



6-21-1973

## Edward J. Guirado (June 21, 1973)

C. Richard Arena  
*Whittier College*

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### Recommended Citation

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Oral History Interview

with

THE HONORABLE EDWARD J. GUIRADO

June 21, 1973  
Norwalk, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Judge Edward J. (Joseph) Guirado. We are in his chambers in the courthouse in Norwalk, California. Today's date is June 21, 1973. May we begin by your giving a brief summary of your place, date of birth, your educational background, and career highlights to date?

GUIRADO: I was born in Los Nietos [California, just south of the railroad tracks. The old house in which I was born is still standing. I don't expect it to stand much longer because it had fallen into dilapidation. My father was born in the same house.

ARENA: Excuse me. How about some dates?

GUIRADO: I was born in 1903. At that time, if I'm not mistaken, Governor John Downey's home was about three-quarters of a mile north and east of the home where I was born and where I lived for a number of years, at least until I was about five years old. In the meantime, our family had built a home up in Whittier and we moved up there, but moved back to Los Nietos during the walnut harvesting season. We had a walnut ranch there, and my grandfather had started a store at the corner of what is now Los Nietos Road and Workman Mill Road (now Norwalk Boulevard), and my father ran that store and the walnut ranch.

ARENA: Excuse me, Judge. Again from the standpoint of your own background, how far back can you trace your ancestry in California, and anywhere before California?

GUIRADO: 1833.

ARENA: And that would be your grandfather?

GUIRADO: My great-grandfather. He came to Los Angeles [California] from Santander in Spain, which is a little town on the edge of the Pyrenees Mountains, came to Guaymas in Mexico, and from Guaymas he came on up to San Pedro [California], and according to Mr. William Workman, he came in as super cargo on a ship and subsequently became a member of the city governing board or council at that time, an office that he occupied for several years. My grandfather was born near the Old Plaza in Los Angeles, and came out to the Los Nietos area about 1845. That's just an account of how the family got here. It's interesting to note, though, at that time, that this was a part of Mexico, so when he came from Guaymas up here he was just moving from one part of Mexico to another part of Mexico.

ARENA: Mexico hadn't been independent too long, as a matter of fact.

GUIRADO: At that time, so that's rather an interesting note. Now, that's how we got into Whittier [California]. Then we moved into an old house--it was built in 1905--up on North Greenleaf Avenue, and we lived there for a number of years, and then we moved out into desert country around Searchlight, Nevada, just west of Searchlight, Nevada. We did some farming and sheep raising, but the area kept drying up, and finally we had to come back down here to Southern California again.

ARENA: Sheep raising was quite prominent, I understand, among the Basques, including the [Gracian] Arrambide family.

GUIRADO: The Chancerinos, the Arrambides all were in the sheep business.

ARENA: Are there descendants of the Chancerino family in the area, do you think?

GUIRADO: Mary Chancerino now lives over around Pomona [California]. She's the last one there. Their sheep headquarters, where my grandfather and Gracian Arrambide had their headquarters for their sheep raising would be what is now the end of Pickering [Avenue], where the oil wells are now; and I think if you look on one of those oil wells--I'm sure the derrick is still there--it is designated as Chancerino No. 1. That well must have been drilled there about 1922 or '23, because I was in high school at the time.

I graduated from the old Bailey Street School in Whittier, went to Whittier High School, graduated from Whittier High School

in 1923, was president of the student body, played on the football team, basketball team. Now this all goes a little bit ahead of President Nixon.

ARENA: Yes, he was born in 1913, was in the class of '30 in high school.

GUIRADO: And I believe he went to Whittier High School.

ARENA: The last two years of high school.

GUIRADO: Then from Whittier High School I went to Whittier College, while I was working first at the old Pacific Electric Station there in Whittier, and then I worked . . .

ARENA: May I ask what you did at the Pacific Electric?

GUIRADO: At the Pacific Electric Station I sold tickets, sold the magazines, sold everything that they used to sell at a railroad station in those days. I used to get down there at 5 o'clock in the morning and open up the station. Used to go down and get the street car, which was parked down by the state school [Fred C. Nelles School for Boys, California Youth Authority], bring it uptown, sweep it out, and then sell tickets to anybody that wanted any, and the first car left about 5:15 A.M. This all had to be done in the meantime. I used to get down there a little before 5:00 A.M. Everything was opened up and ready.

ARENA: Was this actually while you were attending school?

GUIRADO: This was while I was going to Whittier College. And then I went to work after that for General Petroleum Company at Santa Fe Springs [California] in the drilling department, ultimately became a rotary helper, a derrick man, and when the boom came I was driller for General Petroleum. My schoolwork suffered as a result of that, because I didn't take too many courses while I was working, but I kept on taking courses the whole time, until I got out of Whittier College.

ARENA: May I ask what your major was in the college?

GUIRADO: I majored in economics. Then I took some work over at USC [University of Southern California] during that time, so that when I graduated in 1928 from Whittier College, I kept on working for General Petroleum, worked for them both in the fields and at the refinery at Vernon [California], and that's where I got into the law school, because when I got transferred over to the refinery in Vernon I was able to start taking courses in the law school at USC.

ARENA: Did the company in any way, as so many do now, subsidize you?

GUIRADO: Well, no, they didn't subsidize you; they gave you a job. You had to work a full tower, as we called it. But when I was at USC I became editor of the Law Review and was elected to the Order of the Coif upon graduation.

ARENA: If this isn't too personal, and because it's very important in history today, ethnic history, as you know, what would you say about your pre-U.S. ancestry, the Spanish-Mexican background? Were there any problems, frankly, prejudice, from teachers, from townspeople; anything like that at all?

GUIRADO: That's a strange thing, you know. I was talking to Martin Ortiz, who teaches at Whittier College . . .

ARENA: Center for Mexican Affairs.

GUIRADO: Yes, and I'm helping him with that right now. As a matter of fact, I've sent out the invitations to invite everybody in to try to . . . I'm going to try and do some things for him. But in 1945, I believe the date was, Martin tells me that he was subjected to some embarrassment by being refused service at the William Penn Hotel. And I believe he was a student at Whittier College at the time. Now, it's a strange kind of thing, but at that same time I was president of the Whittier Lions Club and we were holding our meetings there every Thursday, and nobody even mentioned such a thing to me. Now, my ancestors came from the edge of the Pyrenees Mountains, came to Mexico, and obviously became Mexican citizens, because they had a part in the political life of the Mexican community, and then moved up to Los Nietos [California], which was a Mexican community.

ARENA: From the standpoint of tying this in with local history, would you have family documents, family records that would enable anyone interested, the historian, to follow through on some of these political and official positions? Did you keep the family records yourself?

GUIRADO: Well, I haven't done as good a job of that as I should.

ARENA: But are the papers in existence?

GUIRADO: Oh, yes. I have papers. The title Insurance and Trust Company has some of where one of my ancestors ran the survey lines clear to Dana Point [California]. And I live down in that area now.

ARENA: And his name?

GUIRADO: I think his name was Rafael Guirado. And I think it was Isadore Dockweiler, one day in court was talking to me, and he has long since gone to his reward, but his son was on the bench in Los Angeles [California] for many years, and he is now retired. At any rate, I was talking to Isadore Dockweiler in court when I was a young lawyer and long before I went on the bench, and he was telling me that his office originally--and he had been in Los Angeles for many, many years--was at the southwest corner of First and Main Streets, and that downstairs was a drugstore, and the drugstore was operated by a man by the name of Rafael Guirado, and he was a druggist and a doctor, and he used to run the drugstore and have patients, but Mr. Dockweiler said he was lacking in clients and the drugstore in clientele and customers and patients, and on sunny afternoons he said that he and this man, who was my grandfather's brother used to sit upstairs in the window, with the window open and the lace curtains blowing, and play checkers. He told me that story. Now, of course, after I finished law school, I went out to Whittier to practice.

ARENA: Just to be sure, what law school and the year?

GUIRADO: University of Southern California in 1932. I was the editor of the Law Review that year, and as I said, I was elected to the Order of the Coif on graduation. And because of that, I thought that I could go out and practice law in my own home town. I remember a very capable trial lawyer in Los Angeles at the time that I talked to. He said, "Eddie, I don't believe I'd try to practice law in the home town where I grew up." But I had more courage, or something, and I went out there and tried it anyway. Practice didn't flourish right in the beginning. We were right in the middle of a depression.

ARENA: Did you have your own office, or were you in with a firm?

GUIRADO: I went in with a man by the name of R. T. Walters. He had been there for many years and he had been city attorney, and the judge of the Recorder's Court. And at this time he was practicing law, and he thought he had to get somebody to help him, apparently. But when I went to Whittier, of course, I didn't know him, and I got me a law book or two, and I looked around for a place to hang my shingle. I went up in the elevator to the sixth floor of the Bank of America Building, and I rented one room, a little cubbyhole right off the elevator; where you'd come off the elevator you'd walk right in my door, if somebody didn't stop you. After about the third day that I was there, Mr. Walters came down to see me, and he said, "You know, I need a young man to work in my office. I've been looking around for one; but anytime that a guy comes up here and opens up an office and gets himself between me and the elevator, I'm going to hire him." [Laughter] And he did, and we had a good relationship, and I stayed with him till he died.

ARENA: You may or may not recall that the President started his first law office with Mr. [Thomas W.] Bewley and Mr. [Jefferson G.] Wingert on the sixth floor. I was wondering if you may have still been there when he started his practice.

GUIRADO: No. What we did, Mr. Walters and I moved our offices about 1934 or '35, right in that area, to the Stedman Building. Mr. [Vane] Stedman opened up one whole side of the upstairs for us, and we moved our office upstairs. And a man by the name of John Whalen went in with us, and so we practiced up there. Then I decided to run for Justice of the Peace in 1938. And there was a man by the name of Donald Jordan, also a young man, wanted to run for it, and Fred Brock, and Roger Johnson, who is now on some kind of an assignment with the President back there in Washington.

ARENA: I had the pleasure of interviewing him--Rog.

GUIRADO: Roger Johnson. Roger graduated with me from grammar school--not grammar school, excuse me--from high school. And it was kind of a funny thing. He and I ran for president of the student body. I was successful and defeated him for president of the student body, and of course I was the only one--maybe there were one or two others--with a Latin name, but I defeated Roger, and maybe that answers something that you asked a little while ago about prejudices against people with Latin names. Then I ran for Justice of the Peace against him again in 1938, and there was Don Jordan, Fred Brock and Roger Johnson, and I defeated the three of them in the primary election. Didn't even have to go into a run-off. So that, there again, I would say that the people of Whittier showed absolutely no prejudice against somebody with a Latin name.

ARENA: One of the things, of course, that makes Whittier stand out is its Quaker or Friends background. Is there anything you want to say in particular about your rubbing shoulders with Quakers over the years?

GUIRADO: I found it very pleasant. I found the Quakers to be very tolerant people, contrary to what some people seem to think about them. I found them very tolerant. Of course, I'm on the board, as you know, at Whittier College, and along in 1945, about that time, I was president of the Chamber of Commerce, I was chairman of the board of the National Bank of Whittier; at that time time was master of the Masonic Blue Lodge in Whittier, and president of the Lions Club.

ARENA: Is that the one on Beverly [Boulevard] or Greenleaf [Avenue]?

GUIRADO: That's the one that's on Greenleaf and is now at the corner of Mar Vista [Street] and Greenleaf [Avenue].

ARENA: Do you happen to have any recollection, speaking of that, of the President's father there?

GUIRADO: No, I never met the President's father in the Masonic Lodge. I understand that he was a Mason, though, but I just never had met him in the Masonic Lodge, or in any Masonic connections I had. After becoming master, I was also inspector for the California Grand Lodge.

ARENA: Before we do get into the President directly, now that we have mentioned his own background, do you recall having any contact with his parents, and then from the parents to his immediate relatives, like his brothers?

GUIRADO: I knew Don [Francis Donald Nixon] quite well, and I used to contact him quite frequently. Ed [Edward Calvert Nixon] I've met, but I never had any particular contact with him. Ed was considerably younger.

ARENA: Yes, born in 1930.

GUIRADO: Yes, considerably younger. I think that the first time I met the President was in the Probate Court Department up in the Hall of Justice in Los Angeles. I was up there probating a will, and Velma Morton, who was my clerk at that time in the Justice Court--I was Justice of the Peace for Whittier Township--was over there as a witness on this will that I was offering for probate. When you were a Justice of the Peace in those days, you used to be able to practice law, also. And she introduced me to the now President of the United States. He was there with Tom Bewley; and if I'm not mistaken, Jeff Wingert was with them; and they were letting the President offer this will for probate, and I think that probably was one of his first court appearances. It was just after he had been admitted to practice. And that was the first time I ever met him was there in that courtroom.

ARENA: What impressions of that first meeting still remain with you? I'm sure it must be clouded by what's happened since then, but does anything stand out?

GUIRADO: Yes, I think this, probably: Miss Morton called my attention to the fact that, "There's that young man that just went in with Tom Bewley and Mr. Wingert." I believe Mr. Wingert was still there at that time. I'm a little hazy on that.

ARENA: Excuse me. The first year he started was in 1937, so if it was close to that year, of course, he would still have been there.

GUIRADO: Yes. I was elected in 1938, and this happened after I was Justice of the Peace; or at least I had been



elected Justice of the Peace; I may not have taken office. That's the first time I ever remember of meeting the President. And of course, I met him many times after that, in various campaigns, when he started to run for Congress; after he first came back from the service. Then he became a congressman, of course, and a senator. And I used to meet him on occasions at various meetings. From then on he was kind of out of the Whittier activities, and I just didn't have too much contact with him, except what I read in the papers.

ARENA: Oh, yes. Could I ask you this: Knowing Whittier as you do, and knowing the President as you do, what stands out in his personality from the standpoint of his Whittier upbringing, if such a question is fair and if such a question is possible to answer? You know Whittier and you know the President. In his speech, in his mannerisms; anything that reminds you of your and his common Whittier background?

GUIRADO: Well, I don't know that there's anything in speech that we might have inherited from the common background, or from the professors that we both had at different times.

ARENA: You both had Dr. Paul Smith, of course.

GUIRADO: Dr. Paul Smith. I was just trying to think who else . . .

ARENA: Dr. [Albert] Upton may have come later.

GUIRADO: Dr. Upton was later. There was a Dr. [Joseph T.] Williams up there. I don't know whether he . . .

ARENA: Dr. Herschel Coffin.

GUIRADO: Dr. Herschel Coffin was there, and undoubtedly the President took some courses from him, because he taught philosophy. I think we all had to take those courses.

ARENA: As you know, Whittier, even today, but at that time, tended to have this service-minded outlook. One of the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] programs, one of the few in the country, I believe, were based there. Would you want to touch on that aspect, in your own life, as well as how much you think the average student was impressed with the idea of service to the community, from what you know of Whittier and other colleges?

GUIRADO: Well, I tell you now what happened. We used to have what they called the Hi-Y in high school. I don't know if they have it any more or not. After I got

into college I didn't make much contact with any service organizations till I got into practice again. Then I got into the lodges and the service clubs, the Lions Club. But during that period that I was in college, I was awfully busy making a living and trying to get an education as I went by; and, as my mother used to say, try to grab a big handful because you know you won't get much of a chance at it. I used to go to work, when I was going to Whittier College, anywhere from 4:30 to 5:00 o'clock in the morning, and then go back after I got out of school and work in the evening in order to get in a full forty or forty-five-hour week in there, so I didn't have too much time to belong to any societies then.

ARENA:           During the college years.

GUIRADO:       When I went to USC it was a little better, because there I worked at the General Petroleum refinery, which is now Mobil Oil, at the plant, and they arranged the hours very nicely for me. As they still are in most law schools, the classes were in the morning. They let me work from 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon until 11:00 at night. And then I could go to school in the morning, have clear up until 3:00 o'clock and after to do my studying. As a matter of fact, you had no time for anything else, because you did that seven days a week.

ARENA:       Mr. Guirado, may I thank you very sincerely for taking the time to answer this call to history. Thank you very much for this interview.