

Henderson Libraries

Southwest Oral History Association Mini Grant Project

Arturo Ochoa

Oral History of Arturo Ochoa

**A contributor to the
Southwest Oral History Association
Mini-Grant
for the
Henderson Historical Society**

**conducted by
Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm, Henderson Libraries and
Fredric Watson, Henderson Historical Society**

August 14, 2015

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Today is August 14, 2015. We're at the Paseo Verde branch of Henderson District Public Libraries in Henderson, Nevada. My name is Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm and I'm here with Rick Watson of the Henderson Historical Society interviewing former Robert Taylor Elementary Principal, Art Ochoa. Thank you so much for joining us, Art.*

Art Ochoa: It's a pleasure.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *First of all, Art, I'd like to hear a little bit about your background and career. What interested you in pursuing a career in education and how did you become a principle?*

Art Ochoa: Well, let me digress into my youth when I was in high school. I went to school in Tucson, Arizona. I attended school in the south side, which was the barrio. It was the area where the majority of the community was Hispanic, a very low-income community with lots of excellent resources in our high school. We had an incredible auto shop, an incredible wood shop, an incredible home economics department, everything that was in place to help the Hispanic community be the manual workforce of tomorrow. Their academics were there but they were typically not very accessible to us. Even despite all this, though, I was able to get into the advanced placement classes through most of my high school career, which was shortened, I'll explain. I was in many of the, of the advanced placement classes and, as a matter of fact, as a Junior, for the Senior year on the year there was one half of a credit and it could have been in PE, it could have been in any subject, in order to get my high school diploma. And that's as a Junior I had almost enough credits to graduate. It was at the end of my Junior year my interest was in becoming a doctor. I wanted to be a surgeon. I could taste it. I could feel it. I do a lot of woodwork, and electrical work, and plumbing work and felt that the human body had all these systems within it that my experiences as a carpenter and electrician, as a plumber, would assist me in doing some of the, some of the exploratory surgeries and transplants because that's when we were starting to get involved with the transplants. And, I thought, I can do this. I can bring something into this profession. I wanted to be a surgeon. So as I was approaching the end of my Junior year, I went to see my counselor because counselors know everything and their supposed to advise you. I went to see my counselor and I was young and dumb. I probably said something very, very nebulous. I asked him something like, what do I do next? You know, I really wasn't clear, I'm sure. So the counselor went to his file cabinet, picked up my folder, thumbed through the folder, and all this time he's saying, "Uhhuh, good", as he's pointing to different things that are inside my folder. I guess all the results of the standardized testing, my class schedules, my notifications or notices that I was taking advanced placement courses, everything was in there. It was my history in, in those files. And he's constantly making comments, "Uhhuh, good, nice, nice", all these good comments. Finally he folded the file up, closed the file, put it back in his file cabinet. And he came back to his desk, he sat at his chair and he put his hands on the desk and his chin on his hands, and he looked right at me and he said, "I think you should study to be a mechanic". You know, this was a blow to my ego because in my heart of hearts I was going to be a surgeon and there's nothing, nothing wrong

with being a mechanic. I love working on cars and I respect people who know how to make my car, keep it running. They're, we, we need quality mechanics. But I had my visions on other things. But here I was being informed that I should be a mechanic. So I thanked the counselor. I didn't ask for any further explanation or, or elaboration and I thanked him and left his office; walked out of his office; went out to the, to the campus and walked off campus and never returned to school. I didn't do a formal dropout. I just never went back. So I instantly went to work full time and worked with, with Circle K Stores. Initially I used to wrap produce and then I went into delivering the produce and then I went into making sandwiches, the sandwiches you can buy at the 7-Eleven because it was a higher paying job. And then eventually I went into delivering the sandwiches and was constantly going off in the job world for 7-Eleven and eventually ended up taking inventories of stores and then became a manager of a 7-Eleven or Circle K Store. This, this went on but it was not the kind of job I could really raise a family. We didn't have a good medical program and my wife was expecting at the time. So, eventually I quit my, my, my job with Circle K and went to work for the copper mines in Tucson, Arizona. I drove an 85-ton dump truck and it was a big compromise. And it was, it was a wonderful job, great pay, great benefits, wonderful insurance. Everything was good except that we had a rotating shift. I would work two weeks day shift, two weeks swing shift, two weeks graveyard shift. Every two weeks you're changing shifts. And every...you'd also get days off in the middle so if you're on a day shift that's fine, but if you're on a swing shift or a graveyard shift and get two days off, you try to do things according what normal people do, normal schedules. But then you've got to get your body to bed in different hours in order to be ready for work. It was a very difficult thing. There was a high degree, a high percentage of divorce in the mines, copper mines, high divorce rate, lots of substance abuse, lots of alcoholism. It was just a difficult thing to have to change your, your entire body program every two weeks. And just trying to change your sleep schedule and it's very difficult. So I worked for two years and eventually came to the conclusion that I couldn't do this. I just could not do this for thirty years. So I came home and told my wife, I can't. She asked me, "What do you want to do?" So I told her I want to go to college and become an educator. My wife was, was very understanding. She just looked at me and held up a fictitious piece of paper and she says, "You don't have a piece of paper." I didn't have a diploma to go to college. So I told her, well, I want to go get my GED and with a GED I'll go to college. So that was a beginning because my wife instantly jumped on board. She said she would get a full time job. She would assist in supporting the family. That I could decide whenever I could and that we would get through it. That from the very beginning I had my wife's encouragement and support, part of the solution. So I went and took my GED test which is one of those moments that I, I, I can remember as it was on video in my mind because it was, it was a, it was a very painful experience. I walked into the GED office, introduced myself, and the lady was sitting behind her desk. Asked me how she could help me. I told her I was there to take the test. And she started taking out some pieces of paper and said, "Okay, we can register you for a class for two weeks and after two weeks you can take the first exam and then you'll go to another class for two weeks and take the second exam and take another two weeks of class and take the third exam. They had

divided the GED into the Math portion, the English portion, the Social Studies and the History portion so there were various exams. I told her I really don't want to do that. I want to take the test now. She told me that had not been done after there was a law against it and she said she wasn't sure. So she called someone, I guess GED Central Office, and I could hear her discussing, "Yes, he's sitting right here. Yes, he wants to take the test." And then she said, "Yes, I know. He's going to fail but he wants to take the test." And eventually she hung up the phone and looked at me and she says, "Well, you can take the test but you're going to fail." She says, "It's a difficult test. You've been out of school for sev..." It was six or seven years that I'd been out of high school. She says, "You're going to fail." I said can I just take the test? So she, she did her paperwork, gave me the exa...a blank exam form. I went into a little room and took the test; finished the test; came back into her office and handed it to her, and asked her for the next one. She looked at me with these big, brown eyes and full of compassion, she says, "You're working so hard, but you're going to fail." I said, just give me the test. So she gave me the test; I went into the little room and took the next test and finished that. It took 45 minutes to an hour in this little room taking the test. I came out and gave her the next test and she says, "You're working so hard, you're going to fail. I feel so bad." I said, just give me the test. It was difficult. I had to ask her to give me the test. I took four of the exams and each time I came out to get rid of the test or my finished exam, she would tell me, "You're going to fail." So I had one exam left to finish the GED. So rather than take the last one, it was already past noon, so I told her I was going to go home and have some lunch and come back after lunch and take the final, the final test. She looked at me, gave me the same line, "You're working so hard but you're going to fail. But you can take the test and then we'll work with you on signing up for the classes so you take the, the, the two weeks of classes then take one exam. Well, I went home and the...all of the calmness of "you're going to fail" got to me. I felt sorry for myself and did not go back for the final exam after eating my lunch. But I slept on it and felt that I needed to get a true answer and the only way to get a true answer was to take the test and see if I was going to fail. So the next day I did go and take the final exam, the last exam, and as I handed it to her she looked at me with these eyes of support and, and, and in kindness, real kindness, and she says, "You've worked so hard and I know that you really want this..." she says, "...and when you fail, we will start signing you up on the two-week class and we'll work with you so that you can get your GED." I says, okay, what's next? She says, "Well, you get the results in 4 to 6 weeks. You get it in the mail and in there you'll get a letter that explains how you did and give you directions on what you can and can't do after that." So I went home and waited and waited and waited for the first four weeks and we went into the fifth week and nothing. Every day I'd go out to the mail or check the mail on the kitchen table – nothing, nothing. The fifth week ended and now we're in the sixth week. A couple of days went by in the sixth week and I got home from, from my day shift job for that two-week session. And my wife was not home, the mail was on, on the front ta...on the kitchen table, so I went out...there was a note that said she'd be back in an hour or so, that she'd gone shopping. So I went out to the mailbox and pulled out the mail and inside the mailbox was our correspondence that there was a manila envelope. And I looked at it and it was from the GED office. So I was holding this envelope in

my hands and it was hot. I dropped the envelope on the floor because it burned my fingers, it was hot. And so I sheepishly looked around to see if any of my neighbors saw me drop this envelope and then quickly ducked down and picked up this hot envelope and took it inside. I just set it on the table and went through the rest of the mail and kind of waited and waited and waited for my wife to come home. Eventually she came home and I called her into the kitchen and I said, dear, can you open this? And I slid the envelope towards her. My wife was a very, very, very astute person. She looked at the envelope, just cocked her head a little bit, saw who it was addressed from, who was, who was the sender, and then she pushed it right back and then she says, "No, you open it." So I opened it. I had support now. So I opened it and I pulled out the letter inside of this envelope and as I'm pulling this letter out, the first word was "Congratulations" and at that instant I realized that my future was now wide open to be whatever I wanted to be. Initially I wanted to be a surgeon but at this point I was married and had one child and I could not in my mind go to college for six, seven, eight, nine years to become a surgeon. So I went in the next direction and that was when I went into Education. I became an educator because I wanted to make sure the children, regardless of their ethnicity, would have the encouragement and the support from their, from their teachers, from their, from their, from their schools. I wanted to make sure that I could be, I could be there to make sure that every child was given the encouragement to reach for the stars.

Rick Watson: *Where'd you go to school? Did you enroll at the U of A?*

Art Ochoa: I, I enrolled at the University of Arizona in Tucson and had just a wonderful experience there. I went through the bilingual bloc. I am, I am Hispanic and bilingual. I speak English, Spanish fluently so I went through the bilingual bloc. But in Tucson there was such a large Hispanic community that getting our...even though I was in the bilingual bloc, my diploma does not say "bilingual", it's just a diploma. You know, my, my, my degree in, in Education, it's, it just says "Education". Here in Nevada it does specify "bilingual" when, when you go through the bilingual classes. So I was in the bilingual bloc and graduated, came...at the alumni building at the University of Arizona, they would post all the job openings across the country. So my classmates and I would go look at all the lists of what cities, states, districts were hiring. And we'd sign up for interviews because these recruiters would come to interview us right there on the campus. Now I would look down the lists and nothing would jump out at me. My friends, my, my, my cohorts, they had all kinds of interviews scheduled because they wanted to get a job. At that time, in 1979, there was, there were too many teachers in Tucson, Arizona, and not enough jobs. So getting a job in Tucson was, was not possible. So I would look at the, at the bulletin board looking for the possible openings and I would not sign up for any interviews. Until out of nowhere, and I have no idea why, I'm going down the list and there's Clark County. It was a list there. I signed up for an interview for Clark County. That's the only one. Now please understand, I was married, had a child and I needed a job, but I only signed up for one interview, for Clark County School District. It was very interesting because the day before my interview the interviewer, Rosshoff Harwood, I believe his name was, I'm not sure, called me up and he said, "Mr. Ochoa, we, we have some, some problems here. We don't need

ele...elementary school teachers, so I'm cancelling your interview." And he says, "That way I'll be able to go home a day early." And he says, "We need secondary but not elementary." And immediately I went into the, "I need your help, sir. If you will just interview me, I know you don't have a position for me, but if you will interview me and give me feedback on how I can interview better", I said, "this is my first interview; I have not had an interview before and if you would just do me this favor, I would be so grateful to you." And I guess I crammed it on thick enough that he agreed. He agreed to catch me. I says I'll come before your interview schedule. I'll come during your lunch time. I'll come after your interview schedule. I'll take you out to dinner if you'll interview me. You know, I was trying to get an interview. And, and at that time I knew there was no job. I wanted feedback. I wanted to be told what I could do to make myself more marketable for some...another school district. Well, I met...we set up to meet him before his regular interview schedule so it was something like 7:00 in the morning on the University campus. I remember walking across the campus. At 7:00 there was nobody there. I'm walking across these empty sidewalks, there's no one. Then off in the distance I see a, a, a fellow walking towards me and as, as he got closer I could see that he was wearing a, a white shirt and tie. It was summer in Tucson so no suits, no coats, it was just a white shirt and a tie and he was carrying a briefcase and I was wearing a white shirt and tie also. And we kind of met at, at, at, on the sidewalk, and he said, "Oh, you got an interview?" And he says, "No, I'm doing an interview." So I introduced myself because I was his person. We walked and it was very interesting because we, we sat in this little cubicle with a table and a, and a...Mr. Hardwick, he sat down and put his stuff down and he sat way back in his chair, just kind of crossed his arms and he, he looked at me across the table. I got him up early. And he wasn't too excited about talking to me. And he just kind of said, "Well, tell me about yourself." So I started telling him about myself and my university program and somewhere in, in, in my dialogue, he heard that I was bilingual. And at that point he sat up in his chair and he reached into his case and got out some papers and started doing some writing and then he starts asking questions. And I could see enthusiasm in his face because now he's interviewing me. He finishes interviewing me and he's writing all kinds of notes on his paper and after the interview he says, "I can't make you any promises or, or give you any hope" he says, "but before I left the office in, in Las Vegas, they were talking about a new position. " He says, "I don't...I didn't hear a lot of it but it has something to do with bilingual and it has something to do with teaching elementary." He says, "I don't have any details", he says, "but when I get back", he says, "I get back tonight after my interview schedule", he says, "I'll get back tonight and I'll report into my office tomorrow morning." He says, "I'll get some information and give you a call." And true to his word, about 9:00 a.m., my phone rings the next...this was the next day...and it's Ross Hardwick. And "Mr. Ochoa, I'd like to offer you a position." They had just opened up what they called a "Transitional Bilingual Education Program" in the, in the elementary schools and it was under the supervision of An., Andy Mipenus, Andrew Mipenus, and he was offering a position to work with children that did not...that English was not their native language. So this was exciting because Clark County didn't want me but all of a sudden the position for me just opened up out of nowhere and gave me the opportunity. So I, I came out and it was...we were very limited in

resources so I had a contract and I came out about three weeks ahead of my reporting date because I wanted to find a place to live...my wife stayed back in Tucson because she had to work in order to get me money because we had no money. So she continued working and I came with my son. He was four years old at the time. And we...he and I went to your central office. I wanted to find out who my supervisor, Mr. Martinez, was and where I could meet him because I just wanted to meet him prior to having to work for him. I wanted to get an idea of what the job was going to be like and what was expected of me. And he gave me a preview into what Clark County School District was going to be. I, I worked twenty-some years with the District and, and very, very much a company man. But when I walked in the front door of Central Office on Flamingo, there was a front desk and a, a secretary behind that front desk. I walked up to her and she says, "How can I help you?" I told her, well, I'm a new employee of the District. And she says, "Well, do you have a reporting date?" I said, yes, it's, it's in two weeks but I'd like to see if I can...if you can tell me where I can meet my supervisor. His name is Andrew Mipenus and I'd just like to meet him before my reporting time just to find out a little bit more about my job. So this, this lady who happened to be Hispanic, the secretary, looked at me and she says, "Oh, is he a custodian? Is he a janitor?" And I was very proud of my diploma and my job offer to be a teacher for the District and I emphatically told her, no, Mr. Martinez is the Supervisor of the Transitional Bilingual Education Program. She was a little bit embarrassed. And I told her, and I am a teacher. I have a Master's Degree in Education. I am a teacher. So eventually we, we kind of apologized and she looked Mr. Martinez up, and she additionally gave me a phone number so I was able to make contact. But that gave me an idea of what things were going to be like at the Clark County School District. I'm not an activist but it just kind of seems that in, in a community we needed to really, really work with our diversity, with our cultural diversity, because this is what makes America strong. I am a very, very proud American born in northern California. I served in the Marine Corp. You know, I'm a flag waver, just very much so. But it's the immigrant community that comes and learns. After all, the United States is an immigrant country. All of us at one time were immigrants into this country. Just as an aside, I have five brothers in my family and during the Vietnam War one of my brothers was in the Army, another in the Air Force. He was killed in the Air Force. Another was in the Navy and I was in the Marine Corp. So we represented the four branches of the military for our country and I'm very, very proud of that. Just kind of one of those things that as an immigrant, my parents are immigrants, coming to this country they were able to give to this country their offspring which all of us have done things, in, in, in our, in this country. I have a brother with a PHD in Electronic Engineering who has done incredible things for government research, incredible things. I don't know because it's top secret. I don't know exactly what but he's got his PHD in Electronic Engineering. I have a Master's Degree in Education. Another one of my brothers was big into real estate and was a very, very prominent broker. Another brother works in a hospital as a physical therapist. In, in other words, none of us came to be burdens on the United States. We came to give. And, and, in retrospect, I'm now retired. I've been retired for almost ten years. I look back at my career as an educator and I cannot tell you how proud I am when I happen to run across some of my former students and I can see that

they are, they've grown up and they're doing productive things for the country. It just makes me very proud to have been a little part of their lives. But anyway, that kind of gives you an idea of why I became an educator and even though I am now retired, I still continue in, in an educator, an educator role but we can, we can discuss that a little bit later.

Rick Watson: *You know, I'm curious about your, your family, your Mom and Dad. What brought them to northern California? What line of work were they in?*

Art Ochoa: Well, I do a presentation. I call it "Yo Soy Joachim" and I describe...I do this in Spanish. I say my Father was a farmer, his Father was a farmer, his Father before him was a farmer and his Father before him was a farmer. And I too follow in the proud tradition of farmers. I'm a farmer. But in, in my presentation, I eventually, eventually I explain the various things about what growing up Imicano in the United States was all about with all the innuendos and all the opportunity to advance with a lot of racial overtones, the society at large. You know, there's many things that go into to being a minority in this country and if we can rise above it there's all kinds of opportunities to serve as role models for other children. So my Father had a second grade education in Mexico and he was a farmer. My Mother had a third grade education in Mexico. She was a stay-at-home housewife. But my Father was very adventurous as a, as a young teenager. The family owned their own land and it was custom, customary, when you had a young man growing up, when it got to be a certain age, the Father would outline a plot of land, maybe a half an acre or an acre, and say, "You farm that in addition to farming the family lands, but whatever you harvest from that parcel of land, that's yours. It was a way of, of kind of sharing, you know, the earning, the earning understandings on how to work for a living. So my Father did this for a year and wanted nothing of that. Literally, he and two friends ran away from home in Mexico. They lived in a very small town in the interior of Mexico, Mamo Be Senada near, near Sa Hueva Senada, which is one of the bigger cities. And he and his buddies, one, one night, I guess, they packed all their belongings in a little burlap bag and left. And as they were walking to the next city, which is about 150 miles to the next big city, they borrowed a donkey to carry their sacks of, of everything that they owned with them. They borrowed a donkey. Their intention was when they got to, to the next city they were going to turn the donkey to just return. They had their own GPS devices on their, on their heads, I guess and they would just return to, to the land. But at that time my Grandfather was the, he was the Osgada da Ora, the mayor of this little town. The towns were connected with telegraph. So my Grandfather telegraphed the next town and told them, "If you see these boys, throw them in jail. I'm on my way." (Chuckling) So my Grandfather got a horse and he takes off after these boys and, sure enough, they were in jail in the next village. And then my Grandfather apparently whipped them severely, all three of them, and then tied ropes around, around their necks and spaced them and then tied the rope onto his saddle horn. And they had to walk back, him riding the horse, my Grandfather riding the horse, and the three boys walking behind very sheepishly, carrying their belongings. So my Father got home and didn't...the dream did not die...several months later he again left, but this time he did not take a donkey. He just left and made it into northern California. And I, I, I see a lot of humor in this because he

arrived in northern California. There he worked in the tomato fields as a laborer, working the lands of the rich land owners. So he was still a farmer, now that it was someone else's land and he's still farming. I was born in that tomato field. I, I am told that my first bed was a tomato box, a crate that they used to harvest the tomatoes in. My Mother said she put a little blanket on the bottom and then fold a blanket half way across the top to shade the sun out and put me between the rows of tomato plants while she was picking tomatoes and my Father was picking tomatoes. And her parts of north, northern California, what town would that be?

2nd Male Voice: Greenville, California, Greenville in Monterey County.

Rick Watson: *I'm thinking about, about John Steinbeck's story...*

2nd Male Voice: Yes, yes.

Rick Watson: *...of northern California.*

Art Ochoa: You know, my Mom tells me that they, they lived in a, in a little hovel that was made out of wood with chinks between the planks of wood. In the summer they'd have flow-through ventilation which was wonderful, but in the winter the gusts of winter would come through and it was miserable. But that was a, that was our first home on, on the farm. Eventually my Father was able to get a job in, in, in the city, in Los Angeles. He worked for the Galacamp Shoe Warehouse. Galacamp's is a big, big shoe company and he worked in the, in the warehouse. He worked, he did that for several years, but eventually he...we left California because the, the schools that we attended there were very much gang infested. My brothers came one day, they were in middle school. They were bragging about what happened at school that day. A young man had been beat severely with the milk crates that, that were...the delivery crates that the milkman used. They were metal, heavy duty, strong, heavy crates that this kid had been hit many times, repeatedly. He was a beaten pulp. So my brothers come home bragging about what they saw, about this kid getting beat up. My parents hearing this decided no way are we going to stay here. So they started making preparations and that summer we moved to Tucson, Arizona, which was a little bit quieter community. So I, I started my sixth grade in Tucson, Arizona and we, we lived in the South Side, which is the Barrio, the Hispanic part of town, and grew up in Tucson.

Rick Watson: *So you were going to go to work for, Andy Martinez would be your supervisor. Was he, was he down at Summers Acres in those days?*

Art Ochoa: No, no. He, at that time, he, he had an office somewhere. What kind of bothers me is that he was a teacher on teacher's pay scale but he was supervising the Transitional Bilingual Education Program. He was an administrator but on a teacher's salary which is kind of weird. Eventually things changed with the District where if you had an administrator position you received administrator pay. Things did change. But at that time he was a teacher and he had his office somewhere and we was assigned to different schools. I, I, I worked at, at Halley Hewetson and Walter Bracken. I would work half day at Halley Hewetson, half day at Walter

Bracken, working with children that...it was a pull-out program, just working with them on English language development. So it was my privilege to work with Andy but after my first year, what I could see is that there was no future in bilingual education at that time in the Clark County School District. So for my following year I happened to...for, for some reason I ended up talking to Jim Schiff, who was then principal at Madison Sixth Grade Center. And so Jim Schiff and I had a nice conversation and offered me a position as a teacher and I said sure. There was no pay for working nothing but at the end of the next year I was at Madison Sixth Grade Center. It was a very informal process. There I worked in the sixth grade center in the middle of the west side and saw a lot of things there having to do with racial profiling, with African American children. And just started seeing the problem as a whole on, on how the Clark County School District really needed to work on developing better ways of educating our children, all of them; our black kids, our white kids, our brown kids, all of them needed a quality education. And from what I could see is that there was some disparity. So I worked at Madison Sixth Grade Center for nine years. But during this time I started taking classes here at the University of Nevada, UNLV, in educational administration. Finally, after, after several years, I believe it was in '87, I got my degree in educational administration and then started applying for administrative positions here in the district, and was lucky enough to be hired on to be a dean at Rancho High School. I loved that. It was...and I mean it sincerely...it was crisis management which is incredible training for any building administrator. You get in there and no matter what you face, you're talking to a student that is angry, a teacher that is angry or a parent that is angry, and your job is to remediate and administer justice and enforce district policy. But do it in such a way that everyone understands this is, these are the rules. And so being a dean was incredible training in crisis management and I look back at all the lessons I learned and, and see that it made me a stronger administrator because I learned how to deal in crisis, in crisis management.

Rick Watson: *Who was the principal at Rancho in those days?*

Art Ochoa: I can, I can see him. Uh, he's a tall African American. I don't recall his name.

Rick Watson: *I can't recall either.*

Art Ochoa: Oh, yeah, Mr. Brown, Brown was his last name.

Rick Watson: *That's right.*

2nd Male Voice: He'd been at Valley.

Art Ochoa: Yes, yes, I don't recall his first name but Mr. Brown.

2nd Male Voice: We'll fill that blank in later.

Art Ochoa: Yes. It'll come to me. Anyway, I, I was at Rancho High School as dean for two years. Loved the position. Absolutely adored it. I was...Rancho High School has several minority groups in there so there were turfs. We, we had our Finoyos that were in one turf; our,

our 28th Streeters on another corner; our, what is it, the Donna Street Crypts were another corner; all these social groups were just part of the student population and one of the things I learned is that these young men had honor. And if you treated them with honor, they would treat you with honor. It was wonderful to, to learn how to interact with what other people considered to be the problem kids. I had no difficulty in administering and enforcing the rules and regulations as long as I treated them with respect. And it, it was just, it was a good lesson for me to learn that because those young people taught me to respect all of our students. So, you know, I had just a wonderful training in administration as the dean. I was there for two years and then I was offered a position as an assistant principal at, at David Clark's and Cynthia Cunningham Elementary Schools. I was an assistant principal but my, my time there was short-lived. I just had a very short time to learn because before, oh, before the year was over I was promoted to a principalship and I reported to my first job as a principal on April 1st to Robert Taylor. I believe it was a, a in '90, 1990. So I arrived at my first position as a principal. Now I'm green as you can be. April 1st and all I could think of, I went right in my office; there's going to be somebody there and say, "April Fools. We didn't mean it." (Laughing) But it was not so. I was the principal at Robert Taylor on April 1st and I went in there and met Frieda Harsey, the Office Manager. This woman was incredible. She was the office manager and my trainer. She trained me how to be a principal. She taught me the ins and outs. She taught me how to be effective. It was wonderful training. I owe Frieda Harsey so much because she was an awesome lady. Well, I arrived in, in, in Henderson and prior to me arriving in Henderson I lived in Las Vegas. I was from the "Big City" and I looked at Henderson as Hooterville. And now I'm in Hooterville on my first job. So I'm asking Frieda Harsey about what is the city like. And before you get upset with me about referring to it as Hooterville, my opinion has totally changed. I now live in Henderson and I'm proud of it but at that time it just seemed it because in '79 Henderson was a small community and it was kind of silly of me, but I arrived here and instantly started making contacts with the business community, the political community, the parents and what Henderson was all about. My first day on the job I was asking Frieda about who is the movers and the shakers of Henderson. She says, "Well, we have our Mayor; we have our City Council." I said I'd like to meet some of these people. She says, "Okay." So Frieda left my office and five minutes later she comes into my office. She says, "The Mayor's waiting." So this was a surprise to me.

Rick Watson: *Who was the mayor?*

Art Ochoa: McMasterson. It was wonderful. Frieda gave me directions to get to City Hall and I arrived in City Hall and knocked on the door and walked into the Mayor's office. And Lorna Kesterson stood up, an elegant, a very elegant woman, extends a warm handshake and welcome you to Henderson with just this incredible smile and, and a feeling of you're welcome to be part of us. We're here, we're here to help you. And, you know, she is just doing all this wonderful introduction and in a seat next to her was a gentleman in overalls. And after she had done her introductions of herself, she says, "And this is my husband." So I met her husband. It was wonderful to meet down-to-earth people. So we sat down and started talking. She asked

me a lot of questions about who I was and what I had planned to do and she promised me that she would do anything she could to help Robert Taylor. All I had to do is call and I was just amazed at my first day on the job and I'm meeting the Mayor and she's telling me, "Call me". I love it. It was just incredible. And throughout my, my entire career at Robert Taylor that's what I saw with everybody. Everybody had a vested interest in the children and I, I so much appreciated that I wasn't alone at doing the job. Everybody was helping. The entire community was helping. One of my fondest memories of Lorna Kesterson is the season was starting to get cold and many of my kids were shivering. They didn't have jackets and it was a very delinquent community. So I called up the Mayor. I says, Mayor, can you help me? I need some sweaters and some coats for the kids. This is a Monday and, and Lorna and he instantly says, "Yes, we will help you." She says, "Today is Monday. Can you come on Friday to pick, to pick them up?" I said sure. Well, the week went by. Friday morning she called me real early and she said, "Mr. Ochoa, do you have a pickup truck?" I said yes, I do. She says, "Well, it may not be enough but bring it." (Chuckling) So I arrived at City Hall in my pickup truck. There were boxes and boxes and boxes of clothing, sweaters and jackets, that Lorna had done a clothing drive to all of City Hall and arranged for me to pick them up. It was incredible. I took that, this truck, well my truck was packed high and tied down with boxes and boxes and boxes of clothing for my kids. So we instantly started a clothing bank in, in one of the storerooms and eventually that clothing bank became a food bank also and several of the merchants were donating food and clothing so that we could house stuff to give away to our kids. And I, I had worked it out with the counselor. I said I don't want you asking our parents if they need anything. But as you see them try to start asking questions about how they're doing, about how's their job and eventually, if you see that there's a need, bring them to the closet and let them take what they need. And, and that's what we did. We had a wonderful clothing and food closet that was really supported by the community in order to make it possible for our kids. So I, I, I owed so much to Lorna Kesterson and the Henderson political community. But another angel, absolute angel, was Sister Joseph Bailey, from St. Rose Hospital. During that first week that I was at Robert Taylor she made an appointment, came to see me, and she brought a stack of forms that she explained to me that whenever we had a medical issue with our children, to give them one of these forms, to give the parents a form, fill it out, and the parents would then go to St. Rose Hospital. And she explained to me that I would be of no charge, that this was just something they did for the community. And this was awesome. I remember an incident where we had a child break his arm on the playground. I mean it was visibly broken, you could see that the bone was broken in the arm. So we, the nurse did what she could. We were, we got ahold of the Dad, the Dad comes running. I went to the drawer to get a form and we had no more forms, they were gone, we had run out. So I took my business card, just my elementary school business card, and on the back I wrote, "Call me." Because the father did not speak English. He was Hispanic. He did not speak English. And I told him you take this child to the emergency room. I told him in Spanish. And when you get to the emergency room give them my business card but turn it around so they can see, "Call me". I figured that way I could explain to whoever was on duty. Well, no calls, no calls, no calls, nothing. I was kind of nervous

about this child but the next morning I was out in the parking lot just surveying, watching for this child to come to school. And eventually I saw him walking with his father and the little boy was in a cast so I went out there to talk to dad and I asked him how did it go? He says, "Very good, very good." This is all in Spanish. I said, they didn't call me. He says, "No, when I showed them your card they just took him right in this room and they..." He was very swollen so the dad explained that they gave him some medications and they put him in a sling and they says take him home for (I think) it was like three hours, give the medication a chance to bring down the swelling so then they...rather than have the boy sitting in the waiting room with all the other people that...they said just take him home, be very gentle. They had him in a sling. So dad took him home and brought him back and they x-rayed, cast it, everything and made sure that he was...that there was nothing else wrong than a broken bone and I said did they ask you for insurance cards? "No." Did they ask you for money? "No." Did they ask you anything? He says, "No. They didn't even ask me my name." That's what these people were doing at St. Rose Hospital. They were taking care of our kids. And I always, always look at the hospital with so much love because they are a reflection of what, what is good in this world. They are just incredible. Another time I sent a young man who had a vision problem to, to the hospital. Mom took him down. He had some kind of vision problem and they explained to Mom that they had no practitioners in the hospital that did that kind of eye work but they were working on it, that they would figure out something. So I called the Sister Joseph Bailey and asked her. She says, "Don't worry. We already made arrangements for it." I says what are you going to do? She says, "Well, there is a specialist in Henderson. He's not part of our hospital." I said well, are they gonna, is he going to charge you? And she says, "No. We do things for each other and he's not gonna charge." So, not only the hospital, but their connections with other people within the community just took care of the kids. If it was not a money issue it was an issue of how can we help the children? So, you know, that...there's so many stories like this of people just doing things because it's the right thing to do. The business community...I have all kinds of experience with the business community just helping me, giving me things in order to help the kids. The Bureau of Reclamations at Hoover Dam, we made contacts with them and they were incredible. They would adopt several of our families for Christmas and bring incredible loads of gifts for our children. What I would do is I'd give them the first name and the age and the sex of the child and he would go out and do shopping and get clothing, get sizes, clothing sizes. They'd bring toys and bring clothing and this was just people doing just to do it. It was incredible to see that kind of, of support. Selma Bartlett at the bank, Selma Bartlett, another angel, it didn't matter what I needed, she found a way of getting to me. It was just a phone call away. And that's, that's what I have to say about Henderson, the people care. You know, I looked initially at Henderson as being Hooterville. Eventually I saw it as a place where I needed to live because I wanted to be surrounded by this kind of humanity.

Rick Watson: *What year would that have been, like 1980, the early '80's?*

Art Ochoa: Yeah, '88, '89, '89, '90 is when I came to Henderson. So I went home after the first month of work and told my wife we have to move to Henderson. And we started looking and

eventually we did find a, a place on Pacific and Horizon and we moved to Henderson, been here fifteen years, and I'm proud. It, it's just wonderful.

Rick Watson: *You know, I notice in, in watching the news about deconsolidating the school district and it seems that Henderson has a particular interest in doing that. I think they'd like to get with...I'm talking off the top of my head...but I think they would like to get back to being something like the old Henderson School District which ended in like 1956, '57 maybe and I wondered if this, these same kinds of experiences that you're describing are partly what's behind all of it. That's interesting.*

Art Ochoa: Yeah, it would be wonderful to see that kind of thing come together because I do believe that Henderson has the grass-roots understanding of humanity. You know it, it's, it's, I know it sounds silly but it's almost like in Henderson they're real people and in Las Vegas, and I don't mean to be rude, but it's almost like they're plastic. It's, it's, they have other worries, other concerns. Henderson seems to be a lot more people oriented and it's just a nice place to live. So a school district, a Henderson School District, I think would be a really, really nice place to work.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Tell us a little bit about the garden that you started at Robert Taylor.*

Art Ochoa: Well, there would two gardens that I started at Robert Taylor. The first one was a rose garden. We were lucky enough to get an Eagle Scout who was looking for a project and so he was able to secure all the supplies and materials. It was kind of self-serving I have to admit because right outside the principal's office there was this little plot of land that I had pegged out to be a rose garden. And now we got the Eagle Scouts to come in and install this garden. It was wonderful. We used it in a number of ways. One of the things that I would do is whenever I had students fighting on campus I would administer justice and the justice was they were on, on...they had to do some detention with me at noon...they would eat their lunch and then come serve the detention with me in the rose garden weeding. So I had two kids that had been fighting; now I've got them in a small garden weeding and I'm sharing with them my observations on plant growth and the rose bushes that I'm very much into growing things. And eventually I get their interest up in what we're doing and eventually they're talking to each other and eventually they're friends. It was the neatest thing because it gave me a chance to work with a couple of kids that had a, a dispute; put them into a different environment and just work with them one on one and kind of get past whatever their argument was and turn them into buddies. It was the neatest thing. So it was my detention cycle, a lot of kids, but it was also a neat way of sharing. When roses were in full bloom I'd go on the intercom for the day and announce, "Third grade boys come by my office to get your rose". Another day, "Second grade girls come by my office, fifth grade girls". You know, I'd just announce and they'd come by and I'd just come out with my clippers and hand out roses to the children just trying to share the beauty and, you know, talk to them a little bit about the color or what that particular rose bush was. It was kinda neat to share some of my passion with the kids and it was just a

beautiful thing. So I really enjoyed it. But the next garden was a much, much bigger endeavor. One of the teachers came up to me with this problem. The problem was that she, she was an SEC, it's a really emotionally challenged classroom teacher, children with severe handi...emotional handicap. She was explaining that the kids, her students, did not know what kind of plants grow in the desert. And we started talking about establishing a desert garden. We literally started talking about a small box, container garden. You know, the little box with a couple of plants and that little box grew into an acre and a quarter that used to be at the bus stop which had not been used in years because it became a neighborhood school and all the kids walked to school. So this hunk of land, an acre and a quarter, sat on the corner of the, of the Taylor property with hard packed from many, many years of buses driving across it. That was a pickup spot and was hard-packed dirt that it was doing nothing. We had the decent of that acre and a quarter turning into a garden, a desert garden, and that's what we did. It, it's kind of funny because I was a rookie principal, I didn't know a whole lot of things. We started the garden without consulting with anybody. I even tapped into the school district's water system in order to put an irrigation system to the desert plants that we had acquired. One of our teachers, Betsy Gillis, had managed to get permission to go out where the county was going to build roads and harvest plants that on the future road, where the roads were going to be. Harvest plants without having to go through the getting tagged and permission and all those kind of stuff. So we were able to harvest some of the plants from the desert wherever there were proposed roads going through and we were able to bring them into our garden. Several of the, of the nurseries cooperated and gave us donations. It was a wonderful endeavor. But the vision was to create a teaching garden so this whole box grew to an acre and a quarter that is an absolute beautiful desert botanical teaching garden including two, two sit-down outdoor classrooms where a teacher can teach plant propagation or, or whatever, in the environment. My vision was that we would do a couple projects. One project was that my students would do research, research in desert plants, and then compile everything they found and create a, a cassette audio tape. And that way, if someone from our community was interested in planting a garden in their own home, they could come to our garden and go...the self-guided tour on the cassette tape would take them to different plants, discuss compatibility; this plant grows well with this plant; this plant needs this kind of water; this plant works well here. You know, just to give tips so that a person that was interested could come, do a self-guided tour on the cassette tape, to do, to do our garden, and this would be produced by our kids with their own research. And so it would have some kind of value for our community. We were going to turn it into a field trip site for the school district. We had all kinds of plans. Another thing is we were going to establish a web site. I don't recall the gentleman for the, for 4-H, who had a web site, I don't recall his name but he, he, he did all the things for, for the equality extension and he had already agreed that if we set up the web site and submitted to him our research, he would approve it to make sure it was accurate. The kids would do the research, write it up and submit it to him and if it was accurate he would put it onto the web site and give credit to the kids.

Rick Watson: *Len, Len Nelson?*

Art Ochoa: Len Nelson, Len Nelson and he had already agreed to be our technical person, make sure we had it correct. And the garden itself has a lot of, a lot of significance because what we're trying to do is give kids experiences, not just in planting, but in studying plant propagation, getting into hybridizing, getting into grafting. We were going to get into all kinds of things in an organized science approach. It was going to be a science class out there. So it's, it's kind of one of those things that has continued...Janet Dover continued it. It's just a beautiful garden. But as I was, as I was talking, I had a little memory lapse into...I'm going to digress to the rose garden. The rose garden is called the "Love Garden". It, that's its name. Officially it's called the "Love Garden". I know this sounds retro, really kind of, kind of corny, but it's appropriate. But the rest of the story is even more interesting. The first custodian of Robert Taylor was Mr. Love; that was his last name. Mr. Love was a champion for the kids and I happened to work with his daughter, Cam Ranke, and she would tell me about her father when he was a custodian and how she was a child and would come to the school. Eventually she was a teacher there. I thought what finer way than to name a rose garden after Mr. Love. So we call it the "Love Garden", and we, we had a dedication made up and so it's Love Garden dedicated to the staff members, past, present and future, that love the children and the school as much as we do. And so that, that plaque is up at the garden and it just kind of...the rose garden is moved because the old Robert Taylor was bulldozed and a new building was put up but the dedication is now towards the cactus garden so it's, it's the Love Garden and it's named after Mr. Love, the first custodian at Robert Taylor.

Rick Watson: *Didn't one of, a couple of your teachers write a book about...that's...I was looking for that the other day. I think I had a copy of that but I gave it to somebody, never got it back.*

Art Ochoa: My first graders, my first grade teachers were incredible in working with the kids. They work...they, there was a contest. It was put together by Scholastic Book Fairs where the teachers were being asked to submit student written books. So my teachers put this together. This was written by the kids. The intent was to show first graders across the country what it's like to live in the desert. So it's written and drawn, illustrated, by the students that...it's just a beautiful little book on the desert and the illustrations are priceless. What, what I have here is a very, very rare copy; this is a signed edition autographed by all the students. I am very, very proud. It's part of my library.

Rick Watson: *Should read Garfield. We interviewed an elderly lady in '93, I think.*

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: Uhhuh. That's right, yeah.

Rick Watson: *And she, she lives in Henderson in 1943 so that's one of her signed kids I think.*

Art Ochoa: You know, in, in this...to me this is a prize possession. It sits on my book shelf and I brag about it every chance I get because these, these, these are my kids. But that's our, the work, the authors were published and this was distributed across the country as, as something to give kids a taste of what it's like to be in the desert and I love it.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Yeah, it's really great.*

Rick Watson: *It's a nice way to teach, to teach writing, to teach art. You know, real life action.*

Art Ochoa: It was just wonderful. You know, some of the other things that I did back in '91 to '95, technology was just starting to take hold in, in, in the business world. It would...the computer revolution was really well under way. But the school district was not doing a very good job about putting technology into the older buildings. New buildings would open up and they'd have a computer lab and they'd have computers; not the plenty that we have now but they would have something. The old buildings were kind of left to their own devices. We had very little. One of the things that I did and I got into a little bit of trouble for it is I wanted a computer lab in my building. I just wanted it, I could taste it. My budget was not sufficient. My, my annual budget was not enough to buy a computer lab. So I talked to IBM and together we came up with a plan that we would buy a computer lab that we paid for it in I think it was five years. That we'd only pay this amount this year and this amount the second year until in five years we've paid for the lab. Well, I, as a principal, signed the contract with IBM. Needless to say, the school year ended. The next year at the first principals' meeting our, our elementary superintendent stood up in front of us, Kay Carle, who was our superintendent, she says, "You shall not", and she's talking to all of the principals, "You shall not go into signing any contracts without consulting with the District". (Chuckling) So she never singled me out but I was sitting there knowing that I was the cause of that because I had gone into a purchase agreement that was extended over time with a company and needless to say I didn't do that again. But I...it, it was part of my, my operational style was to do what was right. I needed a computer lab and I needed it now and the District was going to not...they weren't going to do it. So I did it and I am so happy because once we got our computer lab in I expected teachers to bring in the classroom and I expected the teachers to start integrating into their curriculum the computers. I expected them to start using them. And it was wonderful. This was back in the 286 days. The computers were 286 processors which were very different from what we currently have. I remember we had a big file server in the room. The teachers were all nervous about taking their classrooms in there and I told them, "Don't you worry; you get them in there and we'll have instructions for you and if you have any questions just call me on the intercom and I'll come running". And I was selling myself as being a know-it-all in computers and I knew about that much. So every once in a while I'd get the intercom call, "the computers are all blue". You know, the blue screen adapt. So I'd come running to the computer lab. You know, the file server had its own screen and it had just lines and lines and lines of, of code, computer code, and I would try to put on my smartest look and I'd put my finger on the screen. I'd go across the lines just kinda like I'm reading the line. And its right here, this is it, right here. But my other hand would reach down turning the file server switch off, count to ten and turn it on and it would reboot, and it would reboot and then everything's running fine. (Chuckling)

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *[Chuckling] That's great.*

Art Ochoa: Teachers thought I was a genius. I could read code. But, you know, one of things that I, that I wanted to do is lead by example and, and I didn't want teachers to go out and do it on their own. I wanted them to...and I really did get into computer technology. I really did. As a matter of fact I did some slightly illegal things in wiring a building. In those days a self-contained Special Ed classroom had a telephone in the classroom. And in those days we didn't have a school district telephone system. They had telephone lines from, from the phone company. Well, they were dedicated lines and just one, one phone to that line in the Special Ed classroom. So you had three Special Ed classrooms you three phones in there, dedicated phone numbers, so the teachers in those classes could call parents if there was an emergency. Well, we ended up using a program...now I've got a classroom with a telephone line and no Special Ed classroom in there. Well, I came in on a Saturday, pulled the wire out to the ceiling, spliced wire and took it to another classroom where there was a teacher who was heavy or trying to get into the telecommunications. This was back in the modem days where it was a stand-alone modem. It was back in the caveman days of technology. But we ran...he came that weekend and took pictures of me, I believe, up on the roof running telephone wires to bring into his room. Technically the school district was paying for a telephone line for that Special Ed classroom but it wasn't a Special Ed classroom now but we were using, we were using it for kids. And if I get in trouble, oh well.

Rick Watson: *Did you get on line with it?*

Art Ochoa: Yes, yes, we got it. We had the classroom going on line. Yes.

Rick Watson: *Do you remember the name of the teacher?*

Art Ochoa: Yes, I do. His name was James Gorfest. And James Gorfest was our night custodian while he was going to school to become a teacher. He had worked Channel Ten for a while and then he decided that he wanted to teach. So he took a night job as a custodian there at Robert Taylor while he was going to college. And when he was able to become a student teacher we placed him there in our building. It was the funniest thing because he'd come to the school during the day dressed as a teacher and the bell, the final bell would ring and we'd dismiss students. He'd go into bathroom, change, and come out as a custodian. He was, he was wonderful.

Rick Watson: *But he taught, he taught during those...*

Art Ochoa: Well, he student taught there and then the next year I hired him on as a teacher. Yes. It was wonderful that we got to see this young man just rising through, through the ranks. James was one of the stellar teachers that did a lot of, a lot of neat things with us. But unfortunately his health took a turn for the worse and he's, he's got lymphoma cancer and I just saw him recently at Janet Dobrie's retirement. And, but he's, he's, he's pretty sick. It bothers him because he's a young man with so much talent and so much, so much to give and we lost a great teacher when he was not able to continue.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *What makes a great teacher?*

Art Ochoa: You know, the walking into Robert Taylor was an incredible experience for me because what I saw was people who were there by choice. Robert Taylor is a low-income community. When I arrived there there were several trailer courts that were feeding to our, they were student body that were feeding to our, to our school, and the trailer courts, the trailers in the trailer courts, many of them, the majority of them, were not the twelve-wides or the double-wides. They were the eight foot wides. They were the very small like travel trailers that people were living in, a very low-income community. A hard community to teach in because in many cases there's transience. Robert Taylor was reasonable stable. But Robert Taylor managed to gather teachers who cared about kids. So when I interview teachers I try to get an idea for what, what is, what are they like on the inside. I'm not concerned about how much book knowledge they have. I'm concerned about how they come across to the children. They gotta care. And that's one of the things that I, that I was...I used to, when I did interviews in the school district, I'd always tell the teacher, please understand, I'm listening to the things that you're not saying. Because I was trying to get a feeling for the heart, the compassion, the love of, of education and children. And Robert Taylor had somehow, as a school, had somehow collected this incredible group of teachers that did what they had to do to teach the kids. It was incredible to see so...it's not necessarily what I found in other buildings. Robert Taylor was an exception. I arrived there and they didn't need, they didn't need a leader. They could do the job on their own. It was wonderful because it was self-motivated. I came in with other ideas and started bringing them things and they would kind of nod and smile and do it. But then they'd take my ideas and make them bigger and better and wonderful. One of their, one of their things is the Renaissance thing. My wife and I would go to the Cedar City Shakespeare Festival every year and one year I brought back some booklets of plays written for young children. They were, they were adapted to, to young children vocabulary. So I brought some plays from Cedar City and started talking to teachers and came up with the idea, what if for one month we integrated into our curriculum themes from the Renaissance period: the art of the period; the music of the period; the literature of the period; the science of the period. And I told the teachers, we're going to continue with the curriculum. We have more flexibility then. We're going to continue with our curriculum but infuse the art, the music, the science, the literature. And we established our fifth graders and as being our actors they were going to perform a Shakespearean play at the end of our one month Renaissance theme. Our fourth graders were apprentice actors so when we were doing our, our play at the end of our season, our fourth graders would come on stage and do a scene from next year's play, because next year they would be fifth graders. Our third graders would come on stage and they would do Shakespearean pose. A couple of students would come up and just do a Shakespearean pose and go on stage with...

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *How interesting.*

Art Ochoa: Our second graders, we had some puppet stages set up and out in the, in the common areas, because we'd do like a Renaissance theme, a green show, our second graders would do Punch and Judy puppet shows outside to the audiences. It was wonderful. Everybody would get into theme and one of my favorite stories is during this month-long Renaissance school wide theme, I walked into a classroom and all of the kids were under the tables doing something on the bottom of the tables. There's no teacher in sight and eventually I saw a teacher's feet sticking up from under the table. She's also under a table. So I shook a little boys shoelaces. What are you doing down there? And this little boy looked out, I think he was going to yell at me and then he saw that I was the principal, and very quickly he says, "We're doing Michelangelo paintings". The teacher had put butcher paper on the bottoms of the tables and gave the kids the crayons and the art stuff in order to do a mural of Michelangelo. So after the murals were done she'd take the butcher paper off and hang them on the walls. It was just a wonderful way of integrating into, into her instruction something that was part of the Renaissance. It was just beautiful. So we had teachers that could take a little idea and just grow it and make it bigger and better. And that's the one thing that I loved about the Taylor teachers is you just give them an idea and they would run with it and make it bigger and better than you ever imagined. And we started with a little bit of Renaissance curriculum and towards the end we had this big old notebook with, and it wasn't enough, so there were, there were, there were subsets to this notebook that we put together. And the teachers would just share it with each other. It was wonderful. And then my kids, it was the most amazing thing, I'd go out at lunch time and rather than...the fifth graders...rather than being out there playing kickball or shooting hoops they'd be in little groups rehearsing their parts in the play. And, you know, as the principal I'd walk up to them, "Mr. Ochoa, listen to this." And they'd do a monologue which was just incredible of these kids from a low income community spouting Shakespeare. What pride I had. It was wonderful. Because quite honestly you don't get that in other schools. You just don't get that in el, in elementary level.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *You enriched their education so much.*

Art Ochoa: And I had a ball doing it. It was a, it was a, it was a passion. I just love it. And like, like I mentioned earlier, I've bumped, I've bumped into many of my students that, that have grown up and done wonderful things.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *That's great. Do they stay here, the students?*

Art Ochoa: I would say the majority do because everywhere I go I bump into students. It's kinda neat. I, I just recently inter...in, in my retirement I'm working with FAYM, Foundation to Assist Young Musicians, where we teach low-income children how to play the violin. And to get, to get music instruction for your child is pretty expensive. You have to buy the instrument and they've got to pay for the lessons. It's expensive. I did the calculations and one year would cost a parent approximately \$3,000 to \$3,500 to teach the child, to take private lessons. So, in my, in my current retirement I'm working with the Foundation to Assist Young Musicians. We're out of this Sunrise Acres Community, actually the East Las Vegas Community Center,

which is right next door to Sunrise Acres. So we're teaching kids that and we just opened up last year, we opened up a branch at the Pierson Center in the West Side because I have a passion for my West Side Community and we, we've been able to open up a class over there. But the...I lost my train of thought, Rick. You had asked a question about...

Rick: Um, no, actually I'm reading about what makes a great teacher.

Art Ochoa: Okay, all right.

Rick Watson: *Our next question is, what did you do after leaving Robert Taylor and such fame a part of that.*

Art Ochoa: Well, you know, from Robert Taylor the District moved me to Sunrise Acres. It was not a move that I had asked for. It was a move that the District did. I jokingly say this, but it is the truth. I arrived at Sunrise Acres and I created unity among the teachers. They were united against me but they were united. I created unity. And Sunrise Acres turned out to be an incredible place also. It took a lot of work in order to change mentalities and mindsets and practices. It was a difficult process. But when I arrived at Sunrise Acres we could not hire teachers from in District because anybody in District did not want to go there. We could only hire new teachers through the District who didn't know any better. And so, we, we would hire lots of teachers from, you know, brand new, never-been-used teachers, hire them for Sunrise Acres, and at the end of the year some of them would leave. Once, once you're in the District then you can transfer to other buildings. But we were able to keep a lot of them and eventually we got to the point where we could, you know, keep and retain our teachers. Not only that but we had openings, now we had in-District teachers applying for our positions so we were able to continue to bring in a better caliber of teacher. There, there's many heartaches that I had at Sunrise Acres but it turned out to be a wonderful place with...it took a lot of work but we were able to bring in the kind of teachers that make a difference in the lives of children.

Rick Watson: *What years were you at Sunrise Acres?*

Art Ochoa: Well, I was at, at Robert Taylor in...til '95. So '95, '96 I went to Sunrise Acres and I was there for about nine years. And, uh...

Rick Watson: *That's a long tour of duty.*

Art Ochoa: Yes, and part of my tour of duty there, I'm a builder. I do a lot of construction. So I went into every door, every closet at Sunrise Acres serving the physical building and was so dismayed at the condition of the physical building. The building needed so much attention. If two children went into, went to the bathroom and flushed the toilet at the same time it would backflow. The, the pipes, the drain pipes were so clogged they were not sufficient to take two simultaneous flushes and would just backflow and just flood the whole area. The District, Sunrise Acres was the old style where you had a line of buildings, or a line of classes, maybe four classes, and then a sidewalk and a grass area, and then another line of four classrooms so that every door opened to the outside. The District would come in and they'd put new sod in

but they'd just put it on top of the old sod so when it rained the grass was higher than the sidewalks so the rain would now start drifting onto the sidewalk and eventually into the classes when it...and in those days we had some good monsoon seasons. So it's kind of interesting that the building itself was not conducive...we had two outlets in the classroom and with more and more computers we had two outlets in the classroom. The, the buildings needed some serious renovations and I surveyed and came to the conclusion that the most cost-effective solution to Sunrise Acres was to bulldoze and start over because the underground piping was the old cast iron pipe which was corroded. We'd turn on the water whether it was a drinking fountain or a sink, you'd turn on the water in the morning and it was brown water for like three or four minutes just clearing out the rust that was, that had, that was loose and collected. So you'd turn on the water, you couldn't drink it for a while and when you did drink it, it had this metal taste.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Yeah.*

Art Ochoa: But Sunrise Acres needed to, to, to be bulldozed. And I suggested it a number of times and eventually Larry Mason, who was a school board member, eventually was able to get something across so they built the new Sunrise Acres. It was a welcomed, welcomed addition. So it was my privilege to do the transition from the old building to the new building. I believe it was over Christmas break, I believe. There, it was a break and lull. So during the break we were like crazy moving stuff over. I was told I could take anything from the old building to the new building. And like I say, there, there, there were...the corners were touching. The corners of the property were touching. So I took truckloads of computers, technology. I even went as far, 'cause I was told I could take anything. I even went as far as taking down white boards from the old Sunrise to take them to the new Sunrise and we were able to put...I'm sorry, not blackboards, bulletin boards. I was able to put bulletin boards in all the hallways, just line them, and gave each teacher a couple of bulletin boards in the hallways so they could just place student work out in the hallways in the new building. And so we, we were able to take with us a lot of things that were part of the old building which moved to the new building. And we were able...it was wonderful to see the kids walk into the, the brand new school for the first time. Their eyes were wide open. They could not believe it. This was their school now. And Sunrise Acres, the old Sunrise Acres, they had a, a collection of good size cockroaches.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *(Chuckling)*

Art Ochoa: Good size that they had two speeds; very, very slow and you got close to them then they'd go into high speed and run. But the place was just full of roaches and the ground water and the flooding when you flushed toilets...it was just a...it was lots of things wrong with the building, mechanically, physically wrong. Our air conditioning broke and we had no, no cooling for about a week until they could bring in a portable trailer unit that was running in our courtyard area to cool the building. They had to, they had to hand make parts for the old machine because it was so old they didn't have few replacement parts. The building needed to go. And anytime, under, whenever there was humidity in the air there was some condensate

pumps, it would become overburdened and they weren't big enough to remove the condensation so bathrooms would start to flood, storage rooms started to flood. As a matter of fact, because of this we even ended up with a...we, I was working in a little storage room and I pounded a nail in the wall and it kind of caved in and there was some black stuff all over so I, I called environmental services for the District and they came over and immediately quarantined that area and put the quarantine tape and said, "Yeah, you got the good stuff." I said, what's that? You got the, the black mold. (Laughing)

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Yeeew.*

Art Ochoa: So they had to do an extensive removal sanitation process to get rid of the mold. That was part of a condensate drain for the air conditioner that would get overworked and it would just start flooding and feeding up into the walls and was a breeding place for the mold. You know, the building just needed some serious attention and the most practical solution is the one that they ultimately did and that was to build a new building.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Start over.*

Rick Watson: *Was that about 2005, 2004 maybe?*

Art Ochoa: Um, there, thereabouts, yes. I think 2004, right around there.

Rick Watson: *Yeah, oh yeah, that was an old, old school.*

Art Ochoa: yes.

Rick Watson: *It'd been built around in the early '50's.*

Art Ochoa: Yes, it...the new building was such a gift, a wonderful gift to the community that I shudder to think...I was really pushing, I was really pushing to do something. I wasn't necessarily asking for a new building. I was asking to take care of the problems. That's all. I just wanted to take care of the problems. And I did suggest that the problems are underground and throughout the building and the wiring had to be upgraded. Everything had to be upgraded and when you that kind of...I've done a lot of remodeling work personally and that kind of remodeling, sometimes it just easier to start new. So it was...I did a lot of complaining only to...I even offered to rent a bus out of my own pocket and take parents to other schools so our parents could see the schools that other kids went to just to give an idea. I was asked not to do that. (Chuckling) And, and within, no, within like two weeks I got a call informing that they were going to build a new school. It was wonderful.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *It all worked out. Art, is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to comment on. You've done so much. I mean, I, I feel like there must be more that you're not telling us.*

Art Ochoa: You know, I kind of alluded to a little bit of bias that society seems to have with, with minorities and one of ones that is foremost in my mind is when I first arrived at Robert

Taylor. Apparently they had done, there had been some kind of remodeling or painting. There was a wall of windows that faced the morning sun so morning sun would come in through the windows and pretty much blind the secretaries that were working. It faced the morning sun. They had taken out the blinds to do the painting and remodeling and they had lost the clips that hold the blinds on so the blinds were in the closet but there was no clips. And they had been that way for years, for three or four years. You know, they would just work with a paper like this to block, to keep the blinding sun out of their eyes and it was terrible. So one of the first things I, I, I did was I asked Rita, I said, Rita, do you want me to fix that? And she said, "Well, there used to be blinds there but when they did the rehab they lost the clips." And, and so she showed me the blinds. I, I looked at her and said, do you want me to fix that. And she says, "Can you?" I says, yes. So this is summer just before school started and I came in jeans and tennis shoes and a work shirt and my tools and I had made some sheet metal clips. I had made them myself, old hooks from sheet metal to make clips to hang up in the corners to have the blinds fit in. So I was going to working throughout the whole wall of window there and I had this big A-frame ladder and I was moving desks to get the A-frame up to the wall because the, the windows went up to the ceiling. And by the way, the ceiling was incredible. It had been built during the, the, I think during the Hoover Dam construction because the ceiling was poured concrete that was left over concrete from a pour. They'd bring it over. The ceiling was thick concrete, wonderful building. It was a bomb shelter.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Yeah.*

Rick Watson: *Was there a, was there a...was that like...was there a second story?*

Art Ochoa: No, just the one story.

Rick Watson: *Yeah, that's good because we have pictures of one of the building and I've looked at those pictures many times and I thought well, maybe Taylor had something special that went on above the ceiling. (Chuckling)*

Art Ochoa: I, I heard that it was left over concrete from a run that they'd just bring it over and dump it there and it worked. If that's true or not I don't know, it's just one of the rumors I heard. But anyway, that day, because I was going to be working along the whole office wall, I told the two ladies, the office manager and clerk, I told them why don't you two take a, a, take a two hour break. Go have lunch. I need two hours to get in there and do the installation. I'm moving desks, you'll be in my way, I told them. So they didn't want to do that. I says, look, you can make up the time later on if you want but, you know, I want you out of here. I need, I need access. So I got rid of them. So I'm up on my ladder drilling into con...into the concrete ceiling, drilling up to put my brackets on and as I'm drilling up the concrete dust is falling all over my face and I'm kind of dusty, a couple of CCSD grounds crew men walk into the front door and they kind of stood up there at the front counter and they looked at me and says, "Where's the principal?" And I'm on top of the ladder full of concrete dust. I says, I'm right here. And one of them says, "Come on, we don't have time. We're in a hurry. Where's the principal?" So I came

down the steps rather slow. I was a young man then but I came real slow. I walked into the back to my office; got a business card with my name on it and I put the business card on the counter. I said, this is the principal. I took out my wallet, put my driver's license down, and this is me. I am the principal.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm and Rick Watson: *[Laughing]*

Art Ochoa: Their mouths dropped and I said, what do you need? "Nothing, nothing". They just turned around and walked out. It was hilarious. I never saw them again.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *You were very kind. [Laughing]*

Art Ochoa: [Laughing] So many things like that. And those just a couple of things. I spoke to the School Board. We had formed...as an aside, I had started discussing the, my observations about employment with the Clark County School District and how minorities were not given opportunity for upward mobility. You know, literally, I believe for the longest period I was the only Hispanic male principal in the elementary division and we had a gentleman...I don't recall his name...we had a gentleman that was Hispanic. He was an assistant principal and he would train people for the principal position. He was a trainer for principals and he was Hispanic but he was an assistant principal. I did go to the School Board one day and I said, you know, ideally a business wants to hire employees that reflect the community, that reflect the Ethnic in the community. That's when you get the best kind of interaction with the community is if you have people who reflect the community. And I told them, and I used District statistics. I don't recall the specific numbers but I told them, according to this, Hispanic in this community are 13%. I said, so ideally, CCSD employees, 13% should be Hispanic in the ideal world and, you know, they're kind of nodding in agreement; this makes sense. So I says, in the support staff, you're close to that. It was something like 10% of the support staff was Hispanic. You're close. And, you know, they're kind of nodding like, okay, we're, we're, we're good. I says, in teachers it's not quite that good. I says, in teachers it's like 3.2%. And they're looking at each other with, how did that happen? And I says the whole thing gets worse. In administration it's .7% in administration positions. And now they're really looking at each other. And I says, but hold on. It gets worse. I says, in the elementary division, Hispanic males, it's .25%. And you're looking at him. And they looked at each other like, how did this happen. And I have to give credit to the School Board because apparently they started moving on it. I got a call roughly three weeks after I spoke to the School Board. This was a school, regularly scheduled school day. Roughly, roughly three weeks later I got a call from a School Board member, "Mr. Ochoa, we want you to know we have doubled the male Hispanic principals in the Clark County School District."

Rick Watson: *Hired one, they hired one more.*

Art Ochoa: And it was this gentleman who was a trainer of principals. And, but, the District has, has...I want to be very emphatic...has made a concerted effort because in my dealings with the School Board I tell them we, the Hispanics, are not asking for more but we won't accept less. Just treat us as equals with equal ability and equal opportunity and I told them I don't

want you promoting anybody who isn't worthy, who doesn't have the skills to do the job. We want you to promote qualified people only. But by the same token, don't look the other way if they happen to be of a different minority group. We have to hire people and promote them.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *It's important for the children to see that diversity too.*

Art Ochoa: Absolutely. For the children to see different cultural groups as positive role models...

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Working together.*

Art Ochoa: And quite honestly, quite honestly, one of the things that would have been better served for me is to not necessarily serve in Hispanic community enrollments but to be in communities where there was more of a, of a, of a white middle class because those children are not accustomed to seeing minorities in powers of responsibility and authority and to be able to give them an example of what can happen or what should happen I think would have been a good message also. But it was my privilege, my absolute privilege to serve with pride to the Clark County School District. I served 27 years and only retired because I had some family issues. My parents were becoming very old and fee, and feeble and I needed to take care of them so I was able to retire three years early. But I, I'm applauding the fact that I can leave the School District and I, and I again have to say the District was receptive. We...some of the things were happening that I don't think they were aware. Once they were made aware they were receptive and took steps to correct and I'm very grateful that the District is what it is now because I think we have some good people out there and they've been able to look at individuals and value them for what they offer, what their worth is to the District, and they've made some good choices. They've made some bad choices too but that's beside the point. (Laughing) But...

Rick Watson: *What's Frieda Harsey doing these days? She's retired too, I'll bet.*

Art Ochoa: Yeah, she's retired. I've crossed paths with her a number of times. She's a proud grandma and just loving life. But, uh, Frieda, I wrote in her first evaluation, I wrote, I evaluated her and I wrote a comment at the, at the bottom. I said, Frieda is like the training wheels on a bicycle. She keeps me from falling flat on my face. Because that woman was awesome.

Rick Watson: *Yeah, she's somebody we should interview too. She's an old time, old time Henderson family.*

Art Ochoa: Yeah, she went to Basic High School. And, yes, Frieda, Frieda and...

Rick Watson: *Yeah, a couple of sisters I think that graduated from Basic too.*

Art Ochoa: And so Frieda was a, was a dear, dear friend and I, I was so sorry when I was moved because she was the one that guided me. She was one of the top...she was the one that was always there. I remember her. She'd come to my office and "Mr. Ochoa, in three weeks you're gonna have this report due. So I just started, I just penciled in some things. You can change it".

So she'd put a...she'd anticipate everything that was coming down, that was coming due; anticipate to make sure that I would take care of it. And I'm a bit of a procrastinator so after she'd hand it to me, a couple days later, "How you doing on that?" And then a week later, "Do you want me to, to preview that? And to, want me to start entering that on the computer?" And she would just kind of needle me to make sure that I was getting it done. But, Frieda, she was definitely the person that I owe the most to in preparing for the position.

Rick Watson: *Do you have an album? At home pictures you took at, at your various assignments, photographs at Taylor or...?*

Art Ochoa: Not an, not an album. I did take pictures but I've not put them together. I, I'll start looking for some and bring them to share them with you.

Rick Watson: *Yeah, if we could borrow them. We'd scan them, take really good care of them.*

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm: *Yeah, we'd like to put some on line. Add some that you think would be good to share with the public.*