

RICHGROVE IS ON THE MOVE

A story about the Richgrove HDP by Joaquina Rodriguez, February 2025

It was in February 1980 when I arrived to the Richgrove Human Development Project (HDP) located in Delano, Bakersfield, California. My first surprise when I arrived in Los Angeles, I was waiting for a person dressed in blue (as had been my experience). However, it was Mimi Shinn, in a nice blouse, but not all blue. I located her by the look that the people of ICA have of welcome and understanding. I had passed by her and turned around; and we asked in unison, "Are you Mimi? Are you Joaquina?" Mimi and Ed Shinn were the directors of the ICA Richgrove House, and their teenage son Nathan, and Fernando Campos from Guatemala, lived with them.

The ICA house was about two kilometers from Richgrove. I was surprised that Richgrove was so multicultural. Although 75% were of Mexican origin, 3% were Anglo, the rest were Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, some Arabs, and some already mixed. The local board of directors was made up of: a president of Mexican origin, bilingual, very wise in his behavior; his son who was a significant support for the members of ICA; Mr. Mateo of Filipino origin; a Mexican; a Filipino; a white person; and other people.

I was assigned to be the coordinator of the Richgrove local newspaper, which needed to be published in Spanish and English. Three students, working two hours and earning some money, collected the information and translated it and coordinated with sector leaders.

A key social event for Richgrove is the Community Fair. Annually the community elects a queen and someone of Mexican origin always won. This time I proposed making a float with a representative of each culture. The good thing was that the Mexican population, which was in the majority, took it very well. Therefore we learned more about each culture.

I was also assigned to the Infrastructure Improvement Commission, mainly focused on improving housing, the drinking water system, and the sewage project. Our ICA team included Ed Shinn, Fernando Campos and me, with the support of local leaders. However, at the time Ed Shinn was assigned to Mexico to initiate some actions to start an ICA there, and Fernando Campos was assigned to Pisinimo, Arizona. A few months later, Judy Gilles was assigned to work with me. In that time a microchip enterprise was created with the participation of several young people from the community. With Judy we fulfilled other programs such as the regional symposia, where I had the opportunity to meet Judith and Jim Wiegel in San Francisco.

At this time the water and sewage improvement project was in progress. A decisive meeting was scheduled to approve the project attended by the technicians of the county, other key authorities and the engineer who designed the project. One of the conditions was that it is needed to be bilingual in English and Spanish. Unfortunately due to other commitments, we did not have a bilingual leader for that day. A skilled builder named Moisés promised to arrive at some point of the meeting. So with my limited English, I committed myself to translating, assisted by Judith Gilles and Teresa (a local leader). One limitation in my vocabulary was that the engineer spoke in inches and feet, and I knew centimeters and meters. We were halfway through, and I still see the anxious faces of the people and the technical table. At that moment Moisés arrived. It was the greatest relief of my entire stay in Richgrove. Very nice memories of that place and its people.

Personally, I attended two weekly sessions to learn English with a teacher of Filipino origin, Miss Strabel. I have never been good at languages, even though I'm good at writing and reading in Spanish (my language).

I dedicate this story to all the people I saw in Richgrove: for the tremendous effort they made, and that they did so well. I remember many ICA members I worked with: Inga Bessin, Eduardo Christensen, Ana Mari Urrutia, Father Rafael Davila, Jim Kelly, Elise Packard, Jesusa Aburto, Elisa Chumpitaz, Gloria Santos, Pedro Aburto, Thomas Caycho, Ernestina López, Barbara and Bill Alerding, Mary and Don Hopkins, Kathy Devor, Kim and Walter Epley, and many colleagues at the Chicago ICA building. I recognize the tremendous efforts many of these people did to translate from Spanish to English and English to Spanish during the Human

Development Projects, the Human Development School, and during ICAI meetings (most recently Isabel de la Maza. Lisseth Lorenzo and Gerd Luders, who translated to Spanish the Winning through Participation book).