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Al Mendez was raised in Dallas, Texas and attended D.W. Carter High School. He graduated from Southern Methodist University in 1976 and then graduated from Texas Tech Law School in 1979. He was an assistant District Attorney in Collin County, Texas in 1980 and 1981. He then went into private law practice in the area of criminal law. Growing up he lived in the Elmer Scott housing project in West Dallas. His brother was associated with gang activity. His father was physically abusive. In the 4th grade, his family moved out of the projects and moved to Oak Cliff.