

Sal Rivera, 37

PARTNER AT FENNEMORE CRAIG LAW FIRM

- LA FAMILIA:** Married with two children
IN THE BEGINNING: Born in Phoenix
ETHNIC BACKGROUND: Mexican
HIGHER EDUCATION: B.A. in History and Political Science, Arizona State University
 Juris Doctorate, University of Chicago Law School
FAVORITE FLICK: *Glory*
FAVORITE LIBRO: The Bible
QUOTABLE QUOTE: "Sí se puede!"—*Cesar Chavez*
THE PEOPLE I ADMIRE MOST ARE: My family members

BY SAHAR EL-HODIRI

Sal Rivera still remembers the moment when he first knew he wanted to become a lawyer. As a child, he got an inside view of the good life because his mom, grandmother and aunt all cleaned houses for wealthy people, including several attorneys. When he got to see how different life was for these other families, he began dreaming of life outside the barrio.

"I started asking questions," Rivera remembers. "My parents told me, 'Stay in school and become a lawyer. Do something with your life.'"

Rivera grew up in a rough Phoenix neighborhood where becoming a gang member and dropping out of high school was the norm. Even though only 40% of the students at his high school ever graduate, he beat the odds.

"I'll never forget when I went to my high school counselor about going to college," says Rivera. "He discouraged me. He told me it was going to be hard and expensive. He urged me to find an honorable trade."

Rivera wisely ignored the counselor's advice and opted instead to follow his dream to enroll in college. He was so focused and determined he jumped right into law

school immediately after college without fully realizing what he had gotten himself into—until final exams after the first year.

"For the first time in my life, I started to question [myself]," recalls Rivera. "I wondered if I was in over my head. I wondered if I could really do it or if I had bit off more than I could chew."


His successful career provides the obvious answer to his self-doubt. He is now a partner at Fennemore Craig P.C., one of the largest law firms in the Southwest. He says he owes his success to a combination of hard work and his stubborn nature: He simply refused to accept an alternative to achieving his childhood dream. But he is quick to admit that there were times when even he needed some help, despite his tenacious spirit.

"At all stages of my life, there has always been someone significant who helped me through a difficult time," Rivera recalls. "When I didn't know if I could make it, or when I was a student and wondered where my next meal was coming from, somebody was always there for me—whether it

was my uncle or my parents."

Like many professionals, Rivera's life is a delicate balancing act. Despite a demanding work schedule and full family life, he wouldn't have it any other way and even has added another responsibility to the mix.

Knowing how important it is for kids to have encouragement and mentors, he co-founded and currently serves as chairman of the Arizona Latino Research Enterprise, a group that unites the Latino community in Arizona to discuss important issues and make positive changes.

"I grew up in a neighborhood where there were a lot of people who were more talented and smarter than me, but they just didn't have a chance to make it out of the neighborhood, for whatever reason," explains Rivera. "I want [other talented young children] to have the opportunity to fully achieve their potential. I want to be there to help mentor people, just as I was mentored and helped." 



Fennemore Craig Attorney Sal Rivera has practiced civil and commercial litigation for the past 11 years.