty guys were all black. "Hey, Ralph, how you doin'?"

We're coming out this week. Why don't you fix things up? Why don't you have a little entertainment for us?"

"Hey, I just don't know anything about entertainment. I can't supply anything you want." Son of a bitch. They used to aggravate [unclear].

ESPINO: You didn't feel obligated to accommodate them?

[00:46:26]

ARRIOLA: Hell, no! I wasn't going to do that. But that was their mentality. Again, there were guys—I'll go even further, it may even sound a little racist—probably they came out of the assembly plant, but they also probably also came out of a plantation.

[laughs]

ESPINO: Well, I think that—I think that—

ARRIOLA: I'm not kidding about that. They were crude, rude. They had two things on their mind when they came out: free booze and free entertainment.

ESPINO: Did you experience that also with politicians?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: The politicians never expected that kind of treatment?

ARRIOLA: Never, never.

ESPINO: That you dealt with.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Because today, even, you hear about our politicians that have come from, well, sort of like the grassroots, from working-class communities, working-class families—

ARRIOLA: They're stupid.

ESPINO: —then it's revealed that they've had this alternative lifestyle. That wasn't always the case back when you were involved?

[00:47:50]

ARRIOLA: No. You know, I met with our congressman—what's his—I keep forgetting his name. Alex Padilla?

ESPINO: I want to say Padilla, but that name's coming to mind.

ARRIOLA: Yes, Alex but also with a congressman now. What was the name?

ESPINO: For here, for the Valley?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: I should know that, but I don't know.

ARRIOLA: Anyway, I met with him when they were first going to run, and they asked me different questions, "What's it like?"

"Well, it's exciting. You're going to learn a lot. You're going to be asked to do a lot of things. You've got to be careful." So we talked about the legislature. Then my last thing is, there's also a big problem that you can get into if that's where you're going to go. There's a lot of booze. There's a party every night, there probably still is, dinners that lobbyists put on. Yeah, you know, and there's another problem. There's a lot of young ladies that are looking to hook up with an elected official. If you're married and you mess around, you're going to get burned. You're going to get burned. So, guys, stay away from it. I don't know what they were doing, but, yeah, I mean—

ESPINO: It was that obvious—not obvious, but it was so much a part of that culture that you thought you had to [unclear]?

ARRIOLA: Yes, and it didn't cost you anything. You got it for nothing.

ESPINO: Okay. Well, back to the manpower program.

ARRIOLA: Okay.

ESPINO: So they would come out from—

ARRIOLA: Detroit.

ESPINO: —Detroit, and would they evaluate your work, what you were doing?

[00:50:15]

ARRIOLA: What the hell could they evaluate? Probably like the people who served, I could have taught them how to add. [laughs] *Ay, yi, yi.* There was such—you know that, “Now I’m an executive, I can wear an overcoat over my suit.” [laughs] *Ay, yi, yi.* Aggravating. So you kind of played along with it.

ESPINO: So it was the UAW’s decision to—you were retraining these eighteen-and-older—

ARRIOLA: We’d take people out of the community that were having trouble, not so much our own membership, no.

ESPINO: Prisoners or anyone?

ARRIOLA: Anyone, but basically that’s what we had, drug addicts and—

ESPINO: Ex-cons.

ARRIOLA: —and guys coming out of prison. I had two incidents. One kid, the most handsome, young, bright Latino, and [Spanish phrase], but he was hooked up. I don’t know what the hell he was on, but it must have been heroin. One morning he didn’t show up, his girlfriend called me and says, “Ralph, Alex,” or whatever his name was, “he overdosed last night.” You know, it hurt. [cries]

I had one that started going into convulsions, and he said, “Oh, Ralph, don’t take me out of the program. I’ll get over this. I’ll get over it.” And he ran out the door and ran into the telephone pole. I mean ran into the telephone—boom! *Toda cortada la cara*. We called an ambulance, they came and they picked him up. I never saw him again. I mean, these guys were— [cries]

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We’re back.

[00:52:58]

ARRIOLA: For the program, I developed the basic curriculum for what we were going to start teaching them after having talked to all of them. They all needed basic math, I mean really basic math. So I would develop worksheets and stuff, and I’d go to the regional office downtown, the UAW regional office, and I’d run off a whole bunch of paperwork for the lessons we were going to be giving them. Then Mary would help with the—Padilla and Mary and I would do the classroom work. Julian saw himself as a supervisor. He was such an idiot.

ESPINO: Julian Nava?

ARRIOLA: No. Oh, no, no, no, no, no. That’s another story. Julian Cervantes. He died. He had heart attack about ten, fifteen years ago and just dropped dead.

ESPINO: And then Mary, do you have her last name?

ARRIOLA: I’m not sure whatever happened to Mary. I’m not sure if she’s still alive.

ESPINO: But they worked within TELACU or they worked for the UAW?

ARRIOLA: Well, we worked as part of TELACU, but separate. I mean, these guys were supposed to be teachers coming out of a—I’m thinking about them and trying to talk.

Probably of all three or four of them, Roy Escarciga [phonetic], well, you know, okay, I don't know what happened to Roy. He did have a B.A., but it was more of watching his business. But the others, I had had two years at L.A. Trade Tech, and I was the only one that was qualified to put together a curriculum to start teaching these guys something, the simplest of math, they didn't know English well, taught them how to read an application, you know, and practice it and practice it and practice it, just basic stuff to apply for a job.

[00:56:10]

It was a rough, rough group, because they were little gangsters and there was the old guys that came out of prison. I sort of learned that these were going to be my bodyguards, that when they started getting a little disorderly in the classroom, a couple of them would just stand up and say, "You guys better shut up right now." I mean, the way they listened to these guys, they listened to them, it was interesting. There's a lot of little interesting episodes I just started to remember.

Then, like I said, I would get them ready. "You've got to clean your systems out. You've got to clean your systems out, or they're going to kick you out." And then I would take them. Those that could drive would meet us at the plant, and then we'd process them.

There was a young black guy who was like, I don't know what level, but had a little status in the organization as an employment supervisor. I was working Jim Keysor, the assemblyman. Well, I also got all of the season tickets for UCLA and USC, two tickets and a parking permit for the Museum of Science and Industry. So I had something, and I, "Here, go watch USC and whoever."

"Thanks, Ralph."

“Okay. Well, next week, bring in another twenty or however many.” The things I remember, I’m sorry.

ESPINO: No, those are all great anecdotes. It all fills the picture up. And what happened to that program? It was just temporary money?

[00:58:42]

ARRIOLA: Yes, temporary, but then I went on to the international and other guys started running it, and it lasted for quite a while, but I left it.

ESPINO: The time that you were at TELACU, what was the feeling like there? We’re talking before 1970, right, or was it after 1970?

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes, yes, yes, right after he had gotten it started.

ESPINO: What was the feeling of the place?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, I think initially they were trying to go the nonprofit way. They were trying to get granted for community programs, da, da, da, da, da, da. We’ll open up a mattress—you knew about the bed mattress company they had?

ESPINO: A little bit.

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, that was kind of a real big thing that they were doing at the time.

ESPINO: Banking, was that part of it?

ARRIOLA: Then there was the moratorium thing took place during that time and other things changed things for Eddie. He got recalled to the international again. He got put on UNESCO. What’s his name came in and started running the place, and he took a different course. Look at them now. It was make money.

ESPINO: There's a book about TELACU, a book written about the organization, and I have to find it. I think I might have not purchased it, I might have borrowed it, because I did have it when I was interviewing the congressman. We talked about that. But was banking an idea that came up? Because I imagine during that period you were thinking about different ways to empower Mexicans, Mexican Americans.

[01:00:56]

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, sure.

ESPINO: So this manpower program, training, job training, but what were some of the other—but then you say, okay, mattresses, also economic. Was it purely—

ARRIOLA: Yes, and then the low-income housing. They came up with a—god, I bet I even have stuff on that. It was like four small units of apartments there on—

ESPINO: I'm going to pause it.

[telephone interruption]

ESPINO: Okay, we're back, and you were telling—oh, gosh, now I can't remember what we were talking about. Let me pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: We were talking about low-income housing. Okay, now I remember, the low—

ARRIOLA: They had some low-income housing. That was kind of their beginning to go into getting away from government grants, going into businesses, that sort of thing, and David did a good job of moving them over, maybe even better than what Eddie did.

Eddie was good because he had all the connections to get this thing going. They called him to come and set it up. And David went off in a different path than all of the other

community unions took. They were going out to make money. They weren't going out to just beg for money. They were going to create their own success, and they've done it. They've done it real well. They got a beautiful building. It's just great.

ESPINO: When you remember the low-income housing project, do you remember who was behind that? Because I thought it was someone named Ralph Cuaron who was behind the low-income housing.

[01:03:15]

ARRIOLA: Well, he might have been. I don't recall that too much. And there were very small projects. I mean, later on maybe they did bigger stuff, but I wasn't there for that.

ESPINO: What else did you witness while you were there?

ARRIOLA: Well, a lot of struggle to keep it going. I mean, it had a lot of trouble just finding the money. I mean, when you're looking for grants, it's a hard way. Now, this was us here, and it was LACA. When we went into the fifty units on Blythe [phonetic] Street, the money was there and they were kind of begging me to find people that were willing to do these things. And in a secret way, I did it. I didn't want the L.A. County schools to know about it, because L.A. County schools are a bunch of—oh, lord. Anyway, we—"we," me and Hector Briones—got it funded, dedicated, and dedicated to build, and then I left. It wasn't easy, but we did it.

ESPINO: Were you part of that fundraising for TELACU in the early days, besides that one meeting with Reuther?

ARRIOLA: Only the money that they got from—and I'll have to remember the name of that—the international. Well, not even the international; the national AFL-CIO.

ESPINO: So the Chicano Caucus of the UAW was instrumental in helping TELACU—
[01:05:30]

ARRIOLA: Well, never thought about it that way. [laughs] Yeah, I guess you could say that. Yeah. Yeah, David did give me that recognition then. I don't remember that they ever did anything else. Yeah, I mean, so I did it. Yeah, I'm pissed off.

ESPINO: About what?

ARRIOLA: That I never got a little recognition at all their lousy dinners. [laughs]

ESPINO: Oh.

ARRIOLA: Well, you know.

ESPINO: Yeah.

ARRIOLA: Not even a goddamn letter that said, "Hey, thank you." Oh, what the hell.

ESPINO: But you have some of that paperwork, you say, going back to the manpower program and Chicano Caucus?

ARRIOLA: Yes, I think so, yes.

ESPINO: Were you with TELACU at the time they were helping with the moratorium, organizing of the moratorium?

ARRIOLA: Well, by that time I was with the international. I was at the region office as an international representative. So the guys were coming to me, Rosalio and Moctesuma. When they wanted the money, I opened the doors for them and got them that, and Moctesuma would tell you that, and Rosalio talks about it. See, you know, you get put in a position where you can do things, but you never really get any real recognition. [cries] I'm starting to worry about that with these stupid pictures.

ESPINO: Yes. Well, that's why I'm interviewing you, so your story will be part of our archive, and you'll get the recognition you deserve and people will know who you are and what you've done, and how important your work has been over time.

[01:08:08]

ARRIOLA: We'll see what happens with Mission College. I came back wanting to do something for Mission College, that I saw at San Antone, Mt. San Antone here locally. We were there overnight two nights. We stayed in the college hotel, motel, whatever the hell it was. It was so beautiful. Everything was so nice. I enjoyed their decorations, I enjoyed the pictures that I saw in there as you walk into the place. I had Helen take pictures of all of those things. I haven't met with Sam Quirly [phonetic] yet, but I want to do something. I want to do something that's—they got this old-man catalog all over the goddamn entrance. Have you been there?

ESPINO: No.

ARRIOLA: Oh, my god. I don't want to just see a damn pine tree. That's a tree. I mean, these trees were a little different, you know. They had more life. They had more something. [cries] I'll show you those pictures when we get them of what I'm talking about.

ESPINO: So you want to leave your mark. You want to leave—

ARRIOLA: I want to leave more than a mark. [cries] I want to leave some beautiful trees. I don't want a bunch of goddamned *nopales* all over the place. [laughter]

ESPINO: You want to leave something that's going to last forever that people can enjoy and it's beautiful.

ARRIOLA: Yes. The college is developing into a really nice little college, but all it is is concrete buildings right now. There's no environment.

ESPINO: Nature.

[01:10:57]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Well, we're going to get to that part. I'm still interested in how you—this will be the last thing—

ARRIOLA: Okay. I'll try and dig up some stuff on TELACU.

ESPINO: Yes, but also the moratorium. Was that something that—did you participate? You were there, because you have the pictures. So how did that—well, let me just back up, and then maybe we'll talk about the moratorium next time. But do you remember when you became opposed to the Vietnam War? I'm assuming you were opposed to the Vietnam War.

ARRIOLA: I was opposed. [cries] But then they drafted my brother in 1966, around there. I mean, I was opposed to it before that.

ESPINO: Do you remember why? What was your—

ARRIOLA: Sure. Korea. Met a couple of guys from Garfield a couple weeks ago at our dinner, they were all veterans of the Korean War. "Why didn't you go, Ralph?"

[laughter] My shooting eye was gone.

ESPINO: Was it for a political reason against the—was it because—well, some people were—

ARRIOLA: Not a political reason. For the reason was that our guys were getting killed.

[cries] Korea, 88,000 guys got killed. What was it, like, 250 maimed the rest of their lives?

ESPINO: Yes. Were you against all wars, like a pacifist?

[01:13:52]

ARRIOLA: You know, I got to say yes. And 88,000 Latinos, that was just Latinos.

[cries] Well, there was 88,000 guys, but I forget what the part was of Latinos. It's something like—

ESPINO: Yes, a big percentage. Ralph Guzman came out with that study. Did you read that study back then?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: So do you remember when people started organizing around the moratorium, what the meeting—

ARRIOLA: You know, the war was taking more and more guys, more and more, more and more were dying, Latinos, and just our guys, and my brother was over there, and he lucked out. He got drafted, he got put into a unit of—he called it—toilet builders.

ESPINO: Toilet builders.

ARRIOLA: “What did you do during the war? How many guys did you kill? How many bayonet fights did you have?”

“We built toilets, Ralph. We built good toilets, but that's what we did.” [laughs]
So we were lucky.

ESPINO: Yes, really lucky.

ARRIOLA: He was at Cam Ranh Bay, and that's where he got to. When he got to Vietnam—that just kicked into my dumb head. “They lined us up and they said, ‘Okay, you guys here go to that truck. You guys here go to this truck.’” He got to go to this truck, go build toilets. [laughs]

ESPINO: That random?

[01:16:32]

ARRIOLA: You know?

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: He came back the meanest, meanest, ugly person. Well, shit, what was it, maybe four or five months after he was there, his new wife left him. So that didn't make him feel good. [laughs] So he came back, and it took him time to calm down and get normal again. Then he got married. You know, I didn't think he'd make it with Mary Lynn [phonetic], for some reason, but you know what? He's still crying almost a year after. [cries]

ESPINO: Oh, she passed away? Oh, I'm so sorry.

ARRIOLA: It's funny. It's funny. You never know what you're going to end up with.

ESPINO: That's true. That's so true. Well, I think I'm going to stop it right here. I feel like I've upset you enough. I didn't—

[End of October 31, 2013 interview]

SESSION 6 (November 8, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is November ninth, or is it the eighth? I'm interviewing Ralph Arriola at his home in—

[00:00:11]

ARRIOLA: San Fernando.

ESPINO: It's the eighth, in San Fernando. And I wanted to start, if you could walk me through, we talked last time about your position against the Vietnam War, and I would like you to tell me if you had any role in the organizing of the Chicano Moratorium march, if you played any role.

ARRIOLA: The role I played was being the UAW international rep, and the role was I wasn't in the middle of it all. I knew Rosalio and all the other guys. When they came to us, they would come to us for stuff. Part of it, we provided all the money for toilets, and then they came to me directly for money to buy Moctesuma Esparza's—to get money to develop their film and do *Requiem 29*. Then it was that kind of an involvement. It was kind of an outside involvement, but we were part of it. Paul Schrader was in the middle of that, along with Eddie Torres, who was also an international rep with the UAW, but was organizing TELACU.

ESPINO: So where would you get the funds? Did you have to—

ARRIOLA: I had to go beg. [laughs]

ESPINO: I'm sorry?

ARRIOLA: I had to go beg.

ESPINO: What would you say, do you remember? Like, how would you argue?

[00:02:00]

ARRIOLA: Well, Paul Schrader, he was my director, and we were in the same offices, and I had just gone on the staff, and when Moctesuma came to me asking for some money for the film, I went to Paul. Actually, the first guy I went to was the assistant director and then Paul, but Paul was the main guy, and he said he had some [unclear] under thousand. Then later on, I went to Paul.

[interruption]

ESPINO: We're back.

ARRIOLA: First, let me go back a little.

ESPINO: Okay.

ARRIOLA: When the guys called me and said, "Ralph, we need some money for the film," and asking them for—I'm not sure if the first amount was 1,000 or 1,500, because there were two amounts that we gave them, a total of 3,500 bucks, I think it was. So the first one was for 1,000, the next one was for 1,500 to put the films out.

But when I got the call, I sat down with Marv Brody, who was my immediate—he was my mentor. [cries] And he says, "Go to Paul. Go to Paul. Come on, go to Paul."

So I went to Paul, I told him what we were doing. He said, "Okay."

It was the second amount that I did on my own. I just said, "Go ahead and do it. Send us a bill," which was, I think, the larger amount.

Then with Rosalio, they came, too, and they were coming in and out all the time, so I don't remember everything that we did with them.

ESPINO: Coming in and out of where?

ARRIOLA: Of the regional office on Ninth and Hill—no, not Ninth and Hill. Ninth and Eighth—not Eighth Street. No, Ninth Street.

ESPINO: In downtown?

[00:04:47]

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes, right off of Eldorado.

ESPINO: So you would commute from the Valley every day?

ARRIOLA: Yes, that's where we were working.

ESPINO: They would come in all the time to that office.

ARRIOLA: Yes, so there was a constant contact. I'm not sure but what the Federation, the L.A. County Federation of Labor, did, but our locals, our local unions participated too. They put money in it too. I don't know how much money we put in as a UAW group, but it was sizable.

ESPINO: And do you think anybody ever kept those records?

ARRIOLA: You know, I don't think so. I think the local unions would do it, do whatever they did, and they just did it. I mean, they were independent, so they could do whatever they wanted.

ESPINO: So did Rosalio come to you before August 29th, 1970?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, oh, yes, because the arrangement for the toilets and all that other stuff had to be done way in advance. Oh, yes. I'd say we were involved at least two, three months before the march and moratorium took place, and maybe you could talk to Rosalio about that.

ESPINO: Did you have a relationship with the police department? Did you know any police officers or anybody in law enforcement?

ARRIOLA: Well, my brother worked for Yorty.

ESPINO: At that time?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Did that help as far as the planning of the march?

[00:06:51]

ARRIOLA: No, I don't think so, although I'm sure they went through the process to get a permit. The main person in Yorty's office was Mrs. Chambers. Wow. [Spanish phrase].

After the march, after all of the crap that took place, my brother told her, "Ralph has a bunch of pictures. Would you like to see them?"

So she called me. "Ralph, I'd like to see your pictures."

I said, "Okay, as long as you promise not to take them from me and use them against anybody."

So she did, and she was amazed. Even though it doesn't—well, I think at that time I took her the whole thing, because I still had it, but I only had those ones that I had developed, the twenty-five or thirty. But she got to see all two hundred pictures, and she was amazed.

So they were aware. Then later on they asked me to speak before the special unit of LAPD, special police unit, and we split it with blacks and Anglos and Mexicans and a couple of Orientals. So what was it I showed first? I showed *I Am Joaquin* and then I showed another one. Which one was it? I forget which it was. Oh, my god, they came off the goddamn table like crazy. I mean, the Anglos and the non-Latinos, they went

bananas. “That’s nothing but a goddamn Communist film,” and [demonstrates], all kinds of craziness. But the Latinos just sat back and smiled. [laughs]

ESPINO: Why did they ask you to speak to this group?

[00:09:32]

ARRIOLA: Because they were a special riot police in one of those units of about thirty, forty guys. We did it right there in City Hall.

ESPINO: Was this after August 29th?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Yes, they were really surprised. And, you know, the poem is a poem, and this guy wrote a poem that is very—do you remember?

ESPINO: Do you remember the first time you heard it? Or did you read it?

ARRIOLA: I had read it, but I had also—we got a copy of it through the UAW. We bought one, and I would show it and then the reaction was the same. For the Latinos, it turned them out. For everybody else, they got turned out.

ESPINO: What did you like about it? What part did you feel—

ARRIOLA: Well, I liked the whole darn thing. I thought it was great. I thought Corky did a wonderful job in writing that. I’m not sure who produced it now. It’s been years since I’ve seen it. I don’t know if it’s any good. They were blamed for the riot. *I Am Joaquin* is one of the films that the police said that caused the riot. Bullshit. *They* caused the riot.

ESPINO: Well, take me back to that day, then. So you’re involved in getting funding so they could basically—

ARRIOLA: For things, yes, for things they needed.

ESPINO: —execute in an orderly manner with bathrooms. So it sounds like they had a lot of the details covered.

[00:11:54]

ARRIOLA: They did a wonderful job of organizing it. You know, we just played an outside role by—if they needed something, we tried to get it from either local unions or the region.

ESPINO: In looking back, who did you see as the principal organizer of the march?

ARRIOLA: Wow. Gee, that goes back. Well, you know, one of them was Rosalio, because I knew him, so he was one of them, but there was a whole group of them. I don't remember now, forty-five years ago.

ESPINO: David Sanchez, do you remember?

ARRIOLA: David Sanchez. [laughs] Well, he was in it, but they kind of kept him at—because they were the crazies. They were the crazies, you know. I already told you about it, I'll tell you again, when Moctesuma finished the two—he had two copies of *I Am Joaquin* and *Requiem 29*, and we all met at UCLA, and he showed his film. First thing they did, they got up, he says, “Okay, one of them's ours. [laughs] David said that's when the fingers went up.

ESPINO: Did they really?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Moctesuma and David Garcia, “Hell with you.”

ESPINO: David Sanchez or David Garcia?

ARRIOLA: No, David Garcia and Moctesuma. I think it was David. It was Garcia, but I'm not sure if—he's dead now.

ESPINO: He's dead now?

ARRIOLA: Yes, the guy that produced it with Moctesuma. But David, he and his little group, they threatened to take it. No way. So that was kind of exciting.

ESPINO: Why would you call them the crazies?

[00:14:12]

ARRIOLA: Because they were—I mean, they were—what's the black group, the militant black group?

ESPINO: The Black Panthers?

ARRIOLA: Yes, one of them. Anyway, they were trying to be like them.

ESPINO: Or US, I think there was another one called US.

ARRIOLA: They were trying to be like them, and so they had their uniforms and, you know, they took over Catalina and starved to death and got kicked out, I guess. I don't know. [laughs] It's just crazy, you know. David was also—I don't know. He was always around the Yorty office, too, so he might have been somebody they put in there.

ESPINO: There was the Youth Council, Mayor Yorty's Youth Council. David Sanchez was on that and so was Victoria Castro and a few other people from East Los Angeles or from the Chicano community, but then he left and he formed the Brown Berets. You're saying he kept coming back to Yorty's office?

ARRIOLA: In fact, recently there was something about him. I forget now. They were a little bit of a show, but they carried no weight. Nobody saw them as real threatening.

ESPINO: Do you think they had a role to play in the movement?

ARRIOLA: Well, a little bit. Yes, a little bit. They added the crazies. [laughs] They were going to invade and all kinds of [unclear].

ESPINO: Did you see them as anti-American?

ARRIOLA: No, just crazy Americans. [laughter] They did do something to me that I just kind of laughed at them, because I wasn't against them. We were in the middle of the John Tunney campaign in East L.A. They had just pulled me off for the last three weeks to get this guy elected, pull in the vote from all the way out from Pico Rivera. So I had a team of about fifteen trucks with sound units, and they distributed over 100,000 pieces of material through all those communities. Each truck had a specific area that he had to maintain, so we covered everything.

[00:17:33]

I was in the middle of a fight with Jack Minnet, I remember. I forgot him. I called him on a Friday. I called him Wednesday and Thursday and then Friday, and I said, "Chuck, I need the money." I needed a chunk of money. I forget. At that time it was a chunk of money, but it was probably like about 15, 20,000 dollars, to get the precinct workers working, but to get the guys that had been running all these trucks all this time fed. They had families.

"Oh, Ralph, you know, they'll be all right. We'll take care of them at election time."

"No, Chuck, we're going to take care of them. Friday I take care of them or I shut the headquarters down."

"Well, you'd better not do that."

"Well, you'd better have the money, Chuck."

"Goddamn it, Ralph."

I shut the headquarters that afternoon. I called the Federation, I called Marvin and the UAW, and the old man from the butcher's, Rodriguez, and I said, "It's going down. They don't want to come through with the money. I'm shutting it down."

"Oh, you can't do that, Ralph."

[00:19:15]

"I've done it. I already did. I shut it down a couple hours ago." Holy crap, everything happened. I mean, Friday night I got the money. A couple guys came by.

ESPINO: But you were going to say that the Brown Berets did something to you.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Okay.

ESPINO: You didn't finish.

ARRIOLA: That night—it was Saturday. Was it Friday night or Saturday night? They came to me and they said, "We need \$500 to go to Denver for the convention," Corky's thing. "And if you don't give it to us, we're going to come back and tear the place up."

"Oh, okay. Well, let me see what I can do." I already knew what I could do. I had the money. So I says, "I'll call you in a while." So I did. I called them and I said, "Hey, come on by. I've got that amount you wanted, 500 bucks." I could have given them more, but I didn't.

ESPINO: It didn't upset you that they talked to you that way?

ARRIOLA: No, no. I understood what they were doing. I'd have given them a thousand just to get them out of town. [laughs] So they split, and we spend that time—

[interruption]

ARRIOLA: So we did it. We pulled the vote out on that Tuesday, really pulled it out, really got that idiot elected.

ESPINO: So you wanted the Brown Berets out of town because of the election?

[00:21:47]

ARRIOLA: Yes, I didn't want them to disrupt anything. There was a convention, a gathering in Denver by Corky. It was important to them and important to them, to the Brown Berets and the young people that wanted to go. So, no, it was all right. I understood that.

ESPINO: Do you think they had a positive impact on the movement?

ARRIOLA: A little bit, I think. It showed that our youth was aware of, they were interested in politics, they were interested in what was happening to the Chicanos, they were interested in what was going in the war. All those things were there at those years. It was really an exciting time. So you just assist them. You know, just assist them. Let them do their thing out of town. Get the hell out. [laughter]

ESPINO: Yeah, do it over there.

ARRIOLA: Go to Denver and bother them.

ESPINO: Oh, that's funny. Because some people from your generation were offended by their actions, and instead of supporting them, would try to squash their—

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes. They were embarrassed.

ESPINO: You think they were embarrassed?

ARRIOLA: Yes, you know, what are you doing, acting like a bunch of idiots? No, they had issues that they were addressing in their own way, and it was good to see it. But it's like my little nephew, gave him a lollypop and let him go suck on that while we take care of other things. [laughs]

ESPINO: What was your impression of—so you definitely remember David Sanchez.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: Do you remember any of the other Brown Berets?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Like maybe Gloria Arrellanes, she was one of the female members, or Carlos Montes or Cruz?

[00:24:20]

ARRIOLA: No, I don't remember them. But I'm interested now in Gloria. [laughs] I want to see what they're going to do with the book.

ESPINO: Oh, okay, yes. Also what was your impression of—because people talk about David Sanchez as being just really smart.

ARRIOLA: I guess he was a weird kid. I mean, he had these guys organized and they're all marching around like a little army. They were cute. [laughs] They were okay. They were doing their thing, and their thing was part of everything else that we were doing. I mean, I was doing my own stupid thing, too, you know. I had the Chicano Caucus going and at the same time do the UAW thing.

ESPINO: Yes, and then all the elections.

ARRIOLA: Which hit me hard, now that I think about it. It hit me hard. When I say hard, I had now been given authority and power to do things, and I wasn't sure how to handle it. Right off the bat, they sent me to San Jose to speak to a big gathering of people against the war.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: Oh, man, that was hard. I spoke, but I don't think I was a Walter Reuther.

[laughter] But I did it. And a lot of the Chicano Caucus was there from Norris. But so

many things were happening so quickly, you had to move with it. I wish I had been better prepared.

ESPINO: Well, like you say, everything happened so quickly. So the group that you spoke with, were they UAW?

[00:26:53]

ARRIOLA: UAW, labor, all of the crazies from up north. It was a good-size gathering.

ESPINO: Do you remember what you said?

ARRIOLA: No. No. It's probably just, "Rah, rah, rah. UAW, we support you. Let's keep moving," and da, da, da, da. [laughs]

ESPINO: Do you remember how you met Rosalio Muñoz?

ARRIOLA: Just in the office, off and on.

ESPINO: He came to see you?

ARRIOLA: Yes, and he was there to talk to Paul. He came in and talked to Paul. I don't know how much more money was ever given to them, but they were there.

UAW, we had a wing of the building. The building's here and then over the parking lots, and it was about this wide and about almost as long as this on the both sides. It was also a place where—oh, man—the UCLA professor that opened up the books on—what was his name? Very famous incident. I'll have to remember down the road.

ESPINO: He wrote a book or he—

ARRIOLA: No, he ran a big exposé on the government.

ESPINO: He wrote a book on critiquing the U.S. involvement in Vietnam or—

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes. Oh, god. Anyway, so I had a little sub office in East L.A. By that time, I had gone back to the manpower program because the strike was going to take

place and we were cutting back, and I'd go there every afternoon and use the phone, use the machines, and do whatever I needed to do with the OJT program. What was his name? They were some weird people, and I'm sure that a couple of those guys were cops. I'm sure. I'm sure we were being infiltrated there. And there was the professor and a couple of his people from UCLA, and people would use that. UAW let them use that—

ESPINO: That space?

[00:29:53]

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And this philosophy, you think it came down straight from the top from Walter Reuther or do you think that—

ARRIOLA: No, that was Paul. He was open to allowing people to organize. All the locals did. There was that attitude that, "Come on, let's all do it together. Let's go against the war." It was Paul. He led it.

Some people weren't too happy, like the guy from 509, Jerry Whipple. He's the guy that beat Paul after Paul was shot and recovering. He ran against Paul, and he was actually his caucus chairperson. But he was mad because his son had just got killed.

ESPINO: Where did his son get killed? In the war? Oh, wow. So here you have all this antiwar organizing, and his son's in the service.

ARRIOLA: Yes, and, you know, god, that was one of our big complaints, that so many Latinos were getting killed, and the union—I don't know how many kids got killed from the families that we—

ESPINO: Right. No one's ever done that research, within the UAW how many kids were serving.

ARRIOLA: That would have been interesting.

[00:31:31]

ESPINO: So did you attend—well, obviously you attended. You have all those photographs. Do you remember preparing to go and when you woke up in the morning, what you did? Maybe can you run that day for me, whatever you can remember.

ARRIOLA: All I remember is that Paul said, “Hey, we have—.” Paul and Marvin Brody—yes, Marvin Brody—they said, “You’ve got to go. They want you over there. They want one of us, and you’re the guy that’s going to San Jose. So get your ticket and get out of here.” I mean, it was just like that.

ESPINO: What about August 29th? Was that the first moratorium march you attended? Because there was one before that and after that.

ARRIOLA: You know, I think I have pictures of that, the one before, the one after. It’s with Rosalio. I don’t recognize the street, but Eddie and Rosalio and some other guys, I’ve got pictures of that. I don’t see it as being on the 29th. I want to show it to him, because I blew it up, and before you leave, you can see it.

ESPINO: Okay, great.

ARRIOLA: I mean, there was so much going on at the time, to try to remember every date and everything that we did.

ESPINO: Did you expect violence to erupt?

ARRIOLA: No, not really. No, I really didn’t, because there was a lot of monitors that the moratorium organized. I mean, you can see them at the park where they formed a

line against the police, said, “Stop. What the hell are you doing?” If they had a problem outside on the street on Whittier Boulevard, they should have kept it there, but they didn’t. They rushed everybody in the park.

ESPINO: Did you march the whole way? Did you go from the beginning?

[00:34:19]

ARRIOLA: No, I rode, because I stayed till the end of the last, the two buses full of sheriffs that followed them all the way. So I stayed there till I got pictures of that, and then I went over, I think I got some on Whittier and Atlantic, and then I know I got some on Whittier Boulevard. Then I drove down to the park and set up there.

You know, the other night I woke up madder than hell, just like that, two o’clock in the morning, cussing and swearing at that goddamn Raul Ruiz. Oh, well, what am I going to do? We’ll see. Rosalio’s trying to get an attorney to do a letter and see what else we can do.

ESPINO: You were taking pictures of the march in general, and then do you remember when it started to get tense, what happened?

ARRIOLA: We were having a good time just sitting back on the corner, where I was with the others. We had sandwiches and stuff that people had picked up to eat. Then all of a sudden you see a bunch of young guys running in, and then right behind them, the cops. As you see in *Requiem*, this young Latina, the goddamn cop hit her with a club. [Spanish phrase]. He just got crazy.

But the monitors stopped the cops. “What the hell are you doing? Stop!” So it calmed down and they moved out. Well, the first time, they got chased out, and then the second time, they moved out. God, that film has got to be okay.

ESPINO: Yes, I haven't heard. I need to contact her and see what she thinks could be done with it. Yes, it's an important documentary about that march. Did you take pictures the whole time?

[00:37:28]

ARRIOLA: Well, I took pictures until I ran out of film. I mean, I probably had about eight or ten rolls of pictures, of film.

ESPINO: Who were you walking with?

ARRIOLA: Well, they were UAW guys, some of the guys that are in the pictures. I'm not sure, I don't know, I'll have to ask Henry Lozano about who was there. Manuel Briones was there, a couple of others. I'll ask him. I'll ask him.

ESPINO: How did you get those photos of the bar? How did you know to go there, or what led you to that area?

ARRIOLA: Of the what?

ESPINO: The bar.

ARRIOLA: I didn't go to the bar, no.

ESPINO: Oh, those aren't your pictures?

ARRIOLA: No, no, no. Oh, people went to the bar after the word got passed around that—holy Christ, that added to the anger of the group.

ESPINO: Did you hear when you were still at the march about Ruben Salazar?

ARRIOLA: I don't recall that. Probably did, but I don't recall it.

ESPINO: So what was your plan? You were taking photographs and then you ran out. What did you decided to do after?

ARRIOLA: Well, they obviously declared it an unlawful assembly, and so we all just kind of started walking out. I mean, there wasn't much else I could do. The cops were starting to arrest people all over the place. Stupid. God, what did we do?

ESPINO: Some people went right away to go see about securing bail for the people who were arrested.

[00:40:21]

ARRIOLA: I don't remember what I did after that. More than likely, we went back to the region office, but I don't recall.

ESPINO: Did you ever talk to your brother about the incidents there that day, considering he was working for Sam Yorty?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: What was his view?

ARRIOLA: I don't recall, and he probably would have been very reserved about making any comments. I don't remember what he said, no. What do we do after that? I mean, that was a major event.

ESPINO: Did you think that maybe it was too dangerous to be involved in the movement after that?

ARRIOLA: Oh, no. No, no. People didn't really have that fear.

ESPINO: No?

ARRIOLA: No. So we didn't see ourselves as anti-American, anti-country, anti—we're anti the war. We weren't anti the military. I mean, we were fighting to bring home the Latinos. [cries] I mean, there'd already been eight thousand of them killed. We didn't want any more. No, it wasn't against the military. Maybe it was against the military for

putting us in a situation where we were losing so many young men, and the suckers that could get drafted weren't getting drafted. The guys were going to college, people with money, politicians with sons. No, that never entered our mind.

ESPINO: Were you involved later on when they were addressing police brutality and relationships between the Chicano community and the police department?

[00:43:43]

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, some of that, you had to be in East L.A. because that's where things were happening, and I wasn't down there. I was still working, you know. I had other stuff I had to do.

ESPINO: How about the inquest? Was that something that you attended?

ARRIOLA: Well, no, I didn't attend it. I was aware of it, and a couple of the guys that were in the office had attended the thing. I forget who they were, but we would have copies about it.

ESPINO: So there was somebody from UAW who was following the proceedings?

ARRIOLA: Yes, but they weren't staffers or anything. They were just rank-and-file. If you're there—see, I always felt a little out of everything because I wasn't there. I had to go there to be a part of it. So that was hard. When you quit work, you go to the local bar where the guys hang out and—

ESPINO: Well, can you remember what you felt like after that happened?

ARRIOLA: Well, we were all very upset about it. It was terrible.

ESPINO: Do you have an explanation of why it happened?

ARRIOLA: I feel that the cops were set up to do something, just the fact that there was maybe a hundred officers in those buses, you know, fifteen each, and they followed.

You'll see them in some of my pictures, just following along, and then reacting to some stupid incident in the liquor store and then going after everybody on the street. Well, what the hell did they expect? Go running away from them. There was a lot of discussion after that, but—

ESPINO: Did you think about who was responsible?

[00:46:54]

ARRIOLA: Well, the responsibility for some of it was actually some of the punks, some of the kids, some of them going and steal a bottle of beer or something, you know, and give the cops a chance to react. I'm sure the owner of the place started screaming about, "Get out of here!" and "Cops! Help!" you know, and it has happened. And it just grew, spontaneous growth. I mean, everything was pretty quiet up until that point. People had moved in and were waiting for the speakers to begin. Yes, it was like a fair. People weren't sitting around planning an attack on the cops.

ESPINO: Many people took their kids, their wives and their kids.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: And women on their own, young girls.

ARRIOLA: Yes. It was a family thing, almost, you know, and they were here from all over the Southwest. So the camaraderie there, too, you know, you see it in the signs, the people that were in the march. I tried to get that. I tried to get that, who was it in, you know.

ESPINO: Were you connected with the Valley contingent that was down, that went?

ARRIOLA: Well, I was aware of them. I was aware of them, but my thing was downtown. My thing was being downtown with the UAW. See, prior to that, we had

already been doing stuff in East L.A. with TELACU and the manpower program, trying to get a thousand people employed. It wasn't easy. So all of those things tied in.

[00:50:00]

Then myself with the Chicano Caucus and trying to get more Chicanos on the staff and then try to get the twenty-grand or so that Eddie needed for TELACU. I don't know if he's ever talked about it, but we sure as hell did. I mean, as late as that—was it the morning or sometime that day that Eddie—I met with him. It's like, "You've got to make an effort, Ralph. You've really got to push it."

"I'll do it. Yes." Big old *pendejadas*. [laughs]

No, I wasn't up [unclear]. I knew it had to be done. How do you know what would come out of it? Well, I think he did get his money. He did get the money.

ESPINO: Are you happy the way that TELACU has evolved?

ARRIOLA: I love it. I really do. It's major. It's major. It's one of about six or eight community unions that were begun during those days. WLCAC—you know who that is, the Watts Labor Community Action—and TELACU were the two local ones, and then there was a couple more back east someplace, but none of them survived, only WLCAC and TELACU. But TELACU not only survived, but developed into something really major.

ESPINO: Some people criticize it because of its lack of grassroots organizing. That was the initial idea, that the idea of the community union was to have a place for—

ARRIOLA: But they've done things. They've built housing, they've built industry. I mean, it came out of the community. I mean, what are we going to do, walk around with a bottle of beer all the rest of our lives and talk about it? Ah, come on. Even the

drunkards grow up sometime. [laughs] I mean, these were all local guys. If you look at the board, for many years was all community people.

ESPINO: Were you ever on the board?

[00:53:21]

ARRIOLA: No. No, I was part of a program, so, no. I think it's great. They have a beautiful building.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay, here we go. Okay, we're back.

So maybe if you recall, next time we could talk about the moratorium again, if you recall anything from that event and then in the aftermath of that event. But you said that around that same time, in 1970 you left the UAW for good.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Was that a hard decision for you or was that an easy decision?

ARRIOLA: Well, it was a decision because of the strike with GM. I got laid off, and I didn't have a plan to go back then, see, so that made it difficult. But at the same time, Jim Keysor had a campaign going, and I went to work for him, and he got elected and then I went on staff with him.

ESPINO: Oh, I'm missing all of 1970 on my timeline. I don't know why. Okay. So you got laid off because of a GM strike.

ARRIOLA: Yes, the strike.

ESPINO: Did you participate in the actions around the strike even though you—

ARRIOLA: No, because I wasn't part of the General Motors operation. The local wasn't. Not only did the local have all of GM, but they also had Poly Industries and two or three other smaller companies that were under them.

ESPINO: Was there ever tension between the automotive workers and the other UAW—
[00:55:48]

ARRIOLA: No, no, we were all pretty well together. The only time is when we might have elections going in the local, and then we would pick who in the hell we were going to go after. Parts Warehouse, GM, and Fisher Body at GM, and the Chevrolet unit, even among themselves they were, "Who do we want for president?"

"Well, J_____ is running out of our plant. We want him." There were some crazy people there, too, *ay, yi, yi*.

ESPINO: What do you mean, crazy people?

ARRIOLA: Well, just they had some weird ideas about where they wanted to go with the union and how far to take GM. You needed some calm people and some smart guys to run for the offices at the local.

ESPINO: Do you think they were extreme in their view?

ARRIOLA: Oh, some of them were, yes, yes. You know, it was the seventies. A few years prior to that, most of these guys were probably teenagers working in the fields, working in nonunion shops, picking up on some of the more radical organizations. We had a couple of the guys that identified as Commies. What the hell's a Commie, you know? So what? You could have put Gorbachev out there in the middle of the guys.

"What ya got, buddy?" [laughs]

ESPINO: But I don't understand why you got laid off if it was a GM strike and not a—
how is it if you were working for Poly Industries when the GM strike occurred, you got
laid off? What's the connection?

[00:58:38]

ARRIOLA: Poly Industries had just closed, I think it was in '68, and I went on the staff,
so that when GM strike hit, I had no place to go back to, and the international laid off a
bunch of international reps. They must have let go, I'd say, a good five, six hundred. It
was big. It was big.

ESPINO: Wow. Just here in Southern Cal or across the U.S.?

ARRIOLA: No, across the country and Canada.

ESPINO: Oh, and Canada too. So you were on staff at UAW and they laid you off, not
Poly Industries.

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Who told you, do you remember?

ARRIOLA: Huh?

ESPINO: Who told you that you were going to be laid off?

ARRIOLA: Oh, I got notice. I got a letter.

ESPINO: You got a pink slip, like in the mail?

ARRIOLA: Yes. It said, "Due to the GM strike, we have to make some cutbacks in
staff, so as of such-and-such a date, you'll be off staff," words to that effect.

ESPINO: No one talked to you?

ARRIOLA: Well, I mean, I'm sure that the assistant director probably brought it up, 'Ralph, you're going to get cut and so is—,' da, da, da. There were a couple other people that got cut. I mean, how else do you tell somebody? Goodbye.

ESPINO: How did you feel?

[01:00:26]

ARRIOLA: Well, I was upset with it, but I understood it too. Last one on, first one off.

[laughs]

ESPINO: You didn't worry that you weren't going to be able to provide for your family?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, that was a worry, but that left me right away. When Jim found out that I got laid off, well, he put me on the campaign staff and then eventually on the regular staff. He got elected, and I think I was still on UAW staff, and then when he found out about it, he said, "Well, you can come to work for us. But for the next few months or weeks or days," I don't know what it was," the only way I can pay you is by the campaign, but it'll be something." But it wasn't a big deal, but I got the car and I got the gas credit card, which was all right. Yes, I have to think about what and how and—yes.

ESPINO: Then you worked for him and you worked for his office for ten years?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: What would you say your accomplishments of that period?

ARRIOLA: Oh, there were a number of them, especially around election law. One of them was getting elected by mail. I have or I had a picture of Reagan and Jim Keysor signing the law that changed the process in election law. There was a lot of little stuff. It

wasn't my business too much to be involved with the legislation. Mine was in the district. Mine was meeting with people, promoting him in the district.

ESPINO: What was the district? Can you explain the parameters of the district, what areas and what were the demographics?

[01:03:17]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Basically it included Asilomar, San Fernando, Lake View Terrace, Pacoima, parts of Grenada Hills, Mission Hills, down through Sepulveda. I think the bottom line there was Sherman Way across to Clyburn [phonetic] and back up around.

ESPINO: And this was a time when it was mostly Anglo?

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes.

ESPINO: I imagine Pacoima and some of those parts had a heavy concentration of—

ARRIOLA: Yes, San Fernando, Pacoima, but even at that time, San Fernando was heavy Anglo.

ESPINO: How did they respond to you?

ARRIOLA: Oh, the bastards. In '69, Helen and I moved into the house up above, next block, and I ran for City Council, and I told you eight people signed my petition. No, thirty of them altogether, and eight people were [unclear]. And the old man that was across the street that lived there—well, he lives there—he's now in his late eighties, yes, eighty-nine, I think, he had a young—yes, young—Filipino who stays with him, strictly a caretaker, but she's so great. And she walks him down. They take a walk every morning. They come to my garage and we sit down and we talk for a half hour or so. Susan. Right now she's all worried because her daughter just flew back to the

Philippines and that storm is going on. Anyway, but he's almost the last of the Anglos that lived here.

[01:06:09]

But, anyway, oh, there was some ugly letters that went out, because I was such an activist, you know. I'd go to City Council and take them on and defend. There was only two Latino families on the block then, and the ones next to her and Taylor, Michael Taylor, and all the way up on the end of the block is a former cop, and they're the only ones left of the Anglos.

How did we get off on this one?

ESPINO: Well, I wanted to know how the community, the white community, the Anglo community treated you as a representative of Keysor and as an activist.

ARRIOLA: You know, at that point I've got some drag, I've got some power. "You want to screw around with me? Okay, come on. Sooner or later you're going to come and ask me for a favor, so you'll be kissing my ass at that time." And that's the way it was.

I was close to the city administrator, Bob James, he and I were real good friends, and so I had his support. Then the rest were all businessmen. At that time, San Fernando had a good business community. I told you about how the Kiwanis. Jim Keysor said, "You've got to get on one of the service clubs."

So I said, "Okay, well, I'll apply to Kiwanis."

And six months later, I go by the bank, and the guy who was there was a membership—"Hey, where's my membership application for the Kiwanis?"

"Oh, Ralph, the Mexicans in the club think you're too controversial."

“Okay, you son of a bitch, okay.” Years later, I’ve been ask three or four times already to join. So there was still a lot of anti-Latino. I mentioned to you, where else do you go that you find two Catholic churches within three or four blocks of each other? That’s the white. That’s the Latino.

[01:09:51]

Then when I left Jim Keysor, I took over the Head Start Program. Where Head Start was located, Calisher [phonetic] and Keewin [phonetic], that was—

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. So instead of jumping to the Head Start, can we go back and can I ask you about the Raza Unida Party?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: Because that was forming around the 1970s as well, and that’s—

ARRIOLA: Yes, we had a very active group. One of them, a couple of them are still involved with Mission College. I supported them. I had no problem. I let them use the mimeograph—we had mimeograph then—to come into the office and run their stuff off.

ESPINO: Keysor’s office?

ARRIOLA: And they did come in and they’d run off whatever they wanted to run off, but they never supported me for City Council. So that’s all right. That’s all right.

ESPINO: But did you run under the Raza Unida Party?

ARRIOLA: No, no.

ESPINO: You ran as a Democrat?

ARRIOLA: No, I’m a Democrat. The incident with the Democrats, when I finally said, “Kiwanis, go to hell,” my very dear friend Gene Wyatt [phonetic], “Come on, join the

Lions.” So I went to the club there one night, and they introduced me, and the next meeting, the treasurer of the club came up to me and says, “Ralph, I want to talk to you. I want to tell you why I voted against you. You have been a member of the radical Raza Unida Party, you’ve been—,” da, da, da.

[01:12:28]

I said, “Sir, I don’t where you get your information. I’m a goddamn Democrat. I was born a Democrat. I’m going to die a Democrat. I’ve never been part of Raza Unida. They’re a community group that’s involved locally. I support them. I support anyone. I support the Lions and the Kiwanis.” And I told him about the Kiwanis. And who are the Latinos in the Kiwanis? All my closest guys, you know. I said, “Come on. There’s nothing radical about me. I’m outspoken when there’s crap happening, especially amongst the groups.” But then we were okay. We were okay. But, yes, there still a lot of racism.

But I built a good relationship with the city manager and the police chief, part Latino, Sherwood, and—

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We’re back.

ARRIOLA: When I took over Head Start, I had to deal with gangs. Traditionally there were four major gangs in the Valley: San Fernando, Pacoima, Van Nuys, Canoga Park.

Later on there were more, but then those were the ones.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We’re back.

ARRIOLA: Those were the four major gangs, but even at that time, they weren't that violent. There was a lot of gangs. There was fights, you know, at ballgames and stuff. There was always something. I would go and talk to them. I'd eat in the local little restaurant, and I talked to the guys, and I would do things for them.

[01:15:22]

I had a setup at a clothing store here in San Fernando, a Jewish guy, and he knew me real well. He was very active in the community. I said, "I'm going to be sending you guys who get out of jail." They don't have any clothes other than the blues they come out in sometimes. So they're entitled to a pair of pants, I forget what, two or three pieces of underwear, a couple of t-shirts, a couple of shirts, and some socks. "I will call you and tell you who they are, and then you just supply them, and then I'll pay you. So that worked really great, so that was another way of building friendships.

ESPINO: How did they come to you, these guys?

ARRIOLA: Well, I had a young lady who had just finished her second master's, whose history was one of drugs, a street kid, you know, but she was the brightest damn young woman. Oh, Susie. I had some jobs that opened up, and somehow she heard about them, and she came with another guy who was a former problem guy too. She came with her one pair of jeans and sandals and braids, but I was so impressed with her, just so impressed with her. She became my community person. I mean, she was a [unclear] coordinator, but she walked out there and just started talking to the kids. She knew how to talk to the kids. I mean, she came out of that world.

During the summers, we would go out and I would solicit stuff from the merchants and from the City Council, and get paints, and they'd go out and paint murals

and did all kinds of stuff to stay active. Susie Rodriguez. Eventually, she says, “Ralph,” she was with me for about three years, “I’ve been offered a job by a supervisor,” or one of them, “to do some work for them.” She had good writing skills. She was a writer. She was a writer. She was brighter than hell on— [cries]

ESPINO: Did she pass away?

[01:19:20]

ARRIOLA: Very suddenly.

ESPINO: Oh, I’m so sorry.

ARRIOLA: She worked for the county, one of the drug programs, one of the big drug programs, and pretty soon she was kind of the contact person in Washington for the group. I mean, she really climbed. The closest friend that she had that they built a good relationship was Kennedy, the youngest of the Kennedy, the last one that died. What’s his name?

ESPINO: Ted?

ARRIOLA: Ted.

ESPINO: Ted Kennedy.

ARRIOLA: I have pictures of her and Ted. They loved her because she was so bright. She knew how to talk. She was a thinker. So when she took the job, she was ready. She says, “Ralph, I’m going to take this job, but if I get canned, I want my job back.”

“No, no, there’s no more job here.”

“What?”

“That’s what I said. You leave, you’re gone.” She never forgot that.

There was another young lady, [unclear] Lydia [phonetic], brighter than hell, but she was involved in drugs too. She was a pretty young woman. She was built like a [unclear]. What's the term? Just beautiful young woman, but she was in trouble, and she kept getting in trouble, but I hired her and then she did a dumb thing. I don't know if I told you the story about the post office.

ESPINO: I don't think so.

[01:21:50]

ARRIOLA: So I get a call from the post office. I knew the postmaster. "Ralph, she's here again."

"How much?"

"Oh, about eighty bucks." She would run off a bunch of stamp tickets and then take them all in, "Oh, we made a mistake this month," want to turn them in, and she was picking up about eighty bucks a month, you know.

So one day the guy calls me. I said, "Okay, just keep her there. I'll be right over." I walk in the post office, "Hi, Lydia, what's happening?" Oh, she knew.

So the post office said, "What do you want me to do?"

"Oh, just we're going for a ride." Got in the car.

"Where we going, Ralph?"

"Police department."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to turn you in."

I knew they wouldn't do much, but the cops knew her as well as I did. So the detective said, "Look who's here, Fred," or whatever his name was, or Jim. "Jim, Lydia's with us. Ralph, what's going on?"

[01:23:13]

"Well, we got a federal case here this time." [laughs] "She's robbing the post office." Bullshit, you know. So I said, "I'm going to leave her for you," and I left.

She came about six months later, eight months later on that program where they come back and apologize to you. [cries]

ESPINO: Alcoholics Anonymous?

ARRIOLA: Drug.

ESPINO: Narcotics Anonymous, whatever. You make amends.

ARRIOLA: Yes. And she apologized to me. To date, she's got her master's, she worked for a large insurance company that does all the business with my wife's company. [cries] Helen just had that big dinner for a hundred, and she was there representing the company. Before she left, she came and gave me a hug and gave me a kiss and said, "Bye, bye."

And I said to her, "Be good, behave, because you're the only daughter I ever had."

ESPINO: That's sweet.

ARRIOLA: So brighter than hell, too. She's an executive with the damn company. I mean, it's just amazing.

ESPINO: So it sounds like you gave people opportunities to blossom in those different positions.

ARRIOLA: [cries] Susie asked me one day, “Ralph, why? Why do you love women so much?” They’re cute. I don’t know. Because within the department, I had 280 women and only about ten, fifteen guys.

ESPINO: What department are you talking about?

[01:26:07]

ARRIOLA: When I was running Head Start, the agency. And within the administrative I had maybe twenty-five. I had a couple guys here and there, but women basically deal with children. And I would push the hell out of them. You know, “You’re going to go to school. You’re going to go to school. You’re going to go to school.” I’d say by the time I left there, at least six or seven had gotten their master’s, and a hell of a lot of other ones had gotten child development B.A.’s.

ESPINO: Did you ever pay for anyone to go to school? Did you have that kind of those resources?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I can’t divulge it. [laughs]

ESPINO: Really?

ARRIOLA: I’d always tell them, “You need a book, call me.”

So they’d come and they’d say, “Oh, I need a couple of books. I’m short.”

I said, “Okay. Fill out your mileage so you can buy books.” There was always a way to help them. There was always a way. There was other stuff.

ESPINO: How about with the parenting? Who would be responsible for—

ARRIOLA: I initially had this guy Joe Cruz, who had been with the program from the beginning. He eventually passed away. He was gay, gay Latino, very nice old guy. I also had one of the first seven individuals that were found with—

ESPINO: AIDS?

[01:28:28]

ARRIOLA: Yes. [cries] When it eventually became so obvious that all the staff were afraid, they didn't know what it was, they didn't know what to call it, but they were scared shitless because it was the reference of what was going on. And he was looking weaker and weaker and weaker and paler and paler and paler. I finally said to—what was his name? He was a young Jewish guy, and I said, “You've got to take off and get yourself some medication or treatment and come on. Your job will always be here.”

Well, his parents lived in Florida. They wouldn't take him back. They wouldn't take him back, but his brother did. So he ended up passing away in Florida, one of the states down there. When he left, I got a bucket of water, I got some soap and I got some Purex, chlorine. I made myself a bucket, and I went through and washed the toilet where he would go in. Staff was really nervous. I washed them. I washed the basin, the floor. I went into the—at that time, we had a trailer they had given us where they were in there, that I washed his desk, I washed his chair, I washed—I mean, I did it all so they would relax. But he died. He died soon after that.

ESPINO: Did he tell you or did you suspect?

ARRIOLA: He told me what he thought he had. Joe just—I don't know what happened to Joe. One day he just said, “I'm going to retire, Ralph. I want to retire.” But soon after that, he was gone.

ESPINO: That's sad.

ARRIOLA: [cries] My thing was always I take care of my people any way I can, and I'm not going to be afraid of anything.

I told you about the lady with the tapeworm. They wanted to take her kids away because she was falling asleep, and somebody reported her as a druggie. So we had her checked out, and this one doctor took a picture of her brain. She had a tapeworm in her brain. Tapeworm.

ESPINO: She was a parent or she was an employee? Oh, my goodness.

[01:32:41]

ARRIOLA: Originally from Mexico, and somehow sometime had picked one up, and we saved her. They gave her some kind of drugs to take, and she was all right.

ESPINO: Wow. Okay. Let's stop.

[End of November 8, 2013 interview]

SESSION 7 (November 26, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is November 26. I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando Valley.

You were showing me some photographs of the GM plant that were taken in about the forties, 1947? It said '47, '48 on the back. I was looking at the timeline, and we talked a bit about how you were laid off around the GM strike, but we didn't talk about your role in that historic 1970s GM strike. Did you play a role in that at all in the seventies when they went on strike?

[00:00:45]

ARRIOLA: No, I was working out of the—my plant was still in Pacoima, Poly Industries, but I was already working. In 1970, I went back to the manpower training program, and I'm not sure how long I lasted there.

This morning, there's two or three things that I found, a medallion, a medal, medallion. 1947 to 1992 were the years that the plant was in effect, producing cars. During that time, they produced over six million vehicles here in Van Nuys. Located at the Van Nuys plant were Fisher Body, Chevrolet, and the Parts Warehouse. I think altogether at the beginning there's probably around 3,200 employees. It was one of the major plants.

And then we were located over in Pacoima, and there was another smaller, smaller plant. I forget the name of it. And totally at the local we had like, I guess maybe at one time, 3,500 employees altogether at the local that were members of the union. I came out of that small plant. I think I've talked to you about that before. But we were

very strong as only 125 employees can be if they stick together, and we did. We'd go to the union meetings and I always had 75 employees there, or around that number, and I could control the meetings, and that made me not too happy. I mean, they had with the other groups, so you kind of build alliances. But that's how we worked. That's when we wanted something, we took our people and we voted for it.

ESPINO: Do you have a specific example of something that you wanted and won?

[00:04:02]

ARRIOLA: Probably at different times. I only remember going on strike one time, and at that point you go ask the local for strike benefits, you know, your dues coming back to you to help you. But it was never—no, we never asked for much. We were just very involved with the political side of everything.

Actually, we had a plant manager, the old man Mr. Kaplan, was pretty reasonable about everything. As a young punk, I was probably maybe thirty, somewhere in there, first meeting with him, boy, did I blast. And next time it was Nellie Parra, one of my mentors, and Lee Hebert on the other side. When he opened up and said something about the employees, boy, I shot up and I says, "You can't talk to my members that way."

[laughs] My members. So I went off on my little tirade. I don't know what the hell I said to him, probably very dumb, and Nellie was twisting my fingers and Hebert was stepping on my toes, because they told me from the beginning, "You shut up. You don't say nothing." Well, I didn't listen to them.

ESPINO: What did he say that upset you, do you remember?

ARRIOLA: Well, because I was starting out, and, you know, just like anybody young and full of energy and, boy, you're going to represent your members and all that kind of

baloney, you tend to over-speak. So after I was finished, they all kind of turned around and looked at each other and went on with the meeting, totally ignored. [laughter] That was a lesson and a half.

ESPINO: But you don't remember what the issue was?

[00:06:25]

ARRIOLA: Just stuff in the plant. We probably had some grievances that needed to be negotiated. There was never really major stuff at that place. I mean, the company was pretty reasonable.

ESPINO: Do you think people were generally happy with their jobs?

ARRIOLA: They were happy.

ESPINO: They didn't feel exploited or—

ARRIOLA: No, no.

ESPINO: —discriminated against?

ARRIOLA: No, no. They were pretty happy with that little company.

Eventually the old man died, I forget when, and a new group took over the plant, and that's when things started getting a little harder. But by that time, I had moved out, I was working for the international, and then they sold it, and the company moved out to Riverside someplace.

ESPINO: Did you ever want to get a job with General Motors? When that plant opened up, was it a place where people wanted to work?

ARRIOLA: Yes, sure, I did. Yes. But I was blind from one eye, so that was a problem.

ESPINO: So you did try to get a job.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. So, oh, you know, we'd have a production line, and you've got to be pretty quick, and I'm not blind, but I'm just assuming you would have a little trouble at times with putting the bolt on some stupid thing.

ESPINO: So despite all your classes and all your experience?

[00:08:03]

ARRIOLA: This I found out later from my friend, but they weren't instituting the handicapped programs yet. Neither was Lockheed, neither was Manasco [phonetic], neither were the other companies that I tried to apply to. So it was difficult.

But anyway, the other day I was over at my son and my son's father-in-law, who was an original employee at the plant, and he just lives two blocks down and had just had a leg put on, but he says, "Ralph, I asked him for anything that he might have and want to give."

"Oh, *si, si*, I have." And he came out with this. Wow!

ESPINO: It's beautiful.

ARRIOLA: And this is a beautiful, about a four-inch-in-diameter medallion, one side shows General Motors, Van Nuys, California, the assembly plants, and on the other side it shows that they started in 1947 and left in 1992. There's a Camaro and an old Chevy four-door, and it says on there that they produced six million cars during that time.

ESPINO: So they must have given this away as—

ARRIOLA: To every employee when they left.

ESPINO: Oh, jeez.

ARRIOLA: And when they left, it wasn't a ceremonial thing.

ESPINO: No?

ARRIOLA: The doors were locked one morning, and they said, “It’s all over.”

ESPINO: Closed.

[00:10:17]

ARRIOLA: Closed.

ESPINO: I know that was a historic struggle to try to keep it open.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Did you participate in that?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, we did a lot of things. We had demonstrations at the plant, went to different legislative offices, talked to the reps, but it was a forgone thing. They had decided, and once General Motors decided, it was their call. And it wasn’t just here.

Local 216 in downtown L.A. around, oh—we have the list, 216, we could look up the address. It was a little town, and that was another General Motors plant, and that went down, too, at the same time. Wow. Maybe I could contact a couple of guys that might be from that plant too. In fact, one of the reps is still around, Harry Gonzales [phonetic].

ESPINO: Was he in the Chicano Caucus?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Yes, that would be great. So going back to the GM strike, you didn’t have a role in that?

ARRIOLA: No, I just—you know, we were another company. We gathered stuff, food and stuff, for the GM workers, just enough to keep the kitchen going at the local union.

ESPINO: So does the whole membership help decide whether or not like a plant like that should go on strike since you’re all part of the UAW?

ARRIOLA: Well, yes, see, it wasn't just a strike. It was the closure. So there was a real unity to try to keep it open.

ESPINO: In the seventies? I'm talking about the 1970s, because you said you got laid off around the GM strike.

[00:12:25]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Well, no, around the GM strike, no. I was working on the manpower program, and it kind of kept me away from the local.

ESPINO: So you didn't have anything to do with that.

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: You were going to East Los Angeles.

ARRIOLA: Then even more in '91 or '92 I left the UAW completely and went to work for Jim Keysor.

ESPINO: Right. That was '71.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: 1971.

ARRIOLA: Yes. So I always kept in contact with them because of politics. I was involved in politics, so anything that was happening, I was involved with the UAW staffs, the coordinating staffs, the congressional staffs, all of them.

ESPINO: When you look at your life history and growing up in downtown and going to Garfield High School, graduating from there, moving out to the San Fernando Valley and experiencing things like the Chicano Moratorium—and we didn't talk about the East Los Angeles, the student walkouts, but—

ARRIOLA: No. By that time, I was out here in the Valley, and I was aware of it. In fact, I have some pictures of the—I found some pictures of—

ESPINO: You took some pictures of the protests?

[00:14:10]

ARRIOLA: So, yes, I maintained a general—when I had time to get around to special things like that, and I collected those pictures and I have them separate, so we could look at them sometime.

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: When you're involved in politics the way I was, you're one of the main people. Basically you can't be an organizer. I maintained contact with them, but that's about it, so that it keeps you in everything. So I was involved in a lot of the—

ESPINO: You had your hands in a lot of different struggles, it sounds like. How you do think the Mexican American community changed after those historical struggles, like the walkouts?

ARRIOLA: It was just beginning to change. Be it the walkouts, be it the meetings that were being held locally in East L.A. basically and then in San Fernando, because there was a real active group here in San Fernando, but compared to L.A., you had maybe two or three hundred guys that were really involved, and out here you had maybe twenty, but they maintained contact. So it was the beginning of things to happen. God, I think about where I was. I was really at the beginning of so many things, you know.

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: I mean, I got invited by a local guy, my brother and I, to go to the founding MAPA convention in Phoenix, bringing Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and California together to form one. So it was developing lines of communication.

ESPINO: Did you go?

[00:16:56]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: What was that like?

ARRIOLA: It was great. It was great just to hear the—get rid of the little technicalities about putting together an organization. There was MAPA, and I think the other one was called PASO [phonetic], and something else.

You mentioned Mexican growing up in Texas, which was weird, and then there was New Mexico, and there were not many, but there were some Arizona. And I could see the difference in the attitude of the different delegates. California was always ready to go on the liberal side, really take on the thing and come up with something. Then as you go down to Texas, the guys got a little more cautious and they took a little longer to bring into whatever we were doing at the time. But at least it was a beginning. It was great.

ESPINO: Do any leaders stand out for you from that convening?

ARRIOLA: Oh, god.

ESPINO: Was Bert Corona there?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, Bert was there. Bert was there. But there was—god, I know I have something on that meeting someplace.

ESPINO: Edward Roybal, was he there?

ARRIOLA: I don't remember Roybal being there.

[00:18:49]

ESPINO: What about some of the younger guys like Jose Angel Gutierrez, who would later become a leader in Texas but around Chicano Movement issues?

ARRIOLA: You know, I don't remember. Although, interestingly enough, I have an original copy of Ernest Vigil.

ESPINO: *Crusade for Justice?*

ARRIOLA: Yes. So it's there. He and Susie Rodriquez are very, very dear close friends, so when Susie brought him out, we spent a lot of time talking. Even as of today, I'm trying to get a hold of the guy to send him some pictures of the murals at the ballpark here in San Fernando that we took about four or five months ago, but his phone is loaded, so I don't get anywhere with him. I don't know how I'm going to contact him.

ESPINO: Do you use email? Because I know he's on email.

ARRIOLA: I haven't. I just keep fighting it, and then in the back of my head say, "You better wise up, dummy. You got to use it." [laughs]

ESPINO: It's hard. I can send him an email for you, if you'd like. I have his email address.

ARRIOLA: Okay.

ESPINO: He came out to UCLA about two years ago and gave a talk about the *Crusade*.

ARRIOLA: Yes, we met at the time. God, it's been two years already.

ESPINO: Oh, that's right. He's the one that introduced you to me, I think, at the commemoration for Ruben Salazar. He was there.

ARRIOLA: At the park?

ESPINO: At the Plaza de la Raza.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: That's right.

[00:20:59]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Plaza de la Raza, that was a—you know, the UAW and Eddie at the time, Eddie was pretty active at that time, they pulled together that meeting at Lincoln Park and were very active in renaming it Plaza de la Raza, and I know I have some pictures of that someplace.

ESPINO: Yes, that was an important cultural—it still is, it's hugely important for that area. We can talk about that, definitely talk about that, because I remember when I interviewed Congressman Torres, he said that the recognition really goes to a few people who were not necessarily there at the beginning. I don't know if you remember that conflict, if it was a conflict.

ARRIOLA: Yes, well, you know, it's like anything that you're developing. Our thing with the Mission College. Yes, the old lady at Mission, Lupe, yes, she was very involved with the community and she rallied them up and the La Raza Unida, and they're all screaming, "Let's do this."

But on the other side, Sam Cordova developed the Presidents Club, and we put money up to help Dr. Ravage operate, because he was operating out of our Assembly office. We gave him a whole room, big room, for meetings and everything. And Sam had this slush fund that he used to get stuff he couldn't get on a daily basis. "I ran out of pens."

“Well, give us a work order,” you know, the whole process. So he had, I think—I’m not sure, but whatever he wanted, I would go get it at the stationery store because we had an account there for the state, so get it. It didn’t matter.

ESPINO: Right. So there were always as many people involved there trying to achieve something that huge and that big. Okay. So I’m going to go back to the question about what do you think changed after that period, the seventies. How did the community change, in your mind?

[00:23:48]

ARRIOLA: Well, it would have been better. What do you call Latino Studies?

ESPINO: Chicano Studies?

ARRIOLA: Chicano Studies came in, and we now had pockets of young people, plus the Rudy Acuña and different people, older people that were part of the movement, that were conscious of getting the young involved at every college, be it a community college or a university. It just started to happen.

Why didn’t I run for office? A little chicken-shit outfit like San Fernando, just for fun I’d try to run it. But because the Anglos were still the assemblymen. There was only L.A. and Riverside and then the assemblyman from San Diego, and then a couple of guys locally that had gotten elected. But it was still kind of hard, depending on where you lived. You couldn’t do it out here in the Valley. Even my own goddamn assemblyman, when I asked him, “I want to run for City Council. What do you think, Jim?”

“Oh, that’s a good idea, Ralph,” da, da, da. Comes back about two weeks later, he said, “No, you can’t do it. If you do it, you’ve got to quit.”

“Okay, you son of a bitch.

ESPINO: So you felt like he didn't support you?

[00:26:14]

ARRIOLA: Oh, absolutely, you know, but I didn't say anything. I just kept that in mind. But I was loyal, so I wouldn't do anything to screw him up. He screwed himself up good [unclear]. I told you the story about him? [laughs]

ESPINO: I don't know. I don't think so. Do you want me to pause it?

ARRIOLA: Yes, pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We're back, and you were telling me about Jim Tunney, but I want to know—because you said it was really hard—well, I'm assuming from what you said that it was difficult to get a foothold politically and a political office here in the Valley as opposed to what was happening in East Los Angeles. Do you think it was easier for the—

ARRIOLA: Yes, what was developing in East L.A. You had—oh, what the hell was his name—Armenians and others that had the offices all over East L.A. before the guys came in.

ESPINO: The Roybals and the Alatorres.

ARRIOLA: The Roybals, Ed Roybal was the only one, yes.

ESPINO: And Molina.

ARRIOLA: Garcia. No, I mean, it's taken—in the last fifteen years, the Valley has changed. Look at all the elected officials on this side of the freeway, the 405, but the 405 on that side is still the Valley like it was. So it was difficult. I just put it off. I just didn't

want to take the time, and then personal stuff started happening and that made it even harder.

ESPINO: Do you think you would have had the support of the Mexican American community here in the Valley?

[00:28:42]

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, yes.

ESPINO: But that wasn't enough to push you into—

ARRIOLA: By that time, I didn't want it. I mean, I had seen ten years of what it can do to you. And the new generation Latino is like the old generation [unclear]. What's his name? Felix, state senator now or some damn thing, or city councilman, I mean, he was in the office six months and he'd already taken a \$12,000 gift if he supported the changing of one of the laws regarding development for a group here in the Valley. And the legislation he introduced was directed for only that spot. That's what the 12,000—you know, that kind of shit turned me off. I mean, the guy was already taking a payoff.

They're not satisfied with the \$100,000 they're making. Money corrupts. That's what I told our congressman and—what's his name? He's up in—I'm not sure if he's back to the Assembly or the Senate or what the hell he is. Alex Padilla. When they first started, they had lunch with me, they invited me. "Tell us about it, Ralph. What should we watch? What should we do?"

They were just at the point where they were running for office, and Jim was going to run again. And I told him—we had a meeting with a couple of people that were close to him, and I said, "Jim, you're out of your damn mind. Stop, Jim. Just stop. You're not going to get elected. You're through."

Well, he didn't appreciate that, but that's the way I was with him. I was the most honest man with him. I mean, he knew that I would tell him the way it was, and he also found out that I was the most loyal to him, even to this day. [cries]

ESPINO: Do you feel like he didn't appreciate you?

[00:31:50]

ARRIOLA: No, he didn't, but as time went on, my words were there. They were true. He couldn't run again. He was dead. But because he had the money, the company kept paying him to stay on, stay in politics, you know.

ESPINO: The company?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: What company would that be?

ARRIOLA: The Keysor Century. They produced the material for records, and they had a contract with the government. But I just found out something about them when I tried to get all of Jim's old records. The daughter, she said, "Oh, Ralph, you know, when the company closed and they had everything ready to put away some place, guess what? The FBI moved in and took everything." [laughs] Holy shit. We never did anything illegal, but, you know, what were they doing?

There were like three or four brothers and the old man. The old man was—I loved that old guy. God, he had his own little machine shop with everything. I mean, a doctor could have performed an operation in there, it was so beautiful. It was so beautiful, and he was so brilliant. All of them were smart technically. Jim had an IQ of 100 and something, but no common sense.

ESPINO: Well, it sounds like he grew up privileged. He grew up with a lot of wealth and money.

[00:33:54]

ARRIOLA: Yes, and a lot of—you know Mormons. I mean, what the hell? [Spanish word]. They're very in control, they're very—I don't know. What's the word I'm looking for?

ESPINO: Sheltered?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Protected?

ARRIOLA: Protected, yes. I would go, "Jesus Christ, what are you, stupid or something?" I mean, I talked to him like I would talk to the guys in the plant.

"Oh, Ralph, come on. Slow down."

ESPINO: Well, what did you admire about him that you would commit seven years? Was it seven years?

ARRIOLA: That he was good on legislation. I don't know where I left it. There were a couple of major, major pieces of legislation that he and Reagan combined to introduce and pass. It was on voter election law. But I can't find them. And they were framed. I don't know what I—I don't know.

ESPINO: Why was that important to you?

ARRIOLA: Because at that point at that time it was one of the major pieces of legislation and that he did it with a Republican governor, you know.

ESPINO: What was it going to achieve?

ARRIOLA: More Latinos getting registered. It was just a good piece of legislation. I don't remember it all now, but—

ESPINO: Was he popular among the Mexican American Latino Valley residents?

[00:35:53]

ARRIOLA: Well, yes. Now, I'm not going to tell you this because I thought I was so great, but I was there and I was active in a new campaign management, and I knew a lot of Latinos and I generally had their trust. How did I get on with Jim? Jim started to double-cross us like Negri had when he said, "I'll appoint the administrative—." I forget the title. It wasn't like chief of staff and crap like that, but it was. Didn't have the title at the time. And he committed to Bill Garcia, and they double-crossed him. They didn't do it, Negri. Man.

So out of labor, I'm running David Negri's campaign, and he had this guy who wanted some other job, wasn't that interested in what he had been assigned to do for Negri, and a black guy, who was an asshole, we had a fundraiser at one of the big places in—it's a house. Goddamn it. Anyway, they printed the invitation, wrong address. Do you know how many people showed up? [laughs]

So who I was reporting to? Jesse Unruh, and he just—my god. So he sent down a young guy, really bright young man, I would say in his thirties. He was part of the staff in Sacramento. And I begged him, "You've got to send me somebody who can give me some help to organize it. They won't listen to anything I say."

So he said, "Okay." So he sent down Barry. Barry something.

Anyway, it was too late. We didn't even have a mailer to go. [Spanish phrase].

So Negri lost. He died a couple years ago.

ESPINO: Who was he running against? Which election was that?

ARRIOLA: I don't recall.

ESPINO: I might be able to find it.

[00:39:27]

ARRIOLA: There was an article, and it was another guy. It was the same thing with Jim, you know. We had a campaign. Originally we put a campaign budget together for about forty-grand, and that was pretty good for those days. Little by little, he kept pulling and pulling and pulling and pulling it. I remember the conversation, two o'clock in the morning. "Ralph, what's the latest?"

"It's all over, Jim. It's all over. You lost. You lost the office. You're not the assemblyman anymore."

"What?"

"You lost it, Jim." I forget. I must have shot off something else.

But that's the way it was with Negri too. Every time Jesse Unruh would see us, "Bastards down in the Valley really screwed me up," because he lost the assemblyman, the assembly speakership.

ESPINO: I'm going to pause it for a second while that street cleaner passes.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We're back.

I was going to ask you about people—I'm not a political historian, but I know that when people try to understand campaigns and especially what's happened with Chicano politicians on the Eastside, they talk about the political machines that emerged. Do you

think that the Valley—I mean, was, like, Unruh and Negri, were they all part of a machine that—

[00:41:13]

ARRIOLA: Well, the Speaker, one of his—it's got to be the most important job he's got is to maintain—let's see. What's wrong with my head today? A majority in the Assembly. He's got to get Democrats elected. So he collects a lot of money and he hands it out to everybody. He's got his own—you know, and who needs it most. But there isn't a guy up there telling—once he gets him elected, it's, "We're going to pass certain legislation. I want you there," and they go. They know and they learn. If they don't, they cut the money off. They do. So the guys learn to play the game.

ESPINO: Do you feel like your candidate had to ever support something that he didn't agree with because he was afraid of losing that?

ARRIOLA: No, he was just a duck, sitting duck for everybody. He was generous. He would just help them out with a couple of thousand bucks, and a little more sometimes. Or if Jesse said, "Hey, Jim, Joe D_____ down there in district so-and-so needs a few bucks. Can you help him out?"

"Oh, okay." He did it.

ESPINO: But then when you wanted to run, do you feel like the machine wasn't available to you?

ARRIOLA: No, they weren't—you know, the Widow Club has always been there. They kind of help themselves. But little by little, it's changed. Look what we have in the Assembly now.

ESPINO: Did you ever think of moving back to East L.A. to run for office in one of those districts?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: No?

[00:43:48]

ARRIOLA: I'd never go back there. [laughs]

ESPINO: Really? Why?

ARRIOLA: Well, it just—I never had enough time to—I wasn't born there, I wasn't raised there. I went to school for a few years, but it wasn't—

ESPINO: It never felt like home to you?

ARRIOLA: No. And as soon as I moved out of the—as soon as I graduated and went to work for my brother here in the Valley, I met a lot of people and I got involved in politics. That changed everything.

ESPINO: What do you like about the Valley that kept you here? It must have been hard being a Mexican in the Valley in the sixties and seventies.

ARRIOLA: No, it wasn't. First of all, in politics my brother connected with probably the top woman in early Democratic politics in the Valley in those years, Helen Greenberg. Helen Greenberg was the wife of Sam Greenberg, the owner of Sam's U-Drive, so rented all the equipment to everybody. Multimillionaire. She wasn't Jewish, but he was. Her house was an open playroom for us. I mean, we were really in with her. And every convention, "Ralph, okay, you know what your job is. Make sure she gets back okay, because she likes to drink." [laughs] So we were very close, very close with Helen, and everybody knew it. So we kind of walked into the politics out here in the

Valley, and at the time, it was a different world in politics, a lot of Democratic Clubs, and I think I told you that before.

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: They were there, and every community had a Democratic Club.

ESPINO: But historically, it's a place of deep segregation where the Mexicans lived in, like, Pacoima and places like that.

[00:46:24]

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, it was here, here in San Fernando.

ESPINO: But was that difficult for you or that didn't faze you? How did you deal with that kind of racism, if you experienced any of it?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know it's here, San Fernando. You knew it was here, but you left it alone. On this street up here, one block, when we moved into it, Helen and I, in 1979, there's only two Latino families, us and the mayor, whatever his name was. It was very tight. This guy across the street, he's the last of the Masonic groups. He is. In fact, he wasn't happy when I took over this house initially. He made a lot of comments, [Spanish phrase], but today—

[interruption]

ARRIOLA: He's the guy that one day—he was my neighbor. The old guy was my neighbor and had been for maybe a year or two, and came walking down, and he said, "I understand that Arriola's going to be moving down here. I really don't want him. He's—," da, da, da, "and I know he got the house because of his political," which was bullshit. And he kept talking about me.

Finally Michael said, “You know what? Let’s talk about something else, because you’re talking about somebody who’s my neighbor and I really like the guy, and I know that what you’re saying is not right. So let’s be friends. Don’t talk about him anymore.”
[00:48:30]

So, yes, I mean, I was involved even at that time in the politics of this community. You know, I told you the story about what I did in the *barrio* and the chief of police and Bob James, the city manager, knew about it. They kept their mouth shut and they protected me. But why I did it was because they were messing with my children, with all the kids, and I’d seen so much of that damned neighborhood, the kids walking around all screwed up. I mean, it was terrible. It was ugly. So, you know, I did what I did because I had to do it. Nobody else would have.

ESPINO: Right, right. I think you told me that story off the record.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: So we won’t talk more about it here. So essentially what you’re saying is you didn’t really experience too much or it didn’t faze you, the fact that the demographics were not really in your favor as far as Mexican Americans and Latinos, that you were able to negotiate through your political activism some power.

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes. I think I told you what this old doctor said one morning at the place where we go for breakfasts on Sunday, Dr. Clare [phonetic]. Hadn’t seen him in a long time, and then one day we walked in there. He goes a little later for breakfast, and, “Hey, Ralph, how you doing, Ralph?” And somebody was with him, and he says, “This is somebody I’ve known for a long time, and in his day he was a real hot,” something or other, you know. [laughs] He and I always had a wonderful friendship, and with his

wife, Kit [phonetic]. She died, and to this day he's still alive, but he goes there on Sundays to have breakfast. Best place to have breakfast. You get a steak breakfast for nine bucks, and you have the bar. But really, really, nice. Anyway.

ESPINO: Right. I'm distracted. Okay. Let me see.

[00:52:04]

ARRIOLA: You know, I don't know how we're going to deal with all of the stuff at LACA. That's kind of coming up.

ESPINO: Right. That's like would be the next—because after you are with Jim Keysor, you were with him until '78, no? You're with him until '80?

ARRIOLA: Seventy-nine. Actually '80, because I closed the office.

ESPINO: You closed the office in '80, and that's when you start working for Head Start and—

ARRIOLA: Sometime after that.

ESPINO: —LACA becomes—

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: But LACA was formed earlier, wasn't it?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, in the sixties, '65.

ESPINO: Are you a founder of LACA, a founding member?

ARRIOLA: No, no, that was Dr. Montes.

ESPINO: Miguel Montes?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I mean, he went all the way to Washington. I've got a book that's about two-by-two, on the history of LACA.

ESPINO: Okay. So he went to—so what do you know about the history that you can—
and then when did you become—

[00:53:30]

ARRIOLA: Well, see, when I took over, it was there in '66, so it was about three or four years, five years before me, coming to Jim, but I was active in the community politics, so I would hear about LACA, you know. But the guys that were in LACA were all college graduates.

ESPINO: Professionals?

ARRIOLA: Professional, yes.

ESPINO: White collar, not blue collar.

ARRIOLA: I mean, there's still a couple of them left. Montes is still left. One of my closest friends—I can't even think of his name right now—I call him every once in a while and we talk. I was going to try and do a history on LACA, but, god almighty, all the guys started dropping off, you know, and now he's on his—

ESPINO: He's not well?

ARRIOLA: Well, he's getting weaker and weaker like I am. I mean, what the hell, I'm going to be eighty in another year and a half. Hell, a year and a half, a year. [laughs]

What's his name? Goddamn it. Anyway, but I ended up with the book, and it goes right back. Then during that time I started using LACA. When I took over LACA, I started going through it, and I would have an annual dinner. And it's like I told you about Irene Tovar, she was a punk-ass kid who everybody thought she was the hottest thing that ever came on this earth. She still owes me three hundred bucks. So I would

kind of promote her, kind of promote her. And I can show you those dinner stuff. Next time, I'll pull the book.

ESPINO: Oh, that'd be great.

[00:56:01]

ARRIOLA: So I did the twentieth or the thirtieth anniversary dinner, a big dinner, and I went through every member and I asked them—because she was becoming a pain in the asses by then. She was just one of the young people that was very active and we kind of wanted to promote her. But she was just not part of the founding group. So I have all that stuff. I also found a newspaper clipping of the opening of the fifty low-income housing on Blythe Street, which she claims she did it all. Lying. But anyway, so LACA's another thing we'll have to go into.

ESPINO: Yes. Can you tell me now, though, before we—I know you have somebody coming at eleven. But if you can in ten minutes, I'll just ask you this one question, and that is, what was the role? When you were involved, what was the role of LACA when you first got involved?

ARRIOLA: Executive director.

ESPINO: I'm sorry?

ARRIOLA: I took over LACA.

ESPINO: When you first got involved, you were the president or—

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: What year would that be?

ARRIOLA: Well, I got put on the board. I was asked to be on the board. Then within a year, I just took it over.

ESPINO: Oh, okay. And what were your goals for the organization?

[00:58:12]

ARRIOLA: See, I'd been on the board probably in '75, '76, sometime in there, and then when I took over—god, I've got to go back and look it up. When I left Jim and I took over LACA, I'd been on the board and Orosco [phonetic] kind of got himself involved with a grantee and became—the overseer of the Head Start programs is an incompetent fool. [Spanish word]. He went to a conference in Washington, in D.C., and one morning I walked in and he was dead. He died there. He had a heart problem.

I did a review of the whole damn organization. I mean, I learned a lot from Jim Keysor. Why do I like him? Because he taught me so much about business, about how to do it, about how to plan, how to analyze. So first thing I did is I told the assistant director, Dennis Kira [phonetic], a Japanese guy, he and I were pretty close, I said, "Dennis, for the next two or three weeks, you're the director. I'm going to be out in the field."

I went to every local. I made notes on every local. I looked at every teacher and I analyzed. I really, really checked them out. Cockroach-infested centers, teachers with so much crap in the classrooms, they were a mess. And they hadn't done any—we would return more damn money. We would return \$100,000 a year to the grantee because they didn't use it. Jesus.

After I took over, no. I retrained the staff. They said, "It will take you two years." We did it in one year. I forget the program that we used, but it was new and it was the best program available. I'll have to call my old assistant director.

ESPINO: So when you took over LACA, you took over Head Start at the same time?

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes, that was the program, Head Start and state preschool. I mean, the thing that killed me about Orosco, we're in the *barrio*, I get a call in the morning on a Saturday, he said, "My maintenance guy [Spanish phrase]."

[01:01:30]

I go over there, and the window was shattered, and I call Al, and he says, "Well, it's broken now. Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it Monday."

I said, "Are you out of your damn mind?" So we fixed it. He was so [Spanish word].

So, yes, for me, I was there at seven o'clock every morning. I answered the phones. We had like about a 35 percent absentee rate daily at LACA, either all day or part of the day, but there was high. They had more damn benefits than you could shake a stick at. They didn't know how to negotiate a contract. They'd never done it.

ESPINO: So they were basically grassroots people from the community who had all their money fall in their lap?

ARRIOLA: Yes. And for the few that were on the board, they didn't know shit either. So when I walked in, the first contract we met, I hired an attorney. I loved her, young attorney but experienced. And I said, "This is what we're going to do," and we're talking about negotiations, how we're going to know what my role might be.

And she says, "Mr. Arriola, you have no role in the negotiations. You can sit outside on a chair, and I'll call you every once in a while when I want to know something." [laughs] First I was mad, then I was laughing. She was something else. She was something else.

So we come back with a contract. What was the contract? I took an UAW contract that I had negotiated and redid the whole thing and gave them a place to start with. And they were covered, they were covered good, because my intent was to protect the employees, but protect the agency and give me the power to operate it too. We're okay.

I don't know what the question was, but—

[01:04:27]

ESPINO: Right. Well, we'll come back to that, and you'll show me the book. And I think I'm going to stop it now because it's eleven o'clock, and you're expecting somebody.

[End of November 26, 2013 interview]

SESSION 8 (December 13, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is December 13, Friday the 13th. I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando Valley.

And I wanted to start today, Mr. Arriola, with you reflecting back. We talked a lot about your experience with the United Auto Workers. Can you tell me what you gained from being involved in the union as opposed to being involved in politics or going to college or some other profession or life experience? What do you think you took from that experience?

[00:00:45]

ARRIOLA: Well, being involved with the UAW, I started out as a machinist in my brother's machine shop, and that was the last semester at Garfield. I was driving all the way out here in an old car he got me, a '39 Chevy, and then I'd go home. That was from three-thirty, four o'clock in the afternoon till ten, eleven o'clock at night.

From there, when I left high school, I made a big mistake. I mean, as I look at it now, it was a mistake, but it wasn't—I had to do it. That was, I've explained to you before, that getting—I was tired of the \$94 check that we got for—

ESPINO: Welfare.

ARRIOLA: —welfare. I just figured I would learn a trade with my brother, which I did.

But Gloria at the time ended up at the sanitarium for about four years, five years, it was terrible, because of the TB. And George, my little brother, he was a little guy there at that time. I mean, this we're talking '53 when I left high school. George was then about twelve, thirteen years old.

[00:02:46]

When I went to work at Poly Industries, there was a union there, but I had already been involved with my brother Con in campaigns right after '53, and labor was always the main source of support for the candidates we wanted, we were working with, which included President Kennedy, Kefauver, Stevenson, all the major, major guys. And we were very connected with the Goldbergs out in Van Nuys, and Helen was just a terrific house for politics.

ESPINO: Greenberg? Greenberg or Goldberg?

ARRIOLA: Greenberg. They were the owners of Sam's U-Drive, and they were very conscious of the communities and really, really kept us—we just became very close to that family, very, very close.

Little by little, I got more and more involved with labor, and then I went to work at Poly Industries in the late fifties, and then we had the UAW there. Eventually, through the years, I became the unit chairman at Poly Industries. Our company was also a part of 645, the local that we were trying to collect a bunch of their history. I would say every major politician that ever was came to 645, because we had, like, 3,500 members. That was a lot of votes and a lot of families, if you look at it.

ESPINO: You mean major politicians throughout California?

ARRIOLA: Throughout California.

ESPINO: And also the U.S., as far as like the national elections?

ARRIOLA: Well, when the national elections took place, in the later years we ended up we were very close to Senator Humphrey. There was only two or three or four of us that met him at the airport at Lockheed because of the death of Bobby, and then they just

came after him and it was just a mess. Then labor itself would not endorse Humphrey at the beginning. They're just a bunch of idiots. But UAW had, so I had that going for me, because they pulled me out to organize a campaign in the Valley. I guess I kind of built a reputation of being able to do that, that I wasn't just for the glory of working with the vice president then.

ESPINO: But as far as the skills, what would you say, campaign organizing, office management?

[00:06:25]

ARRIOLA: I learned them. The organizing, I learned it. It wasn't something that was difficult for me. I was able to talk to people. I could go before the memberships at their meetings and solicit their support. I've always been able to do that.

ESPINO: How do you think your life would be different if you didn't have a union, you didn't have the UAW to channel all those skills to?

ARRIOLA: You know, I've thought of that. I don't know. I just don't know what it would be. I mean, I wish my dad—Mom was always around, so she saw what we did. She got used to having elected officials come by and see me going and organizing and working with them, but she passed away in '66, so that was a loss.

But I don't know. I don't know what I—I mean, there was always a trade. I had learned the trade. I last worked as—from an experimental machinist, I went on to a senior inspector, machine shop inspector, parts where you're doing everything to the tenths of an inch, that sort of stuff. So that was always around.

[00:08:26]

It wasn't till 1968 that I think because of the Kennedy thing—I don't know exactly why Paul finally made a decision to put me on the international staff as a—I don't know. I don't know. He just one day said—I think Marv Brody had a lot to do with it.

ESPINO: How was that different? How was the international different than the local?

ARRIOLA: Well, I was about thirty-four, thirty-three, thirty-four, never been on an airplane, never been across the California—

ESPINO: The state line?

ARRIOLA: —state line, except one time with Sam Cordova I rode with him to Las Vegas.

So I'm on the airplane, and it was around the first of the year. It was really rough. Oh, it was terrible. Halfway through, I had mentioned before that I had two little bottles I was going to bring back as a show on the airplane. Nuh-uh. Somewhere over Illinois or somewhere in there, I poured those out and I drank them. It was a rough ride, my first airplane.

And it was going from top wages, almost four bucks an hour. I mean, at the time that was pretty good money. All of a sudden, I had an air travel card, I had a charge card. I was making like about somewhere between 18 and \$2,000 a month. That was pretty good money, you know.

One of the surprises lately—and I say lately; in the last five years—I left the UAW in 1970, right? So this lady shows up and she says, “Hi, my name is—.” I forget what her name is. She says, “I’m an insurance adjustor with the UAW, and I want to talk to you about your death benefits.” [laughs]

ESPINO: Wow.

[00:11:40]

ARRIOLA: “Oh, well, I’m not dead yet, but let’s talk.” So I end up with \$8,000. That’s not bad.

ESPINO: That’s a lot of money, yes. That’s a lot of money.

ARRIOLA: I thought I’d have to start selling tin cans again.

ESPINO: Oh. So they took care of you. They try to take care of you, it sounds like.

ARRIOLA: The first house I got was over here on Grand Boulevard was under the UAW. They did it. I mean, they really supported my efforts.

ESPINO: How so? How did they support your efforts?

ARRIOLA: Well, I asked for a loan from the union, the—what do you call that?

ESPINO: Did they have a credit union?

ARRIOLA: The credit union. And a couple of days later, I had \$8,000. So, yes, they really do take care of you.

Even though at the time I was fighting for more people to come on UAW staff, that didn’t matter to Paul Schrade. He says, “Go ahead. Stay loyal, but fight for your thing,” because there were only five Latinos, as I mentioned before.

ESPINO: Yes. Well, tell me about your time with the international. Did you travel to other—where did you go or were you able to travel?

ARRIOLA: Well, we had nine western states, Region 6. So San Francisco, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, and then from there it was Washington, numerous conventions, gatherings of labor. I just got to meet a lot of guys from a lot of places.

[00:13:50]

I just found a telegram saying to Mary, who became the chairperson of the Chicano Caucus, from the guys in Michigan and Ohio. I mean, the thing was really growing. But I got canned, you know. I got laid off when the strike in '70 hit at General Motors. But we had already started making connections, so then I—

ESPINO: What was your principal responsibility with the international?

ARRIOLA: Political organizing, organizing campaigns, helping the locals work with local candidates, getting them money. Except for a few, we never made real big donations, but whatever they got, they were happy with it. But the biggest part was that most of these candidates were around our locals, so they got a lot of votes.

ESPINO: So, for example, you would help in Oregon, the local campaigns in Oregon?

ARRIOLA: Yes. We had a Parts Warehouse up in Oregon, and we had something else up in—I think it was another Parts Warehouse up in Washington, but the machinists union controlled that area. The same thing in Arizona. The rest was all here in California. We had thirteen local unions here. But it was also our social services that we provided, the support of local organizations for whatever the hell they wanted to do.

I called Rosalio yesterday because I found the rough draft of the letter that I made out for the support of the moratorium.

ESPINO: Oh. [laughs] That's excellent. It's handwritten, I bet.

ARRIOLA: No, it was—

ESPINO: It was typed?

[00:16:40]

ARRIOLA: The girls would type them out, and then I'd go through and change them, you know. Even though I had had two years of community college doing the tool-and-

die and tool design program, I'd been in politics long enough to have read a thousand pieces of mail, so I had a general understanding of how to do it, you know, and my English wasn't that bad.

ESPINO: You were saying about the social services, that was an important aspect of that.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, well, you know, god, the biggest thing we had going out here. The biggest issue was Cesar, Cesar Chavez. I spent a lot of time up at Forty Acres, and whether it was delivery, the Liberty Bell [phonetic] or truckloads of food, that was kind of my job to do. Schrade couldn't be running up and down with a can of beans, but I could. [laughs] Stuff like that. Other issues.

I almost got to go to the walk in the South when Reuther went. I almost go to go to that. What do they call it?

ESPINO: The March on Washington?

ARRIOLA: No, the march on—what's the city down below that?

ESPINO: Selma?

ARRIOLA: No, it wasn't Selma. It was in Alabama.

ESPINO: Birmingham?

ARRIOLA: It's where the cops got real crazy with dogs and everything.

ESPINO: I think that was Birmingham.

ARRIOLA: I almost got to go, but it didn't work out. Everybody wanted to go, so the last guy on staff has no drag.

ESPINO: Why did you want to go? Why did everybody want to go?

[00:19:09]

ARRIOLA: Well, it was taking on the South, I mean, really taking them on and breaking the whole thing of how prejudiced they were, how terrible it was there for the blacks.

I just found the letter that Bill Dodds gave me when I left the UAW, and I want to show you those.

ESPINO: Okay. Pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We're back.

We were talking about how your role in the UAW international allowed you to help different communities throughout the Southwest with their social service programs.

ARRIOLA: One of the major things that the UAW was involved with it, and this was at the national level, the national office, the national organization was involved with developing community unions, TELACU, WLCAC, and then there was some other ones throughout the country, maybe about ten at the most, WLCAC and TELACU, and then National Council of La Raza, who was being run by another UAW member who became a very dear friend of mine, Henry Santiestevan.

ESPINO: Were there other community unions throughout the Southwest that formed, not just these in Southern California? Like Oregon and Washington, did they have community unions as well?

ARRIOLA: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. They were very careful on who they funded. They were trying to work mostly in the inner cities.

[00:21:18]

I'm hoping to find my old UAW convention books, reports. I know I have a couple. I'm trying to think of the name of the guy out of the UAW that was sent out and

worked for the AFL-CIO to develop the community unions. They were being developed by the AFL-CIO. The UAW was a major part of it, and, again, as I tell you, the Chicano Caucus, I developed it within the UAW here. I got membership—I don't know if I gave you the list of the UAW, the Chicano Caucus. They were all really anxious to get into it. They understood there was only five Latinos. I became number six.

So I think that eventually I would have become very influential within the union. I mean, we now have a young lady, and though I may be a little—this is so great, might be forty, fifty years late from the time we tried to start it, but at least we have somebody on the board of directors of the UAW.

ESPINO: There was no one left to take the baton?

ARRIOLA: They wouldn't give it to us.

ESPINO: But I'm saying because you said that you got laid off and you changed focus, your focus was changed when you started working for Keysor, right?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: But there was nobody to pick up that baton for the UAW and the Chicano Caucus?

ARRIOLA: No, there was no other Chicano to do it. I mean, Eddie was tied up with TELACU.

ESPINO: Henry Lozano?

ARRIOLA: Yes, but they wouldn't give it to him.

ESPINO: Henry Lacayo?

[00:23:40]

ARRIOLA: No. Henry Lacayo did, but Henry Lacayo did not have that interest. His was power, plain stupid power for Henry Lacayo. And I love Henry—I mean both of them. [laughter]

But, you know, going back to the convention of, I don't know, '60-something, we're on the floor of the convention. I was putting together some stuff for Paul Schrade, and he came up to me and he said, "You know, [unclear]."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to get you, you bastard. I'm going to get you. I'm going to get you fired. You're going out the goddamn door. You think you're a big deal."

"Well, after you've done that, Henry, what do you have? Why am I big deal? So do whatever you want. I don't give a shit. Do it." Well, that was Henry Lacayo.

Years after, when I was running the Head Start program, knock, knock, knock. My secretary, "Ralph, there's a guy here named Henry Lacayo. He wants to see you."

"Oh, my god, check and see if he's got a .45." [laughter]

ESPINO: He was angry with you? You guys parted—

ARRIOLA: Well, I wasn't angry with him, but years later he left. Everything that we had done, everybody that was involved, they all reached an age where they left the UAW. And he's continued doing stuff. I wonder if you guys ever interviewed him.

ESPINO: No.

ARRIOLA: You've got to. Henry. You've got to. When I tell you he was walking around the damn White House when we went for the conference, "Henry, what the hell are you doing here?"

Well, he didn't say, "I own it," but he was walking like he owned the goddamn thing. He's a great guy, very bright. Anyway, that's another—you know.

ESPINO: Yes.

[00:26:04]

ARRIOLA: But he came to see me and not so much apologize, but just close the friendship, because I was never a goddamn—I never [unclear] any of them, even the guys that were in the opposite caucuses. I've treated anybody like they treated others. [cries]

Jerry Whipple, when he beat Paul Schrade, and he caught me outside his local, because I was working on the manpower program, "Ralph, are you going to follow me? Are you going to support me?"

"No, Jerry, I'm not."

"Why?"

"Because I don't turn on people. I don't backstab."

Jerry Whipple was a guy about six-foot-two, I don't know, really big, bearded, I mean, slanted eyes. I mean, I got a picture of the son of a bitch I'll show you.

I said, "No, I won't." Well, not only did I then leave the—I had already just left the position with the international, but the position with the manpower program, I got cut. So I left the UAW and I went to work for Keysor.

So, you know, if you're just power-crazy, like if you get a little power, then you want all the rest, like Henry Lacayo. I never saw Estevan being like that. He did things for the community, he did things for people, but they weren't to make him bigger. He made things bigger and that's—look at TELACU, yes. So my efforts within the UAW, I don't know.

ESPINO: You didn't travel to other countries? It was primarily national?

[00:28:46]

ARRIOLA: It was all here, yes.

ESPINO: But were you aware of what was happening in Mexico and Argentina?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, yes, we kept up with everything. I've got a collection of posters from the students in Mexico when the university—when they went crazy there and bunch of them got killed.

ESPINO: Tíatelo, '68?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I've got posters that are going with you. It's the little shit like that, it's the little stuff like that, that I found, I am finding, I am finding in all this stuff.

ESPINO: Did you ever want to travel, like, for example—well, I ask you because that's what Congressman Torres did. He lived in Argentina, he traveled a lot to Mexico working with—because the auto industry there was pretty—

ARRIOLA: Yes, but he was unique. They were looking for a Latino within the—at that time, Chrysler had a plant in East L.A., right around the rubber company, right there on Atlantic and that area where TELACU is, across the freeway there. There was a Chrysler plant. That's where Estevan came from. Now, that was sometime in the—had to be in the middle fifties. You know, young guy, bright, bright, bright, bright, and they assigned him right away to the UAW's Washington office where they did all the international stuff, and they did a lot of good stuff, some of it—I don't know. I heard about it, but I couldn't prove it, how much of it was CIA.

ESPINO: What do you mean, you heard about it? You heard about it through—

[00:31:22]

ARRIOLA: You know, after a few drinks. [laughs]

ESPINO: People start talking?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, but it's mostly rumor shit, you know.

ESPINO: Oh, it's rumors.

ARRIOLA: So I was only in it about three years, so I had begun to make contacts with all the other local unions at the conventions. They heard more and more about the Chicano Caucus. I had a thousand buttons made. I had my little report made. It's really eleventh grade, twelfth grade, but I used all of Walter Reuther's stuff. [laughter]

Then you started getting the [unclear] and then you start getting the—because in unions, the caucuses within the union are so powerful. I mean, you're either with one or you're with the other, and when you're out, you're out. When they're out, they're out. Like Jerry Whipple, "Are you with me, Ralph, or not?"

"No, Jerry. I don't turn on my friends when they're down."

ESPINO: What were the powerful caucuses during your tenure?

ARRIOLA: Well, there was Paul Schrade's caucus.

ESPINO: What was it called? Did it have a name?

ARRIOLA: Oh, I forget. It was just administrative caucus, something like that.

ESPINO: What were they doing? What kind of work were they doing?

ARRIOLA: You know, Paul took care of the local presidents. They got some of us put on their staff. Yes, there was a lot of things he could do for them politically. When the local president needed support from a politician, the UAW was there with a few bucks and a lot of membership.

[00:33:49]

You know, I remember Marvin Brody at a meeting of one of the politicians, complaining that there wasn't enough money, and Marvin's response was, "Well, how about the 1,500 votes at our local union? Does that help?" [laughs] He learned to do stuff like that. That was the way to get to these guys. It was such an exciting time.

ESPINO: So then there was Paul Schrade's caucus, and what other caucuses do you remember?

ARRIOLA: Well, there wasn't another caucus there for a long time, but then when Paul got shot and took him so long to get back on his feet, then Jerry Whipple decided to run for the directorship. But he was so angry, I could—

ESPINO: He was angry in general?

ARRIOLA: He was angry at anybody that was against the war because his son had just been killed.

ESPINO: Oh.

ARRIOLA: So you could understand that, you know. He took it out on Paul.

ESPINO: He and Paul had tense relations? Was there a place where they got along?

ARRIOLA: I mean, Paul was very—you know, he could always shake your hand like Obama and Castro, or Castro's brother, yesterday or day before yesterday. [laughs]

Schrade was a—what is that when you get a scholarship to the—

ESPINO: A Rhodes scholar.

ARRIOLA: A Rhodes scholar, Paul Schrade, a very bright guy. You interviewed him, no?

ESPINO: I didn't, but we do have his oral history.

[00:36:14]

ARRIOLA: Very cool guy, very calm, very cool.

ESPINO: Was he the kind of person who was able to negotiate with his enemies?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, oh, yes. I probably told you this one before, but one day he says, “You’re going with me up to Monterey tomorrow, Ralph. Be ready.”

“Oh, okay. That will be a nice trip.” So we show up, and who’s there? The director of the Teamsters. I forget the old man’s name, but I got it someplace, and about five of these guys, Teamster guys. They’re big as mountains, and they stood around the old man. I’m over there in the corner drinking coffee and just looking at them. [laughs] And Paul, we left about then. “How are you going to beat them up, Ralph?”

“I was going to run like hell.” [laughs] Oh, lord.

ESPINO: Just you two?

ARRIOLA: But they were there and they sat and they negotiated an agreement to get the damn Teamsters out of the Farm Workers, because they were going after the Farm Workers membership. So that was an interesting meeting. I sat and listened, off to the side, but I got—

ESPINO: Well, just being in that room, that’s really important.

ARRIOLA: Well, I don’t know if it’s important, but it was exciting.

ESPINO: It is. Do you remember any more details about that meeting, what was said?

ARRIOLA: I was so excited by just being there, it was—and scared. “Wow.” I said to Paul, “Wow. You got it out of him.” It’s probably in one of the books that we have.

So little stuff like that—“little stuff like that”—stuff like that that I was able to participate in with Paul because, let me tell you, Paul, even though he appointed me, one day he made a goddamn comment that really bugged the shit out of me. “Why don’t you

shove your job up your ass?” Brody and I and Paul—Paul was pissed off at something—needed some quick advice, and he would never abuse Brody. He kind of looked at me, “Well, what’s your recommendation? What are you advising me to do?” and walked away.

“Well, fuck you.” Oh, I’m sorry. I just didn’t respond to him. He was angry. I forget what it was. But, you know, stuff like that.

[00:39:21]

There was always—I was part of the staff, but I always felt like I wasn’t on the other side of the circle of the staff, but it felt sometimes like I was sitting on the rim of the circle.

ESPINO: So they would let you in, but not too close, is that what you’re saying?”

ARRIOLA: Brody was the one that brought me into everything. Marvin, he didn’t screw around. He just, “You’re going to Sacramento. You’re going to learn. You’re going to get to know everything I know.

And that was the same with Henry Santiestevan, the one that chewed my ass off in Washington, D.C. They didn’t chew me out; they gave me some good big-brother advice.

ESPINO: Right, because you were just learning at that point. Do you think that race had anything to do with keeping you on the fringe?

[00:40:33]

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes, it did. It did. See, but I didn’t go into this thing as an international rep just out of the plant. No, I had already had about a good ten years’ experience in

organizing politically, not only for the UAW, but for the elected officials that we supported.

ESPINO: Right. You weren't green behind the ears as far as political organizing.

ARRIOLA: So when Marvin told me—Paul didn't—"Ralph, you've got to help organize all the local headquarters for Bobby Kennedy," fine, that's exciting. "What have I got? How much money?" Da, da, da. We started talking. I mean, that was a big— [cries]

ESPINO: Huge responsibility.

ARRIOLA: I gave Lizette an angel. I said, "I have something I want to give you. I don't know if you want it. You don't have to take it." But I opened up the picture. "Ah!" Got all excited. "But you don't have to take it if you don't like it." [laughs]

Anyway, they knew I could produce. They knew I could, because I wouldn't say there was a tough side to me, but I wasn't going to get in a fight with anybody.

ESPINO: You never went to blows with anyone?

ARRIOLA: I only had one eye. [laughs]

ESPINO: But you're a tough talker when you want to talk, tough.

ARRIOLA: Well, in conversation, sure, but I don't push myself into lies. When Henry Lacayo and their group were at 148, the center in—not Long Beach, down below.

Anyway, the next biggest local 148, they were trying to get all of the votes—they were starting to run against Paul—all of their votes changed to support Henry and Whipple. I went down there with a camera and I started shooting pictures of each guy. I was going right up and shooting your picture, you know. God, it's so intimidating, you know.

"What the hell you doing?"

[00:44:02]

[unclear]. Oh, that was hard, but then I did it, you know. So then I had them developed and I showed them all to Paul and—what's his name—the assistant director.

ESPINO: Whose idea was that?

ARRIOLA: Mine.

ESPINO: Were you trying to intimidate them?

ARRIOLA: Hell, yes.

ESPINO: So what was the ideology split? So you're saying Henry Lacayo, Whipple—

ARRIOLA: Just power, strictly power, control of the UAW region.

ESPINO: Did they want to take it in a different direction, or they just wanted to be the—

ARRIOLA: Just wanted it, that's all. I mean, eventually Jerry worked it out so he moved Lacayo into the national office in Detroit with Bill Dodds, and he just brought in all these people, but he got rid of a number of guys. Like I told you, the guy that did all the political stuff and the press for Paul, I called him recently and I said, "Hey, man, do you have any stuff, any stuff I can use from Local 645?"

"There was a lot of stuff, Ralph, but let me tell you what happened. After Whipple got elected, the next day he came up to me, and he says, 'Grab your bag, grab your hat, and get the hell out of here. You're going to Detroit.'" I said okay. [laughs] I mean, that's the way they are. I mean, union politics gets hard. We weren't the kind that went out and shot each other, although before that, there had been some real fights.

[00:45:57]

I did something really stupid one time, my first region conference gathering. We were sitting down having a drink. There was only one place for me to sit next to a guy sitting there by himself, and so, "Let me buy you a drink," you know.

So then one of the guys, Clyde Bullock [phonetic], big son of a bitch, one of our guys, he says, “You know who that was?”

“No, I don’t know.”

“That was Jim Beloli [phonetic],” or some goddamn name. “He’s the guy that Paul Schrade just beat out of the—.” [laughs]

ESPINO: Like “beat” like—no, no.

ARRIOLA: No, I mean, beat him, took over the region. “Oh, okay. Well, I won’t do that again.” How in the hell does that happen?

ESPINO: But it sounds like Whipple was a more conservative. Is that a wrong interpretation?

ARRIOLA: No, he was smarter than all of them, absolutely smarter than Whipple and Lacayo and the rest of them.

ESPINO: Schrade was smarter than the rest of them?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: But was Whipple more conservative?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Well, after the killing of his son, he hated every antiwar deal.

ESPINO: What about the UFW and other people, other causes related to Mexicans?

ARRIOLA: I don’t know. I just don’t know how he handled that. I just don’t know.

ESPINO: But it sounds like he didn’t have the same kind of relationship with Cesar Chavez as Paul Schrade did.

[00:48:05]

ARRIOLA: No, no, he was supported, but limited. I mean, Paul brought the whole damn international to Delano. It’s a lot, thousands of guys that went there.

ESPINO: All at once?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Was that for the march to Washington and Sacramento?

ARRIOLA: No, the march had taken place before that. I think it had. No, there was just a national UAW convention in Delano. That's where it was held.

ESPINO: Because of Cesar Chavez?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There's a picture that's all screwed up I want to take over to what's-her-name to fix it. I really want it.

ESPINO: I'm going to pause it for a second, because I think the kids are going to come this way.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We're back.

You were talking to me about the Delano UAW convention when Paul Schrade brought—

ARRIOLA: Walter.

ESPINO: Do you have any recollections of that meeting or that convention?

ARRIOLA: No, it was just a gathering, and we were on the fields and following Walter and Cesar into the fields, and Walter just walking up to the growers and talking to them. I mean, those guys, with cops and everything around, you know, trying to keep them up, but these guys, they'd been through real hell in Detroit.

[00:50:08]

But the most amazing thing that I remember, Maria, my wife at the time, who didn't even want to go to these things, was walking with a picket sign. [laughs] She

really got into it. Oh! But it was just a few days of a lot of gathering and moving around with Paul and Walter.

ESPINO: You and your first wife didn't agree on politics?

ARRIOLA: No, she was just a little more—yes, you know, Maria wasn't that—she knew I'd been in it all the time and there was always a lot of, “Where are you going to now? Are you going to another meeting?” Especially when I went on the UAW staff, that became a nightmare, because I had to go. The locals were all over California, and I would have to go to them. So it just kind of tore us apart, and now we're good friends.

ESPINO: Do you think that was the principal reason you separated?

ARRIOLA: Well, that affected our relationship, you know, and then she was very, very—Johnny was her life. Johnny was—couldn't go without Johnny going with and taking her with him, even though we had my father-in-law then living with us, but she wouldn't leave him with anybody. And I told her. I told her, “Look, I'm in the shop. I leave here at six-thirty in the morning, I make to the seven, I'm out at three-thirty, and I'm home, or I work a couple hours over. It's going to change. It's going to change. I'm going to be all over the damn place.” It was hard for her to understand that.

ESPINO: Was she a stay-at-home mom?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Then eventually, I ended up hiring her to work for Head Start.

ESPINO: After you had already separated?

[00:52:51]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Then I told you about the thing at the church?

ESPINO: I'm not sure.

ARRIOLA: Johnny says to me—by then he was—

ESPINO: Oh, right, right, right. When he was getting married.

ARRIOLA: “I’m not going to sit next to her. I don’t want them to think I’m in love with her.” [laughs]

ESPINO: Yes, that’s right.

ARRIOLA: She comes and sees my sister all the time. So it was just a very interesting time, and I took a lot of pictures. So many of my pictures from that event went with the international. I took so many pictures and so much of it went with the international. I hope they did.

ESPINO: And to Detroit, to the Detroit archives?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I had one letter from the university, I was looking at it, which attached my pictures that I sent to Detroit for the archives, Wayne State University, found that too.

ESPINO: Well, tell me, in one of our previous interviews, you mentioned that Mexican Americans, Chicano were starting to build a middle class, just starting, and that was like in the late sixties, early seventies. Can you elaborate on that, what you meant by that?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, prior to that, Lockheed, right before the war, I guess we anticipated some problems, and some other companies started locating in the Valley.

And the plant came in—I forget what the deal said—and so they were looking for people to train and put into just a drill press operator or simple jobs, you know, burring, doing stuff that most anybody could do. And they went from basically farm-working, field-working workers to training to become machinists, assemblers, and then the war broke out, and, man, it really flew. Then they started building all their houses here, ten, fifteen thousand dollars, and they’re all former machinists and assemblers.

[00:56:13]

A few years ago, the couple over here, she died and then he died, but he had the most beautiful little lathe. I wanted it so bad, but some guy was really bidding on it, so didn't get it, but it's so much fun working on a lathe. You wouldn't know, but it is.

[laughs]

ESPINO: But what about this idea that—

ARRIOLA: But they were still—you know, it was a whole new—for the Latino here, I mean, he'd been here and this was his area, but what started coming in were all the Anglos. I mean, they were coming in from all over the country to work at Lockheed and all the other companies. So there was a little bit of problems, but they never developed that bad.

I don't know of any riot that was strictly a race thing, but there was. I told you my brother got out of the shop one time early, and he said, "Come on, I want to go eat and I want to go the show." And we ended up going to one of the Hollywood theaters, one of them there in the strip. Tuesday nights, Mexicans only. I mean, in Hollywood at that time.

Well, we had the Zoot Suit Riots, but that was new people coming into the community. You could get all these people from the South. Well, even the people from the North, they never met a Mexican. There was a young man, Jerry Plummer [phonetic], a little older than me, who had suffered infantile paralysis, polio, was working at the shop where I was. His uncle or whatever he was brought him over to work over here. What was the incident that took place? Something took place at the shop. There was a painting. No, it was a *Time* magazine picture, and I'm not sure of the picture that I have of this black kid hanging from a tree, or chained. I have it in there. But I don't

know why—he says, “Be careful, Ralph. Don’t get out of—,” whatever it was he said to me, but what he said was, “You know, you’re Mexican and you’re liable to get more crap on you than the rest of us.” I mean, he was a dear friend, really a dear friend, but he wasn’t—later on he says, “You know, I apologize for making that.”

[01:00:34]

I just looked at him, I said, “Okay, thank you, Jerry. Thank you. I’ll remember that.” But he was a real, real good friend.

ESPINO: Do you think that the labor unions, in particular the UAW or—well, I guess just speaking of the UAW, do you think it had something to do with the expanding middle class of Mexican Americans?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, the UAW, the machinists union. What are some of the others?

ESPINO: The Teamsters? The Teamsters maybe? No?

ARRIOLA: No. The Teamsters, yes, but they hire all the big ugly white guys. [laughs]

ESPINO: Or the ILGWU?

ARRIOLA: You know, the electricians, more the industrial, they were more open to supporting civil rights and some of the other social programs. The old days, they were tight. You had to go through their—it wasn’t the president of the union; it was the financial guy of the union that had all the power. The painters, they were good, and the old manager, I knew the old manager really good, Bill Stadium [phonetic]. There wasn’t a crummy bone in his body, he was such a gentleman.

[01:02:31]

The carpenters, the carpenters were good. They were really good. The carpenters, the electricians, UAW, steelworkers, machinists, they were good, most of the

industrial unions. The Teamsters were rough. They were alone. They took care of the guys that took care of them. Then when they were so open to being cracked up with the Mafia, especially in the East. Well, what's-his-name hit on that a little bit, Moreno. And the other one was the ones that took care of the boats and the—what the hell? What's-his-name talked about them a little bit, where Corona came out of. Anyway.

ESPINO: Oh, the longshoremen?

ARRIOLA: Yes, the longshoremen. The longshoremen were good. That's kind of the basic makeup. I don't know if I told you I found the list of the [unclear] workers, the union.

ESPINO: No.

ARRIOLA: I've got it there.

ESPINO: Oh, excellent. I'd love to see that. Well, let me see. Another thing you mentioned, and this is just looking at the political scene, I don't know if you mean the same thing with the union leadership, but you said that there was a Widow Club, and I was wondering if you could elaborate on what you meant by that.

[01:05:21]

ARRIOLA: Well, within the—yes, it's always been that way. We've got a Chicano Club now. I was going to go to it, but I ended up having to take care of the babies last night. There was a reception for Cardenas, but all the other three or four—I forget which ones, but it was elected officials that showed up for it. They're the ones that are passing out the offices to one another, Cardenas, a whole new group right now. It wasn't like that when I was running it. The Widows control it and they—son of a bitch. That's the way it was.

ESPINO: But at the same time, you mentioned that they came to labor for support.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, always. No, they were tight. They were tight. They came in from the really old, old guys that were in the union that controlled them. They were the new breed, but they were just starting to change.

ESPINO: But it sounds like Jim Keysor came from privilege.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, he did. [Spanish phrase]. I wish I had his little book. I'd like to see what he did.

ESPINO: With all his money?

ARRIOLA: With all his ladies.

ESPINO: Oh. Oh. But do you think that he would have won if he didn't have that financial backing of his family?

ARRIOLA: Oh, no, they wanted him out of the business and running for office. Yes, they wanted him out. No, he'd spend their money with a lot of joy. [laughs] He was a good guy. I learned a lot from Jim. I learned a lot from Jim.

ESPINO: He did have skills, political.

[01:07:53]

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes, but just management skills, just he brought government—not government, but management skills into the political scene at our place. We had constant meetings with UCLA on training. I owe him a lot. I mean, you come out of the shop, you come out of the plant, and you're kind of a crude guy, but these trainings really helped, helped change me. I took them into Head Start. Hell, the Head Start program had yearly trainings away at a hotel. I mean for about three or four days. I would take all these ladies to a place over in Ventura on the beach, and for a lot of them it was kind of a

first. Or taking eight or ten of them up to Sacramento for a conference, and then on the way taking them to San Francisco. They'd never been there. And eating on the Wharf. What do we eat? They looked at the prices. Even then, it was fifteen dollars or more for eating at Alioto's, and they just, "What do we order, Mr. Arriola?"

"What do you want? Order whatever you want." You opened things up for them. It was fun. It was fun to see how they changed.

I had a lot of them that got their initial college education through the program. There were mothers. I would bug the shit out of them. If you're going to come to work as an assistant, you needed to have two qualifications: you have to have an interest in children and you have to be able to allow to talk your husband into letting you get an education. That was it.

Yes, it was Jim Keysor's training that he paid for. Every year we have a year-end conference somewhere, wherever, and the staff from Sacramento would come down and we would meet with them, and we'd set the program for the year.

ESPINO: What was different about working with Paul Schrade and Jim Keysor? I mean, these are two white guys, but there must have been some difference, or maybe not.

[01:12:02]

ARRIOLA: Sure. Keysor treated us and wanted the office to work like a business. That's what he wanted. That's the way he wanted us to function. Schrade, he brought all the skills in, but he looked for guys who were successful in negotiating contracts without a college education with General Motors and Ford and all the others, and there were guys that were really bright that could do that. Then for the rest of the staff that could organize

communities into voter action, so he knew what he wanted, and he went after those. God, Marv Brody. God.

ESPINO: What happened with your relationship with him after you left the UAW?

ARRIOLA: Twice we met in Sacramento. I flew up there when I was with Jim, [unclear], and one time we had lunch and another time we had dinner together. Then soon after that, he died, and he died right after his son died. The kid was so goddamn well educated. He was going to be a news writer. He was being educated with the university or the college of something or other in England, famous school for educating journalism. They found him dead in the vineyard that they had just gotten, had a heart attack, [Spanish word], and he died, and then that really—

ESPINO: The kid?

ARRIOLA: Yes. That really affected Marv.

ESPINO: Because he's not written about in the same ways as some of these other individuals are, but it sounds like he was important to the Labor Movement in Southern California. What do you think his contribution—

[01:14:35]

ARRIOLA: He was very important. You know, I know that he had close contact with some of the university guys in the social programs. They just knew about him because he attended everything that—he really did. And he could talk to you. I will use a word, but it's not a—he was a socialist. He was a socialist in the sense of being and caring more for the individual and the poor, and that's where his fight would go. [cries] Education was really something he talked about all the time. “Got to get these kids educated, Ralph.

We've got to do more for them so they have more to live in." We drank more beer and ate more peanuts after five o'clock than—and he wasn't a womanizer. He wasn't.

ESPINO: Was that uncommon to find a leader that wasn't a womanizer?

ARRIOLA: In the Labor Movement, yes. [laughs] Oh, yes.

ESPINO: Did you ever talk with him about race issues, or was it mainly class issues?

ARRIOLA: No, race. He got to go to—was it Birmingham? He got to go to it. Wow. Wow. He was such a gentleman.

ESPINO: How did he feel about the Chicano Caucus?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, they said it very clearly in Washington, Santiestevan, "It's okay what you're doing. It's important what you're doing, but you've got to know when you're going to cross a line, because you don't want to cross a line. They'll can your ass. You've got to stay a member of the caucus. You can't embarrass the caucus and you can't embarrass the leadership, so you've got to be careful, Ralph. So far I don't see anything that you've done that would have hurt you. You always talk to me, and you always ask for an opinion. 'Am I going too far? Shall I stop?'" I wasn't stupid. I had enough political experience to know.

[01:18:23]

ESPINO: But what would crossing the line—I mean, what does that mean? Because for someone like me who's never been involved in that kind of union activism, it sounds like you knew what he was talking about, but I wouldn't know what he was talking about.

ARRIOLA: Well, you would now. You would now.

ESPINO: I still don't. I don't know exactly specifically what—what would crossing the line mean?

ARRIOLA: You know when you're stepping on the other side of an issue. You know how far you can push Women's rights or Chicano rights. You know how far you can push education. You're not going to go around wearing ten buttons that spell out your—right? [laughs]

ESPINO: Oh, they didn't want you to be so blunt and in their face about it.

ARRIOLA: You had to be careful and—

ESPINO: Polite, respectful.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: I see. It wasn't necessarily the issue as much as your approach, is that what they were referring to?

ARRIOLA: Well, no, you had to be careful with the issues that you were pushing. I was pushing—and I made it clear from the beginning, "I am pushing for more Latinos to be international reps." We got 1,047 international representatives in the union, and five Latinos, 150-some blacks, and the rest are all white. I mean, how did they get 150 blacks on there? First of all, we weren't located in the East, so it was difficult for us.

So they gave me such a good—well, first of all, they fed me so good. [laughs] I've got a picture of the gal that was there from staff in Washington. "It's okay, Ralph. Just listen. Listen. Listen. Listen." [laughs] She held my hand all through the thing. It was hard, hard.

ESPINO: I bet.

[01:21:00]

ARRIOLA: And I walked out of the restaurant smiling, but I spent about two hours walking around Washington in the dark. Well, there was lights. “But where did you go last night, Ralph? I called you after you left.”

“I went for a walk.”

“You went for a walk in Washington at twelve o’clock at night? Don’t do that again.” [laughs]

ESPINO: Do you remember what you were thinking about?

ARRIOLA: Well, everything that they said to me. But there was also a [unclear] in me that said, “Okay, okay, but I’m not going to stop. I’m not going to stop.” No, I wasn’t going to stop, but I had to be careful how I proceeded with it. Remember, I was taking on the whole goddamn international. You’ll see it from the Chicano—you know, the fact that we told Walter Reuther, “If you don’t meet with us, we’re going to picket you.” I mean, what kind of shit is that? [laughs] Forty, fifty years later, I’m still thinking about it. But we did it. “Ralph, are you sure you want us to do that?”

“What do you mean? Come on, guys. We’ve got to do something to get their attention.”

Walter Reuther died, and then Woodcock took over. I couldn’t even get a nothing out of him.

ESPINO: He didn’t care about what you were—

[01:22:40]

ARRIOLA: He didn’t give a damn.

ESPINO: Did you try contacting him?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes.

ESPINO: What happened?

ARRIOLA: Well, he said, ‘Ralph, I understand what Walter was trying to do, but right now I got a lot of troubles with these strikes and everything else, so give me some time.’

There was never enough time. I got laid off.

ESPINO: Did you ever think maybe you were targeted for layoff because of your activism?

ARRIOLA: Well, to some degree, but remember I was never part of the negotiating team for the companies.

ESPINO: For the contracts.

ARRIOLA: I was citizenship political. They laid off two-thirds of the staff. I mean, it was heavy. They mortgaged everything. All of the local unions, all of the buildings went to the Teamsters. They got something like 13, 15 million dollars just to carry the strike on. It was like a million dollars a week to pay for strike benefits. You know, we’re talking about at the time 13 million guys, union members, and probably 10 million of those were autoworkers.

ESPINO: Did you ever think if it was worth it?

[01:24:30]

ARRIOLA: Oh, it was worth it. I mean, that’s the way it is.

ESPINO: But what did they gain? I don’t know. I’m not familiar. I mean, I should read up more on that strike. But since you told me you didn’t participate in it in any way, I didn’t research it. But what did you think they gained from it?

ARRIOLA: They gained changes in—now, that’s where talking to a couple of the guys that were in it would be important.

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: I couldn't tell you right now what the gains were, but it's always about more control of the working environment, salaries, benefits, health, leaves of absence, all that kind of stuff.

I found an old contract. I found an old budget for Head Start, the complete budget for the year. I forget what year it was, but I have it there. I imagine somebody might want to look at something like that.

ESPINO: Definitely, I'm sure. I'm sure.

ARRIOLA: Sometimes I wonder what the hell is Lizette going to do with all this crap. [laughs] I mean, I've hung on forty-five years or so many years. I don't know how many.

ESPINO: They're going to put it in order. People are going to want to see it, so they're going to label everything and put them in acid-free folders and make it available for students and researchers to come and look through now and forever. So it's a wonderful gift to the community and to the history of the UAW and Mexican Americans and California and the autoworkers. It covers a lot of territory. It's an important contribution that you're donating.

[01:26:58]

ARRIOLA: You know, the fight for civil rights, even though we weren't focused as Latinos for—but we were maybe not as abused as the blacks, but certainly it helped us.

ESPINO: Why do you say you weren't focused as Latinos? Because it seems like all these organizations were pretty focused, MAPA, LULAC, LACA, the Valley Labor Action Committee, the Chicano—

ARRIOLA: What power did they have? I mean, where are they now, huh?

ESPINO: LULAC's a pretty influential organization. I don't know about the Mexican American Political Association, but—

ARRIOLA: You know, the leadership dies if they don't train the people under them.

ESPINO: The new generation. Yes. Well, let's stop right here. It looks like you need a break. You've been babysitting all morning, sounds like last night too.

ARRIOLA: Now I'm going to babysit in the afternoon.

ESPINO: Okay. I'm going to stop it.

[End of December 13, 2013 interview]

SESSION 9 (December 20, 2013)

ESPINO: This is Virginia Espino, and today is December 20, 2013. I'm interviewing Mr. Ralph Arriola at his home in San Fernando.

You just pulled out a document that you've recently found. It was the Valley—
[00:00:18]

ARRIOLA: VALPAC.

ESPINO: Political Action Committee.

ARRIOLA: Labor. The Valley Labor Political Action Committee. I think it's still around, but it's not like it used to be.

ESPINO: Well, can you tell me about this committee and when you became affiliated with it the first time?

ARRIOLA: Well, from the beginning.

ESPINO: So when would that be?

ARRIOLA: Well, that would be the mid-sixties.

ESPINO: And what was the role? Why did people think they needed a—

ARRIOLA: Well, it was pulling all of the labor unions together in the San Fernando Valley, and the leadership of that committee—pulling all the labor committees was a big task, but there was a lot of—I'm trying to use a labor term, but I can't think of it right now. But anyway, all the unions were together. I mean, they were really together. Heading the whole thing was the secretary-treasurer of the County Federation of Labor. The financial secretary is always the guy that controls the County Fed. The president, he runs meetings, but Sigi Horowitz [phonetic] was a very powerful man. He really was

good. He really was a good leader, and they were all under him, even the UAW. The only ones that didn't were the Teamsters, but there was always a feeling of, hell, let's just keep them out. There's too many things that go on with the Teamsters that made them not as friendly with the rest.

[00:02:28]

So this document is an old membership list, and if we could find a few of the guys there, it would be great, but so many of them are gone now. I mean, most of these guys, even at that time, were in their forties and fifties. They were old labor guys. So when you look at it forty, fifty years later, not too many guys left. I mean, I was a punk.

ESPINO: What was the main focus of VALPAC?

ARRIOLA: Political. Political and organizing. They respected each other's turf.

ESPINO: Did you ever have any political conflicts with the Eastside?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: As far as having different candidates for Senate or—

ARRIOLA: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I had an incident with—what was the old man Rodriguez's first name?

ESPINO: Tony? J.J.?

ARRIOLA: J.J. J.J. Rodriguez. We had a slaughterhouse here in San Fernando, it had been here since who knows when, and running right in front of one of my mentors, Nellie Parra, well, as the trucks went through, the cows spread their stuff, so it became a big issue, and we took it to the City Council and I spoke and I had to speak against this thing existing in San Fernando. I mean, it was time for it to go.

I called J.J. and I told him, "J.J., I'm going to have to speak against it."

“Ralph, don’t worry about it. Do it.” He understood that he couldn’t have a slaughterhouse in the middle of a little city.

[00:04:44]

So we were okay, and part of it was that we were getting into the campaigns that were coming up in the Eastside with John Tunney, and they put me in charge of it. I had to go say, “I’m here. Tell me what you want. Tell me how you want me to operate, because this is your headquarters.”

And he says, “Well, I have this person that’s going to work with you, Ralph.” Why do I smile? She was a tiger. At the beginning she hated me. [laughs]

ESPINO: Why did she hate you?

ARRIOLA: Because I was put in charge.

ESPINO: Oh, she thought she should be in charge?

ARRIOLA: And she felt I had to go through her to go to J.J. Well, bullshit, you know. Let’s operate like a team, but don’t limit me, because you won’t. Anyway, that settled, but it was a confrontation, the only one I ever had, that I knew of, where before anything developed, I went to J.J. and told him that they put me out, they wanted me to work with him, how does he feel about it?

“Ralph, don’t worry about it.” He was good. He was good. So that was the only one, and we got rid of the slaughterhouse. The building is still there. I don’t know who’s running it now, but it’s not a slaughterhouse. It’s some kind of business somebody took over. So that was the only time.

And the others were the Teamsters. That just went on. I mentioned you earlier that I went to Monterey with Paul Schrade, and he negotiated an understanding that they

would stay the hell out of trying to organize the farm workers. That was great. That was historical.

ESPINO: Yes. When Tunney was running, is it true he was running against Snyder [phonetic]?

[00:07:32]

ARRIOLA: Oh, god, I don't remember. Well, by the time, this was a general election. I don't know what he did in the primaries.

ESPINO: Because isn't it true that Snyder was popular in East Los Angeles?

ARRIOLA: Oh, he was very popular.

ESPINO: And that many people from the Chicano Movement supported him? Or some people. Maybe not many.

ARRIOLA: Some people, I don't know about—I don't know. He was loved by 50 percent and hated by the other 50. [laughs]

ESPINO: So how did you feel about supporting Tunney in that situation?

ARRIOLA: My feelings weren't important. "Hey, Ralph, you're going to go out and do this thing. Are you okay?"

"I'm okay. Let's go." I was always basically a political dog. I mean, I represented the UAW, and I wasn't going to start fighting with the UAW. I wasn't going to start fighting with labor. If Snyder would have gotten the endorsement against Tunney, I probably would have gone and done something for him. My brother worked for him for a time. This was after there was the elections.

But normally, normally the Chicano community supported Democratic candidates, so there was never a real problem. We had people who want to be

Republicans because I guess they felt that we were—was a big deal. I don't know. I don't understand that. When I say I don't understand that, right away comes to my mind my own son, Victor. He's avid gun supporter, and he doesn't tell me, but I think he votes Republican, even though he's registered Democrat. But people have their choice.

[00:10:07]

But Eastside politics, that was about the only time. Now, as a member of the UAW citizenship department and member, we—and I've mentioned Brody. He was there all the time, and we would talk about, "What are you going to do today?"

"Well, I've got to go to Garcia," and all the other guys that were there that were elected at the time were running for office. So in that sense, I was involved. We would do the endorsements and then we'd get the checks out to the guys. Usually we liked to deliver the checks.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Do you want me to put it back on?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Okay. I was going to mention that we made the endorsements, that was part of the—well, Brody and I drew up the lists of the guys that were running in the primaries, and we decided who we would go with. We would hold interviews, the candidates would be invited to a hearing or a meeting, hearing, and we would have maybe three or four guys from other locals sit down with us, and they would make the decision. But Brody, they'd listen to Marvin, and then we went from there.

Now, a lot of times I went out and delivered the checks. They weren't big checks, but it was a chance to meet the candidate and talk, just talk about unions and their support and just politicking him a little.

ESPINO: Is there anything specific you remember about a candidate and their position and why they were favorable to you, why you supported them? Was it because of their position on labor or race issues or—

[00:12:38]

ARRIOLA: Going through my junk, I found an endorsement, a handout sheet that we would—a little card with all of the districts and all the people we were endorsing, and I was going to bring that so I could talk about some of the guys. But, yes, there were some. There were some. There was a very popular one. He was Armenian and climbed the ladder of success in the Assembly.

ESPINO: Karabian?

ARRIOLA: Karabian, that's it.

ESPINO: Is that who you're thinking about?

ARRIOLA: Yes. And he called up and he says, "Ralph, talk to Marvin and find out where my check is."

And I says, "Well, I have your check, but I'm reconsidering it."

He screamed at me, "Why?"

"Well, it's your position with Cesar." I called him on it. He had an argument going with Cesar. I forget what it was.

ESPINO: You forget the details of the argument?

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: But isn't it Alatorre worked for him, didn't he, Karabian?

ARRIOLA: Yes. But I—

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. Karabian.

ARRIOLA: Yes, Karabian.

ESPINO: And you don't remember what the fight was behind Karabian and Cesar?

[00:14:32]

ARRIOLA: I forget what the issue was between farm workers and Karabian, what he had said. So I called him on it, you know.

“So, okay, Ralph.” And that was it.

Well, pretty soon Marv Brody, Paul Schrade, “What the hell did you do?”

“Well, you know,” da, da, da, da, da, da.

“Okay, Ralph.” Marvin said, “I'll give him a call. Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it.” [laughs]

It didn't scare me. I was glad I did it, and what I did, I mean, I wasn't rude to the guy, but I said, “As a Latino, I felt you just went a little too far on the comments side.” I wish I could remember what they were, but that was basically the conversation.

“Okay, Ralph.” So it was okay. We weren't going to lose Karabian, and he wasn't going to lose us. His check was always a little bigger.

ESPINO: Do you know why that happened?

ARRIOLA: Well, because he was a very bright man. He was good. He was good in the legislature. So you take care of your friends. Any other one?

ESPINO: What about people you didn't like that you really worked hard to defeat?

ARRIOLA: Well, they never got an invitation to anything. Oh, sure, I mean, basically Republicans. At that time, they were very conservative. They were under Reagan, you know. Even a little later, my own boss then, Keysor, ended up passing the legislation which allowed people to register by mail. There's time when you built friendships. Even the guy that ran against Jim Keysor here, Hank Arklin, he and I were friends. He and I were friends and we'd tease each other, you know, and he beat us.

ESPINO: Was he a Republican, Arklin?

[00:17:14]

ARRIOLA: Republican, yes.

ESPINO: So when you look at the different Republicans, were they all equal or were some more or less conservative, so to speak?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, there was middle-of-the-road Republicans. I mean, more or less. I mean, they were easy to talk to, guys that you could sit down and negotiate with. Not like now. It's crazy now.

ESPINO: Does anyone come to mind, any middle-of-the-road Republicans that maybe you felt could be an ally back in those days?

ARRIOLA: Oh, god. Right now I can't.

ESPINO: So no one stands out as far as being a big enemy or a big ally in the Republican Party?

ARRIOLA: No, no. There was more willingness to work with each other and not just taking such a hard position that your own party would kick you out or your own party would sit down and talk to you about getting too far out. But right now—

ESPINO: How did you feel about the idea of a third party, of the La Raza Unida Party?

ARRIOLA: Personally?

ESPINO: Yes.

[00:18:48]

ARRIOLA: I supported them. Personally I would do anything on the side to help them out with stuff. But it was like, “Okay, guys, do your thing. I’m not going to oppose you. I’m not going to call you cuckoo wackos.” That’s my grandson’s term.

ESPINO: Cuckoo wacko. [laughter]

ARRIOLA: And then when the strike hit in ’70, and now I came to work for Jim Keysor, I would have the guys operating. They were using the mimeographing machine. We were never close, but I helped them.

ESPINO: Did you think that it was a good idea?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, sure, sure. Anytime you have a group that you can halfway work with that aren’t really crazy, it’s good. It’s good, especially if they’re Latinos. You’ve got to have some guys that are out here in left field screaming about something.

ESPINO: Why is that?

ARRIOLA: Because you get the attention of whoever you want to negotiate with, but you also run the chance of getting of labeled along with them, and that’s what happened with me to a degree. I mean, everybody knew I was a Democrat, but the Republicans and some of the old guys—I told you the story about the Lions Club, that the old man came up to me and said, “Well, I voted for you against your membership, Ralph, because you’re part of La Raza Unida.”

And I just smiled and I said, “No, no, no, no, no. I’m a Democrat. I was born a Democrat. I’m going to die a Democrat. No, I’m not part of La Raza Unida.”

So, no, you can't—at least the way I looked at things, when you look at your community, you've got a lot of people out there with different groups, and not all of them are going to love you, but you need to talk to them. You need to negotiate with them. You need to bring them around to maybe if they're so far out, kind of calm them down and look at the mainstream of what's happening and try to help them understand why it's good or why it's bad.

ESPINO: Do you think they were effective, or what impact do you think that they had? Especially Raul Ruiz was very much involved.

[00:21:50]

ARRIOLA: No, they never had—they got a lot of publicity, and a lot of us, like Raul Ruiz, we supported them. I gave him all my goddamn pictures. Excuse my French. Speak about that guy.

Even within the church, on politics, Father Wagner here at the Catholic church where I go, I had my youngest son, and I was standing in the line to register him in the first grade or kindergarten, and he went by, "Hey, Ralph. Are you sure you want to register your son into the Catholic Church?"

"What's your problem, Father?" I mean, he was very outspoken guy, but so I was.

And he says, "Well, you know, your boss is for abortion."

And I says, "Fine. What's that got to do with my son? You want me to take my son out of your school? Is that what you want, because I work for a—?"

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, you go ahead." And that was the last time we talked.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: Nazi bastard. [laughs]

ESPINO: The priest?

[00:23:28]

ARRIOLA: Wagner. Wagner. Anyway, he was a very active guy in the community too.

ESPINO: So he was good on some issues, but he was not interested in reproductive justice issues.

ARRIOLA: No, he carried the line of the church. That's where he was, and that was okay.

ESPINO: Was that when you were with Tunney or Keysor?

ARRIOLA: With Keysor.

ESPINO: How important was that issue to—I mean, was it—

ARRIOLA: It wasn't a big issue then. It was there.

ESPINO: Well, in the seventies it was huge. Abortion access, legalizing abortion, birth control access, those things were huge in the seventies for the Women's Movement.

ARRIOLA: But in terms of affecting us?

ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: It wasn't.

ESPINO: It wasn't?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: What were the big issues at that time?

ARRIOLA: Wow.

ESPINO: If you remember.

ARRIOLA: Yes. Well, the Antiwar Movement was. We were really involved with that. And—

ESPINO: Immigration?

ARRIOLA: Immigration.

ESPINO: Can you remember anything that you did or any policies that were put forth or any ideas during that period?

[00:25:05]

ARRIOLA: Why does housing come to mind? Not so much housing, but Proposition 14 was big. And I just found a brochure of that.

ESPINO: Oh, wow. Yes, that was hugely important. It was the Fair Housing Act.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, that was big. God.

ESPINO: Did you work for that, or did your candidates?

ARRIOLA: Oh, no, we worked for that, absolutely.

ESPINO: What did you do, do you remember?

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, again, you organize community campaigns. You open up headquarters. You get people in. And at that time, both Democrats and Republicans and anybody else, the American Independent Party, La Raza Unida, had little headquarters where they would take a position whatever the issue was. And it was through organizing the Democratic Party or the Labor Party. I mean, we always had the support of labor. We opened a headquarters, labor was part of it.

Then we just went out and worked the whole community. We never took the issue and said, “Well, let’s see, this guy over here was going to vote for us, but he’s a

Democrat, but he may not vote for us. Well, don't even call him." Bullshit. You went out for 100 percent of your people.

[00:26:51]

There was a difference. There was a difference. I mean, because campaigns at the time, you know, you could run a whole Assembly campaign on \$15,000, and now you need \$150,000. In my opinion, they're destroying the ability to vote or the voting process because they become—well, take the little white light. No, don't mess with the little blue light. Too picky, too damn picky, too damn targeting. You leave a lot of people out. You never know how they're going to vote till they vote.

You call them, you talk to them, you get people out in the precincts and pull them out. Voter registration was major all the time. We did major drives. We used to hold breakfasts. I mean, you're talking about three, four hundred people coming to a breakfast, go out and do voter registration. Five hundred for Get Out the Vote, and we would pay them. Labor would always come up with a lot of money. We would pull out all the guys that wanted to come out and work, Get Out the Vote. We would pay them fifteen bucks. It wasn't much, but it took care of the bar bill. [laughs] But they came out, they got the vote out. That was our power.

It goes back to where I learned when I got a lot of stuff from a candidate, "Gee, is this all you're going to give us?"

"Well, you know, along with this two or three hundred bucks, there's about 15,000 voters in your district, all Democrats and Labor. How's that?" They shut their mouths. So it was totally different. It was a lot of fun, totally different, and that's the way it worked.

ESPINO: I know you mentioned you ran. You did run for office and you were interested in a political office. Why did you not run under the La Raza Unida Party?

[00:29:56]

ARRIOLA: Oh, my god. I love my people, but [unclear].

ESPINO: You never thought that they were going to be successful in winning any office?

ARRIOLA: Oh, no, no, Not even within the Latino community. You know, La Raza Unida, with anybody at the time, anybody over thirty, they weren't paying attention to that. That was the college crap. And they paid attention if they were supportive of the farm workers. The farm workers were the thing. We would get the farm workers coming out heavy, and we included them in our Get Out the Vote efforts. Cesar got a lot of money to get his people out here. When they would come down, they would come down that weekend and we'd find housing, we'd use our local unions, set up all kinds of mattresses and stuff, or beds, folding beds. We'd have breakfast and lunch and kept them here till Tuesday. Yes, he'd come in with hundreds of people, hundreds of people.

ESPINO: Did you ever have a chance to see what was happening in Crystal City in Texas with the La Raza Unida Party and the political advancements of the Mexican Americans there?

ARRIOLA: No. The only thing I saw was a coming together of the Southwest to Phoenix to form a united MAPA.

ESPINO: How would you describe the difference between MAPA—because it seems like it was kind of similar in the sense that it was the Mexican American Political Association, and then you have La Raza Unida forms a little bit later.

ARRIOLA: Well, La Raza Unida wasn't—you know, Corky was active in Colorado. I mean, we'd hear about Corky. That was far away. He was addressing different issues. The issues he addressed were education, immigration, that sort of stuff, but in the political side, there wasn't that much attention paid to it.

[00:33:25]

Yes, I was a little bit interested, but only locally. I never wanted to go for the Assembly. I'd been part of that all that time, and I just didn't care for it. Just too much trouble. Politics, running for office, it's a pain, and once you ran, it's hard. You think you have control of it? It has control of you, because until you build support within the legislative body that you're running in, it's nothing. I mean, you're one of eighty assemblymen, one of fifty senators. You're nothing, you know. They put you on the fourth floor or the third floor, and all the old guys have the other stuff. They put you on different committees. They decide until you get reelected two or three times. But now three times, you're out.

ESPINO: Right. What do you think had the greatest impact, the Chicano Movement or the Labor Movement, in just looking at what happened in the Valley? Because there were so many plants here, the unions were so strong.

ARRIOLA: It was the awakening of La Raza. It was Cesar and his—Cesar brought it on, really, really helped. Cesar was the force behind the Chicano Movement, not directly, but what he was doing just awakened our students and our people, and it was time. It was time, and it came a long ways. But now look at it. Now look at it. Now it's under attack. I don't know what's going to happen. I mean, this whole thing, [unclear] that they may take it away and they're going to build an—they'll bring us some goddamn

bullshit from Mexico. There isn't anything in Mexico that I think that's worth a damn. It's full of corruption. It's worse than our 1 percent situation here. But for them to come here and try to tell us? I love Mexico. My parents were from there. Our whole history was there, but I never went there. I never had a real connection with it. So to have them come try to teach us something, what are they going to teach us? Columbus and all the other guys came from Spain, and what love have we ever had for Spaniards? [laughs] I don't know why I've always been—they look at me and they say, “Well, [Spanish phrase]?”

ESPINO: Right.

[00:37:28]

ARRIOLA: [Spanish phrase], you know.

ESPINO: Yes. Well, I often wondered that about you, because when you first came to the Valley and moved here, do you think people thought you were white or Italian?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes,

ESPINO: Because when you say “Arriola,” it sounds Latino, but if you say Arriola, it sounds it could be anything.

ARRIOLA: Yes, that's always been a little bit of—with me. I don't know about Con. He always had a mustache.

ESPINO: His name is Conrad, correct?

ARRIOLA: No, Condalario [phonetic].

ESPINO: That's right, Condalario.

ARRIOLA: But I'd say I didn't really find a lot of prejudiced behavior affecting me, but there was. There was. There was, especially this little town here. There's a wonderful

article in the *San Fernando Sun* today. More or less it said there's more cities around with the same kind of crap as Bell, where the city councils and city administrators are taking—we've got a police department that makes over \$100,000, and they just went through and put another tax on us. Then they laid off—they put everybody on four days. Oh, no.

[00:39:35]

ESPINO: But you were going to say something about passing. Did you ever think about skin color and what it was like for you with your skin color versus other people with darker skin, if maybe people treated you differently or better or—

ARRIOLA: I don't know if that ever made a difference.

ESPINO: Living out here in the Valley.

ARRIOLA: Yes. My sisters and my brother would probably have more of that. I never put myself personally in whether I dressed or whether I spoke, and I think my mom and my dad—I know Dad every night would sit down with me and we would read in Spanish. So I picked it up pretty well, pronunciation pretty well. So maybe I didn't look as Latino as—I don't know. Jigs said, "Ralph, you're a Chicano. Don't forget it."

ESPINO: That stuck. And that stuck all these years. That's great. [laughs]

ARRIOLA: This is kind of off the thing, but I just awakened to something. There is a tradition—I watched *The Christmas Carol*, the old, old *Christmas Carol* movie. "What are you going to have tonight?"

"Oh, we're going to have rum cake and chestnuts." Chestnuts, that kicked a damn thought in my head. [cries] Every year I put walnuts in the oven and brown them, every year. It's something I got to do. And it dawned on me, that came from Dad. Every year

he would toast—I don't know, toast or whatever—walnuts, every year. You know, I told you about that big sack of walnuts they brought us one year from Camarillo, and I gave them to the—

ESPINO: The teacher.

[00:42:53]

ARRIOLA: There must have been, in Spanish, an understanding about the English and what they did, and chestnuts was always—I've always heard about that, the baking of chestnuts. That's where he must have picked it up. And I told Evan, "We're going to go buy some walnuts."

"Walnuts?"

"Yes."

"Why for, Grandpa?"

"We're going to bake them." [laughs]

ESPINO: Oh, that's a sweet memory.

ARRIOLA: God, you know?

ESPINO: Yes, yes.

ARRIOLA: Some came up.

ESPINO: Yes, that's the interesting thing growing up in this country is the different aspects of that, the mainstream culture that you accept into your life. You don't even realize it until somebody asks you, because you just do it.

So then you always felt a great pride in your background, but things like the La Raza Unida effort, and what else would it—what about your—because there were some issues early on with what we were talking about when your friend Ed Moreno was here

was the *bracero* program, the undocumented workers. Did you have any dealings here out here in the Valley with the whole question of undocumented people?

[00:44:37]

ARRIOLA: No, none that I can recall. Maybe the way I identified it was through my dad, who came across, got his card at a time when that was done for a penny. And Mom. Then, you know, his thing was working in the mines, which screwed him up, and then coming to California and working at the Camarillo Ranch and the Pettit [phonetic] Ranch and the Flynn [phonetic] Ranch and that whole thing around Camarillo. There was always farm work. So, no.

And one of his best friends, I'm trying to—El Changito, that was my godfather. And why did they call him El Changito? He took the peach pit and made a monkey out of it. And I had one for so long. I don't know [unclear]. But I really don't remember him, El Changito. That's what, the name I remember from, and that peach pit.

ESPINO: So that wasn't ever a debate, something you had to debate with other people, something you had to support or not support or—

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: Okay. So there were some things that you mentioned earlier in earlier interviews. Let's see. Where is my question here? You mentioned the OJT program.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: But I didn't know what that was. I couldn't find it anywhere.

ARRIOLA: On-the-job training program.

ESPINO: Oh, okay, and that was the manpower program with TELACU, or was it—

ARRIOLA: No, it was under TELACU.

ESPINO: That was under TELACU, yes. Okay. Just to clarify that for me.

And the other question was, well, going back, we talked about your work with Head Start, and I would like to know about what you learned regarding early childhood education, because you didn't know—you were a labor person, and then you're thrust into this role of administer or director of a childhood development program.

[00:47:42]

ARRIOLA: Well, you know, even coming out of high school, one of the first things I did, I had this panel truck that my brother gave me, and I got involved with the church to run a program for teenagers—

ESPINO: Yes, I remember you told me about that.

ARRIOLA: —in Pacoima. Let me think of the—I'll think about it as we go. They were teens, a couple of guys, girls that were a little older, in the tenth and eleventh grade that were part of the church and were part of the program. And I would organize things during the summer especially. I would work nights, and then during the day I'd be at the church working on the teen programs. On weekends, I'd dump as many as I could in my truck, and we'd go to the beach or go someplace. I mean, it was just that way. So I always had an interest in working with young people. That was me. I can't explain it any other way. I had such a cute name. Oh, I'll think of it.

But I also provided some stuff for them to learn, so I'd get people to come in and talk to them about stuff, just drug stuff. "Just don't get into it because it can be very difficult trying to get out of it. Stay out of the gangs. You guys don't have to go around killing each other." I don't know, just things to try to keep them on the straight.

Then when I was working for Jim Keysor, they asked me to be on the board of LACA, and I was on there for four or five years, and it was under the city of L.A., but they were a bunch of idiots. They didn't want it anymore, and they paid no attention to it. I saw it going down the hill.

[00:50:55]

Then when Al Orozco was offered a job with the county, when they took it over, I decided I'd take a shot at running it. Right away, I had this dear friend now, he really is, Dennis Kira, Japanese guy, who did some of the accounting. I told Dennis, "Take over. Take over the program for about a month," just to give me time to move around. And what I did, I grabbed my book and writing tablet, and I went looking at the centers, and I saw a mess, a mess.

So after a month, I came back with the staff and first with the supervisors, because a day camp was six hundred children, so I forget, we only had like about ten, thirteen centers. But I told them, "You guys, do you realize what's out there?" And I started describing what I saw in every one of those centers, and I said, "It's going to change. You've got children and you've got all this stuff piled up in your rooms, and look at it, full of cockroaches." And we have a mother or somebody who cooks in every center. There are very few mothers that know how to cook. [laughs] They're real good with beans and rice, though. [laughs] So I said, "We've got to change it. We've got to change it."

So during the summer—and I had one of the teachers who was a childhood friend of Maria, my first wife, and when I went into her classroom, I said, "Get rid of it. Get rid

of all this stuff, because I'm going to come in here in a couple of weeks and I'll take it out."

"Ralph, you can't do that. Look at this. This container of eggs with—we're going to make—." [Spanish phrase].

ESPINO: *Cascarones*.

[00:53:38]

ARRIOLA: *Cascarones*. I said, "No, you're not. No, you're not." [laughs]

So I stripped them and I brought them new furniture, and I brought them just a whole difference. Then little by little, I had 1,600 children the first four years, and the program that we started that was there, well, there was no program. I adopted—it was just coming out, and I can't think of it right now—out of back east someplace, but it got a lot of national attention. And I talked to the [unclear], and I said, "That's what I want to do."

"Well, that's going to take you about two years, three years."

"No, it's not." Because by then I had at least 1,200 children, and we sat down and we planned it, and we got it done within a year. They got reeducated in childhood development.

ESPINO: How did you come across this program?

ARRIOLA: Well, when I attended some of the conferences, I started hearing more and more about it, and I saw it operate in one of the centers back east that I visited when I was at a conference. The classrooms were beautiful there.

What we had was something that the teachers themselves had to go out and find, the *cascarones* and all this other crap, furniture to have in the centers. *No tenían*. And every year, Orozco would return 1,000 to 100,000, you know.

ESPINO: He was the previous administrator?

[00:55:46]

ARRIOLA: Yes. Then he became the director at the county schools. [Spanish phrase].

ESPINO: What's his first name?

ARRIOLA: Al.

ESPINO: So you took the position after him, and you feel like you found it in shambles, the Head Start.

ARRIOLA: I would talk to Al. I would talk to Al. "Al, what do you want? What do you want, Al? I'll help you get it. What do you want?"

"Well, we're okay now, Ralph. We don't need anything."

I mean, my big thing was when Mr.—what's his name? The guy that took care of the office, my maintenance guy, "*No, Señor Arriola, tiene que venir aquí esta semana. ¿Por que? Las ventanas están quebradas y hablé con el Señor Orozco y dijo bueno, ya están quebradas. Después lunes los componemos.*"

I went over there and I says, "Take the bars down. Call the window company. We're going to fix them today."

ESPINO: Well, what was your main objective as the director?

ARRIOLA: To educate children. It was not just—their attitude was that they were a nursery. So educating them was the first task.

ESPINO: The teachers, you mean?

ARRIOLA: Yes, especially assistant teachers, and the teachers. Yes, they had thirteen units of early childhood education. What the hell is thirteen units? And the others were just interested in working with children. But I changed that. They all knew that they had to take more units. That they had to go. They had the opportunity to go. They had two or three hours either afternoon or morning to go to school.

[00:58:04]

I had an absentee rate of about 30 percent every day because they had more units and more days and sick leave and personal leave and [unclear]. I was there at seven o'clock in the morning, answering the phone. I heard a lot of hang-ups, but that's all right. We got it changed around. And now it's back to what it was.

ESPINO: Oh, is it?

ARRIOLA: It's a crappy program. I'm so disgusted with it. No Christmas. They don't celebrate Christmas or any other holiday. No birthday parties. I mean, what kind of crap is that?

Yesterday I went to my—every morning for the last month, month and a half, I take Gabe, my three-year-old, two-year-old to Poverello, and then I don't pick her up because either my ex or my daughter-in-law will pick him up. But they have all kinds of activities. I mean, it's Catholic, so they get religion and they get everything else. They work a lot on the social aspects of childhood development.

ESPINO: What did you learn that you didn't know? What did you learn about childhood development from that experience that you didn't know?

ARRIOLA: Well, education was always a part of getting smarter, learning, and I understood that. I knew I had to do it. I told you my first priority was, not having

accepted college, my little brother, my mom, and my sister. [cries] So I took the machine shop route, you know, make money now, give them something financially. But being involved in politics, you know, that was also education. It really was. And then sitting on the board for four years or three years and listening to everything and just observing. They'd have lost the program had it not been for the Filipino accountant that came in, Roble [phonetic]. He was buddies with the guys downtown with the city, and he told me everything that was happening, so we worked on that. I'm trying to think of something that—I had a confrontation with the city, and I won it.

ESPINO: Let me pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay. We're back.

ARRIOLA: Because I took those two years, regular semesters and summer, I went two years to Trade Tech, and the guy put me in as a foreman because I already had experience at it. So when you start teaching people something, you learn more, so it was there I learned how to deal with students, and so education was something that I wanted.

[01:02:22]

Actually, when I was in high school, had I gone to college, I wanted to become a probation officer. Why didn't I want to become a goddamn banker? Because I didn't have any bankers around to help me. Couldn't become a cop because I only had one eye. You know, I tried to do that with my two sons—my three. John went one year to the local private university over here on Burbank. What is it? It's a pretty well known.

ESPINO: University of Phoenix?

ARRIOLA: No.

ESPINO: I don't know. I'm not familiar with there.

[01:03:12]

ARRIOLA: Anyway, he went there for two years, and it helped me to get into the city and it helped him move up in it. He's doing good. I'm proud of him. Victor and Andy, they were athletes. They wanted to become athletes.

ESPINO: They wanted to become professional athletes?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Andy could have made it. Andy could have.

ESPINO: What sport did he play?

ARRIOLA: He played football. Oh, yes. No, he would have made it, but he chose the Marine Corps. There he goes.

ESPINO: And your other son, what sport did he play?

ARRIOLA: Football.

ESPINO: They both played football?

ARRIOLA: Yes. But it took him a long time to realize he'd better get his butt in school and decide what he was going to do, so he decided he wanted to become an electrician. I said, "Okay, but you've got to go to school. Why don't you go to Trade Tech? It's got a great program."

"Oh, I don't want to go over there. I'm not going to drive to Trade Tech every day, Dad."

"Okay." Well, then, I forget whether he did it or I did it. I said, "There's another place over in Long Beach."

"Long Beach?"

"Yes." And I said, "If you ever want to go look at it, let's go."

Well, that cooked for about two weeks, and then one day in the morning I'm having my coffee. He's sitting there. He had been watching TV damn near all night. And he said, "Hey, Dad, you mentioned that thing about Long Beach. You want to go down there and look at it?"

[01:05:27]

We went down there, they took us through the whole thing, beautiful building, beautiful program, everything you want to learn. They are loaded. He said, "Dad, but it's going to run me about \$12,000."

"Oh, well, if that's what it takes, \$12,000, look at that truck there. How long have you had it? How much did you pay for it?" Because by that time he was maybe twenty-six. He had bought a truck. "How much did you pay and what's it worth now?"

"Oh."

"And \$12,000, you paid \$20,000 for that stupid truck, and now it's not worth that. The education is going to cost you 12, 13,000, and you'll be able to work nights or have a job."

So when he walked through that place, he was convinced. He signed up that same day, and he had to be at school either by six-thirty or seven o'clock in the morning, drive all the way to Long Beach every day for a year, and he did it. He did it. That's what he's doing now. But to get really good jobs, it's the city or the county, the unions control that. So you've got to go through the union. You've got to wait your turn. So that's kind of what he's doing, but he's working with people he knows. He's keeping up with it. But he's been my hardest. He's been my hardest guy.

Andy, when he joined, I went to the Marine Corps, I said, “I want him put in a training program with aircraft. I don’t give a damn what kind of aircraft.” They put him with a helicopter and he learned a lot. He worked for a big company out here in Duarte, so he’s up at four o’clock in the morning every day and gone, but he’s making like—I think he’s probably around twenty-three, twenty-four dollars an hour now, so it’s not bad, and all the benefits in the world. And it’s a UAW.

ESPINO: It’s a UAW.

[01:08:13]

ARRIOLA: Yes, it’s a UAW. The company changed. It was General Electric, but now it’s another one which has been around a long, long time. They bought the whole thing. So he’s doing well. He’s doing okay.

She just completed—she’s got one more year or year and a half at Suisun [phonetic]. I’m so impressed with Norma. She’ll sit down in that corner over there—I’ll be in here watching my news, but it put it real low—and she’ll study for hours. She’s very determined to do what she wants to do. And I kind of get into it a little bit, “What are you studying, *mija*?”

“Well, it’s social service, social worker program.”

I said, “Okay, but remember, there’s guys down here and there’s guys up here. You want to be with the guys up here. So make sure that if you do go four years and you get your basic B.A., that you spend another two years for your master’s in administration.” So she’s listening.

She’s a teacher. The kids are learning Spanish real well. They play a game. I don’t know if you know it. It’s a game, and they all get around, it’s like cards, and it’s on

words. It's a word game, Spanish. Oh, *¿Cuál querías tú?* [Spanish word]. They pronounce the words, and the little guy is doing it. Sometimes I feel that little guy is really going to be okay. He's really doing well. Evan is doing okay too. I don't have any complaints. I'm trying to work with him on learning to read.

[01:10:34]

And now Eva, I just decided I'm going to do something. I'm going to record—because I've got three or four old small recorders. I'm going to record some of the Christmas stories, and I'm going to tell Adriana to let her listen to them every night, you know, just listen to them. And I'll pick other stuff and I'll pick other stuff, and I'll rotate it and do others, and I'll use with Jesse *también*. I'm going to do something with them. It's all about education.

ESPINO: Did you have any concrete goals for the Head Start? For example, what you're talking about is just how in general education has always been important for you, and you demonstrated that with your kids and now your grandkids. But when you're with the Head Start, was it learning to read or was it—like what were something specific that you wanted to achieve?

ARRIOLA: The program that we picked, it was definitely education. I wish I could remember all the stuff that we did, because it was so important.

Every year in the summer, I would take the stuff away, the whole administrative and center staff, and which is basically all the teachers, and have a three- or four-day session. It was to give them a little something special, to make them feel good, stay at a beach motel in Ventura. There's a big place there, and that's where we would go, and the

ocean was right there. They didn't have to cook. Everybody cooked for them. They got the [unclear]. And we had fun.

ESPINO: Then what happened? You started telling me a bit about what happened with LACA, and I'm assuming it was a combination of Head Start and LACA, your work with LACA.

[01:10:34]

ARRIOLA: You obviously didn't have a chance to read those papers that I gave you.

ESPINO: I read some of them, yes, but I'd like for you to explain it in your own words.

ARRIOLA: I did fourteen years of Head Start and four or five other years as a board member. The grantee got a lot of money to really expand, but they always a lot of the money, and they left us with the—they took the money.

ESPINO: Who took the money?

ARRIOLA: County schools.

ESPINO: Let me pause it for a second.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay.

ARRIOLA: I was always in the middle of questioning what they did and why were they getting more money.

ESPINO: The county?

ARRIOLA: Yes. I mean, I took them on, and then myself and a couple others, there were fourteen or fifteen agencies that were doing the program, and so many were just ladies that didn't want to fight, so they took what they could. So on the expansion, we opened up eleven classrooms. I had taken on—I think it was twenty classrooms. Then

through all of the crap that we had to go through with the state and opening classrooms and qualifying, da, da, da, I couldn't open those last, and I had hired people to help us with the expansion. As we went along opening, they would move in and start set them up, so it took a few people. I mean, we must have hired—well, there just were ten classrooms—an additional forty, fifty people, plus social workers and others.

[01:15:34]

When I saw we couldn't open those last ones, I wrote them a letter that said, "I need to modify the budget and lay off people that we'll be able to use in the new program year in June, July, but I have to let them go now, otherwise we're going to have an \$800,000 deficit."

Well, they gave me all kinds of shit about, "Oh, no, no, you can't lay people off," and the union got into it. And then I got sick. I got sick, and the unions went to the newspapers and, "What happened to the money? What happened to the 800,000, Ralph?"

Well, first of all, you got only the amount of money that you could use for paying your staff, which was like 160, \$165,000 a month you had to justify getting. They never gave you any more than you could use. We never got \$800,000.

So when my doctor saw that, Dr. Richmond [phonetic], and I told you he was an old friend and he was a president of the community college—no, no. Oh, no. [cries]
ESPINO: Oh, oh, sorry, sorry.

ARRIOLA: "You're going to quit. You're going to quit. You're going to quit right now. You're going to resign. I don't give a damn. You're going to quit, Ralph. It will do you good." You're my doctor, psychiatrist, and I included that in the stuff I gave you.
ESPINO: Yes.

ARRIOLA: So I left it. I quit. Then there was also that other part that really—"If you have any guns, any rifles, you bring them to me." [cries]

[01:18:05]

"Well, what's the hell does that tell me? Don't I understand what's going on with me? Or what the hell's wrong, Ralph?"

Yes, I knew I was upset. I knew I had a lot of pressure. I knew what he meant or what he was thinking when he asked me for the firearms. But I said, "Doctor, I'm not going to do anything like that."

"Bring them, Ralph. Listen to me. Bring them."

So I did. So for five, six months, I don't know how long it was, I spent the time with his doctor, his psychiatrist, and it wasn't just a mental health specialist, it was a goddamn psychiatrist, nice old guy. If you didn't read it, you need to read the letter by Kessler [phonetic] and the one by the Japanese gal—

ESPINO: Yashura [phonetic]. I can't remember her name. Yashura or something?

ARRIOLA: Yes. Donna Iwacaki [phonetic]. And she's apologizing in that letter for what the things that she was asked to do to me.

ESPINO: So you felt like you were—well, I'm still not clear, because those letters, they reflect a certain perspective of what happened, but it doesn't really say exactly what happened. [laughs]

ARRIOLA: Well, when Pat Kessler met with that son of a bitch—excuse my French—with Kennedy, who was a director, and that Chicano head of the department, who eventually went to Texas, he hired him, and six months later they canned his ass because he wasn't worth a damn. Any guy that walks around at times with a blue hairdo is—and

if you look at Kessler's letter, and you know what? I never even looked at those freaking letters. I was so angry at all of them that I just let them rest. So maybe six months ago I read through a little bit. I read Donna's and then I read Pat. Pat says there, "When we met with Bellow [phonetic] and Kennedy, and we asked them, 'Is there financial problems?' and they just kind of looked at each other and said nothing or just kind of, 'Well, we don't know,'" and just wording.

[01:21:31]

That letter came out with Ed Moreno, when he met with the lady. She said, "Well, you know, there's some financial problems."

"What financial problems? Show me the financials," because that's the way Ed is. This was years later. And she couldn't produce any.

ESPINO: There was no hard evidence. So the accusation was that you were mishandling funds?

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes, even after thirteen years of perfect financial statements. So in my mind, I'm clear, but I'm including all those papers in there for the future, because—

ESPINO: What they show is people supporting your side of the story.

ARRIOLA: Well, and then the fact that there was nothing came about legally.

ESPINO: Nothing.

ARRIOLA: Nothing. If there had been a penny lost, it would come out.

ESPINO: That deeply hurt you, that whole issue?

ARRIOLA: Well, sure. But that was besides. I was satisfied that during those years that I was there, I had 18,000 children go through the program.

ESPINO: You remodeled it, revamped the program.

ARRIOLA: Did it all, took over the kitchen at Pacoima Lutheran Hospital, of which I was a board member of, and I didn't mention that, and when they closed up, they closed up the kitchen. The kitchen was about 4,000 square foot. And the guy, John, the minister that ran the hospital, said, "Ralph, go ahead. Just figure out what you can pay me," and we did that. And we did it.

[01:23:34]

When I went to the county schools and I says, "I want this building." I can't have—now we have almost thirty kitchens. I mean, Jesus lord. I want to make it one.

They said, "Well—." They went and looked at it. It was full of furniture. "If you can have this place cleaned up within the week, we'll do it for you."

ESPINO: Wow, that's not very much time.

ARRIOLA: I hired a lot of guys, and I says, "If it looks like crap, make it even crappier, and dump it." You know, I did what had to do. "If the hospital doesn't want it, we'll get rid of it." We did it. We had it cleaned out perfect. They came over and they couldn't believe it.

They said, "Okay." They're trying to screw me again. They came in, and it took them about two weeks to get the kitchen done, and from there we fed every one of those. We fed everybody from Castaic [phonetic] and even that black community—I forget it—that's out there. It's been there for years where the blacks used to go and have their—in the thirties and twenties—used to have their parties.

ESPINO: No, I hadn't ever heard of that place.

ARRIOLA: Oh, god.

ESPINO: You can't remember the name?

ARRIOLA: It's way back in the [unclear].

ESPINO: Oh, gosh, no.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: No, no, no.

ARRIOLA: Gosh. I'll think about it and I'll let you know.

ESPINO: Yes, oh, that would be great.

[01:25:25]

ARRIOLA: Anyway, so we went back there, and Antonovich was the supervisor, and they had a real nice park that they built back in the twenties, thirties, and I asked, "I want part of it, give me a piece of it, just for a building," and he did. So we were sending stuff out, although there was a little kitchen there, because it was so far away. But Castaic, Cahuenga [phonetic], I mean, I had the biggest area of any Head Start program, and we got it done. We got it done.

I had this little black guy that was my nutritionist when I first went in, and we had a warehouse here on Blythe [phonetic] on Kewin [phonetic]. I said, "What kind of stuff are you putting on?"

"Oh, very good stuff, only the best."

Jesus Christ, I went back there one day and I look at the crap that was going out, bars of nutritional candy. Oh, see, these are all—boy, they're—[Spanish phrase.] Well, I think it was the end of the semester, and at the end of the semester, he was gone.

Then I hired this young lady who had come in to run one of the kitchens [unclear]. Janice was so terrific. I don't know if she's still doing it. Or I don't know what their thing is anymore. But we redid the whole program.

ESPINO: The food program as well.

ARRIOLA: Yes.

ESPINO: Wow.

ARRIOLA: Oh, yes. The kitchen was the most beautiful kitchen.

ESPINO: Did you get any press around any of that?

[01:27:35]

ARRIOLA: No, never thought about it at the time. There was so much being done.

ESPINO: Did you ever evaluate if you saved money by centralizing the food production?

ARRIOLA: Oh, she was very good about money.

ESPINO: But I mean did you ever do any studies to actually—

ARRIOLA: Well, in the fact that we were within our budget all the time, I ran a tight program. It wasn't a chintzy program. It wasn't a—

ESPINO: Shoestring. It doesn't look like it was a shoestring program.

ARRIOLA: I could have given my staff more money, but I didn't. I could have cut back on staff and to pay people more. Maybe that was a mistake, but that's what I did.

Money, for me, was for children, nobody else. And I was with them for eighteen years.

The most money I ever got was actually the last three years. I had finally gotten \$43,000 a year.

ESPINO: That was your salary, \$43,000?

ARRIOLA: Yes, yes, because the money was all going for children.

ESPINO: So after that, what happened? Did you work in anything?

ARRIOLA: Well, right after that, you know, I finished my program with the psychiatrist. Then I got a call after the '94 earthquake from this lady that I knew, and she said, "Ralph,

I need some supervisors I can trust. Would you come and work for us at the state Department of Emergency Services?" She gave me again the biggest damn area, everything from Mulholland to Acton [phonetic] over the hill along the county lines, picking up Ventura, coming down cutting across Mulholland, and I had about twenty people working for me on the earthquake program.

[01:30:01]

I was with them—I was one of the last ones that left. I don't know. I did what I had to do. I was reliable. I didn't play games. And, in fact, during the last, oh, I'd say, the last six months, we were down to three or four people after we had hundreds of people working with us before the earthquake, and it was about two, three, four years later.

I had my surgery, the spine, and she says, "This is going to take a little longer, Ralph. I'm going to give you—." I forget how long it was. She gave me a big chunk of sick leave, you know. She was an older lady, very nice. I was delighted. I mean, I was thankful.

Then I left there, and this buddy of mine, John Hall, who we had worked in the same area developing programs for dropouts, Options for Youth, one of the biggest damn programs there is right now, and he's got a ranch now where he takes the kids, so many kids every so often. He called me up and he said, "Man, I need your help. I've got this kind of crap going on, and I want you to help me."

So for four years I was with him, and I visited the centers, I reported back to him, I also saw what was going on in the board. His wife hates me, but I don't give a damn,

but I could see where she was going. She wanted more control. She loved having \$500 tea parties, yes, at the Beverly Hilton. Yes, that kind of shit.

[01:32:58]

But he now has dropout programs for profit, and she runs the nonprofit programs and he runs the ones for profit. But he's in very bad shape right now. I told him, "Quit, John. You're going to kill yourself."

"Ralph, as long as I can provide programs for kids, I'm going to do it."

That was our last meeting about two years ago, and he was already feeling bad, and then I found out he had a stroke, and I haven't seen him since then. We talked a couple of times. But it's going to kill him. You put all your time in, and everybody, everybody opposes you, the union, the staff, the parents, the goddamn state, the goddamn feds. You've got to take all their shit and stay focused on where you're going, and as long as you're not stealing the goddamn money, there's nothing they can do but give you a hard time.

ESPINO: Why is that kind of work important, or why was it important to you?

ARRIOLA: [cries] It's kids, it's young people.

ESPINO: Did you see yourself in those kids?

ARRIOLA: Oh, sure, sure. Sure. When we came to the Valley in '48, '47, when Dad died, and they sent me to Lamona Street School, Van Nuys, Lamona Street School, the Mexican, at night we could not pass without having the cops get on our ass about crossing Victory Boulevard and sure as hell couldn't go on the other side of Van Nuys Boulevard, so you were in the *barrio* area, you know. I wish I knew what it had been like in a different situation.

ESPINO: What do you mean?

ARRIOLA: Well, I just don't feel we got enough of the basics or enough of the better teachers, more committed to what they were presenting.

ESPINO: When you were growing up, you mean?

[01:36:21]

ARRIOLA: Yes. The funny part of going to Lamona Street School was the first day. I think I told you about my brother and his best friend worked for a lady millionaire.

ESPINO: Oh, yes.

ARRIOLA: And we drive up in this goddamn limousine, with a guy sitting in front with an open—and we're in the back. All the damn kids are looking at us. *Ay, yi, yi.* We ran home for a week. [laughter]

ESPINO: Oh, that's funny. Yes, that's a great story.

ARRIOLA: So, yes, just kids.

ESPINO: You also said, and you mentioned this, sort of not this actual statement, but kind of the idea that you made decisions based on the greater good, like decisions that maybe some people might have been unhappy with, but you were always looking at the bigger picture.

ARRIOLA: I was trying to make Head Start the number-one program in the country, and we were. I really, really believe it, because I immediately changed what they were trying. They were *cascarones*. That's education? No. "You guys are going to learn something so you can teach something."

ESPINO: Have you ever seen any of those students today? They must be adults now.

ARRIOLA: You know, I don't know. They're around. They're around, 18,000 kids around here, I know they are. They got their own kids now. But I would love to see—I had this folder. I'm going to try and find that folder. I was looking to put together a brochure for us, and I was going around and I was taking pictures of kids and da, da, da.
[01:38:16]

Then one day on a slide, there was a kid on top and there was this little girl standing there looking back and looking like—she was beautiful. She was cute. But she wasn't a [unclear]—she was perfect for what I wanted. I saw her and I started shooting pictures, and then later on when I developed them. Wow. She's the one. I'd love to see that little girl again. I'd love to see her.

ESPINO: What did she convey? What was it you were trying to capture?

ARRIOLA: That child that needed—to me, she was the perfect little girl that I needed to put some effort into and into making her life a little more successful. [cries] That's what we were there for, to develop them.

ESPINO: That's beautiful. I think we're going to end it soon. Is there something that we didn't talk about that you want to—

ARRIOLA: No. But let me tell you now that I got started.

ESPINO: Let me pause it.

[interruption]

ESPINO: Okay.

ARRIOLA: Now that I got started with you, I'm going to use those two little tape recorders and I'm going to go through the stuff as I'm doing it, and I'm going to put stuff,

and I'm going to to go buy a bunch of manila folders, and it doesn't look like it, but I've already done separation.

ESPINO: Yes, I can tell. No, I saw a lot of organizing.

[01:40:44]

ARRIOLA: I'm going to—in batches, there will be tapes with it—maybe it's the old tape, but [unclear] you guys got equipment—explaining.

Did I tell you about the UAW, that I'm going to meet with them?

ESPINO: No.

ARRIOLA: Oh.

ESPINO: Oh, that's great news.

ARRIOLA: I left all that stuff out there. I called the girls from the UAW, and they're all now doing their own thing, you know. They left the UAW years ago, like all of us, but Carmen remembers stuff. Carmen's really good. And she said, "Ralph, I'm going to give you the names of three people who were in the retirement program."

And I said, "Oh, okay."

She said, "I don't know if the phone numbers are good anymore, but try it."

First one I tried, Cuauhtémoc, and I explained to him what I'm trying to do, and he said, "Wow." You know what? He was the president or is the president now of the retirement. They meet once a month. They just had their annual dance at the Odyssey. And he said, "Wow, that's wonderful. Yeah, we'll help you. Come on the ninth of January, is our meeting. I'll introduce you, you can explain what you're doing, you can show stuff that you might have, or you can, if you bring somebody from UCLA, if they want to talk to us." They're anxious to do it.

ESPINO: Oh, that's wonderful.

ARRIOLA: So I'll work on it. I'll let you know what I'm doing.

ESPINO: Okay.

[01:42:37]

ARRIOLA: I'll work especially with Lizzie or whatever her name is.

ESPINO: Lizette.

ARRIOLA: Lizette.

ESPINO: You can call her Lizzie, I'm sure, or Liz.

ARRIOLA: But I'm not going to stop now that I got it started. I found a letter from Wayne State, I think I told you before, that I got stuff at the archives in Detroit. So I want to send them stuff too. I'll duplicate stuff and send it there, about the local.

So that's where I'm at. I'll try to add more detail to everything. I'm going to invite the guys to come over before the ninth meeting so that they can see what I'm doing and where it's going. I want to build some trust in them, because all this—look at me. Look at me. You're taping my children. [cries] And I don't think any of them have as much crap as I got.

ESPINO: Well, it's going to a good home. They're not being left in the, I don't know, the gutter.

ARRIOLA: And I keep finding stuff. Sunday at Helen and my son Victor, we went out—he's the hardest one for me. He's the hardest one for me. He says, "Well, what are you doing to—these people are all taking your stuff, Dad. What are you going to do? How are you going to control them? What do you have? What did they offer you?" All that crap, and he really came down on me.

“It’s okay, Vic. I’m okay. I’ve got people helping me, and I know where I’m going.” And there’s just so much more. So I says, “It’s okay, Vic. There’s no real money in this, but if I can build up a little something that the boys will have and Evan will have if they go to UCLA.”

He says, “Now they’re going to UCLA. Oh, shit.” [laughs]

ESPINO: Right, and it’s the same principle of what you started with in education, because these documents are going to teach a lot of important history. And the university, they don’t pay for these kinds of collections, but what they do is invest in preserving them. Like, for example, something like this that’s falling apart, well, they’ll put it in special envelopes, and they’ll put it away, and they’ll make it available. So that’s where the investment is.

[01:46:06]

ARRIOLA: And I understand that, and I want to add more detail to them.

ESPINO: That would be great, yes.

ARRIOLA: More detail.

ESPINO: I think that’s a great idea. But is there anything else right now that you want to leave on the record before we stop? Is there something that we didn’t talk about?

ARRIOLA: No, no.

ESPINO: Or maybe reflecting on how your life changed because of the Chicano Movement. We talked about your union activism, but we didn’t talk about how what impact the Chicano Movement had on your life.

ARRIOLA: Well, everything had an impact on my life, and all those things are still working with me. The union thing, I mean, that was tremendous. I mean, the people I

met, the people, Walter Reuther meeting with him, threatening him, to be the three of us who met Humphrey at the airport.

[01:47:14]

There used to be a lady that was very active, had a show, Alicia Sanchez, years ago, a TV program. She was so cute, so beautiful. [unclear] she was lesbian. All my loves, and Ruthie was the same way. [laughs] But anyway, she and I were the only ones at the airport when Humphrey came in. So and then meeting him in Washington with the Teamsters and the UAW, yes, running the campaign for Bobby Kennedy.

Oh, I did something. I don't know if I did it for you, but I did something for Lizette and Angel.

ESPINO: Angel, yes.

ARRIOLA: When they were going to leave, I said, "I have something for you guys."

ESPINO: Oh, you gave them a poster.

ARRIOLA: Yes. You heard about it?

ESPINO: You told me. Yes.

ARRIOLA: Oh. Did I give you one?

ESPINO: You did give me one, yes, thanks.

ARRIOLA: So anyway, I've had a wonderful time in my life. [cries] I didn't become rich, but I did what I wanted to do. I gave back. That's it. Goodbye. Good night. Good afternoon.

ESPINO: Thank you. Thank you so much. It's been a great experience for me. That was a beautiful last—

[End of December 20, 2013 interview]