

**Transcription of Oral History Interview with  
RODOLFO RUIBAL**

May 11, 1998

This oral history interview is being conducted on May 11, 1998, with Professor Emeritus Rodolfo Ruibal, who joined the UCR faculty in the fall of 1954.

My name is Jan Erickson. I work in the Chancellor's office at UC Riverside. Raymond L. Orbach is the current and eighth chief administrative officer of the Riverside campus.

Erickson: Professor Ruibal, would you start, please, by telling us where you were born and a little about your mother and father and any brothers or sisters you have?

Ruibal: I am an only child. I was born in Havana, Cuba. My father and my mother were both Cubans, and they came into this country in the late '30s when I was about eight years old.

Erickson: So, did you start your education in Cuba?

Ruibal: Yes, I went to the early grades in Cuba to Jesuit school and then came up to this country when I was eight years old. I started out in a Jesuit school here in New York City and then went on to grade school at ... actually a very radical school at that time, which was Horace Mann Elementary School.

Erickson: How was that different?

Ruibal: It had absolutely no comparison to Jesuit school in the sense that it was ... if we did our work in a classroom and got done ahead of time, we could leave.

Erickson: No kidding.

Ruibal: And we would do independent projects that we would do while we were doing regular classwork.

Erickson: That really is different.

Ruibal: It was a very radical Teacher's College, Columbia University, I think, was running it at the time.

Erickson: So how old were you then?

Ruibal: I was about eight years old when I started.

Erickson: How were you so disciplined to do something independently?

Ruibal: Everyone was supposed to do it. In other words, all the students did it in some form or another.

Erickson: Can you remember anything...

Ruibal: Oh, yes. Actually, I worked with another fellow about my same age. We were very ambitious. We were doing an encyclopedia of snakes of the world.

Erickson: Great.

Ruibal: And I was doing the text, and he was doing the illustrations. Many years later we met, and we both became biologists.

Erickson: Oh, my goodness. Would you say that is when you developed your interest in science?

Ruibal: Oh, no. I had always been interested in lizards when I was a little boy in Cuba. That's all I used to do in Cuba was sort of run after lizards.

Erickson: Is Cuba...the climate. Is it much like that of California?

Ruibal: Oh, no. It's more tropical and wetter.

Erickson: Oh, much more humid.

Ruibal: And it's the sort of country where you can't miss lizards! They are everywhere.

(chuckle)

Erickson: You were just chasing them around, huh?

Ruibal: When I went back to Cuba after I got my Ph.D. and I had come here to UCR, I had actually an NSF research project in Cuba to study the lizards in Cuba. I always remember my aunt, who had known me, of course, since I was little. One day she took me aside when I was down in Havana visiting them after doing some research. And she said to me, "Rudy, how can this be? When you were a little boy, all you did was run after lizards. And now you come back here, and somebody is paying you to run after lizards!"

(laughter)

Erickson: What did your father do in Cuba?

Ruibal: My father worked for a sugar company in Cuba. The job he got was to be in charge of the office on Wall Street for the same company. The company opened an office on Wall Street, and they traded in sugar.

Erickson: So there wasn't a question of exile or anything at that point?

Ruibal: Oh, no. This was all completely voluntary.

Erickson: What were the relations between the U.S. and Cuba at that time?

Ruibal: They were fine. I mean, from the Cuban point of view, the U.S. was always trying to interfere. In other words, from a Cuban's perspective, the U.S. was always the government that you had

to keep at arm's length because they were always trying to interfere in Cuban affairs. But you know, Cuban's had always been friendly with Americans. They always had made a very precise distinction between individual Americans and the American government.

Erickson: Travelers and tourists.

Ruibal: Right.

Erickson: Because it was a very popular place to ...

Ruibal: Yes, yes. Right.

Erickson: And how about your mother. What did she do?

Ruibal: She was just a housewife. She had actually lived in the U.S. before. She had been a secretary in the U.S. before but then had gone back to Cuba.

Erickson: So, everybody was anxious to come to the U.S.

Ruibal: Yes. I presume. I mean, I don't really have any recollection of any discussion about it.

Erickson: Well, you said ... talk a little bit about growing up in Cuba. I know you mentioned the lizards. ...What was school like there?

Ruibal: It was essentially very pleasant. I went to a very good Jesuit school, the same Jesuit school that Fidel Castro went to. The teachers were all Brothers or Fathers there, very helpful. I have a very good memory of it.

Erickson: After the Horace Mann school, where did you go?

Ruibal: Then we moved out to Flushing and I went to PS 154, the public school. From there, I went to what was called McBurney School, which was a school in Manhattan, which was sort of run like a prep school. It was essentially run like a

New England prep school. And it was a very, very good high school with very, very good teachers. From there, that's what gave me the opportunity to go on up to Harvard.

Erickson: Great. Did you study science in high school?

Ruibal: I took the regular courses in high school which were just broadly trained, including science, yes.

Erickson: And how about at Harvard?

Ruibal: At Harvard, I completely specialized as a biology major and worked at the Museum of Comparative Zoology that was there—so I could work on lizards. (chuckle)

Erickson: Well, how did you get from New York to California?

Ruibal: After Harvard, (I got my B.A. there), then I went to Columbia University where I got my Ph.D. with John Moore.

Erickson: Were you in the same class?

Ruibal: No, he was my instructor. He was my Ph.D. advisor.

Erickson: Well, how nice.

Ruibal: Once I got my Ph.D. from there, I was looking for a job. And my wife Irene and I didn't know where to go, and we had two opportunities. There was a possibility of a job in Orono, Maine. And Herman Spieth, who was here in Riverside, had asked me if I was interested in coming here.

Erickson: Let's go back to that in a second, but I didn't realize that you were already married then. When did you and Irene meet?

Ruibal: Yes. We met when I was a freshman in college.

Erickson: I see. Was she also going to?

Ruibal: No, she was a secretary in the Department of Herpetology in the American Museum of Natural History.

Erickson: Oh. So, you met and then how long did you date before you got married?

Ruibal: Oh, it took me about two years to talk her into getting married.  
(chuckle)

Erickson: Well, I am glad you did.  
(chuckle)

You were married then, through your college days?

Ruibal: My senior year, yes. But actually, I was also in the Army. I was in college for two years, and then I was in the Army for a year and a half in the Medical Corp.

Erickson: Did you enlist?

Ruibal: Yes, I volunteered.

Erickson: What year would that have been?

Ruibal: That would have been ... like '48... or '47. Yes, '47.

Erickson: World War II.

Ruibal: Right. The war was just ending and they were threatening to draft me, and I couldn't stand the indecision. At that time, they wanted people to volunteer, and the GI bill was being offered at a very good rate, so I essentially volunteered for a year and a half.

Erickson: How did you get into the Medical Corp?

Ruibal: They put me straight into it. I have no idea, just the luck of the draw. They needed people in the Medical Corp, and they just

took me and a bunch of other guys and put us in the Medical Corp. And it was great. I learned a lot of biology. I was running a clinical lab by the time I left. So actually, they trained me. And when I got out of the Army, for about six months I worked at a hospital as a clinical lab technician.

Erickson: Where were you stationed?

Ruibal: I was stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Erickson: Oh. So, was Irene able to be with you then?

Ruibal: Well, we saw each other on occasion.

Erickson: That's interesting. Then you used your GI bill to go ...

Ruibal: Then I went back to Harvard on the GI bill.

Erickson: Could you use it also for Columbia?

Ruibal: Part of it. Part of it was still available to go to Columbia.

Erickson: How did that work?

Ruibal: At that time, the GI bill was very generous. They paid wherever you went.

Erickson: For what length of time?

Ruibal: I got it for about three years.

Erickson: Ok. I had interrupted this transition. You said that you knew Herman Spieth or he had contacted you?

Ruibal: When I was a graduate student at Columbia University, I got a job as a teaching assistant at City College. I got the job there because Herman Spieth used to teach a graduate course at

Ruibal: Columbia University, and he was a professor at City College in New York but taught a course for the graduate students at Columbia. I got to know him there, and he got me a job as a

teaching assistant at City College. So, then when he got hired to come to Riverside, he knew me already.

Erickson: Because when he first came to Riverside, it was not as Chancellor, it was ...

Ruibal: No, no. He came as the head of the Biology Department. Right, right. And that's when he then offered me the possibility of coming out here.

Erickson: Did you and Irene talk it over?

Ruibal: Oh, yes. We talked it over, but there wasn't much choice. You know, either Maine or go out to California, and at that moment we essentially said "Let's go all the way." At that time we were confirmed New Yorkers, so it was, you know, tough leaving New York.

Erickson: Well that's what I mean, because I could just as easily have seen you going to Maine.

Ruibal: Sure. We essentially decided that since we were going to leave New York, let's go all the way to California. And knowing Herman Spieth and what he described, we thought it would be worth a try.

Erickson: What did you think about California when you arrived?

Ruibal: Oh, we were enchanted. We drove all the way out. We had never been west of the Rockies certainly. And it was all a great adventure.

Erickson: So different from New York.

Ruibal: Yes.

Erickson: When Herman Spieth talked to you, what did he ask you to do?

Ruibal: Well, he was just asking if I would be interested to come out to teach in the Biology Department at UCR. I was in the process

of just getting my degree. Actually when I came out here, I came out with the lowest possible rank.

Erickson: Which was?

Ruibal: Which was Acting Instructor.

Erickson: Acting Instructor. But you probably weren't that for very long?

Ruibal: Well, I got to be a full instructor within a year. (laughter)

Erickson: Oh, that's terrific. How many people were in your department when you first came out?

Ruibal: Umm. Must have been about six or seven of us at the very beginning.

Erickson: There were a couple of women in the department.

Ruibal: Um. Hmm. Right. Within the first year or so, there were two women in the department.

Erickson: Not initially though?

Ruibal: Well, I can't remember now precisely whether they were both here when I came or they came ...

Erickson: When did you come here?

Ruibal: I came in the fall of 1954, the fall quarter of 1954. That was the second semester. The spring semester of '54 had been the first teaching semester, and I came for the second teaching semester which was the fall of '54.

Erickson: That's right. There were already students here.

Ruibal: Right.

Erickson: What was your immediate thought about the city of Riverside? What did you see?

Ruibal: Oh, you know, we didn't have any strong opinions of it. It was a very different place, so we just accepted it the way it was.

Erickson: Uh huh. Lots of orange trees.

Ruibal: Oh, yes. We were very impressed by all the orange trees. I must say I was very impressed by Victoria Avenue because we used to live out in Arlington. We lived in a cheap motel out in Arlington. And every morning I would drive down the length of Victoria Avenue to come to school, and I just thought that was marvelous.

Erickson: And it still is.

Ruibal: (laughter) Right.

Erickson: So, you found a motel to live in. Because I was thinking about the time. Was housing tight then? Were there lots of people moving to California or were there returning veterans?

Ruibal: No, it wasn't really tight. The Sun Gold Development was just starting between Central and Arlington and Victoria Avenue.

Erickson: Near Poly High School.

Ruibal: Yes, near where Poly is now. That was a big housing development and that ultimately is where we moved in.

Erickson: Was that Fred Jennings who built that?

Ruibal: I don't know. It may have been.

Erickson: Fred Jennings was a member of the Foundation Board of Trustees here at UCR.

Ruibal: I know the name, but that's all.

Erickson: Well, let's see. You moved from the hotel to your home. Tell us what the surroundings looked like here on campus when you first came.

Ruibal: It was pretty barren in the sense that there was really nothing planted, no trees, no bushes. They were actually just starting to do the landscape, so there was absolutely nothing. The buildings were there and there was nothing.

Erickson: Just a core of buildings.

Ruibal: Right, right.

Erickson: The Citrus Experiment Station though was in existence.

Ruibal: Oh, yes. That section was, you know, developed. But the main section where the campus is now was totally dirt and concrete and that's it.

Erickson: How was the transition with the new faculty coming in with the existing faculty of the Citrus Experiment Station?

Ruibal: Well, there wasn't really a lot of contact because the Citrus Experiment Station people didn't teach. So basically there was a minimal amount of contact.

Erickson: They were hired as researchers.

Ruibal: They were essentially research professors while we were basically research and teaching, and there really wasn't a lot of contact at the beginning—that I remember. There were enough of us in the college so that we had more than enough connections and friends with all the people that came here.

Erickson: But there was a Faculty Club. Was that one of the buildings that was in existence?

Ruibal: Yes. That was the Faculty Club, but I don't remember that I had much to do with it?

Erickson: Oh, you didn't go there?

Ruibal: No, not very much that I remember. And, of course, the Faculty Club at that time got into a problem with whether women could go there or not.

Erickson: Oh, tell me about that.

Ruibal: Well, I don't know that part too well. I think Christena Schlundt can give you the real details, but basically, women weren't supposed to go up to that club. And it took a while. Between Loda Mae Davis and Christena Schlundt, they got the rules changed.

Erickson: Goodness. Thank goodness they did.

Ruibal: Yes.

Erickson: Well, one other question I had for you about the buildings. Um...there is a Mormon Church at the corner of University and Campus...is that Campus Drive?

Ruibal: Right. At that time, it was an empty area, and the University had not purchased that. That simply was property, land that had not been purchased by the University. And, remember the freeway wasn't there either.

Erickson: Sure. And so that land was just vacant and ...

Ruibal: Vacant, and then somehow the Mormon Church purchased it. Right. I remember there was a little bit of fussing about it, but ...

Erickson: You mean after they purchased it?

Ruibal: Yes, but I don't know the details. I know that some of the people in the University were upset that they didn't have the property and that someone else could build in right next to the University that way. But it wasn't something I worried about.

Erickson: Sure. You were worried about the lizards!

Ruibal: Yes.

Erickson: When you first came here there had been a number of community leaders who were instrumental in founding the campus. Did you have some interaction with them?

Ruibal: No, I didn't initially. When I came here as I said, I was an Acting Instructor. I didn't really have much contact with them. The only people I ultimately did have contact with was Phil Boyd.

Erickson: Oh, well tell me about that relationship.

Ruibal: That was some time later when he started developing the Desert Research Center that he was interested in donating to the University.

Erickson: Is that now The Living Desert or ?

Ruibal: No, it's near The Living Desert, but it is up the canyon. It's the Philip Boyd Desert Research Center.

Erickson: Oh, I'm sorry. Ok.

Ruibal: Which he initially proposed and I was involved with sort of the administration and the forming of it at the very beginning.

Erickson: What kind of process was that? Did you have to ... or did he write a proposal?

Ruibal: We did write an NSF proposal, and we did get some money. But he had also donated money for it.

Erickson: And then it had to go through The Regents, is that correct?

Ruibal: Yes, right, Right. But I am really fuzzy about all the details. Basically it was a matter of getting it established and getting it set up.

Erickson: And that is still in existence?

Ruibal: Oh, yes. It's a very successful place.

Erickson: Did you conduct some research out there?

Ruibal: No, I didn't really do any research there. I drove out there a lot when it was starting to be formed and the like, but no, I didn't do research out there.

Erickson: Uh huh. Well, the university was a liberal arts college for the first few years you were here. Tell me what was it that precipitated that change then to a general campus.

Ruibal: I am not sure that I can remember what led to the discussion about making the transition. I really don't know. In other words, I don't know what precipitated it. I remember that we got involved in it and there was a big discussion about it. And, I think, most of the professors were very much in favor of going to a general campus rather than just being an undergraduate.

Erickson: Did you like the size of the campus—the smaller size?

Ruibal: Oh, yes, for us as starting instructors it was certainly an advantage to start out with small masses.

Erickson: And what was a typical class?

Ruibal: Oh, the classes were all essentially, you know, twenty students.

Erickson: So a lot of interaction.

Ruibal: Oh, yes. You got to know the students. Many of the students were in the first few years people that had been in the Korean War. So, many of them were older than most students would

Ruibal: have been. In essence, it was a rather mature group of students that we had.

Erickson: And they were mixed together with the eighteen year olds.

Ruibal: Right, right.

Erickson: Was that a challenge in any way?

Ruibal: Oh, no. I can't say I remember it being one way or another. They were just good classes. They were good students to have.

Erickson: Well, they were probably close to your age then.

Ruibal: Some of them were. Yes, right.

Erickson: Did you find them different from a typical college-age student?

Ruibal: You know, it's hard to make that sort of comparison. They were different from New York college students, let's put it that way.

Erickson: Were they more mature?

Ruibal: They were more mature, but they were also less forthright and not as aggressive. Having taught at City College in New York City, City College had a very unique status. It was a city-run college that had academic standards as high as anybody else in the country. And the students who went there were not necessarily well to do. They were students from lower middle classes, middle class families, and they were there to learn. And when you were an instructor there, you realized that there was no ambiguity as to what the students wanted from you.

They were very interesting students to have for me to have first started teaching, because they were very responsive and would certainly complain if you didn't teach them enough. So, it was an interesting experience.

Ruibal: And then to come to California, the distinction that I found was the students here were too passive. I wanted them to be more aggressive, more interacting, asking more questions. And

compared to the City College student, they were essentially a more passive group.

Erickson: I am going to jump ahead a little with my next question. How long a period did you actually teach at UC? It was from '54 until...

Ruibal: '54 till ... you mean until I retired? I guess I retired ... what, two or three years ago.

Erickson: So into the nineties. Maybe this is unfair, but can you draw a comparison between the students of those early college years to today's.

Ruibal: They changed all the time. They changed in the way they dressed. They changed the slang. They changed in, you know, carrying backpacks or not carrying backpacks. I don't think I have a clear analysis of the distinction.

Erickson: It was probably related, too, to what was going at the time.

Ruibal: Sure.

Erickson: Tell me about the Biology Department. You mentioned that there were a couple of women and there were about seven or eight (is that what you said)?

Ruibal: Yes, um hmm.

Erickson: Well, how did you all ... by the time you got here, was the curriculum already established or did you ...

Ruibal: There were already some courses established and Herman Spieth was the Chairman. And Herman ran the department in a very, very democratic way. When we had a faculty meeting, we had a real faculty meeting.

Erickson: How often was that?

Ruibal: Oh, quite often. As I remember, sometimes almost every week. And the faculty meetings were very substantive, and Herman was very good in being a person who got everyone to be involved and to participate. Even if you were and Acting Instructor, you got to have your say.

And, actually the rest of the campus was the same way. In other words, when the Academic Senate met, many of us that were there were either first rung Assistant Professors or less.

And it still was a very open, very well coordinated group of people in the sense that Olmsted, who was in charge of the Humanities people ... they all were very good as leaders in the sense of getting people to be involved and to participate.

Erickson: You didn't ever feel intimidated?

Ruibal: No, not at all.

Erickson: You told a cute little story about a blackboard in one of your lab classes. Would you relate that?

Ruibal: Actually it wasn't in the lab. It was in the Comparative Anatomy Lecture which occurred in a lecture room over in Physics where you had sliding blackboards that slid behind each other.

When I went there on one of the anatomy lectures, they had it booby trapped in the sense that they had put a bunch of naked pin ups in behind the boards, so as I gave my lecture and filled one of the boards, then I slid it up, and what I exposed were two views of naked pin ups. And the class, of course, burst into laughter since most of them knew it. They had been sitting here waiting for me to do it.

Erickson: It sounds like you had a good relationship with them.

Ruibal: Yes, it was fine. I mean, what could you do except laugh.

(laughter)

Erickson: Well, you and Irene have such close ties to the community and you have both been so involved, would you talk about that a little.

Ruibal: I think that happened, I am trying to think back how that happened ... One of the things that occurred was that the social life centered around everybody in the faculty. In other words, I was friends with people in Art, I was friends with people in History, I was close friends with people in the Humanities as well as in the Sciences. That was one of the advantages of a small campus.

At some of those parties, people from town for one reason or another had been invited, and one of them was Tim Hays, who at that time was just starting to take over The Press-Enterprise. And, I think, I got to be a friend of Tim Hays. Irene and I became friendly with him and his wife, and I think that was probably my primary introduction into meeting other people in the town ... through that connection.

But I should also emphasize that at that time, there was a very active social life on the campus, and people from the town would get invited if they had met, and so therefore you met different people.

Erickson: There was a lot of interaction.

Ruibal: Yes. There was a lot of interaction.

Erickson: I think the community was so happy to have the campus ...

Ruibal: Yes. Right. And some of the people we had in the Humanities were just great at giving parties.

(laughter)

Erickson: I mentioned the Faculty Club earlier. Did you ever become involved in that?

Ruibal: No. I never had much to do with that.

Erickson: And where was your office?

Ruibal: My office was in Webber Hall part of the time, and then I had an office part of the time in one of the greenhouse, headhouses. So, I had moved around quite a bit.

Erickson: And where is your office today?

Ruibal: My office now is in Spieth Hall on the first floor in one wing.

Erickson: Would you describe a typical day in those early years, being a scientist and a professor. How did you juggle things ... just tell us about a typical day.

Ruibal: Well, a typical day would have consisted ... if you had lectures that day of spending part of the day getting ready for the lecture and then delivering the lecture. And then essentially going to lunch and coming back and if you had a research project going, to get to work on your research project. And if you didn't have a research project going, you probably were writing for a grant.

Erickson: Did you have any help in those early days?

Ruibal: If you got a grant, you had help, yes. If we applied for an NSF or a different kind of grant, we would get support.

Erickson: By that time, had the Graduate Program been established?

Ruibal: It was probably just starting to be established, yes.

Erickson: So, is that where you would have drawn your help from?

Ruibal: Right.

Erickson: How often does a professor apply for a grant?

Ruibal: Oh, as often as you can.

Erickson: Do you come up with a new idea, is that ...

Ruibal: Yes, when you have a project and you have an idea of how to propose it. I think the difference between when I was doing it in say the 1960s and now, is that it was much easier then. Now it is much harder.

Erickson: Why do you say that?

Ruibal: In the sense that there is a lot more competition, there is proportionately less money for the number of people that are applying. And I think the attitude is a much harsher one. I know that certainly one of the grants that I got, I would not even think of submitting now, because it was a grant that was based on the possibility that maybe something interesting would happen.

In other words, nowadays, the competition is so severe that you have to have evidence that this is going to be something that is feasible and is going to give good results.

The grant that I got to go to work in Argentina in the early '60s ... I got it basically by describing what an interesting place it was and what interesting frogs were there and that I was going to do some interesting projects on the possibility that these were saline-adapted frogs. And basically that was it. It was a proposal that was based on the possibility of maybe something interesting developing.

Erickson: Would you say that it is more restrictive now?

Ruibal: Oh, now it's much more restrictive.

Erickson: And limited in that if you are so focused now on your objective, then you don't have time to be creative in other ways, or am I incorrect?

Ruibal: No, I think it just means that when you write grants now, it is a lot harder. You have to spend a lot more time in preparing for it, you have to have more evidence about the feasibility of the

project ... you are going to get it now if you have already done some research in the area and demonstrated that you know your way. It's just a harder competition.

Erickson: You talked about being in Argentina. How often as a professor are you able to take a sabbatical leave?

Ruibal: Every seventh year.

Erickson: And did you do that?

Ruibal: Yes. When I went to Argentina, I did it on a sabbatical. Right.

Erickson: Where else did you go?

Ruibal: Oh, we've traveled around quite a bit. I used to spend a lot of time in Cuba before the Revolution because I used to do research there during the 50s. And I was there into the Revolution, and then once the Revolution took over ...

Erickson: What year was that?

Ruibal: I was there in '59 and '60 during the time the Revolution was occurring.

Erickson: During the Cuban missile crisis?

Ruibal: Before the missile crisis. And we traveled a lot in the West Indies, we traveled in Ecuador, in Argentina, so we have seen quite a bit.

Erickson: How did you make arrangements for living and that kind of thing and to do your research when you were going to a foreign country?

Ruibal: Before going, I always had some contacts. In Argentina, I had the contact of an Argentine Researcher who sort of told me how

Ruibal: I might be able to find a place to stay. And we essentially rented a room in someone's large apartment house.

Erickson: I see. And how many languages do you speak?

Ruibal: I just speak two—Spanish and English.

Erickson: Well, that certainly was enough to get you by.

Ruibal: Oh, yes.

Erickson: Did you have a favorite country or city?

Ruibal: No, not really.

Erickson: You liked them all.

Ruibal: Yes.

Erickson: I know you have some hobbies you are interested in now. Would you tell us about the jewelry making?

Ruibal: Some years ago, when I ... I guess I am trying to think back when ... the Riverside Art Museum used to have art classes. And when I came here from New York, I had been attending art classes on my own with a friend of mine who was an artist. And since he didn't have too much money when he needed a model, he would call me and a couple of other guys, and we would chip in for the use of a model to do life classes.

Erickson: Was this sketching or ...?

Ruibal: Sketching with charcoal and pencil. So I had been doing that in New York before coming here, and then when we came here, they told me about the Riverside Art Museum, and they said yes, they had life classes, so I joined up with them.

And when I attended the first life class I remember the shock, because the model came out in a bathing suit, and I couldn't understand why we were having a life class with someone in a bathing suit. It turned out that Riverside was so proper that their life classes did not include nude people, (chuckle) which I thought was kind of weird. In any case, I sort of argued about

Ruibal: it, and they finally admitted, well maybe we can get someone. And they did finally, they had a real life class. They had a young lady come who stripped and posed nude, and that sort of broke the ice. From then on, we had regular life classes. In any case, I stayed with the Art Museum and their connections. There was in town a very good potter, Dean Strawn, and I learned how to do pottery.

Erickson: Oh, uh huh.

Ruibal: I became a potter and did that for many years.

Erickson: Did you have a kiln and everything?

Ruibal: I had a kiln and everything at home. Yes, I could do it all at home, and that started me on making beads for necklaces and jewelry. And somehow or other, I slipped from making pots to making jewelry, and basically that is what I am doing now. I am making jewelry actually out of metal.

Erickson: What kind of metal?

Ruibal: I use brass and silver and I make different kinds of jewelry. And again I learned the techniques at the Art Museum. The Art Museum used to have night classes during the summer on jewelry making, and you could do lost wax casting and do things of that nature at the Art Museum. They don't do that any more, which is unfortunate.

Erickson: How many varieties or how many pieces of jewelry have you done?

Ruibal: Oh, I do a lot. I sell them through the Art Museum and the Municipal Museum and the Mission Inn Museum, and I actually sell down at Fallbrook at the Brandon Gallery down there. So, I can actually stay quite active.

Erickson: Well, your work is so distinctive, too. I think everyone can recognize it. It's very, very nice.

Ruibal: Well, thank you.

Erickson: Are you also interested in wood?

Ruibal: No. I haven't done anything in wood. No.

Erickson: Well, we'll switch subjects here. I know that you worked for President Kerr when he was the UC President, Clark Kerr. How did that come about and in what capacity did you work?

Ruibal: I got to work for Clark Kerr, because when Kerr was President, he always had in his office, one faculty member and that faculty member would work for Clark Kerr by taking care of the correspondence that Kerr got from faculty throughout the university system.

If Kerr received a letter complaining about something from a faculty member, it went to this academic who would then investigate it. I think I was recommended to Clark Kerr by Metcalf who used to be up in the Citrus Experiment Station.

Erickson: Robert Metcalf.

Ruibal: Right. And, what I did ... I would go up for a couple of days every week.

Erickson: Office of the President was then at ...

Ruibal: At Berkeley. I would fly up and spend two days up there almost every week. And what I would do in the office ... There would be a stack of letters that Kerr would receive. I would read the letters, and then I would find out what the facts were. You know, if there was a complaint, if there was a request for something, I would do all the legwork that was necessary, and then I would draft a response, I would draft an answer. And this I would then put together with the letter and in the late afternoon, this would go to Clark Kerr.

Ruibal: And Clark Kerr actually used to take all that home with him. And then he would come back the next morning, and I would

get the stack back with either comments from him or modifications of the letter or whatever it was. And then I would do the final form, and I would leave it for him.

So, basically, it was his way of simply making sure his faculty were being treated by an academic who knew what the score was, rather than somebody who was just a bureaucrat. He was very careful about it, he was a very great person to work for. I would have to say ... he was brilliant. He was just a very, very bright person.

One of the examples of, you know, how good he was ... What I did for him was a minor thing, you understand. A minor thing of ...

Erickson: It was a part ...

Ruibal: Yes, but it was minor compared to all the other things he had to worry about, and all the other things he was doing.

And I always remember one morning I came in just as he was coming in, and in the elevator ride from the first floor up to the main office, he just (clicking his fingers in succession) one right after another snapped out all the problems that I was having in the work I was doing. And he had it all right there, you know. And I was very, very impressed, because it was stuff that I would have no idea that he was that attentive to. And he was a great person to work for.

Erickson: So he was a good leader.

Ruibal: Yes. And I was up there, this was during the campus rebellion when Savio and all the other people were ...

Erickson: Oh, tell me about that. What kinds of things...

Ruibal: Oh, I used to go since I wasn't quite a participant, but I went with considerable sympathy to what was going on, because I don't know whether you realize that at the time, part of the

argument was The Regents had set up a system where you could not discuss politics on campus.

Erickson: No, I am not aware.

Ruibal: That was the main argument. That was what started much of the argument. In other words, if you had a student group that organized and wanted to discuss Vietnam, you couldn't do it on campus, you weren't supposed to do it on campus.

Erickson: How intrusive was that into the political science classes?

Ruibal: Oh, it didn't matter in the classes, but it mattered in the sense that if you were a student group and wanted to invite someone in to talk about politics in any form or another, you couldn't do it. So, that was really part of the issue. This is why it was free speech in other words. It was in a sense that we were being restricted from having free speech.

Erickson: So, certainly you could relate to that.

Ruibal: Oh, yes.

Erickson: This would have been in the late 60s. What ... '68 or ?

Ruibal: Boy, yes, somewhere in there, right.

Erickson: What kind of issues were brought up at Office of the President?

Ruibal: Well, I wasn't in on those. In other words, I was just in on this one thing having to do with faculty and that had to do with all kinds of things from people being complementary in writing letters to Kerr thanking him for doing something to people complaining because they didn't get an award.

Erickson: What do you remember from Riverside? How was Riverside regarded in those days?

Ruibal: I don't really have any clear image of how they viewed it. I always remember that the President's office that the troublesome campus was always UCLA.

Erickson: Oh, really.

Ruibal: And that was at the time that Murphy was Chancellor. And I always remember coming to the realization that the President's office did not like Murphy and had trouble with UCLA because Murphy was too successful and Murphy knew what he was doing, and that he knew he had to buck Berkeley and he had to make UCLA a campus as good and as equivalent to Berkeley. And that is what he was fighting, he was fighting that all the time.

Because from the President's office, you know, Berkeley was the campus. And everybody else was peripheral. And Murphy didn't buy that. And I always remember that and I remember that to me, he was the most disliked chancellor, but he was also probably the best.

Erickson: How long was he chancellor, do you know?

Ruibal: I don't remember, for quite a while. He was there for quite a while.

Erickson: And how long did you work for President Kerr?

Ruibal: I think it was just for a year or two at the most.

Erickson: And did it rotate ...?

Ruibal: I think it was just for a year. He changed it every year so he got a different faculty member.

Erickson: How do you feel about the growth of the campus today in 1998?

Ruibal: I think it is fine for it to grow. I think the fact that it has grown slowly is all to our advantage and is a virtue, because we

haven't been overwhelmed. I have a suspicion next quarter may be a little troublesome, because we may have grown a little too fast.

Erickson: The enrollment now is close to 10,000.

Ruibal: Yes. Right. The rate of growth—people have complained that it is too slow. From my point of view, no, it wasn't too slow, because it let us maintain quality of our teaching while we were growing, and once you get too many people too fast what happens is that you take all kinds of shortcuts.

Erickson: I know that you served as the Acting Director of UC MEXUS. When was that?

Ruibal: This was just a few years ago, it would have to be four or five years ago? I forgot the year UC MEXUS was established.

Erickson: I was going to ask you that.

Ruibal: You will have to ... I am bad on dates. Arturo Gomez Pompa was a professor in Mexico, and he was hired to come up here as Director of UC MEXUS.

Erickson: That was in the '80s, wasn't it?

Ruibal: My guess would be somewhere in the '80s, right. And he was brought up and was very successful as Director of UC MEXUS, and then he was asked by the President of Mexico to come down to Mexico to join the government for a year or so to do some work in the preservation of the natural forests, tropical forests in southern Mexico.

Erickson: Because he is a plant ...

Ruibal: Because that is his specialty. He is essentially a plant botanist, a botanist. And at that moment, that's when they asked me if I would cover for him. The original idea was that I would just be

Ruibal: an interim while he went down and did this work in Mexico. And then after he worked there, he decided he didn't really

want to come back as director, so I was essentially the director for a year, and then they got the current director.

Erickson: Who is Juan-Vicente Palerm.

Ruibal: Palerm, right.

Erickson: What kinds of things did you do during that year?

Ruibal: It was essentially...it was a very well run staff there, and basically the staff did all the work and I would ...

Erickson: What is the charge?

Ruibal: The charge is to stimulate teaching and research between Mexico and California. In other words, between the University of California and Mexico, Mexican institutions. So, basically, what UC MEXUS has is many, many connections at universities throughout Mexico, and it has funds to support students to come here or to go there, and it has funds to support research that is collaborative research—that is to say, research done in conjunction with Mexican/University of California personnel.

Erickson: In all sorts of areas?

Ruibal: Yes. Basically everything—in the sciences, the humanities, you name it, which makes it a very pleasant sort of job to do since you are essentially making a lot of people happy.

Erickson: Well, typically, how many students would be exchanged?

Ruibal: Oh, I don't know. I am not sure I can remember. I don't even remember the budget figures by now.

Erickson: But that must have been ...

Ruibal: Oh, yes. It was fun and I got to meet a lot of people. And the staff there was just excellent. As I say, they made my job possible simply because they could do everything.

(chuckle)

Erickson: Well, let's continue with your research, Rudy. In layman's terms, would you talk about your area of research?

Ruibal: Yes. I started doing research on the taxonomy of lizards in Cuba and the West Indies and I progressed from that to doing the ecology of the lizards—that is to say, the physiological ecology of how lizards adapt to their environment and from that I proceeded to start working on amphibians.

And I was interested in the way amphibians adapt to arid habitats—that is to say how amphibians can survive in deserts. This was again physiological ecology of how animals survive under those conditions, and I worked here in Arizona and I worked here in California.

I worked in Argentina primarily with the amphibians trying to find out their physiology. And that's what I have been doing since then. Most of my work has been connected with that.

And the work in Argentina led to a whole diversity of things we discovered. By going there, we discovered things we didn't know were there. And from then on, I also got other colleagues here to participate.

We also did some work in Paraguay when the political situation in Argentina got so bad in the '80s we just couldn't work there. It was too dangerous. You work with frogs, you work at night and you work in isolated areas. And the last thing you want to do is find yourself out at night in the middle of nowhere doing something that looks so absolutely suspicious. I mean, here's some people with headlamps wandering around the bushes with a lot of people with automatic weapons around, it's not something you want to do.

Erickson: Did the government warn you to get out?

Ruibal: No, we just realized we couldn't do it there, so we moved to Paraguay, which has the same ecology and we were able to work there.

Erickson: Typically, how long would a research project last?

Ruibal: Oh, some of them last forever, because they just sort of go on and on with additional things to do. At the moment, I am not doing a lot of research. At the moment, what I am doing is ... we have managed to establish a colony of one of these frogs we have worked with, so we have a living colony—that is to say, it reproduces in captivity. So, we don't have to go out in the field to capture them.

And then I have been working with a commercial breeder of frogs to raise one of the other species—it's a tree frog that they want to use in the pet trade that we had worked with for many, many years. And I am helping them because what they are doing is establishing a colony of breeding frogs here so they don't have to be collected in the field.

Erickson: Is it typical that you would get questions and requests for your research information from an outside entity?

Ruibal: Yes, this was one of the few times, I think when there was really an outside group. And we simply worked with them because they were interested in the biology of the animals as well. And it was to our advantage. They gave us a lot of tadpoles and things like that.

And their purpose, which may be commercial, but we didn't care—that's fine with us, so long as their purpose was to raise them in captivity and have them reproduce in captivity and therefore reduce their being collected in the wild.

Erickson: Do you deal now mostly with research with frogs or do you ...

Ruibal: Yes, mostly with the frogs.

Erickson: Not so much lizards.

Ruibal: Right.

Erickson: You know, I have to interject something here. I forgot to ask you about your son. Will you tell us about him, please?

Ruibal: My son was born here the first year we came to California. He was raised here. He went to Poly High School and went on to Santa Barbara and then went on to Georgetown to get a law degree in Washington.

He was very much involved with Peter Uberoth at the LA Olympics. He was one of the initial group working with Uberoth in setting up the LA Olympics, so he ended up getting involved in sports, and then ended up working for a number of companies and finally ended up in Switzerland working for ISL, which is a very, very big firm there, which essentially does sponsoring of athletic events.

He was involved with getting sponsorships for track and field events throughout the world. He just left them and he is now working for Coca Cola. He is doing the Coca Cola sponsoring of soccer, football. As a matter of fact, he is about to take off to go to Europe for the World Cup, because he has to be in Paris for the World Cup.

Erickson: Interesting. Was he ever interested in science?

Ruibal: No, he developed on his own, and people said, "Gee, didn't you want him to be a scientist?" and my answer was "No." You know, my parents were very good to me when I was a silly boy interested in lizards. They thought it was perfectly ok.

Erickson: I was going to ask you, too. Did your parents move ...

Ruibal: They came out here after we came to California. Yes, my father retired. He had been working since, I think, he was sixteen years old.

Erickson: You said on Wall Street.

Ruibal: Yes. Actually, I am the first member of my immediate family that has graduated from high school.

Erickson: Oh, your father had that position without a high school diploma?

Ruibal: Oh, yes. No, no, he worked himself up to that.

Erickson: Did they like California?

Ruibal: Yes, they enjoyed it very much, as a matter of fact.

Erickson: I just didn't want to forget.  
Let's talk about your being a scientist again. In those early days, what kind of a lab set up did you have, and was it state of the art would we say?

Ruibal: Oh, yes. The facilities we were provided were first rate. I have no complaint at all. No, no. From the very beginning.

Erickson: As technology advances, how does that affect your lab? I mean, are you able to ... how do you update your lab, I guess?

Ruibal: Oh, you update it by obtaining the material in one form or another. If you have grants you obtain the material through the grants.

Erickson: So a professor's lab would be limited then to his ability to ...

Ruibal: But the department also acquired certain kinds of instrumentation, like an electron microscope. A department would have an electron microscope, so if you were interested in doing work with electron microstopy, you didn't have to get a grant to get a microscope, the department had a microscope.

Erickson: I see. So as a faculty within that department you make those decisions on what kind of equipment you wish to work with.

Ruibal: Sure. Exactly.

Erickson: Is that a priority then of the university to keep the labs as advanced as they can be?

Ruibal: Oh, I think certainly the department goes out of its way to do this. And as I say, individual researchers would be doing it by whatever money they are able to obtain in granting. And the department, on occasion, can be called on as an assistant.

Erickson: Well, you came in 1954, so you have known each and every chancellor to this date.

Ruibal: Um hmm. You don't want me to rank them. No.

(laughter)

Erickson: I wouldn't do that to you. But you have been acquainted with them, and I wonder if some of them have been more supportive to the sciences than others?

Ruibal: I am not sure I can answer that. I am not sure I would have any clear image that way or another.

Erickson: Just give me your impression of them starting with Watkins.... He was called a Provost.

Ruibal: Yes. He was called a Provost. You know, I didn't have much to do with him. He was sort of the Provost and I was the Instructor, so it isn't like we ever had a direct conversation.

Erickson: Oh, really.

Ruibal: As far as I can tell, the Chancellors worked out fine. Some of them were a tragedy in the sense that they died while being here.

Erickson: Well, let's take them in order. You didn't have so much interaction with Watkins, but you certainly did with Spieth.

Ruibal: Sure.

Erickson: Now he was called a Provost at first ...

Ruibal: And then he became the first Chancellor.

Erickson: You knew him very well.

Ruibal: Yes. We were very good friends, so I knew him very well.

Erickson: Would you consider that he was a good choice for the time?

Ruibal: Yes. He was essentially a choice that was the compromise choice, because he was the person that the Citrus Experiment Station personnel would accept.

Erickson: Because he was a scientist.

Ruibal: Because he was a biologist. And I guess they felt more kinship with him. Because the other person who was in the running at the time was Bob Nisbet.

Erickson: He was in the ...

Ruibal: He was in the Social Sciences, right. And I think the reason Spieth was chosen was because of the position taken by the people in agriculture.

Erickson: I see. That's interesting. Next was Hinderaker, is that right?

Ruibal: Right. And again, he was a very good Chancellor, very relaxed.

Erickson: He was here for a long time.

Ruibal: He was here for quite some time, and actually, we are very good friends of his.

Erickson: Even today?

Ruibal: Yes. We see them now that he is retired—he and his wife. We are very friendly with them.

Erickson: He was here during the unrest period. What kinds of things did you notice during your class at that time?

Ruibal: Well, one day we had a vote on whether we wanted to demonstrate or have a class.

Erickson: And ...

Ruibal: I just put it up to the class. It was a time of a lot of turmoil, and I essentially told the class I was willing to do whatever they wanted to do. And if they wanted to have a vote, we would have a vote. If they wanted to go out and demonstrate they would, or if they wanted to stay and have a class. They decided to stay and have a class—and demonstrate after class.

Erickson: That's interesting.

Ruibal: But I think it was much more successful to make it be up to them, you know, in a sense. I was sort of eager to go outside too, but being a responsible faculty member, I ...

Erickson: Well, as I understand it, it was to Chancellor Hinderaker's credit that was sort of his approach too to let the students work it out and talk it out.

Ruibal: Right. Yes. I think he handled it most of the time very well.

Erickson: Well, after Hinderaker was Tomás Rivera. Is that correct?

Ruibal: Yes, and it was such an unfortunate thing, because he died very soon after coming here.

Erickson: He was Chancellor for about four or five years, wasn't he?

Ruibal: Or even less than that.

Erickson: That's very sad. Then as an Interim Chancellor we had Dan Aldrich.

Ruibal: Right. And then Rosemary Schraer.

Erickson: Oh, and then Ted Hullar.

Ruibal: I'm sorry. Hullar, that's right.

Erickson: Did you have interaction with them?

Ruibal: Hullar, the times I worked with Hullar, I admired his administrative abilities because he was not a bureaucrat. He was a very direct sort of person.

When we were looking for the Director for UC MEXUS, Hullar was Chancellor. He had appointed the committee which consisted of people from all the campuses. And when we met (I was the Chair of the committee), we met for lunch to decide of the half dozen candidates we had, who would we recommend or whether we would give a list or not.

The committee unanimously picked Gomez Pompa. There wasn't any debate, all right. He was the one, the only top candidate. And I remember I got through lunch. I think we had lunch at what was then the Bear Flag in Canyon Crest. I left there from lunch, called Hullar's office to see if he could see me, and he said to come on up.

I went up to Hullar's office and walked in and told him the committee had just met and they unanimously recommended Arturo Gomez Pompa.

Now, if you have ever dealt with academic bureaucracy, you have to realize that my expectations were that I would be thanked for what I had done, and the committee would be thanked, but then it would be taken under consideration, and it would go through some mysterious process before the final decision was made.

Ruibal: So, I went there with those expectations. And Hullar pleased me no end, because I got there and I said this is who we picked, we picked Gomez Pompa. He was the only candidate and we were unanimously for it. And he said, "Get him on the phone."

Erickson: Really.

Ruibal: And right then and there, I had his phone number in Mexico. I called Gomez Pompa and told him the Chancellor wanted to talk to him. I gave the phone to Hullar, Hullar offered him the job. Now, you have to realize that as an academic, I was very impressed, all right. (chuckle)

Erickson: That is nice. Oh, then Rosemary Schraer. Did you know her as well?

Ruibal: I didn't know her too well. No.

Erickson: And she also died in office. I think she was Chancellor for about five years. And then presently is Raymond Orbach.

Ruibal: Right.

Erickson: Do you have interaction with him?

Ruibal: No, he is fine as far as I can tell, except his talking about Division I in Athletics, which I think is absolutely the worst thing we could do.

Erickson: Oh, you do? Now why do you think that?

Ruibal: Because I think Athletics, big-time athletics, are an embarrassment to American educational systems. They are filled with corruption, filled with cheating. They are filled with all sorts of things that don't belong in an academic environment, all right.

Even our team now, didn't they get in trouble just last year? Didn't they have to forfeit two games because they had players in the basketball team that didn't belong there? Players who

Ruibal: weren't taking the courses they were taking, now that's going on now.

What do you think would be going on when we are in Division I? And no one got punished if you remember. Those students that didn't take enough units, it seemed to be nobody's fault. Nobody knew about it..."Oh, really." "Oh, my, I didn't know that." You know, no one—the coach, "Oh, no, my goodness." And that, I think, is all false. It's all baloney, and that's why I couldn't imagine anything worse than Division I. And I think a lot of faculty would respond the same way.

Erickson: Oh, I know it's divided. Do you see the need for Intramural, that kind of program?

Ruibal: Oh, yes. I think Intramural Athletics and low-level intercampus athletics would be fine. Just don't let it get so that you are training people for the pros, which is what is going on. I mean, basketball teams at UCLA are training people to become professional basketball players, all right. They may not be able to write a complete English sentence, but that's all they are doing. So I couldn't imagine anything worse.

Erickson: That's interesting.

Ruibal: Do you want to end on that note? (laughter)

Erickson: No, I have a question that everybody wants to know. How do you stay forever young?

Ruibal: You just have to pick the right genes.

(chuckle)

Erickson: But you look so young. Did your father and mother also look ...

Ruibal: My mother looked quite young. Yes, my mother did. Yes.

Erickson: You are not going to tell me that it's healthy eating and activity?

Ruibal: No, it's just having the right genes.

(chuckle)

Erickson: But you are very active, aren't you?

Ruibal: Yes. I play tennis four times a week.

Erickson: Well, is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Ruibal: No, I can't think of anything. I think you pretty well covered a lot of it.

Erickson: Well, thank you so much.

Ruibal: All right. It was fun. (chuckle)

END OF INTERVIEW