Alfred Rascon

The Neighborhood

“From there you transition into junior high school, which was across the tracks on the white side of the neighborhood. It was at Woodrow Wilson . . . That was my first experience again with whites, Blacks--you name it--they were there . . . It was a good community because . . . my best friends were white guys, and my best friends were also Mexicans and also Blacks, and you were never looked at by color. You were looked at [by] who you were. I didn’t think about that again til years later--of how much anger I had about the fact it was embarrassing for me to be, first of all, Hispanic, to be born in Mexico. And everyone would come back and put down where you were born. And sometimes I would put . . . [down] that I was born in L.A or Ventura . . . I didn’t want to put [down] the fact that I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. But later on you realize, ‘Hey, this is your fate and what you grew up with.’ There’s not a question of what you choose. It’s a question of what comes to you.”

Heroes

“I think I’m not a role model by choice, but a role model by circumstances--like a lot of us are. You know we talk about heroes, héroes, and I go back and have a very simple story. Medal of Honor recipients are just by a fluke. That’s what happened in our lives. We have a tendency to not understand what a hero is now-a-days. A hero can be that woman or that man who’s helped somebody. It’s not somebody who’s getting a hundred thousand dollars a day. That person may be famous, but it doesn’t make them a hero. Sometimes that hero is that common person who’s helped you--a mother, a father who has given up their time for their children to come back and get an education, somebody who came from the barrio, or somebody who gives themselves for others. That’s what a hero is.”

Survival

“I think there were no expectations at that time. I think it was just an expectation that you were trying to survive. There’s an expectation of you just trying to be a good kid without getting in trouble. But, I never got in trouble in school. I was always a fairly good student. I didn’t have any problems. What I would have problems with . . . [was] the issue of where [I was] born. The fact that I was different from everybody else . . . was a matter of no emphasis on school. [It was] just the emphasis on trying to keep . . . rooted to the ground. I guess trying to earn a living. I don’t have any brothers or sisters, and I was brought up in a very dangerous area. This was the ‘50’s [1950’s] when the pachucos were still there--you know, thugs and heroin which is a big thing now, but at that time was pretty common, and marijuana. What would happen is that Mexicans would do their stuff on their own time, but would never come back and put it as peer pressure towards you, like they do it now. There were a lot of guys mainlining, which I never knew. But they were older people, and they would never come back and bring that to you. But their
families were disrupted, and there were a couple of friends of mine that I didn’t realize how bad the family was involved in drugs until much later on . . . I was also to find out later in junior high school, and later in high school, that a lot of the expectations of people that had everything in front of them, never became anything. And then those that didn’t have--the have not’s--became something, and I think it’s more [of the] art of survival.”

Motivation

“Well, you know, I think what I’m trying to say about everything that I’ve had is the fact that regardless of where you where born and how poor you are, it’s what you make out of it yourself . . . Somebody, someplace along the line was able to motivate you and tell you the fact you can do things . . . Somebody along the line [was] willing to come back and take the time to teach you things . . . It could be anybody of any color or creed . . . I realized the fact that somebody gave me a tennis racket, and the tennis racket wasn’t just made for a white person. It was made for me . . . Your height is irrelevant. The thing probably that I learned in combat was that regardless of the color of your skin, or how tall you are, they’re gonna kill you the same because the bad guys aren’t asking you who you are. You realize that your friends can be of any color or race. You have to realize the fact that you have to be proud of where you’re from or your ethnicity, I guess. I’m proud to be a Hispanic, but I’m also proud to be an American.”