

This interview was conducted on behalf of the Oral History program at Century High School. The interviewee is Detective [Samuel] Urias. The interviewer is Amani Hurr. The interview took place at Century High School on May 29, 2002 at 10:00 AM.

Amani – I guess we should start with: what was your role at Century while you were here?

Detective Urias – Basically I was the School Resource Officer. My job here was basically to keep the peace – insure the safety of the staff, students, property – and mentor, confidant. I was a consultant in many areas – with students, (could?) include the staff – in all matters, whether it be personal or professional. I had a lot of students come up to me and wish to speak to me in confidence regarding issues of the home, issues in the school, issues with friends. So I was kind of the counselor type also.

I was also here to enforce all laws, make arrests if needed. I'd speak with parents. I acted also as a mediator – a lot of times we have conflicts, or had conflicts, that were parent and student associated, so I would mediate it out between the parent and the student – it wasn't always student against student.

So I would also act as a mediator. I dealt a lot with the community the neighborhood out here because there were a lot of situations that come up regarding just basically students speeding traffic laws and things like that I even had to go get kids out of bed and bring them to school. [chuckles]

Amani – So you played truant officer...

Detective Urias – Truant officer. Yes, also a truancy officer. Yes. And I assisted the staff quite a bit, with legal issues, student issues, you know. I actually brought kids who were probably going towards the wrong side of life and kind of counseled them, educated them, spoke about their future, things like that, education.

What else did I do? Well, also I attended football games – security for football games, parades – a lot of school functions. I trained students, gave talks regarding life experiences career goals, things like that, laws, traffic laws, alcohol, drugs, things like that, to students. I was also a DARE officer.

Amani – Oh, really? At the same time?

Detective Urias – Yes. And I taught DARE at elementary schools.

Amani – Ok. How much did being a DARE officer and your job here intermingle?

Detective Urias – Actually it helped, because it helped when I went into the classroom to give talks or when I was one on one with a student because it enabled me to basically relay some of the DARE issues on to them as far as alcohol, driving while drinking, things like that, drugs. So it did, it did help quite a bit.

Amani – Did we have much an issue with alcohol and drugs here?

Detective Urias – You know, there was an issue but I can't say it was a big issue. I think it was kind of normal and it wasn't anything really big. It was mostly the stuff like marijuana, maybe a pipe here and there, stuff like that. It wasn't anything like heroin or cocaine or anything like that.

Like I say, I was privileged to open up the school with Mr. Barnekoff and Mr. Orme, Ms. Montgomery, Ted Zehr, so it was a new school and we had issues and problems that we had to deal with because of it being a new school.

Amani – What kind of issues?

Detective Urias – Well, there were community issues. Such as, before, there was nothing here; now there was this huge, great big building – the largest school in the Hillsboro district – and we housed a lot of people a lot more people than other high schools. So, there were issues in the community as far as speeding, some vandalism, mailboxes getting torn up, speeding through the residential areas – that's when we ended up putting in the speed bumps out there, the city did. And signs there was parking there a lot of issues kids hanging out the normal stuff. You know the normal stuff and they weren't used to it. A lot of kids hanging around their neighborhood all the time.

Amani – How do you think that made Century be perceived in the community?

Detective Urias – All in all, Century was loved. Great, great press. The community loved Century, because we needed it. We needed another high school. Things were getting way, way overcrowded. But the local residents here I think who were experiencing things like kids in their yards smoking, camping out, sitting in their yard, you know, they didn't appreciate that kind of stuff. The stuff you're going to find anywhere, at any school, but it was new to this community so of course we were getting phone calls.

Amani – How do you think the perception has changed?

Detective Urias – We really put a lot of police presence out here to assist the residential community here. I had traffic officers out her slowing traffic down, I was out there, I had other SROs and police cars, I had regular traffic guys, patrol guys cruising by here all the time. Just the mere presence of the police I think slowed a lot of it down. We had our community crime prevention officer go give talks to the residential people around here, the people who live right around the school. So I think eventually the perception became the norm and they understood it. And, I mean, they were kids once before themselves so they began to really enjoy Century, I think, because the complaints really went down to nothing.

Amani – How much conflict was there within the school?

Detective Urias – We had... as far as crime, and issues like that?

Amani – conflict, crime, whatever...

Detective Urias – We had a lot of issues initially because we ended up housing, most of it was gang related type stuff and you're going to have that in any school or anywhere you go but we ended up housing two extra gang types here. We not only had Hispanic gangs but we had Asian gangs and then we had they Crypts and the Bloods. So, and, as you know, each one of these Hispanic gangs, there could be five or six different gangs in a Hispanic gang, there could be five or six gangs in an Asian gang and it goes on and on. So, we had issues with them, not among other students but among each rival gang, so there were some fights. There were strange other gang types coming to the school which, you know, cruising by, coming into the parking lots, didn't belong. Every now and again we'd catch them on the property – we threw them off. You're going to have that in any school. But it was new, it was new to people here. Especially, we don't have Asian gangs in Hillsboro they're in Portland, they're in Aloha, Beaverton, now they're here. So there were a lot of issues that came up there. Like I say, there were some marijuana type issues.

We had our first riot here at Century – first year. But that was due to a rivalry issue between a student here and a student at Hilhi and it turned out one day after school, I don't know how many people from Hilhi, showed up right out here in this parking lot [points out the window to the central/main office parking lot] and it turned out to be a pretty good sized little riot. Yeah, that was, well, we got there. We dealt with it. We got the main players, got them out, arrested them. They were gone. That was about the time of the incident, the batting thing, the baseball bat incident at the Christmas tree farm, and all that, around that time frame.

We had a lot of issues with Fred Meyers – kids skipping school and hanging out over there, buying cigarettes, selling cigarettes, stealing cigarettes, a little bit of shoplifting going on.

There was some Hilhi rivalry because of that one incident but it eventually just kind of blew away, especially once you pick out the bad apples. Things just kind of mellow out. It went on into the summer a little bit but it died off. There really wasn't anything else after that.

I made the first arrest here, probably in the state, due to Columbine shooting incident. Where we had a student here that was basically threatening students and staff in the same fashion as the Columbine incident.

Amani – What year was that? Was that the first year?

Detective Urias - The first year. It was either the first or second year, but I'm pretty sure it was the first year. I made that first arrest here. And to my knowledge he's no longer around; I know he's not here but I haven't seen him around the neighborhood either so.

Then the school itself came under fire from some vandalism, the normal stuff you're gonna see: egg throwing - we come to school one day and there's eggs all over the front of the school doors, yard plowing - you know, when they drive their truck up on the yard and start peeling out and tearing up the grass, you know these kinds of things, just dumb things. And in some of the neighborhoods also, some of the neighbors were experiencing that in their yard. Something that happens 2 or 3 in the morning some kids, but basically that's about it, as far as any type of real big problems, that was probably the biggest. Otherwise there was a lot of things that were within, your normal, kids fighting, pushing each other around, calling each other names, that kind of stuff.

Amani - You don't really see that much now.

Detective Urias - Its really calmed down. I'll tell you, the staff here really got a buckle on things. That first and second year we really hit the bricks hard and just basically (boshed?) everything. We litterally put a stop to a lot of the stuff real quick. We had to. You know, because it was a new school, we had to lay the ground rules down. And that's what we did. We did it together as a staff. I didn't necessarily have to take criminal action that much, because I didn't want to, I didn't choose to. We dealt with it within. That was a way to deal with a lot of issues here. Criminal action wasn't the answer.