

Interviewee: Aaron Abeyta

Date: 03.09.2016

Location: The Cooper Rm, Alamosa, CO

Time: 9:00am

Aaron A. Abeyta is a Colorado native, and professor of English at Adams State University. He is also the Mayor of Antonito, Colorado, which is just down the road from his hometown, Mogote.

Aaron is the author of four collections of poetry and one novel. For his book, *Colcha*, Abeyta received an American Book Award and the Colorado Book Award. In addition, his novel, *Rise, Do Not be Afraid*, was a finalist for the 2007 Colorado Book Award and El Premio Aztlan. Abeyta was awarded a Colorado Council on the Arts Fellowship for poetry, and he was recently named the Poet Laureate of Colorado's Western Slope by the Karen Chamberlain Poetry Festival.

Aaron has over 100 publications, which includes work published in 'An Introduction to Poetry, 10th ed.' 'Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, & Drama, 8th ed.' 'Conversations in American Literature: Language, Rhetoric, & Culture' 'Colorado Central Magazine' 'The High Country News' and numerous other journals.

Abeyta received his MFA from Colorado State University. He lives in Antonito, Colorado where he remains close to his family and culture, both of which are at the center his work.

Aaron Abeyta is also deeply involved in his community. In addition to advocating for local farmers and ranchers on the *Garcia v. Vilsack* settlement, Aaron recently helped lead the fight against Energy Solutions, which was surreptitiously transporting nuclear waste through his community.

Good afternoon, Aaron. Thanks for coming in today. We'd like to get started by asking you a little about your life trajectory. You're a poet, a professor, a mayor, a rancher, and an active member in your community. Can you tell us a little about how you came to wear these many different hats?

We'd like to go back in time a little. Can you share with us some of your earliest memories of Mogote and Antonito?

- What was it like growing up in Mogote?
- What are your fondest memories of your childhood?

We understand your grandparents influenced you a great deal. Can you speak a little to your relationship with both of them growing up?

Your grandfather, Amos, was a great storyteller. Can you comment on how this has influenced your own work as a poet, novelist, and professor?

Of all the stories that you heard Amos told over the years, are there any that stand out in your memory?

- Would you mind sharing one or two with us?

In your mind, what is the importance of oral history to a community or culture?

Most of your work relates to your hometown, and much of it has to do with ranching and farming.

- Related to this, can you comment a little on how important farming and ranching is in your community? And to your family?
- And how has ranching and farming changed over the years?

Like many others, you left the valley for years. However, unlike many others, you returned.

- Why did you leave?
- What made you decide to return?

We'd like to change gears a little bit and move toward a little more difficult terrain. When was the first time you remember being treated differently because of your language or the color of your skin?

How do you think other communities view Antonito?

- Why do they view it that way

We understand you coached football for a number of years in Antonito. Do you recall any examples of ethnic or racial tensions coming out on the field?

- Do any particular examples come to mind?

You are very active in your community. In particular, you've been extremely involved over the last several decades in your community's efforts to right historic wrongs such as discriminatory lending.

- With that in mind, can you tell us a little more about your role in the *Garcia v. Vilsack* settlement?
- When did you start noticing these types of inequalities?
- How did you first become involved in helping out?
- Do you think that the settlement made up for decades of discrimination?

Regarding the local economy, how did being rejected for loans affect local businesses?

- Do you think the region's economy, and Antonito's in particular, would be different if more farmers and ranchers had been issued loans over the years?

How did losing loans affect you and your family personally?

Did you meet with other Hispanic farmers and ranchers about the *Garcia* case?

- How did their stories influence you?

What did you have to show in order to be considered for compensation under the *Garcia* case?

Did you ever receive compensation? If so, how much?

Do you think your compensation, or that of others, makes up for the financial and emotional losses your community experienced over the years?

How do you think that land loss and cultural loss, including the loss of language, has changed this and future generations in your community?

Did this experience of discrimination change you in any way?

- Did it change your family? If so, how?

What are the biggest hurdles that your community currently faces?

- How do you think these issues relate to the discrimination your community has faced historically?

What are your community's biggest strengths?

As mayor of Antonito, what do you want the outside world to know about your community that they might not be aware of?