

BIOGRAPHICAL BRIEF

SEBASTIAN (“SAM”) J. HERNANDEZ



Born into a migratory, agricultural, manual labor family that in the 1930s migrated via the then traditional path of working in seasonal truck-farming crops like cotton, fruits, flowers, vegetable, potatoes, sugar beets, grapes, berries, etc. The circular route was from Texas to California, up the coast to Oregon and Washington, then east to Idaho, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan, and back to Texas. The family finally settled out in a small (population 200+) southern Minnesota town (Delevan) in which I graduated in 1949.

Early childhood talents

I learned to play violin at about age six. My family put together a family string musical combo to which I became a member. By age 9, I also learned to play string bass and the mandolin.

About 1939, my brother (*a guitar player*) and I (*mandolin and violin*) came to Minneapolis to compete in a radio program called *Stairway to the Stars*, headed by Cedric Adams at WCCO. We won an award for our performance. During my junior and Senior High School years, I turned to percussion instruments and learned to play the tuba, baritone and trombone. I became a professional trombonist (union) and performed professionally until 1961 when I quit the profession. My brother (trumpet player) and I were selected to play taps for the returning dead soldiers during World War II for the Veteran's organizations. That was a great honor for us. I also excelled in gymnastics and feats of physical strength due to my daily heavy physical labor in the fields and warehouse of truck-framing. Between 1944 and 1946, there was a severe shortage of semi-truck drivers due to men being taken by the military draft. So, at age 14-16, I drove semi-trailers all over the Midwestern states for the truck farms. Not exactly legal or proper, but war brings about innovation.

Service in the military

I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force soon after graduation (1950) and got my honorable discharge in 1954. I served my stint mostly in administration and records inspection. I finished my tour in the then active Air Force Weather Detachment at a corner of today's Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

I studied photography during my service time, played string bass and trombone with a jazz combo at the base (Landsberg, Germany) NCO Club and learned to seek talent from the USO circuit in Europe and enticed many of them to come and perform at our small base on their way to the big ones. Met and dialogued with many famous movie stars, singers and dancers of the 50's era.

Upon my return to Minneapolis, I joined the musician's union and played trombone with such groups as Doc Evans (Dixieland) and Mexican (West Side) *conjuntos* (combos) with such groups as Jose Cortez and the Nick Castillo Band.

College record and some related experiences

Upon receiving my military discharge (1954) I enrolled at Mankato State. After two semesters, I dropped out, sold my house and moved to Tallahassee, Florida to join my oldest brother who, like me, had gone to Florida State University under the G.I. Bill, and had graduated with a Master's in Hotel and Restaurant Management. He owned a second-hand auto car lot. I went into business with him and started and finished my undergraduate at FSU in 1959. My brother (trumpet and guitar player) also came down and joined us. He and I put together a jazz combo (The Starlighters) and performed throughout the regional area of Tallahassee and neighboring Georgia. I was, again, a union member and subbed regularly with visiting orchestras and combos such as Ray Conniff, Stan Kenton and many Dixieland Jazz groups. Due to my auto involvement, I also got involved in dirt-track and stock car racing, and eventually into the sport car racing circuit here in Minnesota.

I finished my undergraduate at FSU, and returned to Macalester College for my major in Education. I went on for my Ph.D. in Secondary School Administration at the University of Minnesota, but never finished the program. While still at FSU, I had continued my avocation of recruiting musicians who performed at Florida's major campuses, colleges and bistros for excessive fees to come to FSU for a more nominal fee on their way to the big ones. I got my cut.

My teaching career and related experiences

I started to teach for the St. Paul Public Schools upon completion of my Master's at Macalester in 1961. I taught History and Spanish from 1961-1970. During these years, I started my pro-action in civil rights advocacy of the Chicano Movement, focusing on civil rights, human rights and culture diversity. I became active with student exchange programs and issues related to multicultural education and the new Affirmative Action energy. In the three years of 1967-1969, I, along with a very active student multi-language club at Harding High School, put together one of this nation's most successful clubs that generated three years of multicultural/multi-language International Festivals hosted at Harding, that brought language students and teachers state-wide, hosted an sponsored by major metro corporations, mayors, politicians and sundry civil engagements, such as churches veteran clubs, entertainment units, student exchange programs the State Fair and the MEA and foreign-food restaurants. The thousands of dollars we garnered was then used to send language students on student exchange programs all over the world. As a result, these students propelled me to earn the honor of receiving the Teacher of Excellence and Teacher of the Year finalist in 1968—the only Latino teacher to reach that position to this date in the history of Minnesota education.

During these years, I became part of a Minnesota DOE Committee that wrote a proposal for the mandatory teaching of potential teachers and teachers needing re-licensure to take 60 hours on Human Relations Training. This was training on the

history, culture, heritages and contributions of people of color to the U.S. way of life, including women's issues, cross-cultural communication and alternate life styles. It was finally accepted by the state congress and became the HR 521 Bill. All of us on that committee, as well as many others, quickly became well-paid consultants within the state school districts and taught the content and related implementation of it. It soon became part of the package of the new affirmative action movement of school desegregation-integration state and nation-wide energy of civil rights. Colleges and universities joined the movement, as did many of the major corporations. I soon was chosen by Control Data to teach the trainers on Human Relations and Cultural diversity to their managers. The package earned a higher acceptance and market and Control Data packaged it for sale to national corporations. I was hired as a traveling consultant and could accept such contracts because by that time I had left teaching, pulled two years as Assistant Principal and had become a District consultant on Hispanic Affairs and could take days off without pay to take these Control Data contracts. I flew to the nation's major cities in all the states and presented the package called Minority Group Dynamics to corporate offices of many of this nation's major companies.

This brought on solicitations from colleges to assist them in recruiting minority students to enroll at their campuses. The college at which I concentrated most of this energy was Mankato State. This experience identified me via national search to be invited to join the Affirmative Action funded national program called the National Educational Task Force de la Raza, housed at the University of New Mexico, and piloted at other national colleges. I was designated as the Ombudsperson for the Midwestern School Districts, assigned to Chicago State, and dealt with Latino issues related to AA, EEO, human relations, desegregation/integration, as well as bilingual education in accordance with the legal decision of the *Lau vs. Nichols* case. I presented at many of the major districts of the Midwestern states. I ended up starting my own consulting firm called SUNSOL Enterprise. A few years before I retired from teaching (1995), I started doing more of this consulting at the colleges of Minnesota and Wisconsin. I finally started teaching the subject content as an Adjunct Professor at Hamline University, retiring from that in 2001.

I have continued being active, primarily advocating on the dilemma of the educational achievement gap between students of color and their Anglo counterparts. I recently helped coordinate a conference on the Achievement Gap (Sept. 2014), which included participation of the MN Commissioner of Education. I am planning for a state-wide conference in the near future.

Sometime early in the 1980's I was asked to train parents about to adopt Minnesota and international children of color, on how to better prepare to deal with the challenge. As I progressed in this, I ended up becoming a licensed Social Worker, focusing in the areas of adoption and mental health issues. I still do work in this area. I became a co-chair on a MN Dept. of Human Services committee that helped pass the legislative bill called the MN Heritage Act on adoption. (It eventually was eliminated from enforcement.)