

ctnow.com

cars.com

<http://www.ctnow.com/business/hc-assistantag.artjan20,0,2659618.story?coll=hc%2Dheadlines%2Dbusiness>

Lawyer Thrives On Search For Justice

By SUJATA SRINIVASAN
Special To The Courant

January 20 2003

Even at a young age, Mercedes Alonzo possessed a keen sense of justice.

In the mid-1980s, while researching a paper for a college course, Alonzo visited her native Honduras and spoke to Nicaraguan Contra rebels, Honduran officials and locals.

She recalls the Contras brandishing weapons and declaring that they had never violated anyone's rights. Young as she was, Alonzo's instincts told her that the rebels were lying.

"They denied all abuses attributed to them in The New York Times, The Washington Post, etc. Being young and naive and inexperienced, I still didn't believe them because of what I'd been reading in the newspapers," she said.

Alonzo's experiences in Honduras strengthened her interest in justice. However, little did she realize that 15 years later she would be an assistant attorney general in Connecticut.

Alonzo mediates on behalf of consumers who allege that companies have cheated them, and tenants who say landlords have violated their lease. "It angers me that people can take advantage of people," she said.

A native of Honduras, Alonzo grew up in a house that resonated with public service. Her father was a lawyer and lawmaker; her mother was the consul general of Honduras to Michigan. She moved to the United States at the age of 6 in 1976, when her mother was posted to Michigan; her father died when she was 6 months old. As a child, she often traveled with her mother on diplomatic trips. A voracious reader, she would spend long hours during summer vacations reading articles about other countries and cultures.

Alonzo graduated with a degree in international relations from James Madison College at Michigan State University in 1990. During her college years, she had an internship with a British lawmaker in London when Great Britain was considering legislation that would eventually return Hong Kong to China. The work exposed her to human rights issues involved in the handover, which did not occur until several years later.

Alonzo subsequently earned a law degree from the University of Connecticut, in 1993. Afterward, she held temporary jobs in the human rights field for two years. In 1995, she joined the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities as assistant commission counsel, investigating allegations of employment discrimination.

In 2000, she joined the Environmental Unit of the attorney general's office, where she was an adviser to the Department of Environmental Protection on administrative legal issues, reviewing its regulations. In 2001, she was transferred to the attorney general's Consumer Protection Department, where she currently works.

"People are usually at the end of their rope when they come to our office. They have been everywhere else, and have tried to resolve their problems themselves, and failed. That's why we do our best because we realize that they are using us as their last resort," Alonzo said.

Sujata Srinivasan is a free-lance writer who lives in Manchester.

Copyright 2003, [Hartford Courant](#)

