

## **A TEI Project**

# **Interview of Rosa Batres**

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## **1. Transcript**

### **1.1. Session 1 (March 12, 2009 )**

Collings

Okay, this is Jane Collings, March 12, 2009, interviewing Rosa Batres at her home.

Collings

We'll start off, as we always do, hearing about where and when you were born.

Batres

I was born in Mexico, Jalisco, 1972.

Collings

Was the whole family--

Batres

Yes, my parents were all over there. Then my dad two years later came over here, left my mom and I for a few years over there.

Collings

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Batres

Yes. I'm the only one that's born in Mexico, and a year later he brought us over. I was a year and a half when they brought me over here. They were all born here, because I'm the oldest.

Collings

Congratulations.

Batres

Thank you.

Collings

Did you come to Los Angeles initially?

Batres

Yes.

Collings

What part of L.A.?

Batres

I think downtown mainly. Mainly downtown L.A. is where we lived most of our lives when we lived in Los Angeles. Later on in life after living in other places, we moved back to L.A., and it was South Central, where we moved back to.

Collings

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Batres

I have one sister eight years younger than me, and I have one brother that's three years younger than me and another one that's four years, I guess.

Collings

Are they all living around the area?

Batres

No. I'm the only one in Long Beach. Well, my sister lives near Long Beach. My brother, one of them, lives in Vegas, and the other one lives in Lynwood.

Collings

What kind of work was your father doing when you were growing up?

Batres

As I was growing up, my mom always worked in sweatshops, and my dad always did either construction or warehouse work, that type of labor.

Collings

Right. Hardworking. So your mom was working all the time when you were growing up as well?

Batres

Yes, she was constantly working. I remember as a very, very young child--I could have been maybe seven or eight, because I hardly remember, but I do remember playing dishes with her, you know, like playing house. I do remember playing with her and she'd cook for me, but that was for a very short time.

Collings

Did you have responsibilities taking care of the family, as the oldest?

Batres

Yes. Being the oldest, my mom constantly--and I guess she got tired of paying for people that weren't taking care of us, either that wouldn't feed us or their kids would just fight with us. So as soon as I was old enough--I'm talking about maybe twelve--I started helping, and we'd be latchkey kids. So we'd just come home, and I'd take care of my brothers and feed them until my mom and my dad came home.

Collings

What elementary school did you go to?

Batres

My first elementary school was Magnolia Avenue, and then later we moved to South Gate and I went to Hildreth. Then later when we moved back, I think that was the last elementary school I went to, was South Gate.

Collings

So you switched elementary schools a little bit, it sounds like.

Batres

Yes, a little. A little, we did, yes.

Collings

Because you were moving? Why were you guys moving?

Batres

Well, we moved initially--when we used to live downtown, we moved because my father wanted to buy a house. So he did buy a house, but then he got into problems. He put the house into something he wasn't supposed to put it in, and then he had to sell it. Yes. When we moved to South Gate, that was when he had bought the house. Then when he sold it, we moved back to L.A. [mutual laughter]

Collings

Did you have a lot of family and relatives around when you were growing up?

Batres

My dad's side of the family was all here when I was very young. All his brothers and sisters are here, all of them.

Collings

Oh, my gosh.

Batres

Or at least most of them, you know; the majority of them were here. So we were constantly visiting uncles and cousins.

Collings

That sounds like it was really nice.

Batres

Yes. My mom's family moved over here, some of it, moved over here a little later. In my teenage years they started moving back over here. But mostly it was my dad's, and it was a lot of fun.

Collings

It sounds like it. Did you make many trips back to Mexico at all?

Batres

We made very little trips, because, first, my parents were undocumented. Then later when they applied for the amnesty, we made the first trip. That I remember, it was only two trips, because when we applied for amnesty, I was

already older. I was closer to fifteen, maybe, or fourteen when we applied for amnesty. I left my house at nineteen, so I didn't get to enjoy too many trips with the family. I enjoyed two.

Collings

So I guess your parents were supporters of Ronald Reagan at that point. Is that right?

Batres

They were. We were, very much so. [mutual laughter]

Collings

Very big supporters.

Batres

Yes, we were.

Collings

Did they become Republicans?

Batres

Yes.

Collings

Because of that?

Batres

Yes. Yes. Of course, you know, they then followed him. And I remember even my parents didn't--till this day my dad speaks very little English, and my mom understands more than she speaks, but she does understand. [laughs] But I remember them watching TV in Spanish and just following him, and them telling us like, "Oh, this is what's going on," because to us it was boring, you know.

Batres

And we were like, "Can we watch something else?"

Batres

"No, this is important."

Collings

But even to you? I mean, you knew what was at stake at that point, didn't you?

Batres

Yes. Yes. I think I was the only one that understood what was at stake, because my brothers and sisters had no idea.

Collings

And anyway, they were--

Batres

Well, yes. They were born here. But I think in their minds--and we're very fortunate, because I think my parents are very hardworking, and I think that in our younger years we never really felt the discrimination and, you know, the

worries that come with being undocumented. And back then it wasn't such a big problem to get employment.

Collings

Right. Yes, it's much different now.

Batres

Yes, it's much different now. So back then, I mean, we led a protected life in that sense. You know, we were left by ourselves a lot, obviously, but we led very innocent lives as far as that, and we didn't really feel that, the discrimination. I felt it more as an adult and in my teenage years than as a child.

Collings

So why do you think you started to feel that discrimination more?

Batres

Well, maybe, too, because I started understanding people speaking English, thinking--I mean, there's no way that you can look at me and not know that I'm Latina; I wouldn't say Mexican necessarily, but Latina. So people would speak in English about my parents or about us, or when they were trying to do something and I was with them, they'd start speaking about my parents, thinking we don't understand English. And then I'd be like, "We can understand you, you know."

Batres

Sometimes they wouldn't care, and they'd be like, "Well, it's true," or whatever. But other times they'd be like, "Oh, okay."

Collings

Do you think you started to hear more of that kind of thing after the amnesty?

Batres

Yes. After the amnesty is when all that started coming, especially when we had to do something, any kind of procedure. And then the Green Card came up. It came up that, "Oh, we have a Green Card," and then I heard all sorts of comments.

Collings

Like if they were going to a medical appointment or something like that?

Batres

Exactly. Exactly, and then I would hear comments like, "Oh, my goodness, I don't know what these people are doing here," and stuff like that, you know, just different stuff. Sometimes I took it personal. Sometimes I ignored it.

Batres

I think my parents were the ones that showed me to ignore it and to say, "Well, we need their services, so it might not be a good idea," because I think my parents were always--my mom. My father was always, "No, that's wrong," and my mom was always like, "You know what? Ignore it. They're going to help us, and we need to get help, anyway, so let's just ignore it."

Collings

So it was starting like about 1993 that you had to have the Green Card for any kind of services.

Batres

Yes.

Collings

Is that the period that you're talking about?

Batres

Yes, that's the period that I was talking about, because I was a bit older, so I could also understand a lot of the comments that they were making, and I started to pay attention more.

Collings

Did that change your outlook at all?

Batres

If anything, I think it impulsed me. It caused a lot of frustration, but it challenged me, how can I deal with this and still get what I need. It triggered something, and I learned to troubleshoot situations and things very young.

Collings

When you were very young. You're talking more about like when you were--

Batres

A teenager. When I was a teenager, I learned to see, okay, well, this is what my parents need to do, and how can we take care of this. So I would just say, "Oh, I'm sorry," you know. So I chose more like "kill them with kindness" approach than confrontational approach. I think I learned both. From my dad I learned the confrontational and the advocate for yourself, and from my mom I learned the "kill them with kindness."

Collings

When you were growing up, I mean before the amnesty, was your family planning to stay in the United States?

Batres

I think my family was always planning to stay, because my parents had nothing in Mexico. My dad did have something, but he lost it. My dad's never been too good with money, with finances, as you can tell. [mutual laughter] He's very trusting, and he doesn't think. He's very impulsive. He doesn't think things through all that much. So he lost that to I don't know what or who in Mexico, so I think they were always planning to stay here. I think he was always looking to make a living here for his family.

Collings

What's your mom's temperament then, if she has to--

Batres

My mom's temperament is very passive. It's passive at times, but she holds grudges. She holds grudges, and she's very observative. She'll look at somebody and she won't like them, and I don't know why she doesn't like them. Most of the time she's right.

Collings

Then it turns out something from twenty years ago--

Batres

Even with most of my acquaintances, sometimes she'll be like, "I don't like that person."

Batres

I'll be like, "But why, Mom? She's a nice person."

Batres

"I don't know. I just don't like her." And most of the time, later on something comes up, and she was right. My dad on the other side, I think I have more of my dad. He's very friendly. He talks to everybody. He's very trusting, and he's easy to get along with, but he has a very, very hot temper. He gets upset very easily, but then he forgets very easily, too.

Collings

Interesting combination. So how long did your mom work in the sweatshops? Was it in the textile industry downtown?

Batres

Yes. Yes. I think for like her whole life, or my whole life, she worked. My brother that's three years younger than me, I think it must have been when my brother was two that she started working, and she never stopped till very recently she stopped, and when she stopped, it was because she was older, and she had a lot of ailments, and they didn't want to hire her no more.

Collings

Did her situation at work change at all once she had her Green Card?

Batres

No, it didn't. The only thing was that it was easier to get employment. She could get employment anywhere. She's a very hardworking person. I remember her going to work sick. I don't ever remember her taking a day off, but yet she was always at the same position, earning the same amount of money.

Collings

So what exactly did she do?

Batres

I always remember her at the sewing machine, and I guess they would sew-- because I worked as a teenager with her to make a little bit of money, and they would sew pieces of just material. So it's like the piping for the clothes, they would sew the material together so it would become one long piece.

Collings

Okay, just to create like that long--

Batres

Exactly.

Collings

--long piece that can be then used in the rest of the production.

Batres

Then used for whatever, yes. So, that I know of, she always worked in that.

Collings

That's what she always did.

Batres

That's what I always remember her doing.

Collings

Did she always work with the same people?

Batres

She changed employers maybe three times, but we're not the moving or changing kind of people unless we have to, and that I did learn from my parents, you know, with employment, because she was such a hard worker. They never had any problems with her. She was never late. She was never, ever late. She was never absent.

Collings

What companies did she work for?

Batres

I don't remember. That, I would have to say that I don't remember the name of the companies.

Collings

What were your parents encouraging you to think about your own future when you were growing up?

Batres

They encouraged me to go to school. Unfortunately, because they had to work all the time, they weren't always there. We never spoke about college. How were they going to know she can go to college, she could get a scholarship? So they had very little knowledge of how systems work. So they just encouraged me to go to school, but once I was old enough--junior high, high school--I ditched very easily, and they would never find out, because they were always working. They were always working, and they had showed me how to do things that I used, unfortunately, to my advantage to keep things away from them.

Collings

Like what?

Batres



Like missing school, and they never found out about it. They'd send me to pay a bill, a light bill, and they'd tell me, because I was young, so they'd send me to the closest place. But then they would tell me, "You go here, because if you go all the way down to that main office, they're not going to charge you the fee, but it's too far."

Batres

So I said, "How much is the fee that they charge?" It was probably a couple of dollars, or maybe five dollars.

Batres

They'd be like, "Oh, five dollars, but that's why we're giving you the five dollars, so you don't have to walk all the way over there, because that one's farther."

Batres

So in my mind I said, "Hmm, I can keep those five dollars." So I'd walk, and they were at work all day, so after school I'd go. I'd say, "What time do they close?" And then they'd tell me, and I'd say, "Okay, they're home by this time. As long as I'm home by the time they're home, they'll never know." And unless I tell them, till this day they don't know even now. [laughs] Some of the times I've told them that I did. But I would do stuff like that, and I would ask questions of them, and they wouldn't have a clue why I was asking those questions, you know. So things like that.

Collings

Now, when you were a teenager and you were at high school, did you sort of think about the fact that you were undocumented, or was that not really an issue for you at that time?

Batres

In high school it wasn't really an issue, I think. I think I never thought of the fact that--I think we were so happy to have a Green Card.

Collings

When did you get your Green Card?

Batres

I got my Green Card when I was in junior high.

Collings

Oh, when you were in junior high.

Batres

I was in junior high.

Collings

Oh, okay. And before that you were too young to really--

Batres

I was too young to really know. I don't remember thinking, "I'm undocumented."

Collings

Yes. At that age, no.

Batres

I don't remember. I do remember going with my parents and standing in lines. Once it came up, once the amnesty came up, then it became an issue, and then I knew why, and then I knew why it was important. Then afterwards, well, we had Green Cards, so--

Collings

So that was great. [mutual laughter]

Batres

Yes. We didn't worry about it.

Collings

So how old were you when you got your Green Card?

Batres

I think I must have been closer to fourteen.

Collings

Yes, okay. So you were able to understand that this was important.

Batres

Oh yes. Yes, I understand. But even with the understanding that it was important, my parents always took care of every responsibility. Every bill was paid on time. Everything was paid. I don't remember me having to worry, "Oh, my gosh, if my mom doesn't pay the bill, they're going to turn off the light," because they always worked very hard to make sure everything was paid. So, I mean, I don't remember having to worry about, "Oh, we have to do this," or, "We have to do that." I just knew that they were getting business done so we could have a Green Card. But I do now, as an adult looking back, they paid a lot of money for that, because there was three of us, and with what they made, it was a lot of money that they paid.

Collings

Just for the fees?

Batres

Just for the fees. And I remember standing, like I said, in long lines at Catholic churches or at maybe like Centro Shalom or agencies like that that would help you for lower cost. But I remember spending days [unclear].

Collings

So you're talking about not just the actual government fees, but other--

Batres

The paperwork preparation.

Collings

Getting people to help you with the paperwork.

Batres

Exactly. Exactly, getting people to help with the paperwork, because I couldn't do that. I was too young to do that, and I think my parents didn't want to--you know, it was very important to them that it was done right.

Collings

Yes, of course.

Batres

So that's what I'm talking about.

Collings

Did other family members also get their Green Card through the amnesty, the extended family?

Batres

No.

Collings

Really.

Batres

No, my father's family, they're all well off. We were always the ones that were kind of lacking in that area. All of the rest of his family always had a house, and they were always better off than us, and they always had papers.

Collings

Oh, they did. I see.

Batres

They did. They had papers. My father's one of the youngest, so they came over here, and I couldn't tell you how it was that they acquired their papers, but they already did. They were all legal.

Collings

So this wasn't sort of like a larger family issue.

Batres

No. It was more, if anything, with my mom's family. I do remember one of her brothers did that, but they didn't live close to us. So I remember them saying that they were doing the same thing, but since they lived further out, we didn't really see each other. So it was just isolated to my own family.

Collings

I remember one of the things that Ronald Reagan said was that to solve the problem of undocumented immigrants, you can give them documents.

Batres

Well, it makes sense. [laughs] I mean, like with anything, people abuse it, and that's the sad part, but I think it helped the economy a lot. You know, even my parents being undocumented and having three children that were born here, we were never on food stamps. We were never on public assistance, never, because my parents always were hard workers. So I think they were able to then collect those taxes from those people.

Collings

Exactly. Yes, that's right.

Batres

And I think if anything else, it helped.

Collings

What did your parents say when Ronald Reagan died?

Batres

Oh, my goodness. We were very upset. I think till this day he's just--and in a lot of families' hearts, I think he just held a very special place in our heart. Like I said, you know, we knew everything about him. [laughs] And my parents were all like, "Wow, we'll never have a president like him." He was not perfect, but they were upset.

Collings

How did they feel about his other policies, you know, like in Central America and so on?

Batres

Well, you know, like you said, he's not perfect, and we didn't agree with everything, but we were just happy, and my mom did tell me, because back in our country--well, it's my country, but I don't know nothing about the government. But she would tell me, "We don't have that. We don't have good leaders like this." All of their policies are bad. All of their policies are for their own benefit, and that's why Mexico is like that, because the government steals so much, you know. So just for him, you know, we didn't agree with some of his policies, but just with the little that he did do for people, we were just so appreciative of it.

Collings

Are your parents still Republicans?

Batres

Yes, they are. Yes, they are.

Collings

Because of that.

Batres

Yes.

Collings

Are you aware of a lot of other people who became Republicans because of the amnesty and have remained Republicans?

Batres

Not that I know of. Not that I know of. I'm not aware of anybody. I'm sure that there is, but--like I said, my other family members were already, so I don't think--but, of course, all of us basically supported Ronald Reagan. We were all,

even my father's brothers and sisters. I am aware of a lot of people that became Republicans because their family members were able to benefit from that.

Collings

But what about the way that the Republican Party has shifted on that position? Has that caused problems for your parents at all?

Batres

I think my parents are very like set in their ways. Like I said, they don't like changing, and they're very loyal, so I think that they remain, you know. And my father always tells me, "No one leader is going to make every correct decision. You know, no one leader, you're going to always agree with everything he does." He says, "But at least if you know, one, his heart's in the right place. He's trying to do the right thing, and if at least you believe in the just of what he believes, then you've got to stick next to your leader, no matter what."

Collings

It's just really interesting, the idea of people becoming Republican because of the amnesty, and then wondering how that's played out since then. So let's go back to our chronology. What high school did you go to?

Batres

I went to a couple of high schools. Well, actually, that's not correct. I went to a couple of junior highs. I went to junior high in South Gate for a few years. I forget what the name of that junior high was. Then I went to Edison back in South Central. I went to Edison back in South Central, and then in South Central I went to Fremont, and I attended high school a couple of years only, if that.

Collings

So how did all the moving around in middle school affect you, do you think?

Batres

I was always kind of a loner type of child. I was always very shy, very, very shy. I think I've become more social now as an adult than I was in school. Back then, you know, name brands were very important. They are so now, too, but not as much, I think, as they were back then. So I never had the nicest clothes or the nicest friends or anything, so I made that made me withdraw away from others.

Collings

With your mom working in the textile industry, I mean, you understood where these name brands are coming from. But that didn't matter?

Batres

Well, that didn't. It did matter to me.

Collings

It's like they all come out of the same shop. [laughs]

Batres

Exactly. I mean, to me, I mean, it didn't matter to me. I wasn't into the name brands, but as I saw other kids judged you by it, I got away from the other kids, and I said, "No, I don't want to be judged." To me, I didn't care. I was happy with what my mother--because I knew how hard she worked for whatever it was that she got me. You know, and as any child, I think my mom made her best effort. It was hard, because I was the oldest of four. I think it got easier, like for example, my sister always had name-brand stuff, because my mom was able to give her more because a lot of us were gone, or we were already working and helping out to buy our own things. So I've never been a name-brand person, a person to like, "Oh, this is Gucci," or, "This is that. I mean, like wow, I want this." I've never been like that, but I think that's what made me such a shy child, that I didn't want to be teased because of it. I saw other kids getting teased, so I kind of learned from that.

Collings

This was in middle school, right?

Batres

This was in middle school, yes. That's where it usually starts.

Collings

A lot of middle schools have uniforms now.

Batres

And I think that's good. I think that's good for the same purpose.

Collings

So you were in middle school in what years now?

Batres

I'm not good with math. I was born in '72.

Collings

So like in the--

Batres

Eighties. In the eighties.

Collings

Eighties, yes, that was a very big name-brand time, wasn't it?

Batres

Yes, it was. In the eighties it was, when I was in middle school. Then in high school, I think--like I said, I dropped out of high school.

Collings

What year did you drop out?

Batres

I think it was late eighties or early--

Collings

I mean what year, like freshman, sophomore.

Batres

Oh, okay. The first year.

Collings

Oh, you were a freshman--

Batres

Yes.

Collings

--when you dropped out. Wow.

Batres

Yes, the first year, and my mom had no knowledge that I had dropped out.

Collings

Why did you drop out?

Batres

I didn't see the value of school. I didn't see it. I just said, "Why keep on going to school? My mom has to buy me clothes. My mom has to buy me shoes."

You know, at high school you need to take paper. You need to take pens.

There's more stuff you need to take, and sometimes the teachers would require, "Well, we need a fee for this or a fee for that."

Collings

For the lab or something.

Batres

Yes, and I knew my mom didn't have it. I was wrong for not asking her and then saying, "Can you please give it," but I just hated to go through that. I hated to go through that, and then, too, I started getting into problems because I started getting bullied.

Collings

By who?

Batres

By other girls, and I think I wasn't as successful in high school at staying invisible as I was in middle school, so I think I started getting noticed by boys, and then the girls, their girlfriends, started coming after me, and then I got in a couple of fights, and then I got suspended, and then I kept it from my mom, and it was harder. So I just said, you know--it was just easier for me. And like I said, I could stay home, and my mom wouldn't even know it.

Collings

So what high school was this?

Batres

Fremont.

Collings

And clearly, you felt like the staff there was not prepared in any way to help you out.

Batres

I never mentioned to nobody.

Collings

Never felt like there was anybody there.

Batres

No. No. I never mentioned it to anybody. I had very little friends in school, you know, so I didn't really know who to go to, or I didn't feel connected to anybody. I had a crush on one teacher. [laughs] I would never skip his class, and as a matter of fact, I got an A+. I liked learning. I just didn't like the environment. It wasn't school itself that was intimidating. It was just the environment.

Collings

I don't know that school. Is it considered to be like a kind of tough environment?

Batres

Yes, very tough. There was shootings all the time. There was fights all the time, and even sitting in class, even trying to do your work, if you did your work, you got teased because you were a schoolgirl. If you didn't do your work, then the other girls that were messing around or whatever, acting up, then they'd be attracted to you and maybe talk to you. But then they'd have other girls that don't like them, and then that's how you would get it. So I just didn't want to get into all that.

Collings

So with all the moving around you'd done, I guess you didn't really have like a group of friends that were--

Batres

I didn't.

Collings

--kind of like your base.

Batres

I never remember having--I don't have not even one childhood friend. I never had friends. Again, I isolated myself from that. My friends were adults. I remember being friends with neighbors or being friends with other people, but they were adults, not really kids.

Collings

Do you feel like you had more like daily responsibilities than other kids your age?

Batres

Yes, I did. I did, and I think I was never attracted to going outside and playing outside, because I couldn't, because I had to be inside feeding the kids. I'd play with my brothers, and I had enough people to play with. So I felt safer, too. I



felt safer inside my home. I think we would come home. We'd close all the windows, and we'd close all the doors, and we'd just stay inside.

Collings

So the neighborhood was not safe.

Batres

In South Gate the neighborhood was very safe. But we had a backyard, and we had a house, and we had a garage. So we had no reason to be out in the neighborhood. Yes, we had no reason. I never felt unsafe in none of the neighborhoods, but we just had no reason to be out, because I had my playmates there. And I ran a very tight ship, too. [laughs]

Collings

I think your mom was lucky to have you.

Batres

My brothers obeyed me better than they did my mom. [laughs] I don't know if that was good, because at times I'd exaggerate. But I got things done.

Collings

Even though you were really like too young to sort of understand the question of documentation, but do you think the fact that you and your parents did not have documents sort of put you in a different camp than the rest of the kids in the family?

Batres

I think race is more than the documents, because I think the race, just knowing I'm different. You know, I speak Spanish, or I'm darker color.

Collings

Weren't there like a lot of other Spanish-speaking people?

Batres

Not in that neighborhood.

Collings

Okay, I see.

Batres

Not in the neighborhood where I lived at, and the ones that were, were drunks, so we stayed away from them, too. So we kind of felt, "I don't fit in here, and I don't fit in here." You know, because I'm not white. I am Mexican, but we don't drink, and we're not loud, and we're not rowdy, either. So I felt like I didn't belong anywhere, and that's hard as a child--

Collings

Yes, it is.

Batres

--because you're confused. So I think that that's why I made my immediate family and my brothers and sisters, I think that's why we just enclosed

ourselves in our little family, and when we would go out, we went with our cousins.

Collings

But they didn't live anywhere near you, it sounds like.

Batres

No. No, they didn't live in the neighborhood. They lived in better neighborhoods. [laughs]

Collings

So you dropped out of high school, but you didn't have any problems with like the truant officer or anything like that?

Batres

I was out of school for a year before anybody found out. They tried to get a hold of my mom, but she was never there.

Collings

I see. They came to the house.

Batres

Yes, they came to the house, and guess who was at the house when they came?

Collings

What did they say to you?

Batres

I wouldn't open the door. I would pretend like nobody was home, and they'd leave notes, and I'd get rid of them. And they'd leave messages, and I'd erase them. [mutual laughter] So it was a long time before my mom found out.

Collings

What did she say?

Batres

Oh, she was very upset. She was very, very upset, and so was my father. They were very, very upset that I had dropped out of school. But then my mom said, "Okay, you don't want to go to school. Now you have to work."

Batres

And I said, "Cool."

Collings

So how old were you at that point?

Batres

I was sixteen. So I just said, "Okay, fine." I think my mom didn't know how to deal with a teenager and having to work. She had no idea how to deal. So they just kind of went along through life kind of like, "Okay, she's going to snap out of it. She's going to get out of this stage. She's going to get out." But they didn't know how to deal with that. They knew of no resources. And we did end up in a church, so I got involved with the youth group there, and there I had friends. So I guess she kind of said, "She doesn't want to go to school." And she knew

of some of the fights, because she had to go to the school and talk to the girls. So I guess she kind of understood why I didn't want to go to school, and she kind of said, "Well, we need help, anyway, and she's old enough." We never heard, "You're going to go to college," ever. In our whole family one cousin went to college.

Collings

Where did they go?

Batres

I don't know what university he went to, but he's an architect now.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

He's the only one in all of our cousins, the only one. I think now as adults we've all pursued other things, and we've all gotten better. I mean, I can't say we're all a bunch of mess-ups, but he's the only one that really got an education, which is not that good, but back then there wasn't as much emphasis and people didn't talk about it as much. It wasn't advertised that much.

Collings

Yes, now in the high schools it's like they just talk about it daily.

Batres

Yes. I mean, my nine-year-old's talking about what college he wants to go to. You know, he wants to be a policeman and a fireman. He already knows what he wants to be, and he already knows what he has to do to get there. But he gets it from his brothers and sisters. He's the youngest. But back then nobody spoke about that.

Collings

So did any of your brothers or sisters go to college?

Batres

No. No, none of them.

Collings

Did they graduate from high school?

Batres

My brother did, the one that's three years younger than me. He graduated from high school. Well, as a matter of fact, both my brothers did. My sister didn't. She dropped out, also, but both my brothers did graduate from high school. But my brother graduated from high school paying my sister to do his homework.  
[mutual laughter]

Collings

Very resourceful. She should have just done two copies and graduated as well.

Batres

Exactly. Exactly. Because he was working after school, so he had no time to do the homework.

Collings

The fact that your brothers graduated from high school but the girls didn't, was there any sort of issue that the girls, yourself and your sister, felt less comfortable in this public sphere?

Batres

Yes. I think we felt--both of us--we felt threatened. We both had the same type of problems. My sister was a bit more aggressive. She ended up becoming one of the bullies at school, and she got kicked out of school. That's why she didn't graduate. She got kicked out of school. But I think we were both just intimidated by the aggressive environment. My brothers, being boys, were much more able to deal with it than us, even though my brothers got beat up, too, and my brother got mugged once. But they were able to handle it much better than we were.

Collings

So the aggressive environment was just like the kids--

Batres

Gangs.

Collings

Gangs. Actual gangs?

Batres

Actual gangs. You know, actual gangs, and my brothers, like I said, they were never--my sister and I, we hung out with gangsters, because finally we figured, if you can't beat 'em, join them. So we started making friends, and not real friends, but so-called friends just so you would have some kind of protection. I think my brothers, like I said, they were much more able to handle it, to stand up to them and to say, "No, I'm not going to get involved." They were able to then focus more on their education. They didn't care as much about the name brands. They didn't have to deal with that, whereas to where we did. We had to deal with it more.

Collings

When you say "protection," you mean just protection in your neighborhood or protection when you were at the school?

Batres

Both. Both, because I think if you were seen walking to the store with such person, so at least that gang now wouldn't go after you. They considered you a friend, I guess, and they wouldn't mess with you. And if somebody else did, you had somebody else to help you, or you had somebody else to show you, "We can't go in here, because this is where so-and-so is, or this gang is." So I kind of learned from--you know, we had to get cl\_\_\_\_--and thank God, I never

belonged to any gang, and neither did my sister. I think we just kind of befriended the gangsters just for that purpose. And, too, being girls, I mean, I think we had to face more. We had to face aggression, you know, gangs and stuff like that, and then we had to face boys. [Telephone rings.]

Collings

Should I pause this?

Batres

No. No, and then we had to deal with boys, too. You know, boys, you know, just the attention of boys, and then the girlfriends, and then come jealous girlfriends. So, I mean, that was an added thing that we had to deal with. As to them being boys, if they're not going after girls, girls aren't going to come to them.

Collings

Right. So was all of this sort of attention of boys another reason why you dropped out of high school, do you think?

Batres

Yes. Yes, it contributed. It contributed. I think that, you know, just the problems that came around with it and stuff like that.

Collings

So you spent about a year at home then, it sounds like.

Batres

Yes, by myself. Then later I spent about another year, you know, when friends would come in and out, and I was in school, and sometimes I'd miss school.

Collings

Oh, so you did go back to school for a little while after--

Batres

Well, when my mom found out, she dragged me back to school, and she did enroll me in school again, because I was unenrolled. I wasn't even enrolled by then, you know. I wasn't enrolled; it had been a year. So she dragged me back to school, and I tried it, but by then I already knew these gangster friends, and they were saying, "Oh, we have a party," or, "We have a get-together over here. You want to come?" And a lot of times, I mean, I just went along with them, and I would then go back home, or I would say, "No, let's go to my house." Then that would get in trouble with my mom for that, too. So finally she just said, "Okay, you clearly don't want to go to school. Okay, then, you're going to work."

Collings

Were you able to find a job?

Batres

Yes. It was little jobs, you know, mostly it was babysitting. You know, I was babysitting kids for people at home, or I was helping cleaning houses,

housekeeping, stuff like that. I worked at a little liquor store that was nearby. The guy would give me jobs like in the afternoons, and during the day I'd babysit this little boy at home.

Collings

Were you contributing money to your household?

Batres

No, not really. It was just for me. For my parents, I don't recall. My brothers did, both boys. They did. They contributed to the household. My sister and I mostly, that was for us, for us to buy whatever we wanted or needed.

Collings

Were your parents talking about you getting married?

Batres

I was thinking about me getting married. My mom and my dad, they didn't allow me to have a boyfriend, you know. I couldn't wait to get out of my house, you know, so I was thinking about it.

Collings

Because when you got married, you would move, but you wouldn't move before then.

Batres

Well, when I got married, I'd have somebody else. I'd have somebody to be with, and I'd be independent away from my family. At least, that's how I saw it. I did end up moving out of my house. I moved out of the house when I was eighteen. I did. Yes, I moved out, and I got a job with one of my friends. We worked at a restaurant. We were waitresses. I did end up getting a job. I was always looking for jobs. I was always looking through ads in the paper, and I was always going on interviews and stuff like that. But once I was eighteen, I was then able to get a job, and once I got a job, I moved out of my house. I basically ran away. I didn't really move out. I ran away with my friend, and we went to Anaheim, and I lived there for a year.

Collings

So you weren't getting along very well with your parents, it sounds like.

Batres

No. No, because of the same situation. My mom, I resented my mom for letting my dad talk to her like that, because I always had the temper of my father, and I always said, "Why do you take it, lady? Don't take it. Leave him."

Batres

And she wouldn't. She believes, "No, that's my husband. I need to stand [unclear]."

Batres

And I'd say, "What are you talking about? He screams at you and he pushes you." Through my teenage years while I was dealing with all this, even the

environment at home was hostile. The environment at home was very hostile. I would go in, and I'd live in my bedroom once my parents were there. When my parents were gone, I was in my element, but once they came back, especially my father, I'd live in my room. I'd just come out, grab something to eat, and rush back in. If anything happened, if I fought or if I did anything, it was going to get blamed on me, because I'm the oldest. So I wanted to stay away from him as much as I could, so I think that contributed to me leaving and to me wanting to get married, because I did resent my mom for making us sort of deal with it and not leaving him. Yes, so as soon as I could, I left.

Collings

So what was the job that you were doing when you were living in Anaheim, when you got the apartment?

Batres

I was a waitress.

Collings

Oh, okay, that was the same job.

Batres

Yes, it was the same job. We were being waitresses, and there was four girls, so we were all four of us paying for--it was two per room, so we were all paying rent, and we were all paying bills.

Collings

That sounds great.

Batres

Well, it was good. It was good. It was one of the best times that I had, but then I met a guy.

Collings

Oh yes. [mutual laughter]

Batres

And my liberty didn't last long. [mutual laughter] And being young, and I knew nothing about birth control. I knew nothing, nothing, nothing about sex, even. I knew nothing. So I had no weapons to protect myself with, so I ended up getting pregnant fairly soon. Yes. But I did know abortion is wrong. I did have that instilled in me, so, I mean, I just ended up having the baby, and then the baby's dad, my husband, my ex-husband, he right away wanted to get married. And I'm like, "Why marry? Why?"

Batres

He said, "Well, you know, you're pregnant."

Batres

And I said, "But who cares? Why not live with each other first and see how it works out?" But at the same time--because when I left the house, I ran away--I wasn't in good terms with my parents. For a long time they didn't even know

about me, so I saw it as something good to go back to my parents with and tell them, "Okay, I ran away, but I'm getting married, you know. And by the way, I'm pregnant." [laughs] But I was no longer afraid of my father. I was no longer afraid of him, because I wasn't under his roof no more. So I knew he hits me, if he tries to scream at me, I'll leave. I don't live with him no more. So I think in that sense it was something good, because it permitted me to go back to my parents.

Collings

Yes. Did they like your new husband?

Batres

They did. They did like him. I think they just--more my mom, she just wanted some kind of stability for me, because I think she was scared to death. She was scared to death, because I was always very rebellious, but it was for that same reason. So I think she was just scared to death that I was going to end up somewhere else or something bad was going to happen to me.

Collings

Yes, of course. Yes.

Batres

So if this guy goes and says, "I want to marry your daughter," "Take her." [laughs]

Collings

Where was he from?

Batres

He's also from Mexico, from Zacatecas.

Collings

From the same area?

Batres

No, a totally different area. But I think he was the first person I met after I moved out, and he's kind of my mom's temperament, so it was my parents' relationship all over again, but turned; with the roles turned. So I think he was very passive. He's very, very nice, so I just got attached to the first person that was nice, you know, that was nice to me. He is a good man, but I think--obviously, we're divorced--I think we were never a good match. I think it would have took a lot for our relationship to work out.

Collings

So you had your baby. A boy or a girl?

Batres

Girl. Obviously, I got married then, and I got pregnant very soon afterwards.

Collings

With number two.

Batres



With number two, yes, and by the third one we were already having problems, you know, when the third one was born. I mean by the second one we were having problems. By the third one it was when we finally separated.

Collings

So you just weren't enjoying each other's company.

Batres

Well, we were enjoying each other's company, but we were very young, you know. We didn't know what we were doing. We had no idea what we were doing. He had my temperament to deal with, and I had no idea of how to control it. So I know that that got in the way a lot. That's why I said it would have took a lot of work. So he opted then--because he's a very good man, and he took a lot from me. So I think he opted to leave with his friends, and then he started seeing other women, you know, and once he started seeing other women, he left me. So that's basically what happened. That's basically why it didn't work out. We needed a lot of help in a lot of areas, but I think I was the one that needed the most help, because he was the typical Mexican person; doesn't know anything about here, you know. Doesn't know how a lot of things work, and I did, so I felt like, "You're the man. Why are you putting all the responsibility on me?"

Collings

How long had he been living here?

Batres

I think a couple of years, if that.

Collings

Yes, not long.

Batres

Not long. Not long at all, so, you know, I started feeling like, "Why won't you deal with stuff?" I mean, he doesn't know the language. He didn't know the language. So he couldn't handle a lot of the things he needed to handle. And I think we didn't really--in the beginning we didn't stop and look into that before getting involved with each other.

Collings

Let me just pause for a second.[Recorder turned off.]

Collings

Okay, so we're still rolling. So you had your three children, and you were not working, I presume, or were you?

Batres

We weren't. I wasn't. He was. He was always working. I babysat or I did little jobs like that, but no, I wasn't.

Collings

Yes, because you were busy.

Batres

Yes. I worked a little when I was pregnant with the first one. I worked a little. I kept on doing the waitress job--

Collings

Oh, really.

Batres

--until I was eight months, eight months and a half, I think. I kept on doing the waitress job. Then with the second one I did work with my mom again--

Collings

Oh, you did.

Batres

--in the sweatshop. I did work again until I was eight months pregnant. Yes. But then with the third one I stopped working. I didn't do no work with the third one.

Collings

What was sort of the next thing that happened in terms of work for you after your kids were born?

Batres

After my kids were born, nothing happened for me until my fourth child was born, and by then I was divorced. I was on public assistance for a long time, you know. I was on public assistance since I left the kids' dad, which was two years after my third child was born. Two years later finally I decided, "He's gone," so then I went on public assistance, and I was on public assistance until my fourth child was about a year old, a year or two old. Then a friend of mine, I found a church, and I started going to that church, and a friend of mine from church came, and she was having difficulties. Her child got taken away by her mom.

Collings

Oh, taken away by her mom.

Batres

By her mom. And so she came to me, and of course, she was crying, and she wanted to find resources. So we walked down a block to the elementary school. I started asking, and by then I was the manager of the building where I was living at.

Collings

Oh, that's great. Yes.

Batres

Yes, I was on public assistance, but at the same time I was managing a building, so I was getting something discounted from my rent. So we walked down th\_\_\_\_, so I asked my tenants, and they told me, "Well, that school right there has some services." So we went over there, and as I'm talking to the lady,

trying to get services for my friend, I was talking to her for like an hour and a half, and she asks me, and she tells me, "Rosa, do you work?"

Batres

And I said, "No."

Batres

She says, "So you're a stay-at-home mom."

Batres

I said, "Yes."

Batres

And she asked me how many children I had. She said, "Do you want to work?"

Batres

I said, "Doing what?"

Batres

She says, "What you've been doing right now, talking to people."

Batres

I said, "Really. They pay people for that?"

Batres

She says, "Yes." She's saying, "You're very efficient at telling me why your friend needs help, and your friend speaks English. She hasn't opened her mouth once, and you're the one that's told me everything and why and what she needs." She says, "So we would need somebody like you, and maybe you could use the income." And she says, "It's only four hours, but if you want to come work for us, apply and I'll recommend you. I'll say that I know you, you know, if you want to work."

Batres

I said, "Really?"

Batres

She says, "Yeah, you know. I don't mind doing that."

Batres

I said, "Okay." So I did, and I got the job, and I worked there for four years with the YMCA.

Collings

At the YMCA, and so what were you doing?

Batres

It's a Community School, so I was an outreach coordinator. So what it was, was that my job was to go, whenever we had parent classes, I had to go pass out fliers. I had to get the parents involved. I had to build a relationship with the parents that were there, and that was always my job, filled out applications for the Y, go to the parents after the Y was out and let them know, "Oh, by the way, guys, we have this class coming up," and to get people registered. And

once people went to the classes, I was to assist the instructor, prepare for the class, and all that.

Collings

So how would you make contact with these parents? Had they already joined the Y?

Batres

No, they were just there. Their kids were in the YMCA. So their kids were in the after-school program, and they would generally hang around the school to go pick them up or to go drop them off to the program or to just pick them up after school. So every time that school was going to let out, I was always in front of the school.

Collings

So you were trying to let them know about services that they might not be aware of.

Batres

Yes. That was then my job, to let them know about what was going on in the Community School.

Collings

So you were doing that for about four years, you say.

Batres

I did that for four years. I was getting paid \$315 every two weeks. It was very little, but it was something for me. It helped out a lot. At the same time, they paid me four hours, but I worked eight, because that was my kids' school, and I felt like I'm close to my children. I liked the fact that I was seen as staff, and it boosted my self-esteem. Then I didn't feel like just a housewife. I felt like, "I have a job," and plus, I was learning a lot. I was learning many, many things. I was around people that were teaching me constantly. So I liked that. I liked the fact that if I volunteered, because constantly they would tell me, "Your shift is over."

Batres

"Well, can I volunteer?"

Batres

"Sure." They weren't going to turn down a volunteer, so I just worked until my kids got out of school. Then I put them in the YMCA program so I had all that time on my hands. So I just wanted to be close to my kids.

Collings

You said that people were teaching you constantly. What were they teaching you?

Batres

Well, an example, my very first day of work they asked me to create a flier. It took me eight hours to create it, and at the end of the day I erased it. [laughs]

Didn't save it. So things like that, computer skills. My supervisor constantly was helping me do rosters, so she'd give me tasks, like, "Create this roster," and she'd teach me how to create it. "So help me prepare for this class," and she'd teach me how to prepare for it. You know, she taught me how to organize, basically, how to be an organizer. So I was basically getting taught how to work around people, how to organize events, how to organize classes, make phone calls--reminder phone calls--how to file papers, how to use the fax, how to use the copy machine. You know, I was getting taught all that, because maybe I did know that, but it had been a long time ago that I had to use these skills, so I was brushing up on my skills.

Collings

Were you thinking at that time about what you might be doing next?

Batres

Oh, I loved it. I loved it, and I think one of the reasons why I learned so much was because I wholeheartedly got into it. This opened up--I never liked sweatshops. It was a torture for me. Those type of jobs were torture, and I tried it because that was the type of jobs my parents were connected with. So when I was older, they said, "Well, I have a daughter, and she's looking for a job." So out of a favor for them, they hired me, but I hated those jobs. I did them because I needed the paycheck. I didn't do them because I loved them. So for me to be in a job where I loved it, you know, I didn't think twice. I knew that that was what I wanted to do.

Collings

Was anybody talking to you at that time about how you could go on to maybe make this a full-time kind of job?

Batres

Definitely. Definitely. My position, unfortunately, because of the funds, wasn't, but definitely Bob [Robert M.] Cabeza, which is the person that's in charge of the YMCA now, the downtown branch, he constantly was talking to me. He was telling me, "Rosa, you know, if you go back to school--." They were very aware of my situation. They knew I had very young kids and that I had to take care of four kids. So they knew I couldn't go to school; you know, I couldn't afford to stop working. But he was constantly encouraging me, and they constantly gave us trainings. At the YMCA they constantly trained us on work etiquette and different things like that. So constantly I was just taking those trainings, but like I said, he was constantly talking to me, and even my supervisor, my immediate supervisor, she was constantly teaching me, like I said. She was constantly telling me, "This is going to help you develop this. This is going to help you develop that." So definitely the YMCA was the best school I've ever had at the time. [laughs]

Collings

The best school. Did you know other women in a similar situation at that time? Were there other women doing a similar thing?

Batres

No.

Collings

No, just you.

Batres

No, just me. And I think that's why I felt so proud. You know, I just felt so proud of myself because I was--I mean, I always worked. I never just sat and did nothing, except for a short period of time. But I always thought I was going to end up like my mom because I didn't go to school. But when I had my two girls, I did go back to high school.

Collings

Oh, you did.

Batres

I did, and I was already married, and I got in a fight with their dad, because their dad said, "You're not young anymore. You're not single anymore. You just want to go back to the single life."

Batres

I said, "No, this is an adult school." So I graduated. Well, I got my G.E.D. from Maxine Waters [Preparatory Center], and that was all I could pursue, because he would not--it just got too hard. And then I got pregnant with my third child, so then I wasn't able to get my high school diploma, but I intended to get my diploma. My goal was to get my diploma. And against his will, I did manage to--in three months I got my G.E.D.

Collings

Oh, good.

Batres

Yes, in three months. But I would go during the day to school, and during my lunch hours, instead of going to lunch, I'd go to a nearby store, make copies of the books, and then come home and study all night, and then wake up the next morning, and go and turn in work, and get it graded, and make copies again, and do the same thing. So in three months I was able to get my G.E.D.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

I was very proud of myself for doing that, because I went to high school one year, basically. So I was very proud, and I told him, "You don't know. It's because you don't have papers, you know, and with the education I have, I can only work at McDonald's, so if you support me in me going back to school, I can make more money." But I think he felt intimidated. You know, "How is she

going to make more money if I'm the man and she's the woman?" He never got told the importance of education, and I think I figured it out later in my life by myself, so then I wanted to go back to it. But he wasn't supporting me, and that contributed to a lot of the problems we had, because I felt unsupported. I felt like, "How could you not want this? This is for the benefit of our family." But I think, again, that mentality was just not there for him, and till this day he's doing jobs like at warehouses and stuff, hard work that makes very little, very little money.

Batres

Getting my G.E.D, to me, was the eye-opening point where I said, "I can do this." I always thought I was stupid. I always thought I wasn't too bright. But when I saw how easy that came to me, I was like, "Wow, I'm not stupid. I'm smart." And when I saw how much I liked it, I said, "Okay, no, I've got to do this somehow." So then because of the G.E.D. I was able to get the job at the YMCA.

Collings

Oh, you got the G.E.D. before the job at the Y.

Batres

Before, yes.

Collings

Oh, boy, it's a good thing you got that then.

Batres

Yes, and it was because of that that I was able to get the job, because she did say, "Do you have a high school diploma?"

Batres

I said, "I have a G.E.D."

Batres

She said, "Oh, that's a big stretch." She said, "But we like you. You're very good. You're very good. You have very good people skills." She said, "So we're going to use you, and we'll see." And I know that a lot of people protected me in the YMCA, per se. There were a lot of exceptions that were made as far as the paperwork. Every time that came up, that was--

Collings

Every time the issue of a high school diploma came up?

Batres

Of education came up. My supervisor always said, "It's a four-hour-a-day job, you know. Who else with higher education is going to want to do that job? And she's good at it." So I think that was always--but I know that they had, because especially for the YMCA there's rules that need to be followed, and I know that there was a lot of things that went on so that I was able to continue with them. Bob always told me, "As soon as another job comes available--." He said, "But

then you'd have no education." But he said, "As soon as I'm able to--," and they did. They networked me with a lot of other people. I got into interpreting, working with the YMCA, too. At every chance he had he always introduced me to somebody else and said that, "She's very good at this. She's very good at that," because they were always trying to connect me to other sources of money.

Collings

Do you think that the skills that you learned, sort of managing things for your parents, were coming into play at this point?

Batres

Yes. Yes, very much so. The skills I learned with my parents played a role throughout my life, and they still do. Definitely.

Collings

So what was the next job you went to after the YMCA?

Batres

So after the YMCA, I was there for four years, and I was thinking of going into interpreting, because I do do interpreting. I started doing interpreting with somebody else that was working with the YMCA. She told me, "I'll pay you fifteen dollars an hour if you come interpret for me."

Batres

I said, "Yes, definitely," and so I started doing that part-time, and people started hearing me, and I started getting little side jobs, you know, for like the Health Department and for LBACA [Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma] and with Elina [Green] and different other--I'm still an interpreter.

Collings

Oh, you are still?

Batres

I am. So I started getting these other little jobs interpreting, so I thought, "I want to get my certification." I looked into how much certified interpreters make, and that finished convincing me, and I said, "I want to get my certification." So I was looking into getting my certification when the agency I work for now came to collaborate with the YMCA. They started collaborating with the YMCA, and the person that was doing my job at that time, she started working with us, and then a year after she started working with us, I was really, really like looking into going to school. I had to save up the money to pay the inscription and all that. But I just almost had enough money saved up when it turned out that she had to move. The person that was doing my position had to move, and she told me, "Rosa, I'm moving."

Batres

I said, "Oh, really."

Batres



She says, "Yeah, I'm buying a house."

Batres

I said, "Oh, congratulations."

Batres

She says, "Yeah, but that's not why I'm telling you. I think you could take my position."

Batres

I said, "You're crazy." I said, "No, I can't."

Batres

And she said, "Yeah."

Batres

I said, "Do you know how much education I have?"

Batres

And she said, "I'm not asking you." She said, "You know, I think you can do my position."

Batres

I said, "No, I can't, because you do a lot." So all these fears came into my mind, and I started making up all these excuses, and plus I needed to drive, and I didn't have a driver's license. I knew how to drive, but I didn't have a driver's license. I didn't have a car, and I didn't have money to buy a car. I said, "No, but you drive, and I don't drive. I don't have a license, and I don't have a car."

Batres

She said, "Do you want my position, yes or no?"

Batres

I said, "No."

Collings

You did?

Batres

I was scared. I was scared, and she really talked to me, and she really encouraged me, and she said, "Rosa, this might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you." She says, "You know, you're going to be in the Y. You're going to be your mom. You're going to be your mom at the sweatshops for your whole life. This is isn't a sweatshop, but you're going to be at the Y for all your life getting three hundred and fifteen."

Batres

I said, "How much do you get paid?" She told me, and I said, "Wow." It was more than double what I was making, and it was an eight-hour job, so I said all those fears, and she just encouraged me, and there was other people that I mentioned that to, because by then I had tons of friends. By then I had lots of friends. I went to having no friends to like knowing the whole neighborhood, you know, by working at the YMCA. I was really scared when I started

working at the YMCA, because I was still very shy. But I said, "You have to do that. It's as easy as smiling and going up to somebody and saying, 'Hi.'" And I tried it, and as I tried it, it got easier, and then I started meeting people, so it got more and more easier.

Batres

So, anyway, you know, what I'm trying to say is that that really helped, because I had a network of friends already that they told me, and they said, "You're crazy for not taking this." It was working with the county, and they said, "You're not going to get a job with the county otherwise, so just take it and try it, and if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out, but at least you tried it." So I started looking into different things, and I started telling my family members. My family members by then were very proud of me. You know, my mom and my sisters, they were very proud of me, because I was still on financial aid, but I was working. I was doing better, and you could tell. You could tell. My kids were doing better, because I was taking parenting classes, too. So, I mean, my family was changing complete.

Batres

Then going to church, it was like a total, total change. My life had turned around totally. You know, I was never really bad, but you could still see the change. So my family then supported me. My sister had a car that she was looking to sell, and she said, "You could pay me back whenever you can. You're going to make money, so you can pay me back then." And then my brother helped me, and my dad helped me, and I was able to get my license, and so things just started falling in place, and I started going down the little checklist that I had.

Batres

And I went and then I applied for it, and when I went into the interview, the person that's my supervisor now interviewed me for that job, and she told me, "This interview is not to see if we want to hire you. It's to see if you want to work for us."

Batres

I was all like, "Are you sure? Are you sure you know who you're asking?"

Batres

She says, "Yeah." She says, "You have the job."

Batres

I told Soché [phonetic], "Unless she comes in and slaps me, she has the job," because they had seen the type of work. And from my parents I learned--from my father and my mom both--I learned to be hardworking and to do things right, to be proud of your job and to go that extra mile, you know, because everybody would tell me in the YMCA, "Oh, my goodness. Your co-workers are inside. Why are you out in the sun screaming and say, 'Come on, people.

This is what we're doing.' You're by yourself, Rosa. They're taking advantage of you."

Batres

I said, "No, this is my job." I said, "When times get tough and somebody's going to get laid off, it's not going to be me, and if it is, it's not going to be because I didn't do my job well. It's not going to be because I'm lazy, and it's not going to be because I didn't do my job." I said, "So, no." So I always take pride in my job, and I always like to do things the best I can. So I think that made me stand out with this agency when they were starting to work with us, and I think that's why they were so willing to hire me even though I didn't have the education, and they knew.

Batres

As a matter of fact, when I was supposed to go in and start my job, I didn't have my license yet, so they said, "Okay, we're not going to submit your paperwork just yet." So technically, you're not supposed to be driving. I'm not going to ask you how you're going to get to work, but we're not going to submit your paperwork," because then my license would have to be included. She said, "How long is it going to take you?"

Batres

I said, "I don't know." I was just trying to get up the money for the car, and I had just gone and applied for the test, but I didn't pass it, and so all that.

Batres

She says, "I'll give you two months."

Batres

I said, "Okay, fine," and I did it in two months, and then the paperwork went through. But I think that really helped me. And, too, I was just so thankful to even have a job with the YMCA, you know, and it was at my kids' school. I was able to see the principal. The teachers could call me anytime. You know, anything happened, I was right there. So I think that helped to the fact that I just wanted to do the best job that I could, because I knew that if I did the best job, I was always going to have a job, and I knew that something was always going to come up. Somebody was always going to be willing to help me.

Collings

When you started the full-time job, were you worried about how you would manage your kids?

Batres

Yes. But by then I already had a network of friends that I had built working for the YMCA. This is the funny thing, how it worked out, because my youngest was already in first grade, and I told my supervisor.

Batres

She said, "Rosa, you need to go back to school. It's the only thing that's holding you back." Everybody told me that. "You need to go back to school."

Batres

I said, "When my youngest is in school full-time, he starts first grade, I will go back to school. I will further pursue my education." And I knew that I needed another job, too, because I needed more income. So I started at work in October, and my son started school in September. Yes, so it worked out. It worked out, and my kids were in the YMCA, so I didn't have to pick them up until six.

Collings

That's great, yes.

Batres

And then this job is very flexible. This job is the greatest job in the world. I love it, because it permits me to work with my schedule. I don't have a supervisor breathing down my neck all the time, and as long as my job is done, and it's done well, you know, there's no problem. So it's very, very flexible, so it was no problem. It was a problem as far as maybe times conflicted at times, but through my support group I was able to take care of that, and even my supervisor, my current supervisor and my boss, they have worked so much with me, because I think they were able to see, "She's got the will. She just needs help troubleshooting it." And all these three years I've been working for them--a little over three years--and throughout these three years, I've gotten nothing but support from them.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

So I've been very fortunate. [laughs]

Collings

Yes, indeed.

Batres

I've been very fortunate in finding people that are so willing to--I mean, this is how much they support me. My boss takes my two boys to her home every weekend. Every single weekend--

Collings

Oh, my gosh. [laughs]

Batres

--she takes them. She comes and picks them up. She has a grandchild, so I guess her grandchild is my boys' age, so I guess it's helpful to her.

Collings

It's nice for them. It's nice for her grandson, yes.

Batres

Yes, nice for her grandson, and my boys and her grandson have a lot of similarities, you know. They were facing a lot of the same challenges, so they took to each other right away. And very quickly she said, "What do you say we institutionalize this?"

Batres

I said, "Are you sure?" She's taking them for spring break to San Francisco.

Collings

Oh, my gosh.

Batres

Yes, it's amazing. It's amazing. It's amazing. I have any problem with my child in school, she's there. She's there. You know, learning disabilities or whatever; I was worried about that. And I work for a counseling center. I work out of a counseling center, so she said, "Rosa, you have all these resources available to you. Just let me know, and we'll find a way." You know, so yes, definitely first Bob Cabeza. He's not a perfect person. None of us are. But he was my first biggest supporter, and now that both my supervisor and her are great. [unclear] very fortunate.

Collings

Very. [mutual laughter][End of recording]

## **1.2. Session 2 (March 19, 2009 )**

Collings

We're back, and today is March 19, 2009, Jane Collings interviewing Rosa Batres in her home.

Batres

Rosa, I just wanted to pick up a couple of things that we were talking about last time and ask you, for example, your mom worked in sweatshops all that time. What was her opinion of unions?

Batres

She didn't know what they were. They never told them. They were nonexistent, that I know of. And, too, in Mexico unions don't really work. You know, unions means protesting and being loud and rowdy and getting together, and my mom and my dad weren't--my dad is for that, but my mom isn't. She was the passive kind. "Oh, no, we don't want problems." My dad back then would have been for it, but he had no time for it. So he had no time for it, and he doesn't really have the temper for it, because he would have gone [unclear]. [laughs] That wouldn't have been good.

Collings

No, that wouldn't have advanced the cause much. Or maybe it would. [laughter]

Batres

Maybe.

Collings

The other thing I wanted to ask you about, it's a small thing, but you were mentioning how important name brands were to you. What were the particular brands that were important to middle school kids at that time?

Batres

Nike. Nike was very big. I remember the first time I got my first pair of L.A. Gear, I was so happy, and it wasn't until I was able to work, actually, or just do babysitting and stuff like that that I was able to buy myself my first pair of L.A. Gear shoes. Puma, I remember, was very in.

Collings

I remember L.A. Gear. Are they still around?

Batres

Yes. Well, no, I think they're not. I haven't seen much of it, no.

Collings

While you were growing up, did your family attend church, or what was the opinion of the church in your family?

Batres

As I think I mentioned, early on in my parents' relationship there was conflict.

Collings

Oh, no, you didn't.

Batres

Okay.

Collings

Oh, conflict in general, you mean.

Batres

No, conflict with the religion.

Collings

Oh, no, you never mentioned that.

Batres

Yes, my dad's Christian, and my mom's Catholic, so, yes, there was conflict. So that's one of the reasons why they didn't marry in church. They didn't have a ceremony, formal ceremony, because my mom's dad said, "If you marry that man, I'm not going into a Christian Church." And my dad's family said, "I'm not going into a Catholic Church."

Collings

Which branch of the church was your dad?

Batres

I forget. I think he was Pentecostal. Pentecostal, I think, or Charismatic. I think it was Charismatic or Pentecostal, looking back on it now. If you asked my dad, he wouldn't know.

Collings

Is that unusual in Mexico? Did he start--

Batres

No. No, it's actually becoming more and more popular, yes.

Collings

Oh, that's interesting.

Batres

Especially the Charismatic one.

Collings

Oh, really.

Batres

Yes. Yes, it's growing very rapidly, actually, in Mexico.

Collings

I never knew that. And talking about going in and getting your documents, could you sort of describe the day when you got your green card? I mean, what did that feel like?

Batres

Well, I wasn't sure what that was, because, like I said, I never felt it. I heard it once in a while, but I was never really aware of [whispers], "What are they talking about?" But I remember when I did get my green card, they said, "How old are you?"

Batres

I think I was about thirteen, and they said, "Okay, would you like to do the citizenship test?"

Batres

I said, "I don't know what that is, but sure. I'll give it a stab."

Batres

They asked me, "Who was Martin Luther King?"

Batres

I said, "Well, he freed the slaves." [laughs]

Batres

I didn't know he was a Civil Rights leader. I didn't know to say he's the Civil Rights leader. So they said, "No, clearly, you're not ready. You wouldn't pass the test."

Batres

So I said, "Okay."

Batres

But they figured--because he told me. I said, "What's that? Why is it important that I do that?"

Batres

He says, "If you do the test and maybe you were to pass it, you would be a citizen."

Collings

Oh, you didn't have to go through the waiting period?

Batres

I didn't have to. Back then, I guess it was because of my age and because I was raised here--I lived here all my life, and I was in school--that they said if I was able to pass the test, then I would automatically become eligible to become a citizen, and I said, "Oh, cool." So I didn't know the difference between a resident and a citizen. But I said, "Okay, well, we'll give it a stab."

Batres

But a few questions showed them that I wasn't going to be able to pass the test, so they said, "No, don't worry about it. It's no biggie. We just thought we'd save you some steps later on," they said, "but no biggie. You could do it later."

Collings

But your parents had to do the waiting period, right?

Batres

Yes, they did.

Collings

The five years.

Batres

They did. I remember it was just me, because I was able to converse in English and fully understand English and read English, so they figured, you know, "She meets the requirements to be able to become a citizen." But I didn't.

Collings

It's too bad you got that question.

Batres

I know. I should have gotten the easy ones like the colors of the flag or--

Collings

Exactly.

Batres

--the stripes or something.

Collings

Let's see. You talked about like you would be staying home from school. What would be like a typical day when you'd stay home from school? Your brothers and sister would leave, and your parents would be gone. I mean, would you stay in the house?

Batres

Yes.

Collings

Would you go out?



Batres

I wouldn't. I wouldn't. I was scared. I was generally a scaredy-cat, which was good. That saved me from a lot of trouble, being a scaredy-cat. But being a loner, I think, made me scared of a lot of things, because I didn't get exposed. So I was scared of getting beat up, maybe, and I was scared of just being put in danger, because I was aware of the dangers. Being a girl, like I said, men would follow me around all the time. I constantly had that. So I was scared of that, so I would just stay at home. I'd just wake up, be lazy, you know, just hang out at home, watch TV, listen to music, and then I'd watch the time till when it was supposed to be time where I was supposed to come home from school, so I could do my hair and get dressed and make sure that I did my bed, or at least erase evidence that I thought--and then a little later in high school or a little later in the period where I was hanging out at home, I started having friends from church that lived nearby, so they started coming over.

Batres

And then I started getting in trouble, because we'd eat up the food, and then my mom noticed. You know, she said, "Well, we had a full twelve-pack of eggs. Where is it? Where did it go?"

Batres

"I don't know."

Batres

I cooked for them, and all my friends ate there. And the neighbors started noticing people coming in and out, because before the neighbors wouldn't notice anything, because it was just me at home. But now they'd notice the noise, the voices, people coming in and out, and then that's when I got caught.

Collings

When you were staying at home by yourself, were you like satisfied with that, or were you frustrated?

Batres

In a way I was frustrated. In a way I was, because I did have a lot of conflict because I didn't have any friends, because I didn't have the social skills. I think the lack of development of social skills hurt me more as an adult than as a child back then, because back then I was happy, because I realize now what I didn't want to is to have to face other kids and be in that environment where I didn't know how to act, where I felt I didn't fit in. So home was like--and there was nobody else there, so that period of time, I think, was like my little safe haven, you know, in the day, because later my parents came home and then the fighting started and everything else started. I think I was so emotionally drained that I needed that. I needed that rest time and that just reflecting time and that just safe time for me to feel safe, because I remember just being tired and just drained. As an adult now I know that it's very draining, all those emotions and

all those worries. For such a young age, it was draining. And I was thankful that I took that exit, because it could have been drugs. It could have been gangs. It could have been a lot of other dangerous behavior, so I was thankful I was just staying at home.

Collings

Was race a factor at all in your problems at high school?

Batres

Yes.

Collings

There weren't a lot of Latino kids?

Batres

There was a lot of Latino kids, but I think most Latino kids were gangsters in that area. So I didn't really have that--I have that aggressive--I had the temper. I'm very hot-tempered, but I'm not comfortable being aggressive.

Collings

It's more like something that comes and goes.

Batres

Exactly. It's more like something that I know is there, but I hate when it comes out, because I don't like the feeling afterwards, and I'm not comfortable being aggressive. I'm a very easy-going person, I think. I like more the feeling like I'm helping somebody, like you're nice, like you're liked, other than the tough type of personality, the "get out of my way, because I'll beat you up." I don't like that, even though at times I can have it. But I try to control it, because I don't like it. So I think it was that. I think it was that, because, yes, like I said, I didn't fit in. There wasn't many whites. There was more blacks. There was more Latinos and blacks. Maybe the race did take play [phonetic] in it, because you were expected to be a gangster, but I would say it was more the emotional. More than the race, it was more the emotional and all the issues I was dealing with, and I didn't want to be like that.

Collings

It sounds like a really, really tough time.

Batres

Thinking back on it now as an adult, I'm so thankful I dealt with it that way. I'm so thankful, and I'm scared to death, you know, of my kids having to go through that. But my kids seem fairly well adjusted as far as that, and I think that helps me.

Collings

Do you think the schools are more aware of these issues now?

Batres

Yes. There's many more programs. I mean, bullying is not tolerated, fighting is not tolerated, and as parents, parents are more informed. There's many more

programs. My daughter got beat up once in school last year, a couple of years, and I went berserk on the counselor. He called me. He says, "Well, it's nothing big," and I get there, and half of her face is swollen and blue.

Collings

Oh, my god.

Batres

I went berserk, and I said, "What do you mean it's nothing big?"

Collings

What has to happen?

Batres

Exactly. Does she have to be bleeding or what? I mean, b\_\_\_\_\_ or what, and I went berserk on him.

Batres

He kept on saying, "Ma'am, calm down. Calm down."

Batres

I said, "Are you a parent?"

Batres

He says, "Well, yes, I am."

Batres

I said, "Okay, how would you feel if this was your child?" I said, "You know what? I just don't feel like I can trust my child with you guys. Like how are you guys going to show me? How can you let me know that she's going to be kept safe?"

Batres

So I think that now, because we went through all that, I think now parents--there's so many more programs, and everybody's more aware of it, and it's more out, and people are doing many more things to help. Schools especially are doing many more things to help.

Collings

I'm surprised that they reacted like that, because, as you say, there's such a zero tolerance for fighting and bullying.

Batres

Yes, well, you know, they did take other measures, and they did give Kimberly support. But I think that served as an experience for her, too, you know, just not to get involved with those type of people, and just what to do, really. Really what to do when you're faced with that. The best thing is walk away. Don't even get involved in it, you know, because then this type of thing--and it's not worth it. It's totally not worth it, you know. Had that girl had a weapon, you know--

Collings

Oh, my god.

Batres

Had that girl had anything or had that girl had any--thankfully, it's just this little girl that's obviously having adapting issues, and she's acting out, and she preys on the weaker ones. But had she been a gangster or had she had other friends or had she been more in depth in that type of lifestyle, you know, they could have been now picking and picking and picking on my daughter. So I just told her, "You just never know. You just never know. You just stay clear away from those type of people. You turn around and walk away and look for a teacher. It doesn't mean you're a chicken, and if you're going to be called a chicken or a dead girl, I'd rather be a chicken," you know. I said, "Because nowadays it's so serious. Back then you would just get beat up. Nowadays there's guns and knives and all that," I said, "and we don't need that," especially because a lot of times they're at the program. They walk from school to the program.

Collings

To which program?

Batres

They were at the LAMP Program that it was kind of like an after-school mentoring program for youth. So she would come home from school by herself, walking from Poly, and then come home, drop off her books, I guess wait for her brother, and then take her brother with her, because they were all in the LAMP Program. So I said, "You see there's about an hour there. anything could have happened to you, and how would I even find out? How would I even hear about this?" Of course, it's okay for her to come home from school by herself. She's fifteen years old, and it's okay for her to walk her brother a block away from where we lived, because she's fifteen years old. I said, "But you're still not old enough to handle a situation like that or to even know if anything did arise." I said, "So we need to just keep away from that. All the drama that comes with it, it's just not worth it." I said, "In your adult like you're going to get faced with people like that all the time, and you need to get practice now, because as an adult, that's just not the answer, you know, to act as ignorant as somebody that's acting like that. It's just not the answer." I said, "It's hard, I know, as an adult. I've been there." I said, "But you need to weigh things, and you need to make decisions beforehand, so when you're faced with the situation, you know what to do."

Batres

So, thank God, the school took precautions, because I made such a big fuss out of it and because right away I said, "I work for the county, and I will look that this gets taken care of," I said, "because this is unacceptable." So I right away brought in all the guns, and I spoke to my supervisor, and I made the biggest fuss about it. So I think because of it we have parents that are so well informed now, because I [unclear] think that I worked for the county, but I know a lot of

people. I'm a resident in these communities, so I tell people, you know, if they come to me. "Well, my daughter is--"

Batres

"Well, this is what you can do, and this is who you can call, and we need to go and talk to so-and-so, and we need to go to the district." Because there's so many information now and so many people who know what to do now, that doesn't happen anymore. You know, the next Monday I said, "Why is my daughter getting punished when she was the one that was being beat up?"

Batres

He said, "Well, there's consequences. She engaged."

Batres

It was hard for me to accept that, but I needed to, because those are the rules, and my daughter still needed to know, "You engaged. You did. You did engage. You know, even though it was at whatever level, you still engaged." So she took the punishment. They were both suspended. Next Monday they spoke to both girls, and the other girl was told, "You bother her ever again, and there will be zero tolerance with you. You'll be kicked out of school, and these will be the consequences." Kimberly, my daughter, told me that the mom of the other girl was in there, and she kept on saying, "Where is this child's parent?"

Batres

One of the ladies from the office was interpreting, because the other mom didn't speak English, and the one that was interpreting, she said, "You do not want to meet Miss Rosa. You didn't want to be here on Friday. You did not, because this child's mom was a very--." She said, "No, you don't. She's been taken care of. You don't need to worry about that." [laughter]

Batres

A good thing came of it, because then Kimberly built a relationship with that staff member, and she learned to trust them, too. She learned to trust, because I see Kimberly, my oldest, more at danger for that same type of behavior like I had than my second oldest. My second oldest I see as more of a leader. She's more of a follower, and she's more shy, and she's more retracted, so I see her more in danger. So I guess something good did come out of it.

Collings

Do you think that in that school community and in some of the other local communities that the parents need to be encouraged to go and speak out about these things? I'm thinking about some of the sort of West L.A. type schools. The parents definitely don't need to be encouraged to go and complain to the school. I can tell you that. But in the communities that you're talking about--

Batres

Oh yes.

Collings

You think that's an issue.

Batres

Yes, in the South Central. But I think the parents need to be educated and there needs to be more resources, and I think now there is. I believe now there is. I'm not too familiar with the area that I used to live in, but I believe that now there is more programs and there is more outreach for those programs, because, thinking back in my mom's case, she worked, so she couldn't. That was money. The time that she took off to go and advocate for me, that was money. That was money that was needed for food and for rent, so she couldn't. She couldn't take that time off. So what do you do then? The other side of it is parents that don't care. There's parents that are sitting at home but just don't care or just have lost control of their kids.

Collings

What do you think about in terms of undocumented status? Do you think that that might play a role? Parents are afraid to come in?

Batres

Yes, that plays a role. That plays a role still, I think. Not so much, you know, but it could. It could play a role. My mom, when I was in high school, she was documented then, but thinking of the parents that I work with, it would. It would probably play a role.

Collings

They wouldn't dare.

Batres

They'd be scared to. They'd be a little scared to. I think in these schools here in Long Beach, it wouldn't, but in L.A. they'd be scared to.

Collings

Why the difference?

Batres

Because it's bigger. It's bigger. I see it all the time. I see it all the time where here in Long Beach we have so many resources, and we have so many things, and the people are much more closer with their local government and stuff like that. I'm sure that in L.A. there's groups like that, but I'm also sure that the outreach is not enough. Not enough outreach is being done to the right type of parents by the right type of people. Like I told you before, you send somebody that's not your culture, they're not going to listen to you. So all those things need to play a part, so I think that's what Long Beach is doing good or doing right, that they get people that are Kumai for the Kumai culture, that are black for the black culture or for the black people, that are Mexican for the Mexican people. I think they've understood that, that that's what they need to do, because then they can relate and then they can effectively give their message.

Collings

Yes. Okay. Let's talk a little bit about the work that you're doing now. Let's just plunge right in. What's your job title and your principal role? Then we'll sort of backtrack in terms of what the organization does and so forth.

Batres

My job title is Community Organizer, and my role is to organize community groups. Basically what I do, my job, is like the liaison between the county and these groups, the community. So I'm supposed to take the funds that are available to them and organize or make sure that there's food at the meetings, make sure that there's Child Watch that's happening, make sure that there's interpreting if it's needed. So anything that needs to happen, any kind of logistics that need to happen for the meeting, I need to make sure that it's being done. Whether I do it or not, it's irrelevant, but I need to make sure that it's being done.

Collings

So when you say "these groups," what groups are you referring to?

Batres

Usually it's schools. It's existing groups that were already in schools; at least mine are. Very little of my groups--none, actually--none of my groups did we start them. My co-workers have more groups that they started from scratch, but mine were already existing groups, were already groups of parents that were participating at schools in some way, and then we jumped in and we kind of started working with them.

Collings

What is a typical day for you while you're doing this?

Batres

A typical day is I have lax days, like today, but I've learned. Then I have a typical day is being at a meeting at eight-thirty, so being out of the house at least seven-thirty, if I'm lucky, and then being at a meeting at eight-thirty. After that--that meeting ends at ten-thirty--then I have to start looking into what do I need, do I have everything I need for the second meeting, which is usually three-thirty, four-thirty, five-thirty. So making sure there's things, and if I don't need things, like, for example, have I ordered the food? Do I know who's getting the food? Do I know who's going to be doing Child Watch? Do I need to contact anybody for that? If all that's taken care of, then what other things are going to be due tomorrow that I can be working on today or that I'm missing? What am I missing today, because then it's going to hit me in the face tomorrow or the day after, because, for example, Wednesdays, I barely have time to breathe sometimes, so if I know that I'm having another meeting on Thursday and that there's things to do, I'd better do these things on Tuesday. These things better be done on Tuesday, because I know that I'm not going to be able to get those done on Wednesday.

Collings

What kinds of meetings would these be?

Batres

Resident meetings. It's the meetings at the groups. So I have one youth group in Gardena, and for that youth group I get the food, because they're high school students, so they don't cook. You know, they cannot cook. They're in school all day, and then after they get out of school, they go and meet. So I'm in charge of picking up the food, because most of these youths are in school; they can't go pick it up. My co-organizer, which is the person that was already meeting with those people, she could help, but she also has a full-time job, you know. So most of the time it's my job to bring the food. We don't need Child Watch for that meeting, thank God, but it's just bring the food, any activity, any supplies that maybe she asked me for, like if they're practicing for a volleyball game, maybe buy a volleyball or stuff like that, drinks, disposables, all that. From time to time she'll ask me, "Do you want to do an activity with them?" So it's stuff like that. It's stuff like that.

Batres

Like I said, that group I do need to buy the food for, but the other groups, I just give out gift cards, and we give them seventy-five-dollars gift cards for them to buy the food, prepare it, and bring it to share. So I need to make sure that somebody has gift cards, because if not, that means that I need to buy the food for that meeting, you know, but that we know who is going to be cooking, that we know who's going to be doing, like I said, the Child Watch, and then any paperwork, depending on what the group is doing. Like if there was notes taken, then most likely--a lot of these parents aren't computer literate. A lot of them are, but the ones that are work, and so they don't have time. Or they don't have an access to a computer or a printer, stuff like that. So most of the time it's my job to type up the notes and have them ready for the meeting. If there was any supplies that were cleaning supplies, folders that they decided, "Well, everybody's going to have a folder so we can keep all our paperwork in there," so did I get those? Just different types of stuff.

Collings

What are like typical topics of the meetings?

Batres

These meetings--depending on what stage the group is. For example, if it's the beginning of a group, we'll be doing relationship building, relationship building and team building activities, and getting to know each other type of things. But then after the group--because we believe that if there's a relationship between the group members, when they start working on things and conflict arises, it's easier; that they're going to work through conflict if there's a relationship, as



opposed that you just know this person. This person is just somebody you go to the group with. And it's easier for the group to fall apart.

Collings

How are the groups formed? How would a group of this sort be formed?

Batres

Like I said, these groups, mine were already existing. But the ones that weren't, it's usually we contact an agency where we would want to start one, start a group wherever we would be looking. For example, sometimes it's through funding. Sometimes it's through looking and studying what type of groups we have and maybe we should try this. Most of the times it's through funding, you know, or the county asks us to, "Well, we notice you have a lot of parents, but you don't have enough youth." Or maybe we notice that, on our own, we need another youth group.

Collings

But what are they like meeting around? Like what is the topic? What is the issue for them?

Batres

Their community. Community issues. Whatever it is that ails that community. Whatever it is that they want to deal with. So basically that's what it is.

Collings

So many people have like things that ail them, but they don't do anything about it, so I'm just wondering how you get out there and make it so that people even attend these meetings in the first place.

Batres

Usually we see a possibility; you know, is there a facility? Usually an agency, a partnering agency that's already working with us, will say, "I know of this group." You know, we ask around. Kelly's asked me, "We're looking for a faith-based agency. Do you know of any?" So we start asking. We start asking, and we tell them, "We're looking to start a group. Do you know of anybody?" Or like I said, a contributing agency that's already collaborating with us will come and say, "Oh, I have a group. I know of a group." We have had groups that we've tried and haven't worked out.

Collings

So some of the issues in the Long Beach area, of course, is the oil refinery--

Batres

Health.

Collings

--the Clean Trucks Program--

Batres

But even safety.

Collings

--safety.

Batres

Even safety. At Whittier it wasn't really safety. At Whittier it's medical coverage, because one of the first things we do with a new group is the values exercise, which is an exercise that lists a whole bunch of problems or issues or things in the community just so we can see what does that group of people care about. They do it together and they vote together as a group, so they pick three things that they're going to focus and work on for the next year, because we've found that if there's three things that somebody's picked, the efforts are going to be more visible and it's more likely that we're going to make an impact in that community, as opposed as we're all over the map, you know, one project with this, one project with that, another one with that, so you're not going to really see an impact. You're not going to really get much done. Or you're going to get a lot done, but you're not going to see it. You're not going to see the results necessarily. So we try and focus them and guide them through the values exercise, and like I said, at Whittier it's safe--well, it's not safety. It's healthcare coverage, it's relationships with the school, and it's work. So it's taking a look at the immigration status, you know, and what type of work can you do even though you're not legal in this country. What type of things can you do that won't get you in trouble but will generate money or income of some sort to your home? So those are the three issues.

Batres

As to another school or another group that I have, it's safety. A common theme that I see with most of these groups is always relationship with the schools, because in Mexico, especially in our culture, teachers are held up very high. They are held in high esteem. So the parents sometimes think like, "I can't talk back to the teacher. I can't question the teacher. She's better than me. She knows what's best, so how am I going to come in there and question her work or ask her?" So there's a lot of that stigma going on, so the parents sometimes don't feel comfortable or don't know, and then it's the language barrier. The parents don't feel comfortable always, and they see one bad face or one bad incident, and they'll pull away. They'll shy away, and they won't come back and try to resolve that. So in the schools, in the groups that are based at schools, especially elementary schools, that's one thing that always comes up, relationship with the school.

Collings

So these groups are formed, and then you kind of poll them about what the concerns are.

Batres

Yes.

Collings

And then that information is taken in by the county.

Batres

Not necessarily. The agency that's supervising me is South Bay Center for Counseling. The person that runs the center is Colleen Mooney. Well, now she is a county employee, but in the beginning she wasn't, so it's very grassroots. So I think she has a lot of experience from herself, and she's not Hispanic; she's White. So she has a lot of experience and a lot of knowledge from doing it, from just working with the communities and from just knowing what are the barriers, what are the issues, what are the things that people go through. So we go into a group, and we say, "Look, this is what we're doing." We go to a group. "This is what we're doing. What do you guys think? Do you want to work with us?"

Batres

Then they say, "Sure," or sometimes they say, "No, well, we don't really know," or, "No, maybe it's not such a good match." But like I said, so we look at the issues, and now it is the county looking and saying, "How can we help?" Our main goal is that if I was to be gone tomorrow, that if SPA 8 was gone, that these communities--

Collings

SPA 8.

Batres

SPA 8 is Service Planning Area number eight. The County of L.A. was divided into eight areas. It's not only the County of L.A., but the whole area was divided into eight areas, so Service Planning Area number eight is everything from El Segundo down the water all the way to Long Beach. So it's Inglewood, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, a little bit of Compton. I don't know if it's so much Lynwood. But it's basically everything along the water that's Service Area number eight.

Batres

So that if we're gone tomorrow, we're not there, that it doesn't matter, because these parents or these communities know how to take ownership of the communities and know how to deal with these problems, who to go to, how to talk to them, how to go about getting what they need done done, how to advocate for themselves and for their families. So basically that's my goal. If I do my job well, that's what the result is going to be.

Collings

Is that the actual mission of the SPAs, to disseminate this kind of knowledge about civic participation to them?

Batres

Yes, because the county saw that there was something interesting happening. Whenever somebody would get a job or a better-paying job, or something

happened to where there was more income, these people would leave. You'd immediately move out of that community. So you'd get a home, you'd get a better car or whatever, and you'd move out and you'd leave. There was no interest in staying there and trying to change these communities. So that's why there was so many problems in these communities, because it was all people that were living there because that's all they could afford, not because they wanted to be there, not because they took ownership and they wanted to change it and it was a good place for them to live at. They were just there because, like I said, that was what they could afford.

Batres

So what the county thought is if we invest in these communities, and if these people know how, learn--and this knowledge isn't like we know it all and you know nothing. It's let's get together and together see what we could put together, share the knowledge that one has with the knowledge that somebody else has. Every single person is valuable in this group, because every single person brings different gifts and talents to the table. What do you bring to the table? What do you bring to this group that can be useful to us? So the county said, "If we can do that with these communities and show them everybody here is useful, then maybe these communities would be better." They'd be better places. There would be less problems.

Collings

Is there a sense that this is working?

Batres

Yes. It's been highly effective. I know that one of the things that have come of it, because it's been highly effective, in the whole county there is fifty-six--there was fifty-six when I started. I am not aware if that number is still accurate or not. We've started a lot of new groups. But there was fifty-six. In only SPA 8 we had twenty-six of the groups, of the community groups.

Collings

There were fifty-six total, and SPA 8 had twenty-six of those.

Batres

Yes, in the whole county.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

Yes, in the whole county it was fifty-six, and we had twenty-six, so we had a little over half. So the county took a look and said, "Hmm, what are you guys doing that's effective that all the rest of the counties aren't doing--or all the rest of the SPAs aren't doing?" So now my boss--she was always my boss but now she's officially my boss. So they hired her. The county hired her as a county

employee to come and to help them with all the SPAs, so now she's not just overseeing SPA 8. She's overseeing all eight counties.

Collings

To try to transmit what SPA 8 has been doing to the other SPAs.

Batres

Yes. Yes, and like I said, I mean, it could be that there's still fifty-six, because I know that even though we started a lot of new ones, we've lost some. So it could be that we're still close to fifty-six. I'll make it a point to ask. But I really doubt it, because I know that we have started a lot, and they've been writing grants to a lot of other agencies and a lot of other funding sources so that they can come on board and start working with us to use funds for that.

Collings

So why do you think SPA 8 has been so successful in running these groups?

Batres

I think because of the model that they're using, because it's relationship building, and because we stand behind the parents no matter what. I worked with other agencies before I worked with this one, and it was sad to say that I was sent out there to make relationship, to build relationships with the parents when we needed them. But when the parents needed us, I was told, "Oh, no, you can't do that. Oh, no."

Collings

Can you think of a specific example of that?

Batres

Yes, a specific example is one of the parents came to me one day and they said, "Oh, well, I need an interpreter. I'm having problems with my husband. I'm getting divorced, and I need an interpreter to go to court. They're telling me that I need to get an interpreter." She didn't have money, clearly, to pay for nobody, and I'm sure that they offer an interpreter at the courts, but she said she waited half a day, and she also had to go to work. So she waited half a day for just the interpreter to come, and then the interpreter was there, but they had put her case all the way at the bottom of the whole load, so she ended up spending the whole day there. So she figured, you know, "If you go with me, I can have it right in the morning, and then I don't have to wait for an interpreter."

Batres

So I asked my supervisor, "Do you think I can go?"

Batres

They said, "Oh, no. You can go on your time. If you want to go, then that's your time. You can go, but not on our time. You can't go when you're working for us. We still expect you to be here at work."

Collings

Was this a parent that had been involved in one of these groups?

Batres

Yes, that's how I met her.

Collings

Exactly.

Batres

That's how I met her. She was a parent that--and for this agency it was just one school. This agency, I was just working one school. So, yes, she was the parent that was very involved. She was one of the most involved parents. You know, and stuff like that. Other things that I can remember is when something happened with the school, so the school didn't feed some of the children. They didn't get lunches. These kids didn't qualify for the lunches. There was a group of kids that didn't qualify because of the paperwork; something happened with the paperwork. So they got frozen peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and these kids went home and told their parents, and their parents are now fuming. So they come to the school, and they complain, and then the CLI [phonetic] or the group that I was working with gets involved, and then the YMCA totally--and I hate to say it in their name, but they totally retracted, and they said, "We're housed at a school. We can't support you. That is not politically convenient for us. So you want to do something, that's fine, but you are not our group. You are not to associate us with you."

Batres

I mean, I understand where they're coming from, but I thought that there was the way I felt it is like, "Okay, you're on your own now. Oh, no, I don't know. I can't help you with that." And I think that they could have took another approach to that. You know, they could have said, "Well, politically this isn't convenient for us. We're housed at a school. We get a lot of our funds from the district," or whatever, you know. These parents aren't idiots. They understand if you explain it to them and tell them, "I don't know. It's going to be hard, because we don't want to lose our funding, but this is wrong. So how can we do this?" But as an employee I was told, "You're not to go to that meeting, and if you go to that meeting, it needs to be on your own time," because the parents met on the side. They met to try and figure out what they were going to do about it, and they said, "And you cannot be there, and if you're there, you need to make it clear that it's as a resident."

Batres

Because I then got upset, because then I said, "Wait a minute. Yeah, I work for you, but I only work for you four hours." I said, "And then I'm also a resident, and I have kids." I said, "So I want to be involved. So just because I work for you four hours, I can't be involved in something that is affecting me?"

Batres

They said, "Okay, then you need to make it very clear that you're going as a parent." And they sent my supervisor to make sure that I didn't mention the YMCA.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

To me that was very upsetting, you know, because to me that was like, okay, you guys--because I know that these parents have lives, you know, and these parents take time out of their day. They're volunteers, and they do a lot of things. You call them; on a dime you can have them over here. I'd be making phone calls, "Oh, you guys, we're having a site visit, so you guys need to come immediately, you know, like within an hour."

Collings

And make everything look good or something?

Batres

Yes. And, of course, we'd pick our favorite parents, right? We'd pick the parents that were more involved and that liked us the best, you know. But those parents would be there. They'd leave their dinner and they'd be there. And then when these parents needed support, where was the support? So I thought that that was wrong. In this agency, we make--if we cannot, if it's not politically--

Collings

When you say "this agency," are you referring to the South Bay Center for Counseling?

Batres

SPA 8.

Collings

To the SPA 8, okay.

Batres

Yes, SPA 8. I'm referring to my current employer. Yes, when we're there when something like this happens, we explain to them, and I can't think of an example where this would apply. But we explain to them, "You know what? This is what we can do, and this is what we cannot do, because I am an employee of the county. But this is what you can do, this is where you can go, and this is what you can talk to people about, and maybe you can try." I think that we've took even a stance to where we've advocated for some of the parents. It hasn't really happened in a group or in a big-scale, but in small things that have happened, we have took a stance to where the agency has said, "Okay, what can we do?" I've seen my supervisor and I've seen my boss call in the big guns like I did that day, and say, "Well, you know, so-and-so is getting a phone call right now, because I don't think this is correct," and we have gone internally then, because I think one of the things that the YMCA could have

done is gone to the district and said, "You know what, guys? What is going on here?"

Collings

Yes, "We've heard about this and--"

Batres

"There's a big mess, and the parents are now upset. How can we deal with this? We want to work with you. What happened? How can we help these parents and not make it a big old deal, a big old fight of these parents against the district?" Because there's no need for that, because I think one of the things that upset the parents was that they went to the principal, and the principal blew them off. The principal then blew them off, and the principal didn't really listen to them. So I think that sometimes all the parents want is to feel listened to, and all you need to do is sit there and smile and say, "I understand. I understand."

Batres

Even if you can't do nothing about it. Like I said, they're not dumb. You can explain that to them. "My hands are tied. I'm sure the principal has no say over who gets approved for free meals or not, but now we're going to make a plan." Or, you know, "Look, what can we do so that it doesn't happen?" And then like I said, go to the district and say, "What's going on? What's the policy with this? This is what happened, and it's a concern because these children didn't eat, and you can understand that these parents--how can we facilitate this between the parents and the district to where it gets resolved in the correct manner without confrontations and stuff like that? Let's talk about what is the real problem." And tell the parents. Even if they're not going to like it, tell them, "This is what the problem is, and I know you don't like it, but that's what it is. What do you want to do about it? How are we going to work with it?"

Batres

So I think that's what we've done in a lot of cases. I couldn't imagine that something would happen, and we wouldn't do that, we wouldn't say, "Look, guys."

Collings

What are some other cases? You said that there have been cases where you've stepped forward and been advocates for parents or for residents on a certain issue.

Batres

Well, that was one big one. I think with my previous employer, that was the only one, but what upset me was just that, you know, that you use me, and I felt like I was being used, because I'm the one getting sent out there to make these relationships with the parents. I'm the one that they're trusting, so I'm the one that's saying, "I really, really need you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You saved me." I'm the one building relationships with them, and when they come



to me, now what am I going to tell them? What am I going to tell them? "My supervisor said no. My employer won't approve of it, and I'm too busy because I have four kids, and I can't go with you. On my personal time I can't go with you, and on my work time they won't approve of it." What am I going to tell them?

Batres

I ended up going with her anyway. So numerous times I have gone to court dates with them. Numerous times I have gone as their interpreter, and I do ask them, "What do you want, an advocate or an interpreter? I can be both, but I can only be one at a time, because I can't be your advocate but then your interpreter, too. It's a conflict of interest. So if you want me as an advocate, I can be your advocate, but then we need an interpreter. And if you need me as your interpreter, maybe we can find somebody else, maybe an agency you could go to that they can advocate for you or guide you or help you through this, and then maybe I can just be your interpreter." So I've done that numerous times.

Collings

It sounds like you're still really using all those skills that you developed when you were helping your parents out.

Batres

Yes. I think in many, many ways that I've used things that maybe at the moment were negative, to be positive now. I try at least to make the best out of all the skills that I've got.

Collings

So when you go into the groups and you do the relationship building, what's like the method? How does that work?

Batres

We do have set agendas. Usually we do a kick-off of it, so we have an event where, like, for example, we're starting a group here in this community, and we have an event.

Collings

What is the reason for the group? Does it have like a problem area?

Batres

It could be different things. It could be different things. It could be, like I said, that we need a faith-based group, for example.

Collings

But you said you were starting a group.

Batres

Oh, here? Here it was me. I'm at fault. [laughs] I was venting to my supervisor. This is a housing complex. It's housing for low-income families, and I just got in here. I'm not supposed to be in here. I just got in here barely, because of the

relationships I had with a lot of people, and I got recommended, and I am low-income, but aside from being low-income, you had to come with other issues, like maybe mental health or maybe being referred by the courts or, you know, all those other things that I don't necessarily have. I think that if I had a spouse that was also making money, I would have no problem. I'd have no problem at all, because I'm getting paid very good money. But the problem with me is that my income is the only income that's coming into the home. You know, that's it. After my check is spent, that's it. So I think that's where I struggle a bit, and that's what makes me low-income.

Batres

So when I come in here, I'm having to see firsthand a lot of the families. I'm having to hear it. You know, we don't hear it today. They're gone. But the lady upstairs has like tons of little kids that are all toddlers, and you hear the screaming, and you hear the crying. There's domestic violence issues.

Batres

My daughter has a friend, one of her only friends here. She's a teenager. Her mom's never home. Her mom got arrested for being drunk in public and got taken to jail, and the mom's friend had to come and stay with them. And the daughter is now having to call the mom and checking up on her to see where she's at. I'm just surprised that the daughter is as good as she is. I'm sure she has issues, but I'm just surprised that a fifteen-year-old--you know, and it hurts at the same time. But it's a very nice complex, and I go outside and I see it full of trash, and I see barefooted little kids running all over the place, and I'm just dying. I'm just dying, and I hear all these things, and I say, "Oh, my goodness. I know this is the nicest apartment you guys have lived in. Why don't you take care of it? Why do you let your kids trash the place? Where are the parents when it's ten o'clock?"

Batres

Now it's not true. They have a curfew now. Kids can't be outside without an adult after nine, I think; I think it's nine. But, you know, I'm seeing all these things, and I'm living in such a big complex. I wasn't used to that. So I'm venting to my supervisor, because I told everybody I was moving, and they said, "How do you like your new place?"

Batres

I said, "Oh, it's wonderful. I love it," and "I like it so much," and stuff like that. I said, "But, oh, the neighbors."

Batres

And she says, "Well, what's the problem?"

Batres

I said, "Well--." I tell her.

Batres

She says, "Hmm. We're looking to start a new group. Do you think your community would benefit from this group?"

Batres

I said, "I think we would. You know, I think we would. I don't know what's available just yet," I said, "to us, because I just moved in in December." I said, "But I think we would definitely benefit."

Batres

So now I go and talk to somebody in the office, because I was already told, just by talking to the people in the office, they told me, "You need to be on the Tenant Council."

Batres

I said, "Really? You have a Tenant Council?"

Batres

They said, "Yes."

Batres

So I got it referred to this Anna, the lady from the PATH [phonetic] office, and she tells me that there is a Tenant Council. So when my supervisor tells me this, I tell her. You know what my supervisor said? "Do you want to start a group here?"

Batres

So I start telling her about what we do, and do you think this is a good match, and do you think this would be good for here.

Batres

She said, "Well, anything that brings extra resources and just people getting involved," because what some of the people were talking, a few of the people that live here used to live at Carmelitos Housing [Project], and they don't want it to get like that. They don't want it to get rundown, and they want to keep it up and they want to keep it nice. So she said, "Yeah, I think it is." So it was my fault. [laughter]

Collings

Let me just pause for a second.

Batres

Thank you for being mindful of the time.[Recorder turned off.]

Collings

Okay. So getting back to the issue of like the relationship building, you go into a group. The group has started. What are the exercises that you--

Batres

Like I said, some of the exercises might be team-building activities, and we have different ones. We have activities where we have this big sheet of paper, and everybody puts their hand. They trace them, and the hands need to be touching. They form a circle, and inside the circle we put things that are going

to build up the group, and outside the circle we're going to put things that are going to destroy it. So we each have a chance to say. Like I say what I might want from the group or what I think that will build it, respect, support, stuff like that. Then outside I'll put things that I know that will destroy it and that I don't want to see, like criticism, cliques. I don't know, stuff like that. So everybody does that, and then that's hung up somewhere visible. Every time they have a meeting, in their meeting and something comes up, "Oh, do we see this?" We get reminded we want to keep those things out. That's one of the activities.

Batres

Another activity, you know, we have a lot of ice-breakers. So another activity will be sharing, just sharing, you know, the gifts and talents, brainstorming "What are my gifts and talents?" We have gifts of the brain, gifts of the heart, and gifts of the hand. So maybe for gifts of the brain, I'm a good interpreter. I'm good at interpreting. Maybe--which is not true for myself--I love paperwork. Maybe I'm good with typing or whatever. Then for gifts of the heart, I'm loving. I love to work with children. For gifts of the hands, I like scrapbooking. I like arts and crafts. I'm good at cleaning my house. You know, so stuff like that, so everybody knows.

Batres

So not only do you get to know the person and what different abilities she has, when there's a conflict, you see if you can see that. Maybe the conflict is over you were in charge of typing some notes, and you go back to the list, and you see, "I don't like paperwork." So you know that's not a good person to give paperwork to. Is there somebody in the group that is better at paperwork? So you can choose better, you know, and it's a way of knowing that person and knowing who is a good match for what, and that's going to help the flow of the group, because without knowing that, I'll give you paperwork. Or maybe you're in charge of typing up the notes for the next meeting, and if I don't know that you just detest paperwork and you're not good at typing, if I don't know that, I'm going to attack you, and I'm going to say you're lazy, and I'm going to say all these things about you, and you're responsible, when, in reality, you're not. You're just not good at paperwork. You know, you just don't like it, and I'm entitled to not like it.

Batres

So there's a climate of acceptance and of education that's going on, because you're educating on what that person is like. There's a lot of sharing. Sometimes it's even like a support group. Somebody will come, and even though we have an agenda for that day, somebody will have a problem at home, and she'll share. A lot of my meeting have gone on over that problem, you know, but at the end of that meeting, we've discussed it. She found support. She found help. Then we brainstorm, "What do you think she can do about it? Who do we

know? Who knows somebody that can help her? If we don't know it, where do you think we can get these resources? What do you think she needs?"

Batres

So just a lot of that type of thing, and a lot of it, like I said, doesn't necessarily come from some kind of structured activity. It just comes from a lot of these parents, because the knowledge is there. They have it. So it's just knowing how to bring it out in them or knowing how to get it started, and once you get it started, it just flows.

Batres

Sometimes, depending on the group, you'd need more prompts than other times. Then, also, my job would be like, "Okay, the relationship is pretty strong now. Do you guys want to try and do the values exercise now?" You know, so it's just guidance. But as far as the relationship and the team building, that's what it is, and it's a lot of observing. If I see that somebody that doesn't know how to handle conflict well, maybe I bring in an activity on conflict resolution. If I know that somebody--you know, whatever, leadership skills, if I see that that's what they're lacking. So it's just a lot of observing the group, seeing what type of things go on in the group and what things would be beneficial to that group. What could those set of people benefit the most from? So, like I said, it's kind of hard to say. It's mostly just activities, ice-breakers that we use, but it's kind of hard to pinpoint one thing, because we use everything, whatever's necessary.

Collings

Do the meetings take place in Spanish or English or what?

Batres

Most of them take place in Spanish, but some of them are bilingual. I have the Whittier meeting to where I have one English speaker, and I tell her, "You're going to learn Spanish." Sometimes I forget, you know, sometimes a lot, but I try to partner her up with somebody that does speak English so she can try and tell her. And most of it, I interpret. I go back and forth. But if we're doing something like a values exercise, I'm going to partner her up with somebody that speaks English, just so that she can get the best out of that. I'm going to make sure that she's in the group that there's at least one English speaker. Then, of course, if need be--let's say half of the group is English-speaking and half of the group is Spanish-speaking--then an interpreter. Clearly, bringing in an interpreter.

Collings

Do the groups tend to be mainly women, or is it pretty much even?

Batres

Mainly women. Mainly women. There are a lot of men. I know my groups are mainly women. One of my co-workers has a group of just men.

Collings

What is the issue that they are dealing with?

Batres

I am not sure. She started collaborating with somebody. I think the collaborating agency was Friendship House, but I'm not sure if that's just the name of the group. But they were single parents, so it's just single fathers.

Collings

Because like talking with Elina [Green], for example, with LBACA, she's saying their groups are primarily women because they're mothers of children with asthma. So what do you think brings mostly women into your groups?

Batres

That men are afraid of women. They're afraid of their mouths. And, too, they just get shied away, because I see it a lot with my groups. It's all women, and then one woman will bring in her husband, and if he does say something, nobody will listen to it, or they'll just say, "No, that wasn't such a good idea," and stuff like that. So I think that men, especially Hispanic men, they see these groups as a waste of time, like, "You're just going there to gossip and eat. That's all you're doing, so why should I?" Then for Latinos it's the macho thing. You know, "What am I going to be doing with a bunch of women? I don't want to be there," because then the other men will criticize that. He won't be seen well by other men, you know, by his peers. They'll all say, "What the heck are you doing, dude? Why are you in there with a bunch of women?"

Collings

What if there's a specific issue, like crime or the Clean Trucks Program or something?

Batres

That has been what we've seen that will bring in a man, a specific issue, like jobs.

Collings

Jobs.

Batres

That has brought in a lot of men, jobs, or sporting events. You know, with the Cesar Chavez Mothers' Brigade, we had a soccer tournament, and one of our moms, her husband is the soccer coach. So we brought him in, and now he stayed. Ever since the soccer tournament, he stayed. So sometimes we just need one specific issue, and the men will see, you know, "They are doing this, so they're actually getting some work done," and then they'll stay. And, too, because they work, because a lot of them, at the times that they meet, they're working or they're just coming home from work, and the last thing that they want to do is be at a meeting. "Yeah, you can go. As long as you feed my

children and they're with you, you can go, but I'm not going to go, because I'm tired," or they're at work.

Collings

You said that there were some groups in Whittier that dealt with--

Batres

Wilmington.

Collings

--I'm sorry, Wilmington--that dealt with the issue of jobs.

Batres

No, I said jobs has been something that has brought in men. In Wilmington I just think it's single parents. I think it's just a support group, and I'm not sure what time those meetings are. I'm not so sure what time those meetings are. But the jobs issue has been more an effort of the whole SPA. We've been doing our conferences. We have them twice a year, and we've been trying to focus more on economic wellness, just economic development. We had a small business class, so now there's more men because of the small business class. So we try to make the topics gender-friendly or neutral, to where it's not just maybe sewing or cake decorating or whatever. And these aren't just classes. These are--the parents, there's an issue, "Well, what do you want to do about it? What do you think we could do?"

Collings

What are some examples of issues?

Batres

Examples of issues are the Clean Trucks Program, health, housing, safety. The Cesar Chavez Mothers' Brigade deals with safety. The school is located next to a freeway entrance, so the cars would zoom on by with no respect for the children, and a lot of these children walk by themselves. So the Mothers' Brigade decides that they're going to be patrolling before school and after school to try and help with that. Also there's a lot of sexual predators in the area, so they decide that they're going to be patrolling from their house to the school and just keeping an eye out. Do I see any suspicious characters? Do I see any suspicious activity? You know, they're also next to a park, so that also attracts people that are up to no good. So they patrol the park. They keep an eye out. It's kind of like a Neighborhood Watch, kind of like a meeting Neighborhood Watch. So they work on that.

Batres

The CPC that's also connected with LBACA, they're working on housing, housing issues, also because of the housing crisis here in Long Beach. Rents are going through the roof, and then the conditions that these people live is ridiculous sometimes, and the rent is still very high, but yet these are slumlords that don't care about the conditions that they work in. So they're doing a lot of

work with Legal Aid, and they're going like to court and stuff, and talking to the city and saying, "How can we improve these conditions?" Some of the people were getting thrown out, and they weren't given back their security deposit. You know, the owner would make up some crazy thing and say, "No, well, you--whatever, you lost it," because they counted on the fact that these people were illegal, and that they thought that they had no rights. The housing laws here in Long Beach are weak, so they knew that, so they preyed on that, and they took advantage of people.

Batres

The condominium conversion, they would take big buildings and convert them to condominiums. They'd kick people out without telling them, "You're entitled to money. Because we're kicking you out, you're entitled to a certain amount of money." And you're supposed to get offered the condominium first. Whether you can afford it or not, it's irrelevant, but you're supposed to have a stab at it first, and, "We're supposed to give you a certain amount of time to move." So all those things, people weren't being told, and there was a lot of condominium conversions going on here in Long Beach, so a lot of these people were being affected, because the amount of vacancies that are available to people here in Long Beach is very little as it is. So with these condominium conversions it was getting worse, and people were having to live two and three families in the same apartment. You know, people would end up with each other just to be able to afford an apartment, and/or because there was no apartment available in the area that they wanted. So stuff like that, you know, things like that, issues like that, that they see.

Batres

Willard, they have--well, now they're working on safety, and the community and police relationship, and also just the cleaning the area, because they noticed that it was very dirty. There's a lot of shops that are emitting toxic fumes into the air, like body shops. There's a lot of body shops that they'll be working on cars like on the sidewalk, basically, and kids are passing by from school, and people live--on one side there's a house. On this side there's a house where they're constantly breathing that in. We don't know yet if that's legal or not. We're looking into that. But just stuff like that, you know, things in their community that people notice that are a real concern, for example, gangs or crime. At CPC there's one of the members that she got robbed in broad daylight. Broad daylight, somebody came up to her with a gun and robbed her.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

Yes, and now they're working with the police, because the police comes to their meetings. The police comes to every single meeting, so they give a report about



hot spots and things for us to watch out for, like, "Ladies, there's a lot of purse snatching. Don't walk at night. This is the area where we notice it more. Be careful. Don't walk at night with your purse. If you can avoid it, do." They pass out whistles, maybe; you know, whistle if you feel in danger. Stuff like that. Then we report to the police things that are going on, so the police maybe now knows that in this area there's these problems going on, and they'll send more presence over there and stuff like that. So like I said, it's that type of issues. Willard is school relationship, just being able to walk into the school and feeling welcomed, feeling like "That is my school. I can come here and I can talk to the teacher. I can volunteer in my child's class. I can read."

Collings

Why was that such a particular problem at that school?

Batres

The problem at that school, they have a pretty good relationship with the principal and with the school, but sometimes the office staff, sometimes they don't even have Spanish speakers at the office, and if they do, they're not full-time. They're almost never full-time. They're part-time. And then when they come in, they're not greeted. Parents aren't made to feel welcome. So that was an issue. And, too, it was an issue because they want to find out what other ways can we help our kids. How else can we be involved in my child's education, so that if my child is lacking in math, I can catch it early on. You know, there's a high concentration of parents at that school--I'm sure at all the schools, but at that school in particular, there seems to be a lot of stay-at-home moms that wanted to come out, because, like I said, I'm sure there's a lot of stay-at-home moms at all the other schools, but they don't necessarily want to come out, and there they wanted to. So they just wanted to build a relationship with the school and say, "How can we make the best of it? How can we help you? We have time. You have our children."

Collings

But they weren't fundraising or donating money to the school?

Batres

No.

Collings

The school would have liked that.

Batres

Exactly. Exactly. But part of building a relationship is making the school happy in the right way, because the county won't approve of that. The county's money is not for charity, and that's considered charity. So what can the parents do that generates funds for the school? And it's not necessarily donating. I can donate thousands of dollars, but tomorrow they'll be used up, and then what? So

creating things to where it's more sustainable, and it's going to make more impact long-term other than just donating money.

Collings

So what have been like some notable successes of these groups, and what have been some notable failures as well?

Batres

Some notable successes--

Collings

We might not have time to fill all that out now, because I know we're almost out of time.

Batres

Yes. Some notable successes, like for example, CPC--as a result, CPC did a lot of advocating for this housing project. They did a lot of advocating. Now there's more police involvement with the community. I know that I used to live a block away from where CPC meets, and there was a lot of gang activity. There was drug dealing. There was a pregnant woman got beat up in that alley. When I moved in, it was very unsafe, and now I have reported those problems to CPC, the police got involved. So I think just the safety itself, just feeling the thing that you could walk down there, you know, walk and feel safe.

Batres

But aside from that, there's a few laws. They're working with Legal Aid, and I know that now there's a law about you have to get your deposit back within a certain amount of time. Stuff like that. They worked on the 710 [freeway] expansion. You know, before there were all these houses that were going to get torn down, and now all these houses are still there. They didn't get torn down. They were going to bring in a natural gas plant, and then CPC got right on it and just educated people, "Do we want that here in Long Beach?" They were looking to expand the railroads. CPC was also in that. You know, now with the trucks program.

Batres

Failures was CPC used to be called JCPP, and they lost their funding.

Collings

And JCPP was--

Batres

Juvenile Crime Prevention Program. So before, it was more geared towards single women with kids, and there was resources, again, for single mothers and their children, and there was programs that they'd have, like home visits of people that would come and say, "How are you doing? What does your family need? What kind of resources?" They had a Birthday Club to where it was the child's birthday, and you'd bring in the child, and they'd get all these gifts and stuff like that. Then there was classes; there was other things. So because of

this JCPP, now we have CPC, and because of CPC, now we have Mothers' Brigade and we have LBACA, because LBACA wasn't really existent when JCPP was, or it wasn't as big. So because of all the advocacy work that these moms have done, they've got in contact with all these other agencies, and now LBACA is in place, and now we have the Mothers' Brigade, because also a lot of people came to these meetings and said, "We need healthcare. Our kids are missing too much school to go to doctor's visits." And now they have a clinic at the Cesar Chavez [Elementary] School, to where the kid doesn't have to miss a day of school to go to a doctor's appointment.

Batres

So I think that somehow that helped to those successes, and those are more of the most notable ones. Those are some of the most notable successes that they've had. And the closing of JCPP has been some of the failures. We don't have rent control yet. [laughs] That's another failure, but I think it's not so much a failure, it's just that that's tough, especially here in Long Beach. We've met numerous times with Bob Foster.

Collings

The mayor.

Batres

The mayor, and he said he doesn't support it. He said he doesn't see it working. So now we're hoping to see him go, and we're hoping to start. So it's just picking your fights, too. It's saying which one is easier now and which one is urgent. It's not going to be easy, but it's urgent. So it's stuff like that. But those are some of the successes. Failures, we like to think, have been very little, because even though something doesn't go the way we wanted it, we try to make it work some other way, get something out of it, learn something out of it.

Collings

What about like possibly voter registration? I mean, like for example, organizing people to vote in a more progressive mayor, for example? Is that a piece of it?

Batres

I think that is kind of difficult, I mean to do, because a lot of these people are undocumented, and I'm not sure if we're supposed to get involved with politics.

Collings

What about immigration rights issues?

Batres

That we have. That we have done in the past. We have tried. Different groups have tried to take that on, and CPC was one of the groups in the resources, you know, finding resources, finding a lawyer. I think we're working with Legal Aid for housing, and at the point that we brought immigrant rights, we had a lot on our plate, and CPC was going through a kind of shaky period, so then that

got put on the back burner. But I think that it has been. What we're trying to do, I think, first, is kind of working on the relationship of all these groups and taking them to the next part, because if a group doesn't know their local government, doesn't know how their community works, who their local government is, basically, they're not going to be successful at nothing bigger. So I think right now we're trying to help the groups go that next step so that we can take on things like that.

Batres

But it's not that we haven't done anything about it. We've had like forums in the past, informational forums about immigration, and stuff like that, but we also look at what kind of--I think with this president, it's going to be more so. It's going to start seeing that more so, because we also have to look at the president, you know. We don't want to set up the parents for something that we know they're not going to have success with, so we see how possible is this. How possible is this? What are our possibilities? What routes would we take, and stuff like that. And also collaborating. Who's collaborating with us on this? What resources do we have on this to be able to back ourselves, and so we don't set ourselves up for failure, too?

Batres

So I think that's going to be one of the next issues, because like I said, one of the points that we focused on is literacy, financial literacy, and how to make money despite your situation. That seemed like a more urgent and more doable thing, other than immigration. Like I said, with this new president, we don't know what might happen. Doors might be opening a little more. But we have done--I mean, if somebody is like in dire need. CPC worked with somebody; she was a refugee at the Church of St. Luke's. She was staying there, and they did work with her.

Collings

Right. A sanctuary.

Batres

Yes, she was staying there. So we do give resources if somebody in our groups is in that need, but we haven't done anything major around that.

Collings

Do you tend to shy away from more high-profile, controversial issues?

Batres

I don't think we necessarily shy away. I think it's, again, what the residents bring and what we're more prepared for. Who do we have that's collaborating with us that we can use for this? Who have we built a relationship with that can help us with this? Because we never promote or push an issue. We won't be the pushing party. We'll just kind of go--we'll direct them. We'll try to show them

that way, but if there's no interest or if it's not an issue that they bring up necessarily, we won't be the ones.

Collings

So a group that's formed that way is going to be around very specific local kinds of problems.

Batres

We try to shy away from issue-based organizing.

Collings

Yes, exactly.

Batres

It's more relationship-based organizing, what we do, because if a group is formed around immigration issues, what happens when that issue is gone? Then the group disappears. So we do take on pressing issues, like, for example, the Clean Trucks Program. The teamsters came to me. Alberto came to me, and he said, "This is what we're doing. How can I work your groups?"

Batres

I said, "You need to go to my groups and see which one will take you in, which one is willing to work with you on that; what their values are, which one fits with you."

Collings

Which groups did decide to go ahead and work with him?

Batres

Most of them. Most of them decided. All of them decided to work with him to some point, but CPC is the one that's the most involved, you know, to a certain extent. For example, Willard didn't really fit in, but they have supported him. They do go out to events when there's specific things going on, you know, or it's specific meetings going on. They do go out to events. But because Willard is more a working people's group, it's kind of harder for them, especially if it's during the day. It's kind of harder, because they're at work, and then when they come home, they want to be with their children. And they already have these meetings, and they already have all these other things that they're participating on. And they're a smaller group. CPC is one of my oldest and biggest groups, so there's the ones that Alberto fit right in, and they are supporting them.

Batres

With the elections now that we're electing in the First District, we do. We do promote, like we promoted a forum that they were having last Saturday--not this past Saturday; Saturday before that--where all the candidates were getting together, and they were getting organized and having certain questions. What do you think about this? What are your plans on this?

Collings

This was the mayoral candidates?

Batres

Yes. No, no, no, not the mayoral, just the representative for the First District. And, you know, what do you think about this? And we did tell them. "This is who your First District person is going to be," I said, "so people that live in the First District, you need to pay close attention, whether you can vote or not, because you have kids, because you have relatives, because you have neighbors that can vote but are working, and you need to be able to educate them. You need to be able to tell them, 'Hey, have you found out about this? This is what so-and-so thinks.'"

Batres

But again, we cannot push one single person, because we need to be careful with the things that we bring on, because we've gained people's trust, and because we have a relationship with these people. If I come to a group, and I say, "Hey, guys, do you guys want to bring so-and-so? He's running for the First District, and he wants to talk to you guys," they're not going to say no, because even though they know I'm not their leader--I'm their organizer; I'm just their colleague, per se--they still say, "Well, maybe she's got a good reason." They're not going to go against what I recommend, so I have to be very careful what I recommend, because then that's not fair. That's not equal. I need to educate them, what does he think; what does she think. So if I'm going to have a forum like the ones we pushed for where everybody is going to discuss and they're going to be truly informed, well, then yes. But I'm not just going to push one agenda, you know, nobody's single agenda, because I'm not informing my parents well.

Batres

So that's why we have to be careful with what we suggest, because we might be pointing them the wrong path, and we don't want to give information that's not accurate. We want to make sure that they're as well informed as they can be and that, ultimately, the decision is theirs; that ultimately, they're the ones that are making the decisions. Yes, so we did do some, and somebody contacted me. I used to live in the First District, so I've been contacted by all of them, and I think they're not aware, because I'm still registered in the First District. So he contacted me and he said, "Well, I just want to help register people to vote that might be wanting to vote."

Batres

I said, "Okay, but are you just going to register everybody?"

Batres

He says, "Oh, no. I'm just going to register people that are going to vote for me."

Batres

I said, "Then I can't do that." I said, "If you were going to register people regardless of who they were going to vote for, then yes, I can help you. I can invite you to my meetings, and you could come. But if you're just going to register people that are going to vote for you, then I cannot work with you, you know, because I'm not [unclear]. Then what are the rest of the people that aren't going to vote for you, what are they going to do?"

Batres

So, I mean, with things that are politics and religion, we do need to tend to--I know that there's something that says the state and religion can't mix or something like that. So we do need to be careful with that. Like I said, if they're the ones that--if CPC says, on their own, they invited Jana or Jada, which is one of the candidates, and that was fine, because they invited them in, but it wasn't my idea to invite her in, and I support what they decide. I'm just saying, "Okay, well, let's hear her." Yes, but that's kind of touchy.[End of recording]

### **1.3. Session 3 (March 26, 2009 )**

Collings

Today is March 26, 2009, Jane Collings interviewing Rosa Batres at her home.

Collings

Good morning.

Batres

Good morning.

Collings

I just had a couple of follow-up questions from last time, like you had mentioned a situation where, for example, there might be like body shops right next to housing like on a street, and that might be something that the community groups would deal with. I was just wondering like how would you deal with a situation like that, given that the body shop owners, the body shop workers, would also be community members. So would that be an issue?

Batres

That's assuming that they are also community members, because we don't know that. We don't know that. That's a project that one of the groups is starting to take on or wants to take. But I think that the way we were thinking or the groups were thinking about it, was basically just educating ourselves. First, one, what are the laws? What are the laws of around contamination and those type of things? Is there any law here in Long Beach that says that that's allowed, that a shop can be right smack in the middle of a neighborhood, that you can have a shop right here and then an apartment building right next door? Is that allowed here in Long Beach, and if it is, how far away from houses do they have--is there any laws that say that? If there isn't, well, then like look into

that. What are the specifications as far as the toxins that are being emitted into the air? Is there any laws against that that Long Beach has?

Batres

And just start with that, because if there's no specific laws, then maybe that's where need to start. Maybe that's where we need to look into, and we would know that that would be a long, drawn-out battle, but then the group can say, "This is what it is. There's really no laws in place. This is where we would have to start, and this is how long it would probably take. Do we want to take on this battle or not? Is it really that important for us to take it on or not?" So I think that that's basically the first step to doing that.

Collings

I mean, there's so much like educating and self-educating that goes on in these groups, it sounds like.

Batres

Exactly. Exactly, and I think that's the most important thing, like my supervisor said. Through my work as a community organizer, our job is to do just that, to help the community members figure that out, because otherwise a lot of times we wouldn't know how to deal with it. You'd go and talk to shop owner, and now maybe instead of having a neighbor, you have an enemy, you know, because depending on how the conversation works or goes or whatever or what type of personality each person has, that could potentially turn ugly. So our job is to come into these groups and just help these parents educate themselves and learn. Our process in taking these groups through the planning process with these projects, we think that they gain more, or we hope that they gain. What we care about is what they gain in the process.

Collings

Now, you frequently refer to the members of the groups as parents, and that's because it's through the Children's C\_\_\_\_\_.

Batres

Now, it's usually because they are a parent, because these groups are in schools. So usually the people that are there, the members that are there, are parents of kids that attend that school. So that's usually why I refer to them as parents, and most of them are parents. You know, most of them are that. Even though their kids don't attend that school no more, they live in the neighborhood and their kids did at one time, or they have grandchildren there, or they have relatives there that they're caring for and that are attending that school. The few people that aren't parents are very close related, maybe a sister or an aunt, you know, so we've just gotten accustomed to--I mean, I sometimes say "my moms" or "my parents." I sometimes say "my parents," and people look at me like, "How many parents do you have?"

Batres



"Well, no, not my personal parents. It's just the parents for my groups." [mutual laughter]

Collings

Do you think that a lot of the people who participate--the women who participate, particularly--are participating because they're concerned about the health of their children?

Batres

Yes, definitely.

Batres

Because that's one of the things Elina [Green] said. She said that one of the things that brought what she called the "LBACA moms" out, and a lot of them, she said, were maybe like kind of shy or maybe wouldn't have gotten involved, but their kids were sick. So do you think, in the groups that you've worked with, that this is something really central that brings the women out?

Batres

I think that's essentially the driving piece. Whatever it is that we're working on, whether it's involving yourself in your child's school, whether it's involving--you know, because some of them are just there because they want to be more involved. That's their child's school, so they want to participate more and be more informed. Whether it's their school, their education, their health, or whatever other situation, or the safety of the neighborhood, it's always about your family. It's always because of your kids.

Batres

In one of the interviews I did with Alberto [Ramirez] from LAANE [Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy], another agency that's doing a lot of--

Collings

I heard about that.

Batres

--environmental activism work--

Collings

No, I mean I heard about their interview project as well.

Batres

Yes. In one of the interviews that I did with him, I said, "Moms never give up. We can't." And I think that's what unites us. That's the one thing that unites everybody, all the members in these groups, all the people in the community, and the one thing that keeps us going, is hoping that our children will have a better future than we do now.

Collings

Yes, because, as we well know, in many cases women don't feel as empowered to participate in the public realm. So are you really sort of like counting on the fact that the women who participate are concerned about their kids and their

health, and that this is going to be kind of like a way to bring them in to do other things?

Batres

Well, I think, like I said, that's something we know. That is something that we do know that is going to help them overcome whatever other challenges there is. That's something we say. "Who's going to lose if you don't get involved? If you don't decide to come out, who's going to lose your family? Ultimately, you." But it's the family, it's the children, it's the husbands, it's the unity of the family as a unit itself, that's going to suffer from not being involved.

Collings

Do you have any sense that the women that are participating, they are, you know, telling their husbands, "Well, I'm not home because I'm doing this for the kids"?

Batres

I think they do. I think they do, and in the SPA with our work, we have now tried to create father-friendly or men-friendly events, like picnics and like things like that where they can come out and see what it is that their wives are doing. And the women do tell them, you know, one of the things that we talk about sometimes in the meetings is that, you know, what the men say.

Collings

Oh, really.

Batres

Yes, we've spoken about that. The women very often tell us, "Well, my husband says, 'You're never home. Why don't you pack your bags and just go sleep at school?' You're just a bunch of women gossiping and eating."

Batres

I tell them, "Well, you know, ask them, 'Was your mom involved in your education when you were growing up? How exciting was it for you, getting your class prepared for parent conference? How exciting was it if you knew your parent was not going to show up? How was it in your childhood? Did you like that, or did you not like that?'" Whichever the case would be, whether the parent was involved or wasn't, I always tell them, "Ask them, and tell them, 'Is that what you want for your child?'"

Collings

That's interesting.

Batres

If she was involved, don't you want your child to have that, and don't you think that that made a difference in your education? Because usually these parents had to leave school to start working. Is that what you want for your child? We both know now as adults that the key was to stay in school. Don't you want your child to stay in school? Well, if we do, and because we do want our child

to stay in school, the key to this is involvement, and through my involvement I can find out and just meet people, and you never know where this would take me.

Batres

I always tell them how I started in this job. I always tell them that I was a parent; that I was told by my mom, "The ladies that are at school are ladies that don't have nothing else to do. Their houses are dirty. Their kids are not taken care of, and they're just gossipy. They're just busybodies."

Collings

That's what your mom would say, huh?

Batres

My mom would always tell me that. "The ladies that are at school, that's why they're at school." But I found out as an adult that she told me that because she felt guilty about not being able to participate in my education and to be there. It wasn't she didn't want to. She had to work. I know that was a valid reason, but I also know now that she felt guilty, and that was what she told herself to make it okay. I was sure that was my mom's--so when I'm talking to them, I say, "When I started working, and when my job was to bring these people in, I said, 'Oh, my goodness, I'm the leader of the gossipy busybodies.'" [mutual laughter] It's like, "Oh, my gosh, now I've become one of them." But then I figured out, no, we're not busybodies. We're getting work done. They're finding about their kids' education, and I started learning with them, because through the parenting classes that they were giving these parents, one of the reasons why I was so excited of bringing them in was because I knew that these were good classes and that these parents needed this.

Batres

So I always share that with the moms, and I always tell them--share that story, say, "Look, you just never know." I never even dreamed that by getting involved, I was going to then later end up getting employment and having this turn into like a career for me. You know, I said, "So explain that to your husbands." So many things can come from relationships that you form from people, from people hearing your story and just knowing about you and building a relationship with you, because if you have a friend, there's somebody you know that has a need, you hear about something else, and then you make a connection. You're not going to go to a stranger and knock on their door and say, "Would you like this?" You're going to look amongst your friends or your networks and see how you can make that connection. So I always tell them, "You just never know what might come up."

Batres

So I think that, yes, we do count very much so on the fact that these parents want to get involved. And again, what we've seen is that the parents that aren't

involved, you could right away tell with their kids' education, with their kids' lives, even. I constantly have children here at my house. I'm very drawn to kids, but I constantly have children here at my house, and every single time, the kids that are drawn to my kids and the kids that are drawn to my home, it never fails. The parent's either at work or the parent doesn't care or the parent's not involved or the parent's just not there. It never, ever fails that the kids that are always coming to my house and are always drawn to my kids and to myself, that's a common factor that I notice, and I also share that with my parents. I also share that with them, and I tell them, "Involvement is the key to a lot of things."

Collings

It sounds like those kids are lucky to be able to come over.

Batres

I just think of myself when I was a teenager. And, again, my parents were not there because they didn't want to. They weren't there because they were busy, and malinformed, busy and malinformed. It was back in the day when there wasn't so many resources available for parents. There was no YMCA. There was no after-school programs. There was no Girls and Boys Club, and if there was, the capacity was very limited, and there wasn't as much outreach done for it. But I always, always, always tell my kids that if we can help a kid like that, it's good.

Batres

It's good, you know, and I'm always happy to reach out to another child, because I think it also benefits my kids. It helps them realize not everybody is like us. You know, because when you have something that's good, if you've never known anything different, it's very easy for you to take it for granted. It's very, very easy. So when you see the other side and you see other kids that their parents aren't always there, that their parents aren't as involved, and they're not as fortunate to have the things that they have, then they're like, "Oh, well, maybe we're lucky." [laughs]

Collings

You were saying that you thought that the parenting classes were really helpful for the parents. What particular aspect of the parenting classes do you think are the--

Batres

I think every aspect, every aspect, because, I mean, children don't come with a handbook. They don't come with instructions. Unfortunately, you know, I think just my generation, we've been very lucky to have all these resources available and all these things available, but I think that it's very easy to make the wrong choices on every aspect, taking care of them physically, you know, changing diapers appropriately; emotionally, how to deal with the child, how to

understand the child at two years old is not being a brat. He's going through terrible twos. He's going to say no to everything. He's going to say, "Mine," and he's not a brat. You don't need to discipline him. You need to show him, but, you know, that's how a two-year-old acts.

Batres

When a parent goes into the home knowing a child's going to scream in their face, "No," or, "Mine," or they're going to fight, you can then plan or prepare better, and you can emotionally prepare yourself, because I think a lot, especially in our culture, we all come from this culture of spanking, and not necessarily spanking. "Spanking" is a light word for it, you know, but physical or--just physical, physical contact and physical discipline, and we're not necessarily told limits. This is correct; this is not correct. So we act with what we have.

Batres

I know my parents disciplined me very sternly, and I know, even as stern as I thought my parents were with me, I know I was one of the lucky ones, because I know there's been other stories I've heard. One of my groups had a project with child abuse and prevention, and the stories, I mean, even in planning the project and getting information for it, there was tears.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

These parents would say, "I would get hit on the head with pans and pots, and I'd be bleeding. I'd have to kneel on rocks, on gravel, for hours with books in both my hands." I think those kind of punishments, I only see in movies or just read about, you know. I never, thank God, had to endure those punishments, but they do go on, and this is the type of parenting skills these parents have. These are the type of things that these parents have to work with. So when you go into a class and you learn about the one-minute-per-year rule for time out; when you learn about being consistent with your rules; when you learn about telling a child, "Okay, bye. Be good," that that child doesn't know what "be good" means. What does that mean to me? What does that mean to you? What do I expect from you?

Batres

I think that all those skills, the communication skills, the being prepared emotionally for how the child's going to react, all those are very, very important for parents. They're very, very important for us to all know, and we don't learn them from our parents, necessarily. So being able to learn them--sometimes people say, "Well, she's been through so many parenting classes, and she's been through so many programs, and she's still struggling." Where would she be if

she had not been through all those parenting classes? Because, again, parenting is the toughest job ever.

Collings

I guess I was kind of curious, because, you know, you're talking about communities where frequently there's a lot of contact with extended families an, you'd think that once a woman has her first child, she's had a lot of experience already and knows a lot about babies and knows a lot. So I'm just kind of like wondering how the parenting class piece kind of intersects with all of that other knowledge that everybody frequently already has.

Batres

There's a lot of knowledge that just comes with it. I always tell my children, "You know, I was shown how to love by you guys. You guys show me how to love every day. You guys show me a lot every day," and we do. But I think that there's a lot of other things that we don't come with. There's a lot of other things that we do need to know how to deal with. For example, knowing how to take time out for yourself and not feel guilty about it, and knowing you're actually a better person for doing that. You're not being a "less than" mom for taking time out for yourself, for getting a babysitter just to go do your nails, just to go chat with a girlfriend. You know, you're being a better person, because you're coming back as relaxed. So just stuff like that, you know, stuff like that.

Batres

There are--having a child, you'll automatically know what to do, but again, there's other things that are going to be very difficult and that these parenting classes, when you have them and when you hear them and when you hear other moms that are going through the same thing and how they dealt with, you don't feel like, "Okay, now I don't feel like I'm the only one that's doing that or going through that. It's normal."

Collings

Is there ever any sense that the philosophy of the parenting class is like changing the culture of the family in some way?

Batres

I think there could be, but I think that if there is, if anything, it's changing it for the better. If anything, it's giving the family resources on where to go for if you need help with this, what to do if you need help with this. It's making us less afraid to reach out for help, and it's making us a little bit more trustful, because it's hard to trust people with something as important as your family. It's hard to know who to trust.

Collings

How to trust people outside the family.

Batres

Exactly, and even family members. You know, even family members, because even though you do have extended family, sometimes even family members don't know how to deal with it, and sometimes conflict comes up amongst these family members that you don't know how to deal with it. So I think that parenting classes a lot of times help you educate somebody else, help you say, "Well, this is what I'm doing with my child, and this works. Can you help me do it, too?"

Collings

In terms of like the trust issue, I mean, like in terms of like immigration law, a conviction for child abuse or domestic violence is mandatory deportation.

Batres

Yes.

Collings

So how is that handled in the discussion?

Batres

Well, I think that's why these classes are so important, because I think that all these programs are like prevention, are like prevention, because a lot of the times, it starts as a parenting class, but by the end, especially if people are consistent in attending, by the end of the parenting class, you actually have a support group. You've actually formed relationships with these people, and now you kind of have a little network, kind of an extension. In my case--I can say this because of personal experience--in my case, I do have a lot of family here, but most of my family is in L.A., and even my sister's in Long Beach, but she's dealing with her life and her kids and her stuff, you know. So I know that these parents that have gone through--because it was my job, but I also live in the community--they've become my support group.

Batres

The first babysitter, amazing babysitter that I had for my child, that was a parent from these groups, you know, and through sharing, "Well, you know, I love my job, but I hate leaving my child to come to work. I hate having to leave him and then sometimes he asks me when I come back." And I'm paying this person, you know, and my child hasn't eaten.

Batres

So through sharing that, somebody said, somebody said, "Well, I can take care of your child if you want to. You know my kids and you know where I live, and we can try and see if it works." She was the best babysitter I could ever have. My child didn't want to come home with me. He did. On the weekends, he would tell me. I'd be taking him to her house, and I'd be like, "I'm [unclear]," you know. [mutual laughter] So I think, like I said, then these groups form support groups, and I think it's very, very important, and it's handled just like that, by saying it.

Collings

So people, because of the really harsh law, they would be inclined to not go to law enforcement or the county.

Batres

Exactly.

Collings

They would go to these other people that--

Batres

Oh, they wouldn't trust the county or law enforcement. Let's say there is a bad case of a mom that's getting abused by her husband, and she needs help. She needs to find out. She needs to know that she's not at fault, because he's abusing her; that she can go get help. And also she needs to know that if she doesn't do nothing about it, she's now an accomplice. She's now endangering her kids, because she hasn't stepped up and said, "No," and put her kids in a safe environment.

Collings

Oh, wow.

Batres

So that's very important for these parents to know.

Collings

So she's actually like legally vulnerable in that sense. Wow.

Batres

Yes, she is, because she will be just as guilty as he is.

Collings

So how do they handle this particular issue with regard to the immigration law?

Batres

I think a lot of the shelters, they have no requirements for you to be legal, and they don't even ask.

Collings

So they don't even ask, and it doesn't come up.

Batres

Yes, because I had a mom where I know she was not legal in this country, and she got picked up. She was in a very bad domestic violence. We had the fortune to be able to speak to her, and people were able to tell her, "Your kids are the only thing your kids have. You're the only thing your kids have. You need to put your kids in safety, because if you don't, then they will be taken away from you, also."

Collings

Oh, I see. So in that case they would be willing to report their husband and have him deported.

Batres



Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh yes, and you report the husband, because it's better to have a husband deported if he's not willing to shape up; you know, if he's not willing to recognize, "I have a problem. I need help." Because even in those cases, the husbands, there's help. I know that there's counseling, and I know that there are services. And again, these services are for everybody regardless of the status, the immigration status. I know that these services are available, for a fact.

Collings

So because they feel like they could be like next in line in terms of being liable, they don't try to, through the community or anything, cover up what perhaps the father or whatever is doing.

Batres

Oh, no. No. I think it's pretty obvious, you know, with all the outreach. Child abuse and domestic violence is out there now. It's really out there. Everybody knows the symptoms. Everybody knows about it. You see it on TV. You see it on commercials. You see it on movies. You see it everywhere. So everybody is so aware about it, and everybody knows the symptoms by now, to where you know that there's people that, when it's happening, that know about it.

Collings

No, I was just wondering like, because of how harsh that law is, whether that had driven any of this underground.

Batres

Oh, no.

Collings

You know, like there was this effort recently to--I forget--something number forty, order number forty; it's not coming to me right now--where the police are not supposed to be able to ask people about their immigration status, because they don't want to inhibit people reporting crimes. So I just wondered if there was any inhibition about dealing with that issue because of the--

Batres

Because of immigration status. I don't think that'd be the case here.

Collings

So the other follow-up question that I had was, you said that you had Alberto Ramirez coming from the teamsters to talk about the Clean Trucks Program. So who did he come to talk to, and what kind of involvement was he trying to get from the group?

Batres

Alberto Ramirez came out of nowhere for us, but we weren't aware that there was a teamsters' office here in Long Beach, and we weren't aware that there was these issues that were going on with the Clean Trucks Program. So when this started coming more and more evident, and the battle started getting more and more heated, he started asking and inquiring about the groups. I guess it

was also through LBACA that he started seeing all these parents with LBACA, and he started asking LBACA, "Well, where are these parents coming from?"

Batres

So LBACA started saying, "They're actually their own group. They're actually their own network of groups here in the community." So he started coming.

Batres

He came to me at first, and I said, "Well, these parents are their own group. They have their own identity," I said, "so they're their own entity." I said, "So if you come to them and you explain to them what you're doing, if they agree to support you, then I can support the, because that's my job, so support what the parents want to support." I said, "But if you coming in here to use the parents for a rally or a meeting, just to take credit for the numbers, and I figure it out, I will tell them. I'm going to tell them." I said, "So if you think you can use them and nobody's going to figure it out, we are, so you're going to be that more m\_\_\_\_. So we share it with them, and I'm going to say, 'Is this really something you guys want?'" I said, "So if your intentions are authentic, then go for it. But if they're not, I'm just warning you." I said, "And then my agency will step in, and we will say, 'Look, you need to back away.'" Because, yes, the parents can participate in whatever they want. We don't own them. But we will step in and advocate for them if we think that they need it.

Batres

So he says, "No, no, no." He explained to me what he was doing, and this is important.

Batres

I said, "Okay, fine. Go and share it with the parents."

Batres

So he did. He shared it with the Mothers' Brigade at a meeting, so the moms have now decided to support him, because a lot of them do have asthma and because a lot of them do know people that are truckers and do know people that are losing their homes because of the crucial situation that the truckers are going through. And this program where basically they're wanting the truckers to pay for these very expensive--

Collings

New, clean trucks.

Batres

--trucks themselves. We think it's very, very unfair, and we think of it as, yes, my husband is not a trucker, yes, I am not a trucker, but I am part of this community, and so I relate, and we're uniting as one. Whatever issue you're dealing with with one, you're dealing with all of us. Because I think that the parents are realizing that we need to unite, we need to come together as a community, and we need to support each other.

Collings

You know how you were saying that you couldn't have just one political candidate come and talk; you would have to have a range? So if you have somebody coming to talk about the Clean Trucks Program and how it's affecting truckers, do you need to then get somebody from the trucking companies to come in? Did you have to do that?

Batres

We have. We have asked Alberto to do that, and we have had city council meetings where we attended, and then the moms have spoken and made questions to the trucking companies themselves. We spoke with the port people. We had people from the port, we had people from the city, and we had people from the teamsters.

Collings

So that you would have this range.

Batres

So you would really be able to ask questions and say why. As a matter of fact, CPC had a meeting with Mayor Foster where they had questions that were prepared beforehand for him, and he was able to answer it, to give us answers. We haven't set up a specific meeting with the port itself and with the trucking companies themselves, but we have been in meetings where the trucking companies have been there and the port has been there, and we have been able to ask questions and then hear their side of the story.

Collings

Right. And has anybody been like convinced by their side of the story?

Batres

We've actually been offended by their side of the story.

Collings

Oh, really.

Batres

We have been every single time, because they actually have not been able to give an answer that was realistic for the parent. You know, the answers were-- on paper it looks good--"We'll help these people." Because the situation has been posed, "This is how much these people are making. How do you expect them to be able to afford these trucks?"

Batres

And they have said, "Well, we'll help them so on paper it looks good, and they're able to get them." But basically their answer has been, "If they're not able to afford them, that's not my problem." That's the sense that the parents have gotten.

Batres

My understanding is that the Port of Long Beach situation with the clean trucks is different than the Port of L.A., where the Port of L.A. is actually--they're buying the trucks. The trucking companies are buying, and the truckers are--

Batres

Employees.

Collings

--employees, right, whereas Port of Long Beach wants the truckers to buy their own clean trucks. So with the people that you've talked to, do they want to just let the truckers kind of continue with the trucks they already own, or do they want to see something like Port of L.A.?

Batres

What I have seen is that we think it's better if it's something like L.A., because they're now employees. The benefit to being employees, because they call these people independent drivers, so they tell them, "You have your own business. Nobody's your boss." But there's good things and bad things to that, and the bad things that have influenced for us has been no health benefits.

Batres

We just had an accident where somebody died at the port, and because he just happened to be an employee--I think that it was months, just two, three months maybe, that he had become an employee--his family was now going to be receiving help. They didn't have to worry about money to bury him, and they were now going to receive some kind of help because the father had died at work. But had this man been an independent driver, that family is out on its own, you know. That family would have had to figure out, how am I burying my husband, and what am I going to do when the primary food-winner, you could say, the one that brought the most money into the home, is gone now, and I'm a mom. I'm still illegal. I still don't have no legal status, maybe. Maybe I do, but I've never worked, and I have now three kids that I have to take of on my own, so from one day to the other, I'm a single parent. I have no idea how to do it, and I have to go out there and work and provide for my family. Nobody's helping me. And I have this burden. I'm going to have this due--because I'm going to have to borrow money or get money from somewhere to bury my husband, and I'm going to have to pay out this money now on top of having to deal emotionally with everything else. So this is a very, very bad situation for families to be in. That's one.

Batres

Another thing is, let's say you're an independent driver. You have no health benefits for you or your family. You know, if you're legal, you can apply for Medi-Cal. But if you're illegal, what are you going to apply for? With the kind of money that these truckers are making, and because they are illegal, because a lot of the companies know at the port, if they complain over anything--

Collings

At the Port of Long Beach?

Batres

At the port, yes, if the truckers complain about everything that--these truckers have to stand in line sometimes two and three hours before the port even opens, for them to be like at the front of the line and be able to get a load and be able to get out of there and take a load in time to come back in time to even hope to get a second load, because if not, that's going to be the only load for the night that he's going to be able to take out, and depending on how much he's getting paid. So my understanding is that a lot of these companies, they're dispatching the truckers, they have favoritism with the jobs. The higher-paying jobs, they don't give to certain people. That's one of the problems.

Batres

Another of the problems is that, yes, I'm an independent driver, but now I have to pay for tires, and I have to pay for road tax, and then I have to pay for all these other taxes, and now I have to pay for diesel, cell phone, so all these expenses. Yes, on paper I make good money, but then we're not taking into consideration all these other work-related expenses, you know. Because to change tires, how much does a tire cost for one of those trucks? A tune-up, how much does it cost? If I have to change a light on it, how much does it cost? You know, so all these costs are coming out of my pocket and are coming out of this paycheck that I'm getting. So a lot of the times those are a lot of the things that are not beneficial if you're an independent driver.

Batres

As to if you're an employee, yes, you do have a boss and you're not your own boss no more, but you have healthcare. You have paid days off. Maybe you have vacation time. Maybe you have sick time. You know, there's all these perks that come with being an employee.

Collings

So what is the main reason that the Port of Long Beach has presented to the community for not following the Port of L.A.'s model?

Batres

Basically, from my understanding, it's that L.A. is getting sued by all these big corporations, and they're big corporations that use the truckers. They're the big corporations that are needing these goods to be brought in to them, and the big corporations have the money, you know, so they're basically using pressure, political pressure and money, you know; that they're saying, "If you do this, I will sue you." So that's basically the answer we've heard, that that's why.

Collings

Then that Long Beach doesn't have enough resources to fend off all these lawsuits.

Batres

They don't want to. They don't want to find themselves in the same position, so their solution is these truckers should pay for it. But, as consumers, we think if I'm buying from your store anyway--you know, we calculated, and from the calculations we did, that if these corporations would have to buy these trucks themselves, on a pair of shoes, it would be three pennies more expensive on a pair of shoes, if they were buying the trucks as opposed to the truckers buying them. So, you know, obviously the tax would go up maybe a couple of pennies, or maybe the price of something would go up maybe five cents, ten cents. But I'd rather pay those five cents, ten cents, and know that I have clean air and know that my neighbor or my brother that's a trucker now has better conditions, as opposed to saying, "Oh, well, it's not affecting me. Let them deal with it." And then I know that there's these families in these communities that are struggling, you know.

Collings

Do you think that like discussion of this sort makes it so that these community members are more aware of how the global economy works than your average consumer?

Batres

Yes. Yes, I think these discussions are giving us an opportunity to really finding out how does this work, how much would it be. You know, because it was mentioned before, you need to investigate, and that's one of the things that I fell Alberto. How much would it be? What would be the effect? Let's say these companies do buy these trucks, or let's say the city does buy the trucks. Somebody's going to pay for it. Who's going to pay for it, and how much is it going to cost? So then when I can find out that, I can weigh it and I can say, "What do I want?" Do I want to say, "Sorry. Sorry, guys"? Or do I want to say, "No, this is the best way to go about it"? So, yes, it has given them an opportunity to find out things that they wouldn't normally find out otherwise.

Batres

Does it change their attitude, do you think, toward like shopping and acquiring things and all of those wonderful American activities?

Batres

I think it does.

Collings

Really.

Batres

It does. I think it's starting to make more so a difference now. Those are things we don't normally think about. You know, you don't normally think about those types of things, but I think now it is making a difference and it is making us think, "Do I really want to shop at that store? Do I really want to buy for

them?" Because it's telling us, "We don't care about you." The message that these corporations are giving to us, "We don't care about you. I just care about my pocket. As long as you buy from me, that's all I care about. What I have to give to you, I don't want to know that. I just want to know how much do you want to give to me." And if you tell me that, that will make me think twice. I'll say, "Maybe I don't want to spend money on your store."

Batres

I think, again, it's giving these parents the power. It's empowering them and it's telling them, "This is what they're saying, guys. Did you know that?" So it's educating them, and now they feel like, "Oh, yeah," as opposed to feeling like, "Well, I don't--," and taking that kind of attitude, because it's very comfortable to take that kind of attitude, but then again, it crushes your spirit. So when you give them information, it makes them like, "Yeah, I know what's going on." You empower them. You empower them to know your voice counts, and that makes a difference in a community.

Collings

So let's talk about CPC. What is CPC?

Batres

CPC is the Community Partners Council, so this group has been around much longer than SPA 8 has or my agency has. This group has been around since JCPP, which was the Juvenile Crime Prevention Program, and that was some funds that were given to that agency to try and work with that community, and it was basically single moms with kids that were at risk. So single moms, basically, and they would go in and work with these families. JCPP lost its funding.

Collings

Because last time you said that it was CPC that was doing most of the environmental-type stuff in that area.

Batres

Yes. Yes, JCPP lost its funding, so through a new funding that they got, they turned into CPC. And yes, they care a lot about the environment. They're one of the biggest groups. They're one of the only groups, actually, here in Long Beach that have taken up these kind of issues for a long time. So they do have Health and Housing Subcommittee, and through the Health and Housing Subcommittee, that's how they're working with LBACA. And that's how LBACA, the idea for LBACA even came up, you know, through the work that these moms are doing and through them saying, "I have kids with asthma that are missing two and three days of school out of a week," and them saying, "Well, what could we do? Well, maybe we could work with the school nurse and your doctor, and maybe they can communicate, and maybe we could educate you on what are some of the triggers that might be inside your home."

Is there mold? Is there mold underneath your rug? Is there--I don't know--do you have pets? Are your pets causing their asthma to flare up? Does anybody smoke in the house? Do you have special coverings on your mattresses and your pillows? Are you being exposed, is your child being exposed, to dust mites?

Collings

Yes, but what about like looking at the port and the refinery?

Batres

Well, they've always been involved with that, because, again, that has to do with contamination. They've been involved with that, because a lot of their children, at some days they can't even go to the park, and the contamination is so bad sometimes to where there's days that their children do have to stay inside. So they started getting involved, and they've been involved for a long time with the 710 [freeway] expansion, you know, because that was going to bring more contamination. It was going to bring more cars and more trucks, and then some of the homes were going to be torn down, you know, for the freeway to be expanded. So it started with the freeway expansion, with them getting involved, and then they got involved in the expansion of the railroad yard. Then they got involved with the expansion of the ports, you know, and now they're getting involved with the Clean Trucks Program.

Batres

So I think anything that has to do with more contamination, they're getting involved, because it's affecting them directly. And they're working with agencies like the Clean Air Long Beach something Coalition, and then the Lung Association, the American Lung Association, you know, LBACA, the Health Department, you know, just agencies like that that have to do with it and that help educate them.

Collings

Do they do this work by organizing community groups as you have been doing with your work?

Batres

Well, they are a group themselves. They are a group. They do this work through partnering with agencies and educating themselves. I think a lot of these agencies come in and give them trainings, and have given them the skills of how to go to a meeting and say your message in three minutes; you know, get to the point and say what you want to say in three minutes. So they have received a lot of these trainings from a lot of these agencies that they're partnering with.

Collings

When the port has come out like to talk with your groups about the Clean Trucks Program, for example, talking about that again, is the discussion just



purely about like the economics, you know, how much it would cost the truckers, how much it would cost them, or do they address the health benefits of the Clean Trucks Program overall?

Batres

No, they've addressed the health benefits. I think they do address the benefits, because I think that's one of the weapons that they have to sell this program to the community. That's one of the things that they are playing on. So I think, as a matter of fact, they address that more so. They address it more so. They address the economic part once we bring it up.

Collings

I see.

Batres

So if we question it, they bring it up, but otherwise they play on the health benefits, you know, and, "This is going to be good because it's going to clean the air, and it's going to be less contamination, and your child has asthma, and that's what he needs." And how much is it going to cost, and who's paying for it? I think we're the ones that are--and they'll say, "This is how much it's going to cost. This person is paying," you know, like real quick, and hope that we don't catch it.

Collings

Do you ever have community members? Is there ever any representation from truck drivers who, for whatever reason, would like to just be their own owner-operator?

Batres

Yes.

Collings

They would like to buy their own truck.

Batres

Yes. I think that there has been. At these meetings there has been truckers that are saying, "You know what? I just want to be my own boss. I've already bought my truck. I don't want to--"

Collings

They already bought their clean truck.

Batres

Yes. "I'm already paying my truck, and I'm doing fine with my payments." There has been truckers. They're very few, very few, but unfortunately, a lot of these truckers are paid off. A lot of these truckers are the truckers that are getting the good jobs, that are getting those trips that are going to pay two and three hundred dollars, so it's worth it for them. So it is working out for them, because they're the ones that are getting the good jobs. They're the ones that are in good with the boss, you know, and a lot of them are doing it out of fear. "If I

say anything, or if I say I don't agree, I'm going to lose my job tomorrow, or I'm going to get intimidated, or there's going to be repercussions. There's going to be consequences to that."

Batres

So a lot of them are doing it out of fear, and a lot of them are being sincere. That's because they're getting the good jobs. That's why it's working out for them. Because I couldn't imagine that, if it was really working out for these truckers, that they would say no when some of their children have asthma. Some of the truckers have children with asthma. So I can't imagine that if I could afford this truck, that I'm not going to want to pay for it, you know, and that my wife's not going to say, "You know what? It's an investment we're doing for our child's health." I can't imagine that these families wouldn't see it like that, and that they'd rather have these drawn-out, very, very painful and difficult battles with the city, if they can afford it.

Collings

Yes, exactly. And are the communities small enough that, like if there's a trucker who, as you say, like is paid off and is supporting this, that maybe the neighbors know he's saying that? Maybe their kids know his kids, and there's tension there. Are there any of those kinds of--

Batres

I haven't seen them, those kinds of things, but I would imagine there is. I would imagine that there is some. I mean, I really do think that these men that are saying, "This is working out for me," it's because it is. It's because it is, and I would think that he does know that he's being favored. But I think that, you know what, the bottom line is I have to provide for my family. And maybe even, "I've earned this. I'm a hard worker. I'm loyal. I do good at my job, so I've earned this. You know, I'm not getting favored. I've earned this." So I do think that maybe a lot of these truckers do think, "I've earned it. That's why I don't get in nothing that's not my business. That's why I don't open my mouth about anything. I'm just keeping my mouth shut, and I'm just keeping on doing what I'm doing." Because, I mean, I would imagine that that's a lot of the attitude. "I feel bad for you, but I'm not going through that and I don't want to go through that." I would imagine there is that kind of attitude.

Collings

Okay. Well, I've sort of come to the end of our questions here, but I did want to sort of finish up with what do you see as the future of the communities that you're working with? How do you think things are going? What direction are things headed in?

Batres

The future that I see are these communities coming together, these groups being one, intermingling--

Collings

Oh, really.

Batres

--a lot. It's started happening with two of mine. Cesar Chavez and CPC are almost one.

Collings

Oh, really.

Batres

Yes, they support each other a lot in what they're doing. They help each other a lot. They include each other in many things. So I see these communities as coming together with continued support. I see these communities as coming together and really advocating for themselves and really working towards what their true needs are.

Collings

Do you think it's becoming the kind of community that, if somebody had more money, they wouldn't move away?

Batres

Yes.

Collings

They would want to stay because they had these relationships and so on?

Batres

Yes, I think it is. I think that it is becoming the kind of community. In the future I do see it as that, that it's going to become the kind of community to where these people are going to want to stay here, live here and have their grandchildren here and invest in their community. I think these people wouldn't be fighting so hard if they didn't want that.

Collings

Wow.

Batres

You know, because like you say, it is easy. If we're going to pay seven or nine hundred for a single here, you can pay nine hundred for a single in L.A., or we can pay nine hundred for a single somewhere else where we won't have these type of problems, you know, where we're not so close to all these type of problems. But I think this is really showing our kids, also, you fight for what you want and you advocate for yourself. You just don't lay down and say, "Oh, well, that's how it is."

Collings

Yes. I mean, there seems to be a very strong tradition of activism in Long Beach and Wilmington, around the ports.

Collings

I think, yes, there is much more now. I think it's becoming more evident now because of all the things that are coming up, and people slowly have developed that advocating for themselves, that sense of advocating for themselves and for their community. So I see a very good future for this community.

Collings

That's wonderful. Okay. Thank you.

Batres

You're welcome.[End of interview]

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