A TEI Project

Interview of Gloria Arellanes

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1.1. Session One (September 26, 2011)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino. Today is September 26, 2011. I'm interviewing Gloria Arellanes at her home in El Monte [California]. We're going to start with [recording interruption]. …for our interview, and I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me and to share your life story with me. I want to start with what you know about your earliest family history, what's been passed down to you, what you've learned through your study of your genealogy.
Arellanes
Okay. I was born in East Los Angeles at the Mayo Clinic over there on Soto Street, and we lived in the Maravilla projects probably the first five years of my life. Then my dad came and got this home here in El Monte on his G.I. Veterans Bill. My dad was very fair-skinned and could have passed for probably some type of Anglo. My mother [Laura Arellanes] was Native American, very dark, very brown, very beautiful brown skin, very black hair, no red highlights. So he came and took care of all the business. On the last day he brought my mother, and they tried to take the home away from him when they saw her. My father went into a rage and said, "Oh, no.

I've put my money down. I have signed. No. No. You have to continue." So we moved here to El Monte, which was a very predominantly Anglo community, and I remember all the neighbors were white. So we were here and I grew up here, and I remember going to the school systems here. I remember coming home one time telling my dad that I was an American, and he says, "No, you're a Chicano." He didn't say "Chicana." He said "Chicano." I remember that very vividly, and it would make me cry.
I would say, "No way, no, no, no. I'm American." And that's kind of a brainwashing that is done to children. That's how I see it now. They don't allow you to be who you truly are or take any pride in who you are, because that's how it was back in the fifties and sixties. Then I went to the high schools here. I got involved with community services here with Chicano groups, and we had to hang around with each other, almost like you see buffalos out in the snow, how they herd. They make a circle around their babies to protect them, and that's how we were. We stuck together because there was race riots in the high school I went to, El Monte High School, and the police would come into the halls of the high school on their motorcycles and just arrest the Chicanos. They never arrested the white surfers. That's who were fighting all the time. [laughs] There was one counselor who took interest in us, and he was having meetings with us, and these were screaming matches, you know. Then, eventually, once you get that out of your system, you're kind of like, "Okay, what do you want to talk about?" and you'd come down to a level where you're able to communicate, and we were talking with these people. We started having meetings in the school. We were sent to Camp Hess Kramer. I was able to go to Camp Hess Kramer, which I've learned [Spanish phrase]. There was other people that I've met that have gone to that and didn't realize how that is part of me and what I got involved with now. It's taken me over forty years to learn these things. From there, I was a very large woman, so I was constantly teased and harassed because of my size, and I think I reached a point, I said, "You know what, if people don't like me, they want to look at external, they can kiss my behind," and I developed a hard attitude, but also in that sense, it made me kind of rebellious in fighting. It made me want to fight people because of my size, and I will say I was close to 300 pounds at that time, and I'm very tall and I'm big boned, so people were

very afraid of me, period, so nobody wanted to fight with me anyways. [laughter] I have a lot of pictures, a lot of good memories of when I went to high school. I'm still in touch with people I went to high school with.

Espino

That's nice.

Arellanes

From there—

Espino

Before you move forward, can we go back to—

Arellanes

Sure.

Espino

I don't know if you want to talk a little bit about your family history, your grandparents, great-grandparents, any of that kind of information, or if you want to start with elementary school. I'm interested in how you developed that identity of being an American.

Arellanes

The schools developed that attitude in me, and that's all I knew and I believed. You figure, you're, what, five and six years old, you're very impressionable, and here's the teacher who's telling you these things and you're pledging allegiance to a flag and you're taught to repeat these words. You become very robotic about it. To this day I will not pledge allegiance because I also have an allegiance to my own nation. We are sovereign people as a Tongva, Gabrielino Tongva woman.

But growing up like that, it was very confusing for me, for my dad to tell me, "No, you're not an American." It made me cry and it was very hard to understand, because nobody was there to tell me, "This is your culture." I was just told, "You're Chicano," but what does that mean? Okay, the school tells me I'm American, and I have a flag to salute to, so there was conflict in my very young mind.

Espino

How about the dynamics of the classroom? What was the ethnic makeup of, say, your kindergarten, do you remember?

Arellanes

Yes. It was predominantly Anglo. So I was in a white community. There wasn't that many people of color. El Monte was known for

having the Nazi Party here, okay, so I remember it was a great thing for Chicanos to load up in a car on the weekends and go and shoot. [laughs] They tell me they shot at it or they tried to start fights, and it was a constant thing always with the Nazi Party. There was no Afro-Americans in this community. There was no Asian people in this community. It was predominantly white. Eventually white flight came about and they started moving out to the Covina area, San Bernardino area, and now this is a predominantly—I'm not sure if the Asians are here in higher rate than Latinos, and there are some Afro-Americans now, very few still. This is the end of the Santa Fe Trail, as they called it, and I read some of the history of it, and there was a lynching of Juana Maria. This was known. There was a lot of vigilantes, and they hung a woman. I don't know the reasons for hanging her, but I did read that. I go to the little museum here and I try to learn things, and it's a very homey-type little museum, not much of the true history. They don't talk about the First Nation people who were here. They talk about the Lakota and the Sioux. They have a whole display for that, and so I went over there, and I was kind of disappointed.
One thing that amazed me was the beds of the old days were very small, and I'm very tall. I'm told that my great-grandmother [Natividad Valenzuela] on my mother's side was six feet tall in the 1800s, which is extremely unusual, and she was considered a freak because shoes couldn't fit her and clothes didn't fit her, and they had to buy the materials to make her things. So I know that's where my height came from. I'm five-foot-eight. I had one cousin that was six feet tall. But my mom was five-two. My dad was five-eight. All my aunties were like five feet, you know, little people. [laughs]
Espino
Was she Tongva, your aunt?
Arellanes
My mother?
Espino
No, but your aunt who was—or who was the one—
Arellanes
My grandmother? My great-grandmother?
Espino
—that was very, very tall?
Arellanes

Yes, my great-grandmother, Natividad Valenzuela.
Espino
One hundred percent Tongva?
Arellanes
Yes, yes, and that was very interesting, and one of the things that I read, some history books kind of identified us as a tall people. They say we were a beautiful tall people with fair skin. I don't know if that's true or not, because all the Tongva that I know are very chocolate, very pretty brown.
Espino
Do you have photographs of your ancestors?
Arellanes
I do. I think I do. I'm sad. I was hospitalized with a triple bypass heart surgery, and my boys decided to clean my house, and I have the feeling, because I've looked for years, they've thrown all my genealogy information, writings and pictures, away. My oldest aunt gave me all her family pictures because she said nobody else was interested in our family, about the history and the genealogy of our family, and I was able to sit with my auntie, who helped me identify most of these people. So I did have pictures of her, and she was tall. She had a sister that was very tall, a brother who was very tall, and then there was an adopted sister also. It was amazing, one time I was in a store here in El Monte, this woman came up to me and she says, "Your mother is Laura." I said, "Yes." And she goes, "Oh. You are Gloria?" I said, "Yes. Who are you?" [laughs] She said, "I'm her great-aunt." And I didn't get a phone number or anything. I was very young, probably a teenager at that time, and just wasn't there in terms of wanting to know things. Clara was her name, and I had a picture of her also. She said she was living in Monrovia, and so I lost touch of that family member. One of the things I learned about genealogy is we're almost all very related, when you start looking at these old families like the Valenzuelas, the Lugos, the Duartes. I've seen my family line, my pedigree chart, and it goes way, way back to names that almost everybody has in common in their family. So that woman, even though she wasn't of natural birth to my grandmother, but she was adopted, still means there's a family out there.
Espino
Interesting.

Arellanes
Yes, and we lose touch. It's very sad to me when we lose touch, because I know when I meet people, I have that name in my family, and you start learning how small the world is and how related we are, and it's very, very interesting.
Espino
So your father came—or was he a Native Californian?
Arellanes
Yes. He was born in Los Angeles. However, he was first generation. They came from Chihuahua. They were traveling musicians. They came on a burro. They'd settled in Texas first and then came out to Los Angeles. They had the first residential phone in Los Angeles, and I remember it was a big black heavy thing, and you had to dial. I remember loving to play with that. They were ironsmiths, and so my grandfather on my dad's side has this shop in East Los Angeles right there on Mednick and Dozier. Kind of cattycorner from that corner was my grandmother's house, and it was this big, big huge property, a two-story home. My favorite thing, oh, it had a whole pipe room for an organ. It had this monster of an organ. My grandmother was a very cold woman. It was very interesting. My mom would say every Saturday we had to go there, and she'd say, "Don't eat the food. Okay. Behave." My grandmother would speak in Spanish, and I knew no Spanish at that time. I've learned Spanish on my own. She didn't like my brother *[NAME?]. She said he was dirty because he had dark on his elbows and neck, and she said he needed to be scrubbed with a stone. And my mother would say, "Oh." [laughs] She would just tolerate her. I never got a hug or a kiss from that grandmother, and so I'm the kind of grandmother that smothers my grandchild and my friends.
Espino
Do you think she had negative feelings about your father marrying an indigenous woman?
Arellanes
Yes, yes. And not only that, my father was in a very serious car accident and he was in the hospital. He lost a lung because of that accident, and I remember my mom telling me she was pregnant with twins and she had to live with her at that time. She made my mother get an abortion, and I think I always held that against my grandmother, because she told my mother something like, "You

can’t have more children and live in my home.” So I always held that kind of resentment towards this woman. I mean, her whole demeanor was very stoic, very non-emotional, [Spanish phrase], you know. But I’ll tell you a funny story. There were sixteen in that family. My mother came from a family of fourteen. My father’s family was sixteen. One of my uncles was a big alcoholic, but he was a hilarious alcoholic. He was just one of those guys that stole the scene very time, and very loud. Every year we had to go to the September 16th parade, and the Arellanes took this one corner. My dad would put his truck there, and we’d sit there and watch. The last person to arrive to our group was my grandmother with my aunt on my father’s side, and she was always carrying her little Chihuahua. Ever since I can remember—now, remember, I’m a fat little girl—going to my grandmother’s house was a battle with these Chihuahuas. I love animals. I’m a passionate animal rescuer and love my house to be filled with animals, but Chihuahuas were the only dog I never liked because that little dog’s goal was to bite my ankle, and, thank you, I had fat ankles and it couldn’t grab my ankle. [laughs] [demonstrates] Then it would sit there shaking all the time with his big bubble eyes. I don’t care what color they were, black and white, brown and white, brown, white, cream, they were all called Coco.

So she would come with Coco. My aunt would carry her chair, sit her down like the queen of the family, and watch the parade. Well, my uncle had a big sombrero on that day and was being loud, people laughing. Everybody in the neighborhood knew him. Almost towards the end of the parade, he took my grandmother’s dog, Coco, and ran after a float, threw him on the float, and then waited a while and then started screaming, “Mi perrito! Mi perrito!” And everybody was just laughing. I wanted to see what my grandmother’s reaction is. It’s just, “Ay, que Charlie.” No emotion, again, just blech. [laughs]

Espino

She was like that with everyone?

Arellanes

Apparently. Apparently.

Espino

So even her own kids?

Arellanes

I don’t know. I never asked them.
Espino
And your cousins?
Arellanes
Yes. I had so little time with her, only on Saturdays. I looked in the refrigerator. She was a diabetic. So I remember seeing carrots and calabasas and thinking, oh, there’s nothing good in here anyways. [laughs] She had parrots, and then another thing she had was rabbits in the back. I would go back and, “Oh, look at the little rabbits.” Next week I’d go, there was no rabbits but there would be pelts, and I didn’t connect what was going on until I got older. Oh, she was eating them. Oh. [laughs] And I will not eat rabbit.
Espino
Or maybe she was making a living somehow selling them, raising them?
Arellanes
I don’t know. I never asked. My parents never explained to me. I just was in horror as a little girl, you know. So, anyways, the treat my dad would give us every weekend coming home on Saturdays was stop at the carnesaria and buy some carnitas and rolls and a green onion, and we’d come home just [demonstrates] eating some good stuff.
Espino
Did they ever talk to you about your grandmother and her feelings about their marriage?
Arellanes
No, not really. I didn’t learn about her. Her husband died very young. My grandfather, I don’t remember knowing him at all, and he was very dark, they tell me, with blues eyes, white hair. There’s family on my father’s side—well, my dad had, like, hazel eyes, and there’s people who have green eyes, but I never saw those blue eyes again. But, no, they didn’t tell me too much. My mother just really didn’t want to talk about them, I think, and I was always closer with my mother’s family. I always found my father’s family to be kind of very icy, and they seemed to be of money, a little bit of money, it seemed to me, just by my grandmother’s house. She rented that house out one time, and it was a church. So that’s how big it was and this whole organ—one of the things I loved to do—she had this baby grand piano in the—one of my uncles was a

musician. In the front room was this big baby grand, this big organ where, I mean, you had to climb up to the big stool, and then it had all these buttons. My favorite thing to do was to start pushing buttons and doing that, and then you could hear it starting up like [demonstrates]. Then I'd play a few tunes, shut everything and run, because I'd hear her coming [demonstrates].
I was told not to go into the pipe room. It was at the back of the front room and it was a smaller door, but I would always go back there, it was dark, and then just push those giant pipes. That was like a dinosaur. They couldn't even sell it. It was so old. They donated it to a church, I understand, when my grandmother passed way.
Espino
Where was this located, this house?
Arellanes
East L.A., right there on Dozier.
Espino
On Dozier Street.
Arellanes
Yes. Near Mednick, a block away from what is now Cesar Chavez Boulevard, south of that, and it was the second house over. There was a barbershop and some little apartments and then her house, beautiful two-story with wrought iron all through the house. Her boys did that. That was, I guess, my grandfather's work, and then my father took it over. Everything had sconces. I mean, just beautiful. When she passed away, they've remodeled the house, and I went there one time. They took away the round archways, the walkways, the sconces were gone, all the wall texture that they had was gone. They put wood paneling and it just looked so ugly. They took the beauty of that house away. You look from the outside, it's a gorgeous two-story house, but you go inside and if you remembered what it was and just see it now, it's very sad for me.
Espino
They modernized it?
Arellanes
Yes, and they took all the beauty away. Just a gorgeous site. It had a basement, yes, just a really, really old house. And the furniture there was amazing. I appreciate antiques and old furniture, and there was some gorgeous things in there, and it all was gone.

Espino
So your aunt, the one who was the—in Spanish it's concentida, the one that doted upon, did she ever get married and have children?
Arellanes
She did. She did, and her children are now living in that house, and then she bought a house across the street, and I went to visit her one time. I told her I wanted to know about my family and I was interested. Her and I just didn't click in terms of information. She worked for the County of Los Angeles, and she's the one who was always pushing me. She had more community civil-minded activities compared to anybody else on that side of my family. She was always telling me, "You need to join the county," and I would say, "No, I don't want to." Eventually I did, and I wished I could have spent more time with her. She's already passed. The reason why her and I did not click, I had already become involved in my own genealogy and my culture as a Tongva woman, and I remember her saying—we were talking about Catalina Island, and she said, "That was Mexico's." I go, "No, it wasn't. That was Native. We call it P_____." She says, "No, no, it's—."
So right there, I said, no, she's not going to give me any good information, because I've already learned more than she knew. And I think because of that, it just kind of turned me off. This is not a person you can learn from if they're going to impose something on you without saying, "Well, how do you know that? Where did you learn that? Teach me, or show me what I can read." So I didn't go back until they told me she passed away, and my kids never got to meet that side of my family. I know at one of the funerals they said, "Oh, we're going to stay in touch," and everybody exchanged addresses. It never happened. So there's a whole 'nother big family out there that I will not be in touch with, probably, and my kids will never know.
Espino
It's interesting because part of it is also the treatment that you received.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
It wasn't an embracing and making you want to learn more about it.
Arellanes

Yes. Right. It was very icy, keep away, arm's distance.
Espino
And that's not the stereotype when you think of the stereotype of the Mexican grandmother.
Arellanes
No. Your abuelita. When you go see your abuelita, you get food, you get comfort, you get laughter, and I didn't get that, and it was very stoic. But my dad was kind of a stoic person too. He didn't show emotion. His dad passed away at a young age. My father was very young. He became the head of household of a large family, and so he had to provide for my grandmother, provide for my mother and us, and he did. But it was like there's a reason why, I guess, me and my mother are kind of—I was thinking about this. Our family has this history of being clutterers. Am I a hoarder? I'm not sure. I just like stuff. Now I'm getting a little bit better at saying, no, no, I don't need it. I'm going through stuff and saying, no, no don't need it. Didn't use it, it's got to be gone. It's a slow process for me because I can't do the arm sweep. I've got to go through everything.
My mother was the same way. My auntie, when she passed away, I had to clean her apartment. My son told me, "Do you want us to do that when you pass?" I go, "No, I don't want you to go through that." [laughs] But a lot of my stuff is writings and all the things that I collected from all the years in the Chicano Movement, which I donated. Now I've had Native American things. I'm not keeping them. I'm giving them to somebody who archives, and I say, "Now, I don't need this. You take it." I'm at the point now where I used to make a lot of jewelry with shells and make different things with shells and little silver pieces. I used to make jewelry. I'm giving it all away. I'm done. I can't do it no more. My hands are messed up now. My back's all screwed up. So I'm getting rid of stuff. There's some things I won't get rid of, and I'll tell the boys, "These were my mother's and I don't want to get rid of them, so you make the decision when you're going through my house." I have records. I'm an avid music person. I have 78 [rpm] records. Those are the big glass-type records. They're all scratched. I have a collection of those, 33s [rpm], 45s [rpm], and I packed them all up in a box, in totes, and albums galore. I have a really big collection of the young Chicano groups before they became mainstream. Some people

borrowed them, they wanted to record them. Cannibal and the Headhunters, [unclear] Midnighters, [unclear], groups that go way, way back that, yes, I had that. Ritchie Valens, you know, just really old music. It was like a collection, and I tend to do that. If I see something I have a big interest, I will try to buy all of it.

Espino

Even when you were younger, sounds like.

Arellanes

Yes.

Espino

Because this music was—you were a teen.

Arellanes

Yes, exactly, came from the sixties, seventies. Sixties, actually. And they're still in their original covers. I packed them up and I put a letter in there to my boys. I said, "Someday you'll come across this. I don't know how to divide this between you, so you guys make the choice how you're going to divide this," because I also have tons of CDs, music. But the one thing I found that amazed me the most was a spindle. They used to put these little plastic things in the middle of the 45 [rpm] records, and if you had one of those things like that, they dropped. But these were individual. I found one, and to me, the most amazing thing in this box is this spindle here. [laughs] So they'll come across it someday.

Espino

So in a way you're an archivist yourself.

Arellanes

Yes. That was my goal when I went to Rio Hondo College. I went to East L.A. College, and this was right out of high school. My dad wanted me to be a woman who had a family and children and a husband, you know, traditional family, but at the same time, he wanted me to be educated. So as soon as I graduated from high school, El Monte High School, I tried to go to East L.A. College, and I just sat there in these classes and I felt like things were just [demonstrates] going over my head, and I just couldn't get into it. That's when I started to travel and was a Brown Beret, did some traveling, did some amazing things, Poor People's Campaign. I think not very many people write about that event, because the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was not happy with it, is what I've learned.

To me, that was the biggest experience I had in terms of meeting diversity and people from other parts of the country, because you're raised in an area, you don't leave it, you don't travel, you don't take vacations. We used to go to the mountains all the time, but for me to travel across the country in that manner was so exciting and to learn all these people.

Espino

I really want to hear about that.

Arellanes

Oh, it was amazing.

Espino

But before we get—because there's some things about your early childhood that I'm very interested in, and that is, I'm interested in do you know how your parents met?

Arellanes

I know my dad was in the—where they lived, my mother came from the Pasadena area. They literally were kicked out of the city because my father—my grandfather, I should say, did something that he wound up in jail for, and the city wanted them out. They wound up on East L.A. on Dozier. They were up the street from my father's family, and here's this really well-to-do family. One of the things they did—I should back up a little bit. My grandfather, I'm told, with Lucille Ball's father and one other man, formed a corporation during the [Great] Depression, and because my grandfather was in the steel fabrication, they made these trailers. They would go up north and bring fruit down for the Maravilla projects, the people in the projects, because everybody had rations, those tickets, and they had to work. The females had to work and everything. They were labeled communists by [Joseph R.] McCarthy during that era, and I always say that's where I got my kind of rebellious or my civil-mindedness, civil rights. But what was the question now? I kind of jumped there.

Espino

No, that's really fascinating because your grandfather was able to start a business during the Depression era and make a living, and then you were going to tell me about how they met.

Arellanes

My parents, how they met. Apparently, they met—they went to the same high school. My mother went to Garfield [High School], but

my dad went to [Theodore] Roosevelt [High School], from what I understand, and he only went to the eighth grade. He didn't even get to Roosevelt. He went to the eighth grade, because, remember, my grandfather died, he had to work and help my grandmother. But they met because they lived down the street from each other's. They got married. They lived in the projects for a while. I lived in the projects, I think my first year of life, and then he got this home up here, and he had that wrought-iron business. So her family was there, and they used to make fun of him, because she said—my auntie was telling me all these stories, saying that when they'd walk, they'd say [Spanish phrase]. They would make fun of him, because they didn't speak Spanish.

I had one rowdy aunt, my favorite auntie, my Auntie Helen, I just loved her so much. She was rowdy. She goes, "Yeah, I'm an Indian, and I'm going to get my hatchet and take your head off." [laughs] My mother was very not like auntie at all, very, very—a soft, gentle woman. All my friends growing up would say, "I wish my mom was like your mom." I remember growing up, all the brothers and sisters came here, like she was the mom when they lost their mom, and they always found comfort in my mom. They'd come and do her lawn if she needed it or anything like that. So, yes, they met because they lived down the street from each other's. Then he was in the service. I have letters that I found that he used to write to my mother. Being that my dad was such a conservative, very stoic kind of man, also like my grandmother, you know, never showing emotion, I remember one time he hugged me and kissed me and it was like, ugh, because he was drunk. He liked to drink. And to me, I can remember that, just, "Ew," just like, "Don't touch me. Don't touch me." Because he never could do that sober, straight. He held all those emotions in, which I think is a horrible thing, but I think that was very typical of a lot of Mexican families. The head of household was macho and in charge, and, "Me man, you woman, you pregnant, you barefoot," that kind of thing. I remember coming home, my mother would be over here watching her soap operas. If he drove in, she'd have to turn them off and start cleaning. I actually saw him one time do a white-glove test on one of the things, the frame over the door. I just thought, "Oh, my gosh," and that made me not want to be in any relationship like that, because I

always told my mother, "I'm never getting married. I will never have a man demand me around like that."
And she says, "Oh, honey, you're going to fall in love, and you'll see it's different." I fell in love, but, no, I decided, I'm not getting married, and I raised my children as a single woman. As I am the age now, I would love to have a companion or have had somebody to be a companion with me in time, but I was not willing. I was such a strong woman, such a "will not take games," okay, that I think I have hurt myself, and I don't advocate any woman trying to do it all on your own. It's very hard. It's very hard. But I did it. I raised my kids. My kids are doing well. But not everybody can do that, and I don't advocate to do that. But I don't advocate get involved with a dirtbag, somebody who doesn't work, no, oh, no.
Espino
So when your parents got together, the family life that they created, are you saying that was traditional in the sense that your mom didn't work and your dad worked?
Arellanes
Right.
Espino
Can you describe, for example, what your life was like as a child as far as how they divided up the different responsibilities?
Arellanes
Well, my mom did all the yard work and all the house. My dad only worked, came home, and was fed. My mom cooked very well. He was a demanding man. I remember him, when he was sick, being in the back bedroom. Her name was Laura, but he called her Cuca. And he didn't even have the gumption to come over and walk over to the kitchen and say, "I'd like some soup," or something like that. "Cuca!" he would just yell.
I used to sit there, "Ew." I'd go, "What do you want?" But my mom, it was like [demonstrates], and she'd go. She was obedient. And I just promised myself, no, I'll never be like that. She was so wonderful, and they stayed together over twenty-five years.
Espino
Did she seem bothered by that? Did she complain?
Arellanes
I never heard her complain, not once. Maybe to my aunts. You know, sometimes you don't tell your kids things. Maybe to my aunts

and my uncles. And they were afraid of my dad. If they were visiting and he came home early, they'd, "Okay, we're going to leave now," and they'd go. It wasn't like, "Come on in. I'm going to cook in a while. Stay for dinner," or something like that. No, they wanted to leave. If they had parties, they used to have big parties, my aunts and uncles would come, and there was just one, my Nina. She was just one of those ladies, you know, "I don't care what you tell me, I'm me and I'm going to be me," and he got along fine with her. It was the ones that were kind of quiet and wanted to back away that he [demonstrates] tried to scare them. So I grew up with a dad that, you know, I loved my dad, but he couldn't show me love. If I said, "Dad, can I have a dollar?" when he dropped me off at high school, sure. He never said, "No. What are you going to use this for?" He would give it to me. My mom, she was always in the home, and she cooked very good. She wouldn't teach me some of the things she cooked, like tortillas. She said, "Oh, no, you'll make a mess." [laughs] So when she passed away, I tried to make some, because I did a lot of things from memories. I can make tamales like her. She would let me. She wouldn't say, "Here's how we do it, and here's what you do." I just watched, and when I did them, I said, "Oh, these came out even better."

One of the things I remember, we had a peach tree in the back. She would make a big pot. She would get the peaches and cook them down with cinnamon, and I remember that smell. It was so yummy. Then she'd make her own crust for empanadas. She'd put a little pat of butter in there and cook the fruit in there. Oh, man. After she passed away, I remember coming through the kitchen and that smell just came over me. I said, "My mom's here," you know. I never tried making that because we got rid of the tree, because it was dirty, bees, and all the fruit dropping if you didn't eat it all. I remember delicious peaches. But, yes, my dad, he provided for my mother, but not in a—oh, let's say, we had a rug in there one time and, I guess, from us—from my brother, who was younger than me, five years, I guess from his urinating, his going through his diapers—we didn't have Pampers in those days—there was a spot that was pretty worn and she complained about it. He says, "No, turn it around." So she had to do that. When he passed away, he was only forty-nine when he passed away.

Espino

That's young.
Arellanes
Very young. The diabetes and the drinking took its toll on him, and he died in the Veterans Hospital in Long Beach. My mom died when she was fifty-four also, diabetes, congestive heart failure. But I remember when he passed, she went through his money and bought whatever she wanted, because we had a little black-and-white TV that we had to watch. It was very barren here. If the furniture was torn from years of wearing, he wouldn't get it reupholstered; he would just cover it up.
But he did things like—I have a beautiful set of dishes. They're all Mexican pottery. He used to go deep-sea fishing in Ensenada. He bought her a whole set of these dishes, and I loved them. I still have them, what the earthquakes haven't taken. I used to have them all displayed on the shelves here, and now I have them in my china hutch over there. That china hutch, I bought my mother a whole set of furniture, because my dad never bought her things like that. So I bought her a china hutch, had a buffet, the big table. She didn't want all that, just the china hutch, because she loved china. I've packed all her china away because I'm afraid it'll break. She still had her original dishes when she got married to my father. They're all faded and everything. There's four plates only. I still have those. But she had this set that he bought her that is absolutely beautiful. It's got this gold rim. I have a cousin who did paints for decals to put on ceramics and different things like that. She'd tell me, "This is very valuable." I have almost the whole set, almost all of it. A lot of it has broken. So I have that packed away too.
Espino
So he showed her affection?
Arellanes
Yes, he did. Right.
Espino
Through those gifts.
Arellanes
Right. And I think in their relationship it was a good relationship. I didn't understand things like that when I was a kid, but they went together places. He joined the Elks. She joined the auxiliary. They did things like that. He just didn't show me and my brother. He was

always yelling. Afterwards I reached a point where I can't go camping with him; all he does is yell. He thought that's how you make a person do things, just yell at them. Not this person. [laughs] So, I guess, that's kind of why I'm the way I am, speaking up and, "No, you don't say that to me." I will tell people.

Espino

Right. But you did say that he was concerned about your education.

Arellanes

Yes.

Espino

Was that from a very young age?

Arellanes

Yes, he always wanted me to go to school, and I tried it and it just wasn't right for me. And I'm so glad, because I went out and got my life experience, and I did some beautiful things. Then in my late thirties, I went back to school.

Espino

You were ready.

Arellanes

Yes, and it was so valuable to me. I told them, "I don't want nothing I don't need. Just tell me what I need to get through. I want my A.A. [Associate of Arts], and then I want to go on to my bachelor's." I did what I could, but I couldn't stand welfare. I was on welfare at the time, and that was a boot on my neck. I just, nuh-uh. I went and worked, and then I never got to go back to school. During the clinic days, I was very upset, and now I realize I promoted education to all those young people that were volunteering. So many of them, I ran into one guy one time. I was in Alhambra shopping someplace. His name was Robert, and he came up to me. He goes, "Gloria." I go, "Hi, how are you?" He goes, "I'm doing great. I'm a psychologist now. You told me to go to school, and I'm a psychologist."

I go, "Well, I am so happy." And I know other people went on and got some kind of medical education and went into some field where they got their degrees. And I didn't take advantage of that. Here I was pushing everybody to do that, you know, because we needed Latinos in the medical field.

Espino

Sounds like you were getting a different kind of education, not the traditional or the convention, but definitely an education.
Arellanes
This is what I tell people. I may not have a degree. I have an A.A., which is nothing, but I sit in a room, my friends are all Ph.D.'s, master's, they're teachers, they're professors. That's who I sit with. Then sometimes I'll tell them, "It's so funny, I'm the only one that doesn't have a degree behind my name." [laughs] But I do have that street education, and I think it's been very good for me. It's been a blessing for me, everything that I've learned, all the people that I've met in my life, some I'll never probably remember, just hundreds of people. And traveling, you meet tons of people. And Poor People's Campaign, I did more connecting out there and bringing back contacts. I could go to New Mexico and things like that, Colorado, know somebody there, or Texas. It was just amazing.
Espino
Yes, an honorary degree in organizing and politics and healthcare, all those areas it sounds like you—
Arellanes
Because I used to tell people, "I don't have the education, but I'm not stupid. I am not stupid," and I will get a book and read if I want to know something. Now we're spoiled with the Internet. [laughs] Willie Herron y Los Illegales. I said, "I've got to remember." I started remembering Herron, and then I couldn't remember the name, so I said, "I've got to look it up." So the first name, that's who he is.
Espino
That's who it was we were talking about last time.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Yes. What a great combo. But, anyway, I'm sorry. I keep going backwards. But I'm wondering, did your parents go to your elementary school, speak with your teachers ever? Were they involved and did they talk about your homework? Did they say, "Why aren't you reading?" or, "Pick up a book," that kind of thing?
Arellanes

I laugh because I know my mom went to all my parent-teacher conferences. I don't remember my dad. Maybe he did; I just don't remember him. I was always a good kid, not a problem, until I got into high school and I remember I ditched one day and we were walking and we got stopped. So they had to go into the counselor's office, and I remember I was just sitting there. "I don't care. I don't care." [laughs] Because in the education system everything was good until I got into high school, and there I felt my color very strongly, because we had race riots, number one. During that time it was Chicanos versus surfers, and, like you say, we stuck together. We always stuck together, and we would get—I remember there was a park across the street from the high school. It's still there. We would hang out there in groups all the time. We were always in groups, and it was almost like a protective measure. But I remember walking home, being yelled at, things thrown at us, things like that, and we'd be yelling back just as much. Chicanos getting arrested and nobody else, and then this counselor took interest in us.

But my dad had to go to see the counselor, and he was so upset because he wanted me to be a good girl, and here I was, sitting there, "I don't care. I don't care." And my mom would just stay very quiet. My dad was the spokesperson. I mean, I ditched. I wasn't drinking. I wasn't smoking nicotine, you know, nothing, no drugs, nothing like that. I just wanted to be the wild child for a while.

Espino

But what about school? Was there anything that interested you or were you bored? Why do you think you didn't want that?

Arellanes

I've got to tell you that when we're in classes, I remember being in a history class, and history has always been my love. I remember this teacher. You know, when you're young, you're supposed to raise your hand. And I'd be, "I know, I know, I know!" She would never call on me, and so eventually you hit the wall and you get it, right? So I said, "Why should I try? Why should I bother?" And I stopped trying. So, no, nothing really interested me until that one counselor took interest in us and we started going to junior high schools. That's how much value they had in us, and we talked about race relations. Since that time—that's in the sixties—there's never been another race riot. Times have changed, I'm aware of that, but

at one time it was very, very hard. We formed our own Youth Council. I think it was called the Mexican American Youth Council, and we had our own meetings. We were allowed to that, and nobody had taken an interest in us but this one counselor.

Espino

Was he white?

Arellanes

Yes. Yes.

Espino

What did he say to you? Do you remember any of his words of wisdom or his advice?

Arellanes

I don't remember his words of wisdom. It was just the fact that he pulled us out of classes to have meetings, and that's always, like, "Yay! All right!" if you could get out of a class. He empowered us to think on our own. "How do you make this better? What would you do." Then when we met with these surfers, I tell you, it was a screaming match. Then you eventually get tired and you just kind of take a deep breath and then it comes down to a talking level. So you have to get that emotion out of the way first, and then you come to that talking level. We had a partnership and the race riots stopped, and there was an understanding of people when then a dislike without even knowing the person, and I think people still do that to do this day. "I don't like that person. I don't like that group," without ever even talking to them.

Espino

What are some of the stereotypes about Chicanos?

Arellanes

Oh, Frito Bandito was one. We were lazy. Siesta time. We're dirty. In those days, you didn't eat your bean burrito. You did not eat your bean burrito, because that was embarrassing. Unfortunately, because now those white people kill to get that good food. [laughs] But, no, you couldn't show your culture, and we didn't have a culture. We didn't even know our own culture. Okay? All we knew was in hanging out together there was protection in our numbers, and we thought alike, and our music was—we enjoyed our music. We enjoyed how we dressed.

We used to do things like we'd have Black Friday. Everybody wore black skirts and a white top, and they were high empire waists with

straps. We used to wear these shoes that were called teardrops, bunnies. They were these big round white things, almost like orthotic my shoes. We had Green Thursdays. All the women would wear green, and in those days we wore the wool skirts with the dyed-to-match sweaters and the big flower. Very classy, but our hair was like two feet tall. [laughs] It was really funny because we used to backcomb our hair, rat it up, and spray that really nasty stuff.

Espino

Aqua Net?

Arellanes

Yes. [laughter] We were in the park one time, and there was a pigeon. I'm the tallest woman, remember. I said, "Oh, no." So I started ducking. That pigeon landed in my hair. [laughter] He thought it was a nest. My high school graduation picture, I went to one of our reunions, my ten-year. I think it was my ten-year reunion. My hair was so high in a beehive that it cut it off; the picture cut it off. [laughter] That was very, very funny. We had fun in high school, and, like I say, I'm still in touch with a lot of my friends from high school.

Espino

It sounds like you created your own culture. It wasn't necessarily Mexican.

Arellanes

No.

Espino

But it was definitely not what the white kids were doing.

Arellanes

Exactly, and we all knew we were Mexican, because up to that point I had been told I am Mexican.

Espino

Yes, Chicana or Chicano.

Arellanes

Right. My dad said Chicano, and we weren't using that word "Chicano." I may be wrong, okay? Some of my friends spoke Spanish, some did not. Then we all had these silly nicknames. Oh, we had the most—there was a group of girls that we hung out with. I mean, I was Cheena [phonetic]. There was Watusi. There was Ubangi [phonetic]. There was Zombie, Duck. Oh, we just had all

these silly names, and we would just have so much fun, always laughing. I have good memories of high school with my friends.
Espino
It sounds like it. You had a close bond with people.
Arellanes
Yes, yes.
Espino
Even though there was alienation.
Arellanes
Again, we stuck together. That was a form of protection for ourselves, I think.
Espino
What were the stereotypes of the Anglo kids? What would you guys say about them?
Arellanes
Well, they were crackers. They were white Okies. El Monte was Okies at one time with the end of the Santa Fe Trail. I can remember as a little girl one time, my mother took me to the Thrifty's counter. They used to have a food counter. We were walking up. Now, I only felt fear from my mother twice. There was these three big white women sitting at the counter, and the look they gave her, I could feel the hate, and my mother right away grabbed me. She goes, "Oh, let's go sit over here, honey." But her grasp taught me fear, told me there's something to fear. She was trying to protect me. She said, "Let's go sit over here, honey," and we sat at a different section.
Another time it was thunder and lightning. I grew up with fear of thunder and lightning, because she stood me in the middle of that front room and said—because it was thundering and I wouldn't have been scared had she not been scared, but she stood there and she grabbed me and my brother—again, that tight grasp—"Oh, it's just God moving his piano." Well, I grew up scared to death of thunder and lightning. I didn't know who was moving what, but it scared me. But when I had my kids, I had to, "Look at that. Oh, look how beautiful!" And sit them in the window and overcome that fear. I had an aunt that would cover all the mirrors. She would go under the bed, so I kind of would cover the mirrors. I grew up with that kind of fear.
Espino

Why would she cover the mirrors?
Arellanes
She said it attracted the lightning.
Espino
Oh. I wonder if something happened?
Arellanes
I don't know. I don't know. But I did the same thing, and now I don't bother.
Espino
I think that's interesting.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Because who knows what happened in their past, what they grew up with and what their parents grew up with.
Arellanes
Exactly. Exactly.
I remember in college I did a report. It was a political science class, but one of the subjects that we could choose was environment. So rather than talk about changes of the environment, pollution, blah, blah, blah, I chose to do many areas of environment, including like sacred sites. I did a thing on lightning. I did a thing on recycling. I just tried to get as many areas of environment as possible. The recycling one, I put in there, because you were supposed to be put a news article in and then write a little summary or something that you felt about, and I said "As a child, I scared to death of lightning. I overcame it. I am now afraid, after reading the statistics, of how many people and cows are killed from lightning." So I remember that so well. But high school was a good time. The one lady who took interest in us, Maria Avila, she lived around the corner from us, she let us having, like, little gatherings every Friday at her house, and we did the Stroll. We would dance.
Espino
Who was she?
Arellanes
She was just a lady around the corner. She had a lot of kids herself, and she took interest in the Chicanos in the school, and she allowed us to be at her house rather than on the street. She eventually became a political person here in El Monte. She held a City Council

position. She's passed away. Her kids would come by and say hi all the time. She had us in the El Monte Parade. El Monte has a parade and she got us in there.
Espino
As what?
Arellanes
As just the Youth Council. It was nice to have somebody take interest in you. That's so important, and I look at young kids and that's what they need. Everybody wants to yell at them and point at them, they do this, they do that. But if you take some time and show them that you care and that they have empowerment, you can empower them, and there's things they can do it in a positive way. People should do that more often.
Espino
So the Youth Council, what were the objectives?
Arellanes
I don't remember. I don't remember. I know we met on campus in the high school, and we also did activities at her house. I think we had fundraisers. I don't remember any specific things that our goals were or what we were trying to achieve other than to be acknowledged as to who we were and not be pushed aside, because we had experienced so much discrimination. We didn't understand those things in those days.
Espino
Were you supposed to advocate for yourself?
Arellanes
I don't remember. I really don't remember. I vaguely remember—I think in one of my high school annuals there's a picture of us, and I can remember Mrs. Avila taking such a great interest. She was like our advisor. But for specifics, I don't remember. I just don't remember.
Espino
Maybe any presentations to the Board of Education or any kind of thing like that?
Arellanes
I don't remember anything like that.
Espino
Was it mostly social, do you think, or you just don't remember?
Arellanes

No, I think it was like a leadership-type thing, more of a leadership, because so many people that went into that kind of came out as leaders. I mean, leaders just kind of come out anyways. You have to have something in you that makes you, I think, a leader. You're not afraid to rise above everybody else and speak out. Some people are not leaders, but they're important, right, and they're learning and they're understanding and they're supporting and they're there and a member.
But only some people—like I'm not the greatest speaker. I don't like going up and speaking. I always preferred other people did that. Even in the movement, I would let you do it. I was more of a writer. I prefer writing. Now I don't mind speaking. I don't have a problem with it now.
Espino
Yes, I think you're very good at it. I've heard you a couple of times. Through the Youth Council, did you go to Hess Kramer through that, or was it a different program?
Arellanes
It was through the counselor, the high school counselor who actually bought this Camp Hess Kramer. I had those papers. I kept all my papers from that. Then when I was cleaning things, I said, "This is not interesting. Nobody wants this." Then meeting people, gosh, I should have saved those things. I remember the Captain Malibu going there. It was really neat. I don't remember all the activities we did, but I know there was a lot.
Espino
Did you go with a group from high school?
Arellanes
From high school, yes. Actually, it's in my archives my mom had, there was an article in the local newspaper, and it was me and a male that went. No, there was three of us that went. Three of us went, and she had that picture along with the little article.
Espino
So can you explain exactly, you take a bus there, and what happens, who greets you? Any details that you can remember from—
Arellanes
I don't remember how I got there. I remember there was a lot of people there from all these different schools. It wasn't just our

school. We were just a representative of our school. I don't remember all the specifics. I remember walking back and forth and how beautiful the area was. That's all I remember.

Espino

Did they give you classes on leadership, on public speaking, on—

Arellanes

I would think so. I would think so, but I just can't remember them. I just know I went to Camp Hess Kramer, and I was chosen. And I also held a position in the Council. I just don't remember what it was. So I guess I was showing some leadership at that point for people to say, "Gloria can do it." From what my friends tell me, they always say, "You were always the smart one. You always could talk well," and I just don't remember that. I just remember being big and harassed. [laughs] But that harassment and the way people treated me made me a fighter, and you just reach a point where—I reached a point where I said if people want to look at all this fat on me and this big body and judge me for that, then I have no use for them. They need to look at what's here and what's here, in my heart. Once I did that, I wasn't so shy. Because I was shy, I was so shy in, like, elementary up to the sixth grade, because people were, "Ew, she's just so fat." Fatty, fatty two-by-four, as they used to say, can't fit through the kitchen door. [laughs] When I reached that, I can remember so well that day where I said, "If people don't like me, I don't care anymore." Once I came out of that shyness and said, "Hey, this is me. I don't care what you say. I don't have time for you if you're just going to laugh at me," and started looking for people who were genuine and could sit and talk with me and not, "Look at that," but want to hear what I had to say, and I came out of my shyness. I came out of my shyness and didn't mind being in a leadership position and had no problem speaking out. That goes back to being the big scary woman that scared people. When I talked, they would listen to me, or they didn't want to fight me or something like that. So I always used my body, body language. Even when I worked for the county, I used my body. If somebody was not treating me right, like an administrator trying to harass me, I would never sit in their presence. I would always stand over them, make my chin go out, my one hip out, and usually cross my arms, and I always used that body language.

Espino

Interesting. And you learned that in high school, do you think?
Arellanes
No, I learned that in reading about body language, what it says, how you use your hands, the eyes, how you contact with people. Sometimes your eyes say more than your mouth. You just learn how to read people. I've always been able to do that. I really appreciate it.
Espino
So you have this epiphany about yourself and your body image, but were there issues at the time that were so important to you that you wanted to speak up about?
Arellanes
No, it was just, like, my growth, I think. I was getting involved with things where it required you to speak up, and if you were opinionated and you wanted people to hear your opinion, then you had to speak up. I had always tried to hide. Because I was so big, I always tried to hide that bigness. I did it on the tank in the September 16th parade. I started going down into the [unclear] and doing this, making myself as small as possible. I think I did that. I had to hide my bigness. Don't be out there where everybody can see you and make fun of you more, because it hurts. It hurt as a child, you know.
So when I was able to lose that, I didn't feel that. "This is me. I don't care. Hey." I really got an attitude about it, and it seemed like, I guess because I wasn't so sensitive to it anymore, I didn't feel it anymore. And also because I was in the movement, people were not really out to look at your body, they were more, "What are we going to work on? How are we going to do this? Let's organize," blah, blah, blah. So if you had something to say, you would listen. I think it was Carlos Montes [phonetic] that told somebody—they were interviewing him and he talked about me, saying, "When Gloria spoke, you listened," because I guess it was like with power and dominance.
Espino
That's so interesting to me, because that's contrary to what some other women activists say, because that's why they left the male-dominated movement, because they weren't getting that say. So your experience was different.
Arellanes

I was different. I was different from all the other women. I saw the abuse the women got, and I fought for them. I always fought for them. I would have no problem going to David Sanchez and yelling at him or any of the other so-called ministers. They had put me in a position as a minister, the only female to have that, and I was always in most of the meetings. They didn't include me in everything. I still say to this day I was nothing but a glorified secretary, but I was an outspoken one.
I remember when we were doing the newspaper one time, some of the men came in and said, "You can't put that in there." I said, "If I want to put the F-word five feet tall, I'm going to do that. You're not going to stop me." It was like, "Okay. Okay, Gloria, whatever you want." [laughs]
Espino
Do you think they were afraid of you?
Arellanes
I'm not sure.
Espino
Or intimidated?
Arellanes
Maybe intimidated, intimidated. I have found intimidation throughout my whole life, especially when I was a bodybuilder, because men would say, "Why do you want to be a bodybuilder?" And I'd say, "Why not? Do I look like a man?" And they'd say, "Well, no, no," because I was out for the feminist look, was never out for massive. I didn't take steroids, and that's what gives you that ugly male appearance in your face. No, I just wanted because I weighed so much and it was such a challenge for me, having weighed so much and to be where I wanted to be. But some men, irregardless, were intimidated by just hearing I'm a bodybuilder, without saying, "You do look like a man," or, "You look real masculine," or something like that. "Why would you want to do that?" Because that was considered a male-dominated sport.
Espino
Or unattractive.
Arellanes
Yes, because the women, I mean, honestly, they did not look pretty. I tell you, I followed a couple of women bodybuilders who were very feminine, very beautiful women, and so I followed their

programs. Then I would have men, "Can I touch your muscle?" [laughs] "All right. Touch. Touch."
Espino
They figured out you were still a woman, and then they wanted to touch you. [laughter]
Arellanes
They were either like, "Wow. Really?" or, "Ew." You know, wasn't appealing to them. "I didn't do it for you, sir. Sorry. I did it for me."
Espino
Have you ever looked back and thought why you were overweight?
Arellanes
Oh, yes.
Espino
Was it from since you were five, or since you were a baby?
Arellanes
Oh, birth, birth. Not birth, but as a baby. In those days they believed a fat baby was a healthy baby, so you pushed food constantly. Then the kind of food we ate was very starchy, a lot of rices, a lot of potatoes. My dad was able to afford good meat and foods, and he had an outside freezer. I mean, go to the market, people would say, "Oh, my gosh, look at all that meat." He'd buy a whole leg of lamb, and he was always bringing fish home and seafood. I'm not a seafood eater very much, just a few things. But food was never a problem. I did not grow up hungry, not once. I think when I went out on my own, I was hungry. There was times when I was hungry. When I was raising my children on welfare, I was hungry. I had to buy powdered milk to make their milk go further. I remember shoes. In those days, there was no Payless Shoes. There's was only Sears and Buster Brown's. Those were too expensive for me. So I remember my youngest son, he was getting corns on his toes because his high-tops were crunching his feet. I mean, it was hard.
We had to eat a lot of rice and beans, but that's a protein together. That's a very healthy plate, actually. I had them in a childcare center, and they said give them franks and beans, pork and beans with weiners, that's a protein, so I learned how to cook a little bit differently for my kids. But they don't remember what it is to be hungry.
Espino

They were too young.
Arellanes
They were too young. Then eventually I became very comfortable in the kinds of money that I made, and they were never hungry. They were never hungry. I raised them in teaching them, when they were old enough to start getting ready to going out, always keep potatoes, flour, beans, a little bit of salt. You'll never be hungry. You'll never be hungry. You can boil up those beans. You can make some tortillas. Even though I never learned how to make tortillas. [laughs] I made them one time. I said, "I can do this." They came out like pita bread and they were yellow, and they cracked. So I never tried it again.
Espino
It's really hard.
Arellanes
I've looked at recipes online. I said, "I can do that. I can make them." My mom used to make the big flour beautiful ones, thick, and she would sit there and just do them, and, oh, gosh, they were beautiful and perfect. Mine were [demonstrates], looked like cow udders. [laughter]
Espino
It sounds like culturally your mom had some Mexican.
Arellanes
Absolutely.
Espino
Do you know where that came from?
Arellanes
Absolutely. She was taught to be ashamed of who she was, and she wouldn't let me learn that side of my culture when I was able to ask her about it. They were raised in Pasadena and then put in East L.A., so they had to take on some of that culture because people were making fun of them because they were Indians. For my dad, he required chili every day and beans, and then she would make a meat or a vegetable. To this day, I cook that way, a meat, a vegetable, and now I'm not so much making the rice anymore, so it's more vegetables. Like I say, I don't eat breads and tortillas. Once in a while I do. But she cooked really good, and she learned how to cook a Mexican cuisine. She made good aros. She made tamales beautiful, delicious tamales. And her chiles, she would roast

them and then use the molcajete. I just cut and put them in the blender. I used to sit there and cut little pieces, and my hands would be burning. Now I just throw it in the blender, chopper. I have my great-grandmother's molcajete. I have my mother's molcajete, and I have my own molcajete. When I can paint and get this room fixed up, they'll be out.

Espino

Oh, that's nice.

Arellanes

Yes. It's funny how each one has a different shape, and you can see how much—like my great-grandmother's is almost smooth and it's flatter. It's more flatter, and my mother's was more higher, and then mine is really almost like that. That was interesting.

Espino

So even your grandmother cooked Mexican style?

Arellanes

You know, I don't remember eating any of her food. I stayed with my grandmother a lot, but I don't remember what kind of food she made. I'm told by my mother, they were so poor, they were very, very poor, that she would send them to get a quarter's worth of hamburger. I don't know. With all those kids, how much is a quarter's worth of hamburger? She said they ate hamburger all the time. That was the main thing that they ate. She could not stand the smell of rice pudding or oatmeal. I never got oatmeal until I went to Cal State L.A. [California State University, Los Angeles] as an adult.

Espino

Because they ate it so much?

Arellanes

Yes, yes. So when she'd smell it, she'd get nauseated. So when I started learning how to make, for my kids, oatmeal, she would have to go in her bedroom, because she goes, "I can't stand the smell, Gloria." She wouldn't teach me how to make the rice pudding, so I developed my own way. I make white rice, the leftovers I put cinnamon, raisins and sweetener in it, and milk, and there's my rice pudding. She would not teach me how to make it from scratch. She just hated those smells.

Even when she ate, she always maintained those habits. A lot of potatoes. Well, my dad required beans all the time, but when he

passed away, her favorite breakfast was chorizo and huevos. I remember coming in because I would drop my son over here for school and I'd come to visit her and eat her leftovers with a tortilla, because it was just so good. She'd put onion and cheese in it. But when she cooked for us, I remember she was always—the chicken back with the little bones, and she would sit there and slurp each little bone, because there's more flavor where the bone is. She taught me that, even with a piece of meat. She loved lamb chops. I couldn't eat lamb chops when I was pregnant. I smelled them one time. I thought, never again. [laughs] She loved those little chops because of the bone.
My dad liked meat, like I said, and she cooked like that. We weren't salad eaters in those days. Now I survive on salads. I mean, I just love salads. So, not leafy stuff, but everything was home-cooked, everything.
Espino
From scratch?
Arellanes
Yes. And he liked cabezas, and I used to, "Ew!" I'd see the head come out of the oven and see the eyeball, the tongue hanging out, and I was just like, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Can't do that." Or the big lengua, he would cook the big lengua. "Oh, no, no, no." I was just one of those Freddie Phooey kids. Do you know who Freddie Phooey was?
Espino
No.
Arellanes
[laughs] That's really old. That's some kid that didn't like anything good, healthy, you know.
Espino
On TV?
Arellanes
Yes, I think it was on TV, like Farmer John, Sheriff John, Sheriff John, Engineer Bill.
Espino
I think that's fascinating that your mom knew how to cook all the things your father loved, and he was definitely Mexican from generations.
Arellanes

Yes.
Espino
Do you think she learned while living with him or she came with that knowledge?
Arellanes
She always wanted to be a nutritionist, so I don't know if she studied it somehow, maybe in school. You know how they used to push people into those kinds of careers, either auto mechanics, and they pushed you out, in other words, nothing academic. Because she did graduate from Garfield and she did learn how to cook really good. And my other aunts cooked very Mexican. All my other aunts that I'm aware cooked very Mexican. My mother kind of cooked, I would say it was American style, in that my dad liked steaks. He loved his beans, though. He loved his beans every day. Breakfast of champions, I guess. [laughs] But she did learn to cook that way. She used to make chile rellenos, really good, oh, my goodness, and enchiladas. I remember all the Mexican food she cooked, and I watched her and I cooked those things, used to. Now I don't, for health's sake. But her food was good.
Espino
Sounds like it.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Sounds like she really enjoyed being in the kitchen, that it wasn't a chore for her.
Arellanes
No, no, because she was a home mom all the time.
Espino
When you think about some of the women who were angry in the sixties because they were expected and frustrated with their life and depressed, would you describe your mom that way?
Arellanes
No. If she was, she never told me. Even as an adult, we were such good friends. She was my best friend. I just loved coming every day to sit and talk with her, then go home, and then she'd call me, "Hi! What are you doing?" like we hadn't talked in days. We just had a very close relationship.

She never indicated those things. All she ever told me was, "I loved your dad. I stayed with him for twenty-five years." I think they separated one time, then they were back together, and she goes, "I have always loved your father and I've always been happy." That's what she would tell me. I think she would get mad at some of his behavior, like "Cuca," but she would not show it. One time, I wasn't here, but she told me he was drunk and he was whistling "La Cucaracha" in his sleep. [laughs] Then another time she said she was angry at him, and for her birthday there was mariachis outside the window. So he did those kinds of thing, and I think maybe she was angry because he didn't do anything for her birthday, maybe, and then he would surprise her and do something like that. I don't know. But she stayed with him. She did the Elks thing with him, and they thought the world of my mom and dad. They thought they were wonderful people. I would say, "Really? My dad? Really?" [laughs]

Espino

I need to learn a little bit more about what the Elks Club is to have a conversation with you about that. And you said your mom was involved in—

Arellanes

The auxiliary of the Elks.

Espino

The auxiliary. That's the women portion?

Arellanes

The women's portion, right, and they were just cooking. That's all they did was cook, but they enjoyed each other's company. It's just like the malan [phonetic], when women get together and do the tamales.

Espino

Yes.

Arellanes

You love that company.

Espino

That's something that draws you into a whole social network.

Arellanes

Yes.

Espino

So instead of staying in the home and just raising the family, they went out.
Arellanes
That's right. That's right.
Espino
That's interesting. So I want to ask you about that maybe next time. But it's 1:20, so I think I'm going to wrap up. But I'm interested in, as an adult, you learned about your Tongva heritage.
Arellanes
Yes, as an adult.
Espino
So looking back, can you say your mom was indigenous in this way or that way? I mean, growing up sounds like she really adopted the Mexican way—
Arellanes
Yes. She had fear of being a Tongva, of identifying as an Indian. Because I remember talking to her cousin one time. She had genealogy charts. She had books. I have an uncle who wrote books in the twenties. She had all these things, and she would tell me all this stuff. So I came home one time, I told my mother, "What kind of Indian are we?" She goes, "You're not Indian. You are Mexican." I said, "Well, why does your cousin tell me I'm an Indian?" She goes, "Don't listen to her. You're a Mexican." And it was with such [demonstrates], "Don't listen to her," because they were punished for who they were.
The history of the Tongva is we lived here and then the Spaniards came and enslaved us and decapitated us and raped us and gave us disease, made us live in crowded missions. The men didn't want to come in. If you tried to run away, they would take your feet off. They would put the heads on the poles around the mission. And so we grew up with this fear. Then the white people came, the Mexicans came, we were conquered over and over and over and over, and so you had to deny who you were. When the rancherias were established, we had to work in the rancherias. The pay was alcohol, and get drunk, you were arrested, and you were sold as a slave on Olivera Street. Most people don't want to recognize that history. We were slaves and we were sold as slaves back to the same system that paid us with the alcohol. And we had to work in all these fields for the rancherias, so the way to escape that was to

either go to the mountains, which a lot of people—my uncle wrote about the people who went up to Bakersfield. He was a horseperson, and they called him Chief. He did all the rodeos and everything. But the other ones had to deny that they were an Indian. They had to learn how to speak Spanish. They took our Indian names away in baptism in the missions and gave us Spanish surnames. At one time it was horrible; they would not recognize us as an Indian. They say we're Mexicans, that we spoke Spanish. We were Hollywood Indians. We got discrimination from our relations and from everybody else. So you had to deny who you were, say you were Mexican, speak Spanish, and then you survived, but don't say you're Indian, because you'll be punished. So her generation grew up with that, and my generation had to undo that and bring back. We've been able to bring back language. I did genealogy for thirty years. I mean, I still could sit there and do more because I still have unanswered questions. There's just so much that's documented. There's so much that's not.

Espino

Any mannerisms or any, I don't know, in her daily routine or religion?

Arellanes

Some of the things, my mother had knowledge of plant medicine. I'd drive someplace and I'd park. She goes, "You see that plant right there? That's good for headaches." I'd go, "Really?" When my first son was born, she said, "You need to do this and do that." When he'd have colic, she goes, "Spit it in your hand and rub it on his stomach." It worked. She would say, "You need to put [unclear] on his body." Spiders would close the cuts. I was just talking to somebody. They said, "Yeah, we did that too." Spider webs. When I had my first child, I told Mom, "Sit down and tell me everything you know about folk medicine." "I can't remember." But when something would come up, you do this, you do this, you do that. So I did see that in her. Then when she passed away and I got close to my auntie, my auntie said, "Oh, yeah, we're Indian. Yeah!" My great-auntie went to the mission to get us registered. I don't know what happened. Something didn't happen. We were supposed to get monies for being an Indian. I don't know. But she said, "Oh, yeah," and she recognized a lot of things. I think I learned more from my auntie about that culture other than what I learned on my own and

going back to the Gabrielino Tongvas and saying, "Hi. I think I'm related." [laughs]

Espino

What is your mother's maiden name?

Arellanes

Her maiden name is Lopez. Gonzales. Gonzales. Gonzales. My great-grandmother's name was Lopez. That was a big family in the area. I have a baptism certificate, and it was my great-great-grandfather and my great-great-grandmother getting married, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and on the back it says Ramon is a native of California. But in those days, they didn't label you as an Indian or anything like that. Except in cemeteries, what they did is "Seven Indians buried here," no names. At the L.A. Plaza, where we found those burials there, that's how the Indians are buried, some of them, and they tried to deny there was Indians because it was a Catholic cemetery. We said, "It doesn't mean because you're Indian and you're Catholic. I mean, you can be a Catholic and be an Indian." We had to fight them, and they claimed there were no records. We took in stacks. I met with—we called him El Conquistador. [laughs] I met with him with Cindy and Desiree. She's an archaeologist. She took in all the records that they denied were there. We left him with his jaw down to his knee.

Espino

What a travesty.

Arellanes

Yes. And not only that, I'm very sensitive to spiritual presence. My hair stands up when I tell these stories. We were walking. We had to walk past—you park at that Olivera parking lot next to the church, and then that's where they were doing the excavation, and then there's that beautiful building where we were going to meet. Well, we stopped, because Cindy said, "You've never been here, have you, Gloria?"

I said, "No," because I try to stay away from that, because I'm so sensitive to spiritual beings. I looked in the fence. They had already stopped the work. They weren't allowed to do anything until it was proven there was Indians or no Indians. When I turned around, I started, "Oh, oh, oh!" And they go, "What's wrong, Gloria?" I go, "There's hands all—," I felt hands, you know, but they were children's hands, they weren't adults, and they were friendly. She

goes, "Do you need to make an offer?" I said, "Yes, yes, yes." So you do a prayer and then you make an offering of medicine. The rest of that meeting that I went in there, I could see spirits all around me. They were all over. And I told the man, I said, "Do you believe in the spiritual world?" He goes, "Oh, yes. My country," blah, blah, blah.

Espino

Where's he from?

Arellanes

I don't remember. I think he's from Mexico. In fact, they told me he got fired for some funds disappeared. [laughs] El Conquistador. He came to steal. [laughs]

Espino

Unbelievable.

Arellanes

Yes. So he was fired. But that whole project was done wrong. Gloria Molino, I have no respect for her because of what she did. She wanted that thing. She didn't care. "No. Do it. No, no. Do it. Do it. Don't let those Indians come in here."

I warned her. I sent her an email, "If you don't discuss this with people, you will pay for this. You'll be sorry." I told her, "There are things that have to be done with burials that have been disturbed." But they had already moved all the—but there was over a hundred left. How did that happen? Rosalio [Muñoz] was giving me all the scuttlebutt on that.

Espino

And it's still not resolved yet.

Arellanes

No. No, no, no, no. Then what we found was there was so many tribes represented. I guess [unclear] was like a collecting area, people who were on travel and some stayed. So there was Kumeyaay, that's from the San Diego area. Serranos, Kawaiisu, mostly from the south, not the north, no Chumash, things like that. A lot of the Pobladoras, first families, were there. I know I've been traced to the Pobladoras through my Lopez side also on my pedigree chart.

Espino

So there was intermarrying back—

Arellanes

Oh, yes. In fact, what I was told in my history through this uncle who wrote these books, I had letters that he handwrote and he identified us as—my cousin was asking him are we Mexicans, Spanish Mexican? He said, "No, you're Gabrielino/Azuta." Azuta identifies the village we came from, which is Azusagna [phonetic], which is Azusa, and that's the place of the grandmother. So that's where my ancestral people come from. That's my ancestral lands, is the mountains, the foothills.
Apparently somehow we got down here. I know we lived in the Pasadena area for the longest time, and a lot of my relatives, like the Valenzuelas, are there. I have the Valenzuela in my family. The Lugos, I'm related to the Lugos. There's a lot of names that you know. Ruiz, R-u-i-z, another family. So there was a lot of those families there. Pablodoras were there. The Pablodoras did a pedigree chart for me, and they took it back to Lopez. Then Valenzuela Lopez married and they were actually first cousins. Then I found that grandmothers, they didn't stay monogamous. They had multiple marriages, multiple, multiple, multiple. My fourth great-grandmother, Rita Ruiz, she married a Lopez, she married a Montaña, she married a Quintero, she married a Lopez, and a Rashel [phonetic].
Espino
That's a lot.
Arellanes
That's a lot.
Espino
What happened? I wonder, do you know if they died or if—
Arellanes
We don't know if she was a black widow or what. Then you figure with all of these, she must have been young enough to have family, so imagine all that family I don't know.
Espino
Interesting.
Arellanes
When I found my great-grandmother's burial plot in Pasadena at the Mountain View Cemetery, I couldn't find her plot, and they kept telling me where it was at. So I went back, and they go, "You know what? A child was buried on top of her." I'm trying to remember now. I think it was her own son had—he was a SIDS [Sudden Infant

Death Syndrome] baby, so he was buried on top of her, so that's how it's identified. Then, plus, her name was Natividad Valenzuela. They had her buried as— [End of September 26, 2011 interview]

1.2. Session Two (October 3, 2011)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino, and I'm interviewing Gloria Arellanes at her home in El Monte [California] on October 3rd, 2011. You were telling me before I turned on the recorder that you have just recently come from a ceremony that reflects your heritage and your biculturalism, because you are Mexican and you are Tongva.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Instead of going chronologically, because this has been such an impactful experience for you, I thought maybe we could talk about this today.
Arellanes
Well, I've been kind of in my house for quite a while because of some health issues I'm facing, and there was a full day of events on Saturday, October 1, and one was the World Festival of Sacred Music, which was on the beach at Santa Monica, and a ceremony in a sense in that people sat in a circle and all these different performers from around the world come and honor us, the people of the land. We usually take our tiat out there, and she's got some breaks in her and she needs to be repaired, so we decided not to take her out, and we decided to ask the Chumash if we could have their paddlers and their tomol come down. They said yes, and a week before they found out it was double-booked, so it was all cancelled. So in a sense, it was a blessing, because at the end of all these performers from Brazil, from the Hawaiian people, the Japanese drums, the Agape Choir and La Cañada [High School] marching band, which was really awesome, go out there and perform for us, we will do an offering to the sea. So we ask people to bring flowers and things that are compatible to put into the ocean. This year we told people, just walk up to the water, go in the water if you want, and we led first and we did that.

Then afterwards, it was our goal to go over to Puvungna or Cal State Long Beach [California State University, Long Beach] where Puvungna is our Center of Creation for the Tongva people. That's where we came from. It's where Chini [Chungichnish] came out of, and he was our giver of our all ceremonies and our ways, traditional ways and regalia and everything, and there's a lot of creation stories that come from there. It's a sacred site. There are burials there. There are shaman still on top of the ground from our people from thousands of years ago. They were going to have the Ancestor Walk, which is held annually, and I think this was the twenty-third year it's gone on. They start down in Orange County at Acjachemen sacred site. The Ancestor Walk is for the Gabrielino, Tongva, Acjachemen, Juaneño people, and they will caravan. They'll go to one site and then go on to the next one in the cars. So they come all the way from Orange County, and some people start at the beginning, don't finish at the end, start in between or start at the end. So it picks up different groups all the time. It goes to Bolsa Chica, which is a sacred site that I've been working with because of the burials that are there, and the village importance that came from there for the Tongva people. Then it goes from Bolsa Chica, then it goes to M_____, then it goes to Puvuna, and there they have a giant feast where people bring potluck, and I mean tons of food. Part of our ceremonies is to feed people. You are required to feed people when you have gatherings, when you do things, so food is always a part of us. Yummy. [laughs] There's no sadness there. Then in the evening there's a bear ceremony, California bear ceremony, which is unique to California. It is a healing ceremony. When we arrived, it was already dark because we were traveling from Santa Monica on the 405, and we felt very lost, having very little few times traveled from that direction. When we saw Lakewood, we knew we were close. So we got there, it was already dark, the parking lot was filled, and I just told my cousin, "Well, that's because students park here also." Well, I just found out today the school had closed off the parking lot to the students and allowed the people going to the bear ceremony to park there. So it was packed and it was hard to find parking close. So we did, eventually, and got down there. It was dark. I don't see well in the dark. Saw a lot of people. That's always a good thing when you have these gatherings, when you see people you haven't seen in a long time.

So I was told by an elder they had already had the healing portion. This is a dance. The bear ceremony starts with men. Only men dance in this ceremony, men who go through ceremonial process to literally change from a man to a bear, and so they wear the bear pelt. Traditionally, I would not wear any part of the bear on me, because he's so sacred and he's so powerful. I know a lot of people use the claws of the bear. I would not use those, and I was told only people of medicine and spirituality should wear those adornments. But they take the whole bear. The claws are gone, but they wear the pelt. Underneath, they wear their regalia, which is a loin skirt, leather, and they wear necklaces, and some of them paint their faces.

But when they start coming in, you start hearing—they make the sound of the bear. If you ever heard a bear and you heard these men, you're hearing the same sound. Then once they get into the circle, which is sacred—a circle is always sacred. The way we do our circles is the east is where the spirits come in, so people can enter from the east, but you cannot block the east, because we allow the spirits to come in all the time. So the bears come in. There's a drum going. There's a big fire going. Prior to that, we have people that are selected, and normally I'm one of those that does that, is you feed the bears. So we give honey and salmon to the fire for the bears. Then they come in, because they're getting ready to hibernate. So they come in and they start dancing, but they don't dance straight up. They go way down to even look more like a bear. They're making these noises and they kind of do this dance that they go back and forth like this. So they will dance, and the drums are going. There's wingmen in there with eagle wings, who smudge people down, keep the bears from going into trances. They go into trances and they want to go to the fire. So they have to keep them going. Then there's a part where they'll say, "Okay, we're going to have a hookup." The music will stop. The bears just kind of stand for a while. And they have a hookup, and that means you can go in, and every person has to put their left hand up and hold the person in front of them's shoulder, so you have this hookup. The line was so huge, I thought I don't know how they're going to get everybody in that circle. I mean, I have not seen that many people there as this year.

Coming late, we were sitting at the back, and we could see this, but we couldn't actually see what was going on in the arena. So one of the elders told me, "They already had the healing of the elders," which is where I would have gone, sat in the middle, because I just cannot do hookups anymore. I can't dance anymore. So I just stay where I am. Usually one of my friends will come and smudge me down. There's a beautiful man, Robert John Knapp, I just love him, and he kind of runs the wingmen and what's going on inside. If he sees me, he'll smudge me down. If I ask him, he will smudge me down, which means cleansing you, taking what's not good off of you in prayer. This is a traditional way to do this and has been done for thousands of years. Has it changed? Probably. It gets a little bit more generic. There's a lot of people who go around waving wings and medicine, and I will not be touched by those people. I don't allow anybody I don't know or trust to touch me. That's how important it is. When you deal with the spirit world, you have to understand the spirit world, because I pray to the spirit world every day. Anyways, they do the hookup, and the line to go into the arena was just so long, I couldn't believe it. And I just, "Wow," you know. So one of the family organizers of the Robles family came and sat with me and was talking to me. I told her, "I understand I missed the healing, the healing for the center." She goes, "Yes. Let me see what they can do." So she came back. She goes, "I have your chair."

My friend Susanna, my dear friend Susanna, walked me in, because I get very wobbly at the end of the day. Even though I have a cane, I just—and then it's dark so I can't see well. I was taken in the center with other people who have to sit on a chair, and the healing begins. It's a healing round. So all these people step up to make a circle on the outside, who are able to walk and are healthy, but have prayers for healing for either themselves or other people. You pray for a lot of people, because people have pain. Like what I say in my prayers, people who are suffering with pain of the mind, pain of the heart, pain of the body, pain of disease. You pray for all those people to be healed some way and not to suffer. So I sat down, and the fire is very hot and I was sitting very close to the fire. Then they start and the bears come, and there's parts where they will just keep dancing and dancing. Then they come to you and they start. They do a bear dance with you, and you're sitting down, and they

kind of do that. You're kind of rocking back and forth with them. It makes you cry. It makes me cry. I get very emotional about it because I understand the healing that's going on. There was other bears who had come, and one put his head near my lap, which told me that's my legs. One of the things that you see the bears do is, because they're picking up stuff from people, all kinds of things, they will go to the fire and they start gagging and doing this really horrible gretching [phonetic], stomach gretching like they're trying to get something they got on them. He turned immediately and went to the fire. So I just thought that's my legs, that's my legs. And there was other things that just made me cry. Last year, I had a bear that came to me and he didn't do a dance, but he just had his head and he was making the sound that tells me a bear is crying, and that just broke me up. It was a very emotional—you know, it's a good thing, but it's emotional.

Espino

Was it sad?

Arellanes

It was a sad cry, because I took prayers for someone, my daughter-in-law who lost her baby at six months, and for a cousin who was not doing well. So in that way you feel your prayers are being answered, but it's very emotional. [Cries] Excuse me.

Espino

That's okay.

Arellanes

That was last year, and it still affects me. But this year this was new. One of the wingmen came to me and says, "I want you to go and stand over on that side with the fire." He was getting us to stand up. And I told him, "I can't. I can't stand for long periods." So because my friend Susanna was behind me, he said, "Can you go for her?" She goes, "Yeah, I can go for her." So she went over on the other side, and I was watching her. Then eventually she was the only one standing there, and she told me afterwards, she goes, "I healed your legs." Her legs were burning from the fire. I told her, "Susanna, are you blistered?" I felt horrible. She says, "No, they didn't blister, they're just red, and I put aloe vera on them, but I took healing for you. I took the fire's healing for you." So you're so thankful for things like that, people, your friends would do that for you.

Another part, a bear was going by and his paw hit me. Now, there's no claws on that paw, they kind of hang off the pelt, and it hit my leg. It felt like a rock. I just thought that's medicine. That is medicine. So it was a very long and powerful ceremony. They bring people in wheelchairs, and little children were in there. The bears would take them by the hand and dance them around the fire, and the fire, people are smudging them down. The medicine is constantly going. So that was the bear ceremony.

Espino

How did you feel afterwards?

Arellanes

I just felt very light, very uplifted, not tired. This granny doesn't stay out very late very often, you know. [laughs] People were calling the next day to see if I was okay, wanting to know, "How are your legs?" I go, "They feel really good. They weren't sore from walking in the sand." I just felt good. It's a matter of time. Three years ago, when I had a heart attack, I went to a bear ceremony, and there's a part of the ceremony if you're standing close enough they go by and you can touch them, their backs. One thing I had never ever done was touch, and I brought it to my heart, brought it to my heart. The next morning, I had a heart attack and didn't know I was having a heart attack, but I did. My son went into fits and took me to the emergency room. I kept saying, "I'm fine. I'm fine. The pain's gone. The pain's gone," because it was way on the side, not what you would think, or it didn't go down my arm. From what I understand, that's very common with women.

So I blamed the bears, and I actually went into a seclusion because I went into the hospital, I was there for several days, and they were doing all these tests and were saying, basically, "No, you didn't have a heart attack." And I started blaming the bears because I had touched them in that way to my own heart, and I have never done that. I always protect the heart. I don't let people touch my heart, and I would warn people, "Don't let people touch you on your heart." People can touch your arms, hug you, that kind of thing, but don't try to do medicine on me or tell me you're giving me a blessing or something, no. "Don't touch me, please," and I will say it very straight out. So it took me two weeks, and I told my son, "Just tell people, please allow me this time to be by myself," because I went for an angiogram, and they found I was blocked in

three main arteries. One was at 30, one was 60 percent, one was 96 percent. I should have died that morning. I came and took aspirin. I don't take aspirin ever. I take Tylenol. For some reason, there was aspirin on my counter, and I took two of them, and that's what saved my life. I really believe that. And the bears. And the bears. It took me two weeks to understand and get over the anger, just to try to spiritually understand and pray and pray and pray. There was nobody around. The one spiritual person I spoke about, Robert John Knapp, he was in Europe, and I couldn't call him and ask him what's going on with me. So I had to kind of go through this with myself, and I came to the conclusion had it not been for the bears, this probably wouldn't have happened to me. I eventually had a triple bypass and felt that the prayers that people had for me—because everybody was saying, "We're going to pray for you." My son put out the word, "Please pray for my mom." I felt floating for two days. It was the oddest feeling. I feel wonderful with my heart.

I came home. I healed very fast. I was very strong. In fact, my sons used to get upset with me because they don't want me to do anything. I'm not a "don't do anything" person. I'm always on the go or trying to move things around, do things. They said, "No, you can't do that." They got mad at me. But I healed, and I felt I healed in a good way. When I finally found my friend, Robert John, they had a coming-out little gathering for me at Puvungna, our sacred site, because I hadn't been out after that surgery, and they came out and sang songs for me and gathered. He was there. He goes, "Yeah, they told me, and I had to be here for you, Gloria." I told him what my feelings were, that I has secluded myself, didn't want to talk to people, had to understand what I had gone through, why I was blaming the bears and then not blaming them. He said, "You did everything right. Everything you should have done, you did right." He says, "Now you can heal yourself." And he gave me some things to say. You start at the bottom of your feet and you're just mentally—I believe the Buddhists do this, you know, the light, the light. He said, "Just work on it, and you can heal your own body." Takes a lot of work and training, and I wasn't consistent with it, but I do have an idea of it, and I've gone through other—not hands-on healing, but people who don't touch but use your own body energy

taught me how to use my own energy, how to move things. So I believe in that, too, yes.
Espino
Did you think that, because you say you blamed the bears, were you angry?
Arellanes
I was very angry.
Espino
Or did you feel like you made a mistake yourself?
Arellanes
No, I was angry at myself for allowing that heart touch, for touching them and bringing that to my heart immediately. I thought, what did I do? I'd never done that before. Why was I so—felt so impulsive to do that? I had never done that. I'd been to many, many bear ceremonies, and I've never done that. I was mad at myself, because I didn't understand. Sometimes things happen to us spiritually and you try to understand it. I understand a lot more about the spirit world, a lot more, because I do see spirits around me all the time. When I went to the L.A. Plaza when they were digging there, I don't know if I mentioned this before—did I mention this?
Espino
Yes, you talked about this last time.
Arellanes
The hands, you know, and I can't—
Espino
The children, yes.
Arellanes
—go there without feeling spiritual presence, sometimes very powerful.
Espino
Do you recall someone or a spiritual message to touch the bear? Or was it something that just happened so quickly?
Arellanes
It just was an instinct to do for some reason, and I always believe things happen for reasons. It's just understanding those reasons and why. So now I try to be more thoughtful about things and things that are happening around me, that surround me, to understand them.

I don’t want to say I’m a visionary, but sometimes I get visions. I sense things happening and then I’ll continue to do it, and I’ll say, “You saw it. Why did you do it?” I have conversations with myself, yes, I do. So I try to take more time with what I see to not do it, maybe, if it’s in a bad way. I just am trying to work with that more and more. I believe as people get older, you sense those things. They come to you more easily. I think when they’re younger, your mind is just so overwhelmed with other things, and you don’t have the time to really understand. Those things are there and they happen, and they can be good, they can be bad, but you have the opportunity to maybe even change them if you’re open to it.

Espino

It seems like you’re also on a late curve as far as those rituals and traditions and learning them, because you learn them late in life when in a different time and place and family. You would have been learning those from childhood or from even pre-birth.

Arellanes

Absolutely. I was not born into tradition. My mother denied it because her generation was punished. So she always, “Oh, no, you’re not an Indian. We’re not an Indian.” My dad was very Chicano, but didn’t really promote that. I have a lot of stories to tell you when I try to get him to see what I did, and wasn’t going to take it. He made comments to me that I just thought, oh, well, okay, done. Can’t try any more than that. But my mom was not raised in tradition. None of her family was, even though they had ways, you know, like my auntie recognizing fry bread as a pillow, little things that they did. Cutting their hair once a year with an ax. I remember my auntie saying, “Yeah, we used to go out to a tree.” They had a tree stump, I guess. In June they would put their hair on the tree and cut it with an ax, the tips. I’ve heard that from other people.

The word colachi, it’s [Spanish term]. I remember I was at a little gathering, and there was an elder there, and I go, “What did you make, Grandma?” She said, “I made colachi.” I go, “Colachi?” Nobody had ever heard of the word. I would say, “Do you know what colachi is?” Because my mama always said, “I’m making colachi.” And nobody knew that. She says, “Yeah, it’s zucchini. It’s squash.” I go, “I never heard anybody say that.” Just like Tata. We used to call my son’s grandfather Tata, which means a rock. That’s

in the language now, that it's a rock. I didn't hear too many people say that. I heard other people call their grandfather Tata, but just never knew of the connection.

Espino

Yes, those are also so important, and it shows that, that there are old traditions still passing, despite what was going on in their mind or what they were trying to hide or what they were forced to hide.

Arellanes

Right. The habits, some of the things that they grew up with, without even realizing what they were, probably, and then me learning that step because I always felt like my mother's generation came, wasn't accepting that, traditional ways, cultural ways as a Native person as a California Native. My generation kind of took the task on to bring back the culture, find a new language where we could find ceremonies, regalia. I mean, some of our people were dressed—we used to call them jammies. They would wear flannels and then cut little fringes on the edge like to make it look like fringe, or else they'd dress like the campesino, all white with the red bandana. We knew that wasn't how we dressed, and people started researching and finding out. Most historians said we were extinct, the Gabrielino. They didn't even have our traditional name, the Tongva. They said the Gabrielino were extinct and didn't exist, and here we found thousands of us still exist. Some people don't even know they're Tongva.

As I learned more and more and more, I recognized indigenous people all have traditions, and we didn't put those borders there, and we did have territories, though, and we didn't cross without protocol. You had to have a protocol asking permission to pass through the land, and very few of the California tribes ever fought except the Modoc, and I'm very happy to say [Spanish name], because my family came from Azusagna, the mountains here, the foothills, Azusa, she had six villages behind her. She was a very young medicine woman and she organized to fight the missions, because they were trying to strip us of all our language, our regalia, our ceremonies. We weren't allowed to sing our songs. So we lost so much, but we have found so much. It's amazing, and, there again, sometimes you have to kind of bend, because if things are lost and we try to rely on almost like a genetic memory how things should be done and you talk to the old people, you always want to

go to the old people, "Did you ever hear this? How was this done?" I was taught when you're learning, they tell me, you can sit with the elders, but do not ask questions. You sit and you listen. You don't say, "Give me. I want to know. I want that information." You sit. So I had to sit, and I learned so much. It's amazing what they talk about. Then there was a few when you shook their hands and looked in their eyes, you knew they were reading you, your entire body. That's happened to me twice, and you just knew it.
Then when I stand, I'm so tall to most people, I know sometimes the little elders, little tiny elders, they would look at me, and I could see. I could understand what they were saying. "She's so big. She looks so mixed." [laughs] And you just accept that. I am mixed. But culturally what I feel like, people ask me, "Do you feel Mexican or do you feel Indian?" I say I feel Indian. That's what my whole—and all my energies goes into culturally now.
Espino
Do you remember the first time that you even decided to inquire?
Arellanes
Yes. It was after visiting my mother's cousin. She had history about the people of the area and said that her grandmother had gone and registered us. Then my other aunt used to say, "We're supposed to get monies for being Indian." They opened up the mission twice, in the twenties and the 1800s, some point back there. I don't know what happened, but she said her great-aunt had taken papers down there to register us. I don't know if they were incomplete, because you had to have genealogies and all that. I have done my genealogy since and submitted it because we're trying to get federal recognition as a tribe. To me, it's not important. I don't need this government to tell me who I am, how much I am. I just refuse to accept that, and I've told my kids, "If you're really interested in pursuing that, then you pursue it, but I refuse to let this government tell me who I am or what I am and how much I am." Why quantify us by blood? To me, that's very racist. How do you determine what percentage your blood is? I used to tell them, "Maybe if I cut myself there, I might lose all my Tongva blood." Who knows? I just know what I feel in my heart and what I've learned and where I prefer to be.

But I'm not ashamed of anything I've ever done. Like all my Chicano involvement, I still have a spot in my heart for that, and I'm so glad that I was, because it also taught me a lot.
Espino
Do you think, though, it's important for the country to have people register and identify?
Arellanes
It does in terms of monies and schooling. You get monies to go to schools if you're in the sciences. You know, look, here's my son who went to school something like nine years, and I don't know how many umpteen years to get his Ph.D. because he became a physical chemist, so he could have got monies had he been registered. Okay. But he didn't. And my other son is more into the business side, so there's no monies available. But there's health issues that they could take advantage of. I'm sure my older son doesn't have any—he has a plan, but my younger one, he just went back to Arizona, and I told him, "You need to go over there to the Indian Center and try to get health services," because he has his documentation from Anthony Morales, who is now the chief of the Gabrielina Tongva, because he's a Morales. He's related to them.
Espino
His father?
Arellanes
Yes, yes. So he's entitled to that just based on who he's related to. So there's a lot of benefits to being registered and there's a lot of other things. Look at what they're doing with all these tribes that have casinos. They're dis-enrolling people. They're saying, "Oh, you don't have enough blood now." In other words, they're getting greedy. They want more money, so the ones that are getting money, let's cut them out, and they're cutting hundreds of people off the rolls.
Espino
The American Indians?
Arellanes
The Tribal Councils.
Espino
Themselves.
Arellanes

Themselves. I know Pachanga has done it. Other ones have done it. I'm not sure if Morango is doing it. But I do know Pachanga started it and got a lot of angry Indians out there. To me, that's all money. That's money that kind of corrupts you.

Espino

It's not pressure from the government to—

Arellanes

No, no. See, the tribes that have the reservations, the government is not supposed to go on the land. They can't send law enforcement in. They do because they don't have their own law enforcement, their own fire departments, and now with the casinos, yes, they are able to live better. There was people that were living with candles still, no running water, no gas, no electricity. I have gone to reservations. The Dine reservation, there's nothing out there in the Four Corner area. I used to go to a ceremony out there. It's very dry. The tallest tree is cedar trees, and they're probably about six feet tall. There's no shade. They're only allowed so many sheep to do their beautiful woven woolen blankets. They are limited. It's because the land is rich with minerals. Peabody has been excavating out there. The Navajo people, or Dine people, when their children are born, they bury the umbilical cord, and that's very sacred, and so all of these things are being—not only burials are being disturbed, but the umbilical cords, which are very sacred to them. It's a little piece of land.

I went out there. No gas, no electricity. They have an outhouse. Every year that we went back, they close one, open another one. I would walk around. There's these people that live out there, and I would watch the elders cooking on their potbelly stoves outside, making their corn biscuits. Just beautiful people, beautiful people. And the water's shipped in barrels. We would leave after a week and we'd go to a hotel and get a shower and eat, you know. [laughs] Then you come back to the city and you hate it because you loved the quiet out there and the peace. But it's a hard life. It's a hard life. They live in complete poverty.

Espino

I know that you're not of that same group, but the Tribal Councils, how aware are they or how invested are they in the larger group versus—we look at our government, the U.S. government, and especially today, they don't really care about the working people.

Arellanes
No.
Espino
So is there a dynamic like that, or do you think that they really are linked?
Arellanes
I think after hundreds of years it's more of an acceptance and a way of life, because you wonder why is it they do—I'm going to use an old quote. They put people on the Moon, and yet they can't run electricity and water for these people? They go to the rivers. They get big barrels and they go drive into the city, get their water, and bring it back to the reservation to these poor areas.
Then on the other hand, you look at like maybe Pachanga, where they live with candles, outhouses, the same thing, and now they live like rich folks. Yet I remember, I mean, I was all for when we were voting for the propositions to allow Native people—they don't do that to Bank of America and all these other things, right?—to have a casino. I lost my train of thought here.
Espino
You were going to talk about, I think, your position that you did vote and why.
Arellanes
I mean, how can you not say somebody's entitled to live in a humane way? I mean, I know the people in Appalachia also suffer the same things, they live in extreme poverty. And this government is not able to run things to them? Their children suffer. I look at them, their teeth are messed up, you know, when I've seen documentaries. We're not in a third-world country. We're in the United States, the richest country. People, how many, 1 percent is—what are they talking about, the 99 percent? Well, I think some Native people and Appalachian people live way below the 99 percent. We should be thankful that we have homes and heat and food and water, even if you don't have a lot of food. I'm not saying you should live on the Ritz, but there's basics. Because my mom always told me as long as you have beans and rice and flour, you're never without food, and I taught my kids that. You always keep those things for you.
Espino

Were you conflicted with that vote? Was it something that you just automatically knew, or was it something that you had to—

Arellanes

No, I supported it 100 percent. I went to meetings for it, and I was for it 100 percent. It didn't directly affect me, although they promised at that time when they were setting up all these propositions, and they were planning to have a casino. Now, you can't have a casino unless you're on federally recognized land. Like for the Gabrielino Tongva, we cannot have a casino. Our chief does not want one, but there are groups of our tribe that want a casino, and you can't have it. You don't have a land base. But I was all for the people who could, because they made promises. "We will help the non-federally recognized tribes." So getting money from them has not been easy.

Espino

Are you involved in that struggle?

Arellanes

Not really. I'm on the board of the American Healing Center, which is a Native American clinic in Whittier, and we're always looking for some source of revenues, because the state cut out all Indian health programs. They used to fund us big monies. Now that's been cut off with all the state economic problems. We're hoping [Edmund R.] Jerry Brown [Jr.] might still reinforce that program. We have a CEO who's always looking for grants, always. He's asked Morango several times, and they have denied him. They finally gave us money, and it was very welcomed, or else the clinic would have closed, and this is a great clinic. I started as a patient there. Now I'm on board, because I have experience with a free clinic, you know, taking nothing and making something.

Espino

Health is such an important service.

Arellanes

Yes. Believe me, when I stopped working and my insurance ran out because I didn't do the COBRA [Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985] thing, I had to go to the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center, which is a county-run facility. You need to spend eight hours there just to be seen by a doctor. It takes months to get an appointment. Once you get in their system, it's not so bad, but, I mean, it was horrible.

Then they told me something like, "Well, you're a county employee." Because I wasn't retired yet, "We can't serve you with a work-related injury." I said, "Based on what rule? Show me the paperwork. Show me what you're talking about." "Well, I'm just telling you what it is." I said, "Me accept that? No." I called the administrator. I called Gloria Molina's office, and they said, "We never heard of such a thing." The administrator of the clinic called me. He goes, "No, no, we don't do that." I said, "Well, you need to retrain your clerks, then, your frontline people, because if I can't get past them, and I'm going to speak out, what about the person who doesn't? I go there and I see women standing at that door at seven o'clock in the morning with their babies, rain or no rain. At least open the doors and let them sit inside until the clinic opens." They did do that. But he got me in. He says, "Oh, no, that's wrong. No, you're entitled to come here." I go, "I would think so. I pay county taxes too." But a person who doesn't understand that push, they're denied because they don't know. Then on the other hand, I would sit in there, waiting in this room full of patients, and then I'd have people tell me, "Oh, yeah, I have insurance, but I come here." "What?" When people really need the service? So there's something wrong in the whole system. There's something very, very wrong. People know how to manipulate systems. Some people just patiently wait and don't get treated well.

Espino

Why do you think it's so difficult to get support for something as important as a health clinic from those tribes that are making huge profits from the gambling?

Arellanes

They're getting their health clinics now. There's no issue now. I think part of the whole thing that's going on the reservation now is they're able to train people now for jobs, they're able to send people for education and then come back, and you've got your doctors, your nurses, your medical staffing. Before, that didn't exist. People had to travel miles from reservations to go to a clinic, a hospital. Now on the reservations where the casinos who have money, I think they now have what is appropriate. I have not heard complaints about the lack of health services on the reservation.

Espino

It's the non-federal, I see.

Arellanes
When you're not on a reservation, and even here in San Gabriel, I think it's University of Irvine will see the Tongva people, being Native people, but still you're talking about a distance to go from San Gabriel to Irvine. I've tried helping them set up a clinic here in San Gabriel. We only got like immunizations, very small things for the children, physical exams, but anything else had to be referred to County Hospital. The services are just—you have to go to these health clinics in the county or the County Hospital.
I think MediCal is changing a little bit where they can—I know my cousin's been on it, and she just got hospital emergency services, which is a biggie. She broke her foot, she went to the County Hospital, and she said she went to a line, broken foot—broken toe, I think it was, swelling up. She waits in the long line, gets to the front, "Oh, you have to go in that line." Didn't say, "Let me get you a wheelchair." She was with her nephew, little kid. She was feeling bad because the little kid's sitting in a room with people hacking all over. She goes in the other line. "Oh, you've got to go over there." I said, "By then I would have, 'No, no, no. No, no, no, you tell me where. Give me a wheelchair right now and tell me what I'm supposed to be. Don't be sending me to another line unless that's the right line I'm supposed to be in. Or bring me a supervisor.'" She said when she went in there, the doctor says, "I want an x-ray." She had just had an x-ray here in El Monte, and they told her to go there. She said, "No, I already have one. Here it is." "No, I want my own. I need urine." She goes, "I'm not pregnant. I have a broken toe." So she got so mad, she left rather than fight them, and now her foot is really messed up.
Espino
Oh, no.
Arellanes
Yes. I told her, "You know why? Because you were too angry. You've got to know who to talk to and what to demand." And that's an example of people get mad, they don't know who or how or what to do, and so they get ignored.
Espino
Right. I want to really talk about that also because health is so critical, and then your involvement back in the seventies when

people were starting to become aware of how these services needed to be provided to the working. I mean quality services.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
But I have a question. Have you ever entered a casino? Have you ever been inside one?
Arellanes
No, I've never been. I take that back. We were invited to a wedding, a Chumash wedding up in Santa Rosa, beautiful land, beautiful land. They had a tiny little casino, and we did go in there, played a few quarters, you know. That was it.
Espino
Do you remember what it felt like or what you thought, what your impression was?
Arellanes
I just thought it was more of a social drinking place for people who really like gambling. I know my brother was like that. He loved gambling. It just didn't appeal to me. It wasn't something, "I've got to go back. I'm going to hit it big there." I just didn't feel that. People have tried to get me to go to Morango, and I say maybe someday I would like to go. They say Pachanga is really amazing. They have a big powwow in July, and I've always thought maybe I'll go to the powwow and see what their casino's like. But it takes a lot of money, and I don't have money to throw away right now. [laughs]
Espino
It seems to me, someone who's not knowledgeable, who's uneducated on these issues, but your description of the bear ceremony and my experience in a casino, they almost seem like two competing energies.
Arellanes
Absolutely. Oh, yes.
Espino
Do you find that?
Arellanes
One draws people who truly believe in traditional healing in spiritual ways, and one draws nothing that has to do with anything traditional or spiritual or Native, even. It's all about money. It's all

about the game that's in there that people love. But people are addicted to gambling sometimes. Some people just find it fun to go every once in a while. I remember when I was younger, I used to go to [Las] Vegas. I'd allow myself $20, win or lose, and that's it. So it wasn't important for me to be in a casino. The people that are drawn to ceremonies are very different from the people who are drawn to casinos, very different. And that's tribal run, so is a ceremony, but it's done in this old traditional way that involves a lot of emotion and prayer and spirituality. You're not going to get that over there at the casino.

Espino

Is there a dialogue about that among indigenous people? Like the activists today who are vegan, who will not eat because of the political, it's just wrong, is there that kind of element who just don't believe in the casino?

Arellanes

No. We might joke about the casinos and the money that it brings it, but there's no talk about, "We've got to stop that environment." No. You have to look at each nation as sovereign and separate. What the Morango people do, the Tongva people don't do, so we would never, ever be so pretentious to go over there and tell them, "You should not do that." There's alcohol, tobacco smoking, gambling, who knows what else is going on there. Just as we would never allow them to come and tell us, "You people need to do this and this and this and this." So everybody's independent.

Like I say, we may joke about it and laugh about it. We always say, "But we're not casino tribe, you know. We have no money." [laughs] That's a joke with us. We accept that. So, no, we would never, ever, and it's not our place to do that. We have to respect whatever that tribe does, whatever that tribe does, and whatever my tribe does. We're supposed to respect it. We have problems with Bolsa Chica. At Bolsa Chica, when we were created by Chini [Chungichnish], it was who are now the Acjachemen people or the Juañeno people and ourselves down in Long Beach, and a Chief Coroni [phonetic] from the Acjachemen people came, and she took her people to travel south. So they are mostly in the Orange County area. So we have kind of shared areas. While a lot of people don't want to admit it, I think historically, like Bolsa Chica, we consider it a Acjachemen /Tongva shared village. It was a very important

village, 9,500 years old. It was the only place in the world where cogged stones were made, and they were these stones that were carved. They were always round, but they always had designs, always different. They were carved rocks. Nobody knows what they were used for. Some have wound up in Peru, and that's because I believe we—our maritime people were so strong that they traveled. The Hawaiians believed we traveled back and forth. This Polynesian gathering that took place where they left from New Zealand and came, they crossed that big ocean, went to the Hawaiian Islands, and then came down to Oregon and Washington, San Francisco and then, for us, San Pedro, and then went on to San Diego, and then flew back to New Zealand to go home, because their big boats, their canoes, their vessels are being repaired down there, and then they'll come back and they'll continue the journey. I understand they're going south this time.

I believe we did that. Our canoes, if you saw our canoe, it's huge, it's heavy. It's made out of redwood that drifted from up north and washed up to the shores, and we'd build our tiats. You have to have somebody bailing the water all the time, and the paddles are huge. They're gigantic long things. So you had these crews doing that. Did we lose people in the ocean? Probably. Yes, I'm sure a lot of our people didn't make it. But they became experts. Just like they understood the stars and the constellations. All the ancient societies and peoples were able to read the stars, understand the weather, understand the ocean. When it was nice and smooth, you could travel. When it was choppy, you didn't want to maybe take that chance. So I believe those cogged stones that were found in Peru came from our village. I believe it was part of Puvungna, because it was such a spiritual site. I tried to research as much as I could because I got involved in it. There was a burial found with these cogged stones. One person being buried, cogged stones, twenty-one cogged stones were placed around this individual. That's got to be significant. There was another burial where there was a dolphin buried there. That's got to be significant, because we consider the dolphins our ancient people. They're our relatives, just as all the ocean is. We had stories where the dolphins would circle our world and they protected us. They just protected us. They also had the stories about the sea lions. Everything had a place and reason and were part of it. So we refer to the ocean animals as our relatives. I

consider the dolphins our ancient people. They do strange things when we're around.
My son went to Las Vegas one time, Las Vegas, and they had those dolphins up there. I don't know if they still have them. There was a tank up there. He said that he went on the tour and saw the dolphins swimming around, but he went back and sat there. He said the dolphin came up, stood straight up and danced for him, and he took pictures of it, this dolphin standing straight up, just absolutely gorgeous. Then one time we went to Catalina. That's part of our lands, and we were going out. It was early, early morning, and out on the line of the water you could see things. He had a small outrigger that we're on, so he didn't want to go too far. Those started coming toward us, and it was a whole school of dolphins, hundreds of dolphins. So he drifted a while, and I so afraid of tipping that boat. I told him, "I don't know how to swim, so I'm going to sit here." "Gloria! Gloria! Look!" And I know I could have touched that dolphin, he was so close and he was doing that. Then he turned the motor off and they said, "Come over here." They wanted me to lay on the bow of the boat. "No, I'll stay right here." Well, they went to the front. There was two dolphins following the boat, and they turned up like that, and we have pictures of that. I have those pictures. So they do really amazing things when we're around them.
Espino
Their communication.
Arellanes
Yes. Yes. I just heard a story. Somebody was saying that the dolphin communicated with her. I said, "They're our relatives. Yes, they communicated." I just believe that. They're such smart animals.
Espino
So you're thinking the dolphin burial site represented—
Arellanes
Something significant, because I've also been told they had—what did they call it? It was a place where the shamans were buried. Would never want to go near that place, would never want to be there, and I don't go around burials. If they're doing reburials or they're excavating, I will not go. I will go and fight for the land. I have walked Bolsa Chica, and I have heard something walking

behind me. And I turn around real fast. Nothing there. You hear the crunching, and so you say, "Okay, I know what it is. Okay." Then the birds start doing strange things, the little hummingbirds. I believe my mother comes and visits me. There's a little hummingbird out there every single day, and she comes to my face, and I know it's my mother. It's the spirit of my mom, and so I always talk to her. One time my grandson, when he was just learning how to walk, you know how they're kind of clumsy, he was running down the walkway and he fell and he got a big egg on his head. Right? So my son picked him up, and I went and got cold water, and he didn't want it. That hummingbird came up to him. I go, "Look, it's your great-grandma. That's your great-grandma." And he just looked at the little bird. They come so close to me, and they're [demonstrates] their wings, you know.
Animals will tell you things. I believe in animals very strongly. The crow will always warn you when somebody's coming [demonstrates]. It's just me. It's just me. [laughs] But even my cats and dogs, they will tell you some things, so you just have to learn to listen.
Espino
If you can maybe explain Bolsa Chica in the sense of what's the struggle now, how you got involved in that.
Arellanes
How I got involved, it's been going on for over ten years, the struggle to stop development on that land, and the development that has gone on, the homebuilders, it's really multi-million-dollar homes. It's coastal. The wetlands are right there and those are supposed to be protected. We're fighting for the last five acres. There's actually eleven, but we're fighting for the last acres. Unfortunately, I think we've lost them. We have tried to buy them, raise money, and there's several groups. There's Save Bolsa Chica, there's Bolsa Chica Land Trust, who have tried to raise funds to buy the land and we were offered a million dollars. Then when we put in our bid, it went to $5 million. So the developer doesn't want us there, money or no money. He has been in bankrupt. Things happened. We have pointed out to the California Coastal Commission, we've gone to meetings with them, we've gotten letters, I mean hundreds of people. We asked [unclear] Southern California. They were awesome. They put it on Facebook. They said

we got letters from France and Germany. We can't read the language, but it was supporting, because the word goes out. You use social media, and, boy, the word just goes out, right? We used to go once a month and protest. They still do that. My friend's in school right now, so I can't get a ride down there.
I was asked to get involved. I walk the land and I can feel. I can feel there's burials there. There's burials there. These homes, the Bright Water Homes, they're huge homes, this much of distance between each one, no yards to speak of, like what I have. One lady came out and she goes, "You know, I don't know what's going on, but we hear things and we see things in our house now." We just sit there and, "Yeah, okay. It's the spirits." It's like when I go to an old [unclear], I feel the spirits there. Well, these people think they're ghosts. In their mind, they're ghosts. To us, they're spirits, spirits who were disturbed, reburied. They were put in a big hole, just thrown in a hole with a backhoe. The way our people were buried, they were buried and some were buried in deerskin and you had to face a certain way. You're buried with your most important items. The rest are burnt. It might be your medicine bag is buried with you, a bowl or something, some food to carry on to the next world. So when they excavate them, what happens to a body, naturally, is it decomposes and so fluids come out of your body, so all the dirt becomes sacred, and these people who remove remains don't understand that. There was 167 remains that came across at Bolsa Chica, put them in plastic bags and boxes, and put them in a trailer. We used to go over there and we'd see the bags on the ground, and so we complained about that. It was horrible. The bags were moved, we don't know where, and then eventually there was a reburial.
But what we found, because there's always what they call a most likely descendant, has to oversee all this whatever they're excavating and where it's being put. They found body parts mixed in with artifacts, because these were funeral objects. So we don't allow anybody to take those and put them in a university to study. They have to be back with the person. But, see, they mix everything up and you don't know what goes with what. One of our complaints was there are body parts that are being mixed in those artifacts, and they just tried to hide it so much from us, but we know what's going on. So there's a lot of pain.

Espino
Can you explain the significance and maybe even a little bit more to someone who has no knowledge why it's so important to keep those burial grounds untouched?
Arellanes
I think anybody who has ever buried a family member, friend, I don't care what, even an animal sometimes, you don't want them disturbed. If somebody were going to go over there and tell me, "We're going to dig up your mom and your father," I don't want that. So when you talk about ancient remains, why do our people have to be dug up? There was a law passed—and Anthony Morales helped this law—any find of six burials or more constitutes a cemetery. What they were using was, "Well, it's not a cemetery. It's just grounds." Yes, it's grounds on the coast which are very valuable. We would use the wetlands because those are under protection, and there are several animal species out there and plants that are under protection. One of the things we pointed out to the California Coastal Commission—they have a lot of say on what goes and what doesn't go, and we told them there burrowing owls out there and there was a scrub brush, I don't remember the name, that were being disturbed, and they still allowed it. Then they were using the backhoe. Their instructions are they're not to use a backhoe. They can't go down so many inches when they're first doing development where there's a known village.
They found remains, tried to hide it, told the most likely descendant, "We'll give you more money if you take these down to the coroner's office, or if you rebury them now." That's what it was. "You rebury them now." And the guy said no. They took themselves down to the coroner's office. That's a violation of the law right there. There's all kinds of codes. You can't touch them. Everything has to stop. Everything has to be examined by the coroner's office, and those things weren't done. So it's very defeating and it's very frustrating when you deal with these people that are supposed to be in charge of those things and they bend over backwards for developers, bottom line. Then Huntington Beach was involved with that, and their board, their council, just is pro development, and we would flood their chambers with meetings, I mean with people protesting that, and we gave testimony after testimony, and it doesn't matter. "We don't have the money. The developer does."

And it's all about money, and those are very expensive homes overlooking the ocean.
Espino
But also when you think about it, you don't have support of the government agency.
Arellanes
No, no, not at all.
Espino
I'm trying to think of that one very important influential—the Bureau of Indian Affairs, BIA?
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Is that something that ever would come out and check in?
Arellanes
Oh, no, no, no. They're very—I don't know how to describe them. They're all about who gets a role, who doesn't. They're not so much over what should happen on the lands. The one that's more important to us is the Heritage Commission, Native American Heritage Commission, and that's an appointed commission by the governor. They oversee all these things, and that's who we contact immediately. They'll write letters and say, "You cannot do this," and this and this and this. When we came across L.A. Plaza, we got them involved, because I worked at the coroner's office, so I know how it functions, and I knew the CEO. I called him and I said, "Anthony, you sent somebody out there, and they're saying there's no Indians out there. We have proof." Because they denied there was any Natives buried there, and we had the records. We gave it to El Conquistador, who's been fired for misappropriation of funds. When I first met that little man, I looked at his suit. This man is about money. He had a very expensive suit and tie. His hair was just so groomed. I'm not accustomed to people like that. Even when I worked for the county, I didn't see people dressed like that. And to learn what he did and then to know people who actually got fired or laid off because of the misappropriation of funds, fifteen people. I just got a notice from Cindy Aragon. She goes, "I was laid off because of what he did."

I said, "You're a victim. You're a victim, just like what they're all protesting about, corporate greed. I mean, there it is right there. He's the 1 percent. You're the 99 percent."
Espino
Was he responsible for covering up?
Arellanes
I don't know if he's covering up. They just found that he was lavishly spending this money that was supposed to go into all of that on limos and trips and things like that.
Espino
So as far as the burial site, did he have a hand in that, as far as you know, in possibly—is he someone that you hold responsible for not really—
Arellanes
I hold Gloria Molina responsible. He was her sacrificial lamb. She sent that little man out to meet with us, and he was very small in stature. I'm sorry. [laughter] I used to call him El Conquistador.
Espino
I wonder if this is a libel issue, if you can call somebody a little man. [laughter]
Arellanes
I mean, describe him, he's small. It cannot be libel. Anyways, I just felt like I was talking to a Spaniard from years ago because he just was trying to protect everything, and he says, "There are no records." One of the ladies from our group is an archaeologist, Desiree Martinez. She took stacks of documents. She goes, "Here, here, here they are. Look at all of them. There's more than a hundred burials still left there." "But it's a Catholic burial."
Well, it doesn't mean because you're a Catholic that you're not Indian. You can be Indian and be Catholic. I know a lot of Indians who are Catholic. I know a lot of Indians who are Christians, Presbyterians. So what? That has nothing to do with it. They tried to use that, and we said, "No. No, we don't buy it." So then I took that same information to the coroner's office, and I wanted to meet with him, and he wouldn't meet with me, and he goes, "I didn't know that. This is fascinating, Gloria." He was all interested. I was trying to give him the history. It was just hard dealing with them. I think Gloria Molina, because she's over the coroner's office, you know, I really blame her. I think she just wanted that thing open because

we had things. There was articles written. "I don't care. I just want it to open on this date. Nothing is supposed to stop it." And I think people are afraid of her. She became the bulldog of the county supervisors. Unfortunately, she's the only Latina, and she's been active in Chicano, the moratorium and been very pro, but we were not considered part of the Chicano community, and I think, therefore, we were treated—I had written her an email when this first came about, and I said, "You need to prove there are no Indians buried there. You need to prove that. Because once you've disturbed them, then you've opened the can of peas and you need to talk to the Native American community and don't disturb burials if they're there." And how does a cemetery close and you leave over a hundred burials there? Who does that? It makes you wonder what else do they do, and then claim they didn't know where they went. So that was bad. That was really, really bad, and, to me, that's government. That's just government, protect your behind, send out that idiot over there to—let them chew him up.

Espino

If you can define or explain the differences in the way that an indigenous culture might address a situation versus what we have today in the U.S. government. Because you said "that's government," but what's like the big issue that makes them so different, that makes them so, after all these years, unable to find a common—

Arellanes

Just in the fact that you're put on a reservation with nothing. I look at the biggest reservation in the country, and that's the Dine. You go out there, there's nothing but red dirt. Nothing grows. There's very little water. And they expected hunter warriors to be corralled and live off that land, and it's been like that all the time. They gave them C-rations. I had a Shoshoni friend who used to just laugh. You have to laugh about this, but it's horrible. They used to have contests on the reservation of who could make the best cheese recipe out of the C-rations. They gave them to the welfare people. I remember the big bricks of cheese. I went one time and got it. I was on welfare one time, and I went and got my cheese and that helped clog my arteries. [laughs] But they give people, poor people, poor people just crap. Excuse the language or the description. Never respect. I know there's been some presidents who have tried

to change that. I know [William J.] Clinton was a great—I mean, he's just loved for what he used to do, not seeing those barriers like that, going out of his way. [Barack] Obama has done it also, but, you know, still people are living poor and horrible. And not only Native people, but it's just like the idea that the government took healthy tribes and put them onto pieces of land that had nothing and said, "You are to farm now. You're no longer a hunter and you're no longer a warrior," and defeated people and just beat them down.

The histories of some of these tribes, if you ever want to read a book that will just tear you up, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee by Dee Brown. I used to go to work on the bus, and I'd be reading that and I'd have to close it because it was so disgusting, that this government gave U.S. congressional bills to exterminate whole tribes, and the cavalry would go out there and shoot the men, and, to save bullets, would get the women and children and beat their heads on trees to kill them. They would stretch the genitalia of the women over their saddle horns. And that's okay? Your government can do that? Now, I know they're not so out there doing that thing now, but that's the government. That's what they did to Native people. Look at what they did to us. They paid us with alcohol, get drunk with alcohol and then you're sold as a slave on Olivera Street. It was a vicious cycle. So they had to deny. "Don't say you're Indian. Say you're Mexican. Speak Spanish, learn how to speak Spanish." And that's how we became so acculturated that most people didn't see us as Native people; they see us as Mexicans. California Indians, I've heard the word used. We get discriminated by even Native people because we come from Hollywood. [laughs]

Espino

Is the perception that you're better off?

Arellanes

I think so. I think so. We don't have a land base, so they see us as being more wealthier, I guess. We don't come from reservations. That wasn't our fault. They took our lands and sold it at two cents an acre to the Spanish [Spanish term] and all these big rancherias that were established that we had to work on. We were the labor force. We were the labor force.

So you have a lot of resentment, a lot of denial. I understand my mother's denial now. I didn't at the time. I was very confused as a

young person, very conflicted, and then the Chicanos confused me, too, when that time came. [laughs] I now know who I am just by the fact of my relatives and the names that I carry in my family history, and doing my genealogy.

Espino

Did you have anger towards her when you were becoming aware of what your consciousness was?

Arellanes

My mother? No. I just never understood it. It wasn't such a big issue, and after her passing I realized. I understand why she said, "Deny it." I understand. There was never resentment. Then her sister, who I became very close with, she goes, "Oh, no, we're Indian," so I used to take her all over with me, and she loved it. She wasn't ashamed of it. My oldest aunt, she's in her eighties, she's always fighting with people, "I'm not a Mexican. I'm an Indian." [laughs] I mean, she's just at that age now. [demonstrates] Then when I go to gatherings, and I used to do culture tables, put out the stuff that we use to show how we caught fish, the plants that we ate, the baskets we made and so forth, we were known as great basket makers. So many people would come, "My mother had a picture of an Indian mat," and she would sit there and shake her fist, and there was something about people that said they were angry. I got that over and over, "My grandma would be so angry. We're Indian, and she didn't know what kind." I'd always get that, "We're Indian, but we don't know what kind. How did you do your genealogy?"

I try to tell people that it's not that hard, it's just very frustrating sometimes, because sometimes you find information and sometimes you don't. There's a point where there's no more documentation. One of my blessings was I have an uncle. He passed away. He lived to be ninety-eight years old. Arnold Rojas, he wrote books in the twenties, and he wrote a lot of family history in his books. I was very blessed to get one from one of my cousins, and she had letters from him. She asked him in these letters, and she didn't even know the culture that well. She said, "Are we Spanish/Mexican?" He said, "No, you're Gabrielina/Azuta." He named the village we came from, or else I would have never known that. There's not that many people that know the village, because we were removed like cattle and put into holding areas and mixed all up. Why is it I can go to

look at old mission records and I'll find names that are associated with me and they're in the Santa Barbara mission also? So I'm confused about that. I've gone to genealogy teaching classes and things like that, and I still don't have a clear picture of why is that. Why is my relative up there and over here?

Espino

So how has the history been told from, I guess, in the last ten, twenty years? Is there anybody writing that history of the Tongva?

Arellanes

Fortunately, there was Harrington, J.P. Harrington. He's the one that documented our language. And it was really funny, the way it was documented, it was done in Spanish, Tongva, and English, and we had a group of people who sat for months and just decoded all of that. So there is a language. There was other people that just wrote historical things. What's that book? Johnson. Johnson wrote about the Gabrielino. It's called The Gabrielino. You can't get these books. They're worth a lot of money now. Even my uncle's books. I've tried to go to find old books, and they want 200, $300 for them.

In there, he had our family history. He even had a rice pudding recipe, which I would love to find. [laughs] And he told stories about sitting around the fires, because he ran away with another uncle, Jim McFall. I haven't figured that name. I can't find that anyplace. I can't find that name. There was also stories about Joaquin Murrieta in his book. Anyways, he ran away at age twelve because he was in an orphanage. His mom died when he was five years old, and then he ran away. He went to stay with a grandmother, and then he ran away from her with Jim McFall. They went to Bakersfield and they were horsemen. He was known as a horseman, and they did rodeos. He was called Chief because he organized all the Indians. But he put names, lists of names that went up there, hundreds of names in this book, and those are a lot of the people that were down here that people say, "That's my relative." The Valenzuelas was a big family, the Lopez, the Lugos. They went up there and they would tell stories around the campfire, and there was books written about that. A lot of people also ran into the mountains to get away from the mission systems because it was torturous. They took mostly women and children, because the men wouldn't go in. They ran away. And they made them dress. We have such beautiful climate

here, we did not require clothing, so the women were bare-chested. One of the things the women did was they tattooed their face, and the older you got, further down it went and that showed that you were an elder. Rabbit furs. Had sandals if needed. The men wore loincloths if needed. Sometimes they didn't. There was no shame in that.

The Spanish came and said we were barbaric. It's written at the mission door right now that they came in 1711. Father Geronimo Boscana came to Christianize the pagan Indians. That is still there from 1711. I took my kids, I said, "You remember this. This is how you were viewed. This is how your ancestors were viewed, your relatives of the past." They wanted to make us Christians, so they baptized us into Christianity, took our Indian name away and gave us Spanish surnames, and that's why we have Spanish surnames. Taught us Spanish, how to clean, how to take care of the kids, and we died in huge numbers of smallpox and venereal disease from the Spaniard soldiers who raped the women, and if you ran away, they cut your foot off. Sometimes they decapitated people and put the heads on the poles of the mission. This was to scare anybody from doing that. So a lot of people ran to the mountains. I don't know if they're still there or not. I don't know. I don't know, because there was already a lot of villages up in those areas, and I just know a lot of people ran away from this area. So then you understand your own mother's fears, why you're not an Indian. So I grew up thinking I was Mexican American and Chicano, and got involved with things, and my dad hated it. [laughs] My mom just said, "It's her." She accepted me, who I was.

Espino

Do you think there's any way that the U.S. government today can make up for all that?

Arellanes

No. Oh, no. I mean, they can't even take care of poor people, so how are they going to handle tribes? I get really upset when I hear they're going to reparations for Japanese encampments, which was a horrible thing in itself, but what about the Native people? What do you owe them? Why can't you give them something to live in dignity? So, no, I don't think so, and I think our economy, especially now in this government, is just upside down and don't know what's going to happen. Don't know what's going to happen. And the rich,

I'm all for taxing the rich. They got rich because they're tight with their money, period. They're not like us, kind of frivolous, you know. Come on, they can share a little bit. People do it who have so much less. Philanthropists and people who volunteer give so much, and so why can't they give a little bit of what they make? It won't make them poor by any means. But the government, I think the government has bigger headaches and are not concerned about—they're into honoring people. I look at the code talkers. Those were amazing things that they did for the military, and those people are living on those reservations and have nothing, because I've seen documentaries on it, and very few of them are living now. They barely got acknowledgement. I think Clinton did that. And it's just very sad, such a big part and they were never decoded, never, using their language.

Espino

It feels like, just from paying attention to the news and politics and what's happening in the larger nation, that there's not an advocate, somebody who's out there advocating for the issues and the rights of the American Indian people in the U.S.

Arellanes

That's true.

Espino

Is that correct?

Arellanes

I would say that's very true. And then, don't forget, this is California. California is a really kind of—I guess it's considered a liberal state, and you get those states more in the South and even Arizona, they're ultraconservative. I read stories where there's one sheriff where he carries the jawbone of a Native American. He always shows it off that he's proud to carry that around. So there's a lot of dislike of Native American people. Unfortunately, a lot of Native American, because they come out of so much poverty, that alcoholism is very high with Native Americans, so I guess they look at Natives as drunk scum, you know. It's just horrible. Did you ever see that movie Up in Smoke? It's about a northern state, I can't remember if it's Washington or Oregon, and Sherman Alexie is an incredible author who's Native American, and he writes these very prophetically sad but funny stories about drunks, about things. There was one about an Indian who didn't speak and he went to

court and he didn't speak, and then he could speak, he just chose not to speak, almost like To Kill a Mockingbird, the Indian that was in that movie. That's his movie, Up in Smoke. It was this little reservation, and the houses have trash all over them, broken cars just parked there, because they live on nothing. The thing that used to make me laugh the most was this guy that would park on the highway and had a radio program, and he'd say, "Oh, ladies and gentlemen, we've got a car coming through. Wow! A car!" That was the highlight of his day, to see a car. [laughs] I had a friend who moved up there, and she was telling about the Indian reservation that was called, I think, the Klamath, and she says, "They live in trash." And I was so offended, because she was a friend. I just said, "It's not even worth it," because she was living very comfortable, but she could look at an Indian and say, "Look how terrible they live," and judge them by what their house looked like and not what they were as individuals. I just thought it's not even worth it to talk to her about it.

Espino

It seems like there's a completely different value system of material things.

Arellanes

Yes. Yes.

Espino

Because I interviewed one woman, in a similar experience as yourself, her mother married Mexican, not a Mexican American, he was Mexican. So she grew up with this biculturalism, but her mother had a strong identity and would take her back to the reservation, which was the Cheyenne, I think, in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Pine Ridge Reservation, I think that's where she would go back to.

Arellanes

The Pine Ridge, yes, Reservation. That's a big reservation.

Espino

Oh, god, what was my point? My point was that she said it wasn't rich or wealthy, but there was something really special about being in there that she remembers from her childhood.

Arellanes

It's like when I get together with Native people, we laugh, we eat, and you really feel a family sense, because that's my extended family. My mom, my dad's gone, my brother's gone, my only

brother's gone. I have my two sons. I have a cousin that I'm very close to, and I've made a choice not to be so close to other family members because of drugs or alcohol, and that was what I protected my kids from growing up. They kind of complain, "Well, you know, you say we have family, but we—." "You've met them. But I made that choice to keep you away from them." But I do know when I'm with Native people, and even if we're not related blood-wise, yet we are because of the old families, but even other ones that come from other tribes and they're out here, it's just this sense of community and we're close. We acknowledge each other. We may not know each other. We always get, "Hello." I'm called "Auntie." I'm always, "Auntie, can I help you? Can I get anything for you? Auntie, do you want me to carry that?" Or Grandma, some of them call me Grandma because I belong to a grandmothers' group. There's just something about being very comfortable with each other and you know you're going to have a good time. You come back enlightened because of that, you know, just that sense of community and how we stick together. Do we fight each other? Oh, yeah, just like Chicanos. We fight each other. We disagree with each other. We have different—my tribe has what they call "factions," quote, unquote, you know, several groups, several groups.

Espino

What divides them?

Arellanes

What divides them? One group is divided by the wish to have a casino, which our group is not. I should say the Tribal Council is not in favor of a casino, and by law we can't have one because we don't have federal land. We don't have a reservation. Other groups, they get mad and they decide, "I can do it better," and so they go off, they drift off and they do their own thing. When we're fighting for some remains—over at Cal State Long Beach there's some twenty-one remains that have been there over fifty years. We've been fighting to get those reburied into the land, and what we have found is they took such poor care of them. There were silverfish in them. That's against the law. They have to be protected. They lent one to USC. Nobody knows what happened to that one. They've been mixed up. Like I say, when a body is excavated, because of the decomposition process of the body, the dirt absorbs body fluids, so

we consider all that dirt sacred around that, and they're not doing that. They're just taking everything, putting it in a plastic bag or a box, and then they get mixed up. So we've been fighting that for the longest time.
It all depends on the administration of the university whether they're going to allow no building on the twenty-two acres we have been fighting for decades. I was a plaintiff, my son was a plaintiff, and they say as long as they have no plans to build, we're okay. Administrators change about every ten years, so we always have to go through this fighting process to preserve that land from development, any sort of development, and that's where we have a lot of meetings, a lot of gatherings. It's a very sacred place. You just go there and you just feel it. It's very, very special. There's hawks, there's hummingbirds, there's herons, there used to be fox out there. I think those are gone now. Just a beautiful land, and then there's a university. [laughs] Then Bellflower is right there, busy, busy street, but it's kind of shielded with plants, bushes. You have to fight different entities all the time. It may not be a government per se, because that's the large one, but you fight a university at a time. You fight a corporation at a time, a developer. You fight the California Coastal Commission. You're constantly fighting something or trying to get them to understand why the land's so important to us. I think what I told one of the ladies from the California Coastal Commission was, "I want to bring my grandson to this land and show him what was here. I can't go past these big multimillion-dollar homes and show him that."
For me, that's—leave a little bit of land to explain what was so historical about that site. And you can't really do that. All he'll be able to have is books. I've learned traditionally in an aural manner, not so much books. I still read books. I'm thankful that some people took the time a long time ago to write some books and preserve some historical consciousness, but when I sit with an elder, I've got gold. I've got gold. Now that I'm an elder, I can ask questions. When I was young, I couldn't. I had to sit there and be patient and listen and not, "Wait. Tell me more." [laughs] So our younger people are not that patient anymore. They're coming in and saying, "I want this." And I say, "No, I don't do that." Like I've had people come and say, "Can I have some of your sage outside?" I grow my own medicine. I'll say, "I don't ever gather medicine from her when

she has flowers. She's in her reproductive cycle right now. She has flowers, so I never take the medicine. I have to wait until that's gone." Then they think I'm doing it to be mean. I'm trying to teach them, you know. There's a reason. What I was taught, you never go out there and take the medicine when there's flowers. There's times when just like the bears hibernate. The bear ceremony will not go on as long as the bears are hibernating. Then they come out, and then they'll start all over again next spring. The bears are preparing to go down. It's really sad when I see so many of them coming out of the mountains, the coyotes and the bears, and people are threatened by them. They should be threatened by them, but they should keep their small animals and children inside or cage whatever they need to cage. They're only hungry. They're being sent down because of the fires and the development up in the mountains.

Just like the Amazon, what they're doing to the Amazon, that's a horrible story. So it's the same thing with the four-leggeds and the winged ones. We don't look at that. We only look at my property, my, my, my, my, my, my, my possessions. I think my auntie taught me a long time ago, because she lived in a world of cats, they scratch and they're kind of destructive sometimes when they're inside the house, but she said, "They're really just material things." So I kind of live with that. If it's special, then it needs to be put away or you shouldn't have it. But the other stuff, eh. Recycle it. [laughs]

Espino

What do you think—this will be the last question and we can always come back to this—what you gained, if you could, it's probably not something you say in one sentence, but from learning more about the Tongva, your Tongva heritage?

Arellanes

What I've gained as an individual?

Espino

However you want to look at it.

Arellanes

Well, I think I've learned a rich culture and I've taught children about that and tried to share that. We used to have a Youth Council where we would dance in my backyard. Sometimes after a rain, it was all muddy and we'd be out there dancing and dancing.

Espino
Oh, I think my card is full. Just a second. Let me pause this here. [interruption]
Espino
Okay. Do you remember what you were going to say? Something about dancing.
Arellanes
Right. The ability to teach a culture, to learn about your culture, to bring it back and to teach it so that it keeps continuing to go on. The pride that I have for myself individually and when I see my people together, when we do functions, it's really nice to see my people doing very significant things culturally and to hear the language come back. That's amazing, and it's hard. It's hard. To learn the traditional ways and spiritual ways, it's so important to me. As an individual, I feel more balanced in life and more at peace with myself.
I don't need to be fighting. I spent so much time fighting for what we should have had with the Chicano Movement, and to step away from that, in itself has kind of calmed down. The times have changed. When I see people still out there about "Kill the pig," and this and that, I'm like [demonstrates], I'm back in another century. It just feels like you're out of place again. Come on. So all these things. I'm more balanced, I'm more at peace with myself, and try to offer that to other people to use that and understand that and how to conduct themselves and try to understand things and to learn how to live with the spiritual world in a good, humble way and to be humble myself instead of being so arrogant. When I'm around arrogant people, that's not good. Oh, gosh, people really like themselves. [laughs] I mean, I like myself, but it's got to be humble, because I wouldn't do what I do if I didn't like myself. So it's taught me a lot, and I think a lot of people. Like I say, there's those people, they want to be instant Indian. I wrote a little writing, a little poem. I called it Shaman 101, because I see so many people who just jump out there, wave wings and want to smoke it down. They say they're medicine people, and I don't trust those people because you're going into a realm that is dangerous. You can hurt people. I believe people get hurt.
I think what this man Koso [phonetic] did over there, or not him per se, but the whole reburial issue and the whole fight that went out

there, people are suffering for what—I believe El Conquistador is part of that. I believe with people losing their jobs, it's all part of that, even though they had nothing to do with it. I just believe those things come back at you and they bite you. If you're going to come out here and use people and do things, it hurts you. It comes back and bites you. So I believe all of that. It taught me values and family, how to be passionate about the ocean, how to be passionate about the four-leggeds and winged ones and the little creatures that crawl on the Earth. It tells me to value food and how to try to be self-sustainable. I've been trying that, growing my own food. I had a great summer of great vegetables.

Espino

Here in your backyard?

Arellanes

Oh, yes, right here on the side here. I made a whole thing of salsa from my own tomatoes, my own chiles. The only thing I didn't have was tomatoes—I mean onions. And cilantro, of course. But, no, I'm trying to grow it. Now I want to try to capture my own water for my garden. I had strawberries in the back. When my legs went, all the hospitalization I had, I had to give those up, almost. I had a watermelon and honeydew in the back. I got one watermelon, and I just made like a thing, "I'm sorry I have to let you go," because I can't take care of it now. The front is kind of weed-grown over, but I'll do what I can when I can little by little. But it's very challenging for me to do those things. Learning how to use Mother Earth, how to respect Mother Earth, how to respect the ocean and the waters. They're very powerful things. Going to the ocean and not being afraid to pick up somebody's trash. Because we go to Long Beach, and it's filthy down there. Boy, is it dirty. We go out first and we clean up everything, cigarette butts, straws, plastic bags, glass, just do a little bit of cleanup. I wish more people would do those kinds of things. Just learn how to respect all that I'm surrounded by and everybody that I encounter.

Espino

Sounds like beautiful, beautiful gift.

Arellanes

It is. Like I tell people, I love being an elder. I love being an elder because I don't have to do the work anymore. I can sit and support and counsel and give my opinion and not fight anymore. That's

what's wonderful about being older. I hope I've gained enough wisdom that people would look at me in that manner, and I think they do. They do. It's a great honor too. I've been honored so.
Espino
Was that an important part, though, of your evolution, the fighting, in the evolution of just a human? Is that part of indigenous belief that there's a time where you are the warrior, where you are the fighter, and as you get older—
Arellanes
I think because of what I expose myself to, the causes that I got involved with, required fight, whether it was in the Chicano Movement or the indigenous Native community, because, like I say, we fought ourselves sometimes from different groups. But I can also say there was times when we made all those groups come together and we agreed upon one thing, and that was remains, the reburial of remains at Cal State Long Beach. It was like a first to see that many groups that disagreed with each other to come together for one purpose. So it's possible. It is possible. It's doable. But—
[End of October 3, 2011 interview]

1.3. Session Three (October 11, 2011)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 11th [2011]. I'm interviewing Gloria Arellanes at her home in El Monte, California. Last time, we had such a wonderful conversation about your awakening to your indigenous history and your embracing of the traditions and the culture, but I want to step back today and really look at your experience during the 1960s, because the 1960s was a period of phenomenal change in the whole country and the world.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
So I want to really get deep into that period and get as much from you as far as what you recollect of your personal experiences, and how you understood, for example, the Civil Rights Movement, the African American Civil Rights Movement, so try to bring in U.S. history into your own personal history. So let's start with you

mentioned last time that you had a high school counselor that really embraced, I guess, the Mexican American students, is that correct?
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Then you would have these race relations meetings with the white students.
Arellanes
Yes.
Espino
Can you talk to me about exactly what were the issues, what did people say, why were people angry, where was the hostility among those two groups?
Arellanes
Sure. There was a lot of race riots in El Monte High School, and when the police would come on campus, they'd drive on their motorcycles into the hallways and just arrest the Latino kids. They never took white kids in. So there was this horrible dissension between whites and people who were brown, and there was yelling all the time. I remember this yelling going back and forth before there was fights. If we were walking down the street in a group, we'd get things thrown at us. We'd be yelled at by carloads of white people, and we stuck together very closely.
There was an area of the park across from the high school, it's kind of cattycorner, it's now called Tony Arceo [Memorial] Park. We would always be there before classes started. Even if it was guys in one group and the girls in another group, but we always were there in that park. It was a means of protection for each other. I would say at that time racially we were in the minority. Now El Monte, you're lucky if you can find white people here. [laughs] So because of these race riots and all these problems that were going on and arrests of students, this one counselor, Jack Barton, he took interest in us. I think he came to the Latino or Mexican American students and started talking to us and let us air our grievances to him, and I guess he went to what we considered surfers, okay, and did the same with them, and then decided to put us together, I remember, in a classroom. He took us out of class. See, that was the cool thing. "Get out of class? Yeah, I'll be there." We went, and this yelling went on, I mean yelling, "You people this," and, "You people

that." It's really interesting how you use that energy with such hatred and with such animosity, and it's like you get it out of your system and then you're, like, "Whew," you're exhausted and then you don't have anything bad to say. Then you kind of lower your voice and start talking at a level where you communicate. So I've always learned that if you're yelling at somebody and you're telling them something, how to be, you're not communicating. You have to calm down, step back, and come back in a calm way and communicate or make rules. No yelling. No screaming. No hitting. We eventually became friends, and he invited us to go to the junior high schools and talk to the kids that would be coming into the high schools, and we talked about race relations. We talked about people may call you names, but they're just names, and it might make you mad and you might want to fight, but there's other ways to deal with it. There's counselors. There's mentors. We had a Youth Council and we considered ourselves mentors. To this day there's never been a riot there. Of course, ethnically it's changed dramatically, but at one time it was kind of scary, even moving into this neighborhood as I related, you know. They tried to take the home away when they saw my mom. It was just a time, and we did that for years. All of my four years of high school I was involved with that, so I think that kind of piqued my mind to not only organization, but civil rights.

Espino

Do you feel like something was accomplished through that, through those discussions that you would have with the surfer kids?

Arellanes

Absolutely. For you to be able to talk in a civil manner to each other without having to fight or be derogatory and call you racial slurs and so forth, because we did it on both sides, and to overcome that and start to look at people as a human being, even though it was just the high school arena, because out in the community there was still that racism and bigotry. That was something in the larger community, and it was beyond our communities. It was in many communities, that bigotry and racism. But you got a taste of how to work with it, and, plus, being here in El Monte, being very young, I wasn't out traveling at that time. There weren't community meetings like what we have now. So you were kind of isolated and insulated, I guess.

We had our Youth Council meetings and we met around the corner, and we had a place to go and somebody who cared about us, put us in the parades during the Christmas Parade and so forth. So it gave us that chance to be our involved with our community, our little community.

Espino

Were there places growing up that you wouldn't go because you didn't feel welcome?

Arellanes

Oh, absolutely.

Espino

Can you talk about those places?

Arellanes

Oh, yes. I mean, just talking down the street by yourself, you took a chance, because people yelled at you, they threw things at you. When we were in groups, it didn't matter to us, because we had each other and we felt, well, you know, they're just throwing papers or a can or something at us, but there was a lot of places where you couldn't go and feel comfortable. Some stores, like I tell you that time that my mom took me to Thrifty's counter to eat, and how the white women treated her, and the fear that I felt from her. So there was a lot of places, sure. With time, it became easier, I guess. When you know you have the Nazis out here, you know some people are just going to hate you for your color of your skin, no matter what they know about you or don't know about you.

Then we're coming into the sixties, and that was an explosion that happened all around the country in terms of what people's consciousness was at that time. So you're hearing all these things on the news and then the killing of [John F.] Kennedy, you know, those things. I remember in high school that's when that happened. So you're becoming very aware that there's a lot of stuff going on in the world.

Espino

Did you feel like you wanted to be involved in it or did it make you fearful of the future? Do you remember your feelings at that time?

Arellanes

I think at that time, being very young, right in high school and been out of high school, you want to party. You want to have fun. When people used to say, "What did you do before you got in the

movement," I said, "I cruised Whittier Boulevard." [laughs] Yes, that's what we did, and that's how I came in contact with the East L.A. community, cruising Whittier Boulevard for many, many years. Then one day, I don't know how we wound up, but I was with Andrea [Sanchez] and Esther Sanchez, and we wound up at the La Piranya coffeehouse, and I don't who told us go down there. We were probably [unclear] party. [laughs] It was a very strange experience, because there was no lights on, and apparently we were with somebody that said, "No, you have to go inside." We were like, okay, and we went inside, and there was a lot of people inside, and they started asking me questions like who was I, where'd I come from, not in an intimidating manner. Then they said, "We have this group here. Would you like to join?" Because we started going back every weekend. There was something there that attracted us, and so I wanted to know more, wanted to know more. They were talking these issues of community involvement, which I had been having a good time up to that point. I went to school, I went to East L.A. College, so I was learning some things, but not like this. This was very different to hear what they were talking about.

I remember talking to David Sanchez all the time, and he would say, "Would you like to join our group?" At that time, they were the Young Citizens for Community Action, were just about to transition to Brown Berets. It was so different for me, so radical from anything I had ever been involved in, that I was almost leery of it. I told him, "You know, I need some more time. I want to know more about it." So we kept going back, and eventually I said, "Okay, I'm going to join," and we joined. Andrea, Esther and I joined, and there was other young women there. I don't remember who they were. A lot of the men who went on to Brown Berets were there, Carlos Montes, Ralph Ramirez, David Salcido. I think Carlos Montes; I'm not sure. I don't remember Carlos or Richard Diaz. But then we started getting involved, going to fundraisers, talking to people about what we were doing, going to rallies and telling people what we were doing and getting flyers wadded up in our face. I know one time they sent us to East L.A. College where it was a Catholic gathering. Oh, boy. [laughs] So we go in there in our Brown Berets, and we didn't have our bush jackets yet, and we had some kind of a flyer for some event. I remember people getting—they would look at me,

"Chicano?" And they'd get the paper and wad it up and throw it down on the floor.
One of the things we were taught was never to argue, because it cuts your channel of communication off. You have to kind of just bite your tongue and back off and walk away with your head up, which, for somebody who is like me, kind of hotheaded, oh, it almost hurts sometimes. But I learned, I learned, you do communicate much better if you're not arguing, the same thing that I had learned in high school. So we went through a lot of that, and there weren't very many people at that time identifying as Chicano, and here we were, young people. The older people just thought we were being very disrespectful when we really weren't. We were trying to say we feel there should be better schools, our kids should be able to go to school, we should have health services and different issues that most communities had. It took a long, long time to gain people's confidence in us, and then it seemed like a Chicano Movement started to emerge and people just came out of the woodworks. People started forming their own groups. Even one of the things I noticed, we had an office on Soto Street in East Los Angeles, the gang activities seemed to be down, and we were getting gang members joining us. But in that area, that's Primera Flats, our office was actually firebombed, and they came in one night and they started yelling at us and saying that we created too much heat in the community. In other words, we brought the police into that area too much, and so it interfered with their gang activities. So we tried it, and I remember saying as a woman—and he ridiculed me. He says, "I don't care what you say, woman." So they just wanted to fight. They didn't like us. But they never ran us out.
We did pick up some people from that area, and we did have a lot of gang members that joined us. I was always pleased to know that the Chicano Movement had something to do with the leveling-out of gang violence and activities. Of course, afterwards it just went right back up when everything kind of fell apart. But we did a lot of things. I had fun with the Brown Berets. I really had fun. We were all young. There were some older people, but majority were young. I was in my twenties at that time. That was a long, long time ago. We protested. We went to marches. We went to rallies. We were always trying to recruit new people, so you're always meeting

people and talking and talking and talking and traveling a little bit up and down the state to other areas that were interested in setting up Brown Beret groups, and that was always a lot of fun and interesting. So we did a lot of that.

Espino

It sounds like you were involved in sort of an activist, even in high school with your high school Council. You were grouping yourself with other people who wanted to do more than just the mundane everyday go to school, study. You were involved in other organizations.

Arellanes

Yes.

Espino

What was it about the Brown Berets—or at that time was it Young Citizens or Young Chicanos for—

Arellanes

When I went, they were already transitioning to Brown Berets. So I wasn't part of the Young Citizens for Community Action. So it was always Brown Berets.

Espino

What was it about that first initial encounter that worried you? It sounds like you were a little bit afraid of—

Arellanes

Because it was so different. I had not heard anybody talk in this manner about organizing as young people for the betterment of the community, but in a militant manner. They weren't talking guns or anything like that at that time. It was just so different from anything I had ever heard or talked about or been involved with or even known people like that. So it interested me. It really interested me. My first job was with YTEP, Youth Training Employment Project, one of the antipoverty programs. So I got a learning about those kinds of problems and issues and worked with a lot of teen posts and that kind of thing. So my interest was always helping people, I guess. I always felt I was some kind of a nurturer. In retrospect, you start to understand yourself. You know, yes, I always wanted to be the veterinarian; yes, I always rescue the animals; yes, I always take the underdog. That was in my own character makeup. You don't know those things as a young person. As you start to mature and become a little bit more wise, you start to understand those

things. But, yes, there was just something. I think most people who go to high school don't get involved in any kind of organizational gatherings or talkings, sitting down and talking how to improve things and how to make a better organization. The group that we had, it was quite large. I don't know how all the other people did, what they went on to, if they continued to pursue things in that line of civil—I mean making things better, improvements and trying to help other people. I don't know. I only know what I did.
So, yes, it was there from high school. It was after high school, even though I was trying to have fun, and then when I came with the Brown Berets to see what they were talking about, it was so intriguing, very intriguing because I had never heard anybody speaking in that way, probably read about it and didn't understand it or wasn't interested in it, but then when you meet somebody who's talking in this manner and you're with a group of young people and they're all talking the same way, it's very interesting. So it piqued my curiosity and eventually I said, "Okay, I'll do this."
Espino
Did they have a plan initially? Did they have some strategy that you could just fall into? I'm curious about how it unfolded.
Arellanes
How it unfolded? I remember the first things that I got involved with were going to a very affluent woman's house in Altadena, Rona Fields. She was wanting to help any way she could. I don't know how they made contact with her, and we had a fundraiser at her house. We're talking about a mansion that has its own tennis court and a horse on the property, a swimming pool. And I come from little El Monte. [laughs] And I could imagine how the other young people felt too. I think she got a little bit upset because somebody took her caviar. Yuck. I'm not into caviar. I didn't even know what it was.
Espino
Do you know what the fundraiser was for?
Arellanes
No, I don't. I don't remember. It was so long ago. I just remember this luxurious home and she was a nice lady. Her husband was a writer. Charles Fox, I believe, was his name. I think he's still in the entertainment field, and I know she's in New York. She's still around. Eventually she would become part of the organizing efforts

to establish the free clinic because she's in the medical profession. I can't remember if she's a psychologist or psychiatrist. I don't remember now. But that was a connection that we made early on, and that was through David and his connections.
It's very interesting, when I read about Sheriff [Lee] Baca and the issues that are going on in the jails, people being beat up, that has gone on forever, that is nothing new, and people act like, "Oh, this is shocking. We didn't know." No, it's always been there. It actually used to be worse. I would visit people in the County Jail. They would say, "You see that cop over there?" And you turn your eyes. "Don't look at him." You'd get afraid, and they'd say, "They choked somebody with a towel." These things have gone on. My own cousin was dragged down some stairs and became paralyzed, and I told my aunt, "Let me file a claim." Oh, no, no, no, no, because he was a drug addict, and she thought, well, they'll blame it on that. You don't get dragged downstairs, beat up and dragged downstairs and not be able to walk. That's not normal. I don't care what you're doing. So people had a lot of fear. I remember talking to a sergeant one time. He was black. They were working on diversity in the sheriff's department. They had internal meetings with the law enforcement, then they went to organizations like ACLU and others, and then they went to the community last and had these meetings. He was telling me, he says, "There was a couple, an older couple, who were driving, and there were sheriffs next to them. The wife was driving. The husband looked at them, and she yelled at him, 'Don't look at them!'"
I told them, "Yeah, you don't eyeball a cop. I tell my kids." He says, "Are you serious, Gloria?" I said, "You don't understand that, the community." He came out of a very affluent community. He wasn't raised in the black ghetto areas. I told him, "No, you don't look at cops, because they think you're eyeballing them, and that's a reason to stop you." He was shocked. I used to tell my kids, "Don't look. Don't look." So I perpetuated that also, but that's the reality.
Espino
That was a big issue in the sixties, one of the issues, and there were so many, but that was one of the—
Arellanes
Police brutality.
Espino

Were you involved in any of those—what would they be?
Arellanes
Protests and rallies? I don't remember them ever meeting with us. There was a Special Operation Conspiracy, SOC, group that were led by a Sergeant Armas, and his whole thing was to get Brown Berets, that was his whole thing, and surveillance. We had so many infiltrators in the Brown Berets, it was ridiculous.
Espino
I can imagine.
Arellanes
Robert Avila was one when the student walkouts occurred, and he looked like a kid. He did, and that's how he came into the Brown Berets. He had been in the walkouts, he said, at Lincoln High School, and then came over to our office on Soto Street and got involved, and he was likable. We had no idea. The only time, in retrospect, that I can say, "Yeah, you are a cop," was one time when we went to meeting over there on First Street, Euclid Community Center, and La Junta was there. La Junta and Brown Berets clashed. It was not a good thing. I don't know if it's because they mostly came out of Primera Flats, the ones that said we brought too much police in the area, but I had no problem with a lot of them, the Rodriguez brother and so forth.
There was somebody who, I guess, was just [demonstrates], Robert Avila. He was taking it, taking it, taking it, saying, "Leave me alone. Leave me alone," and then I guess he just pushed the right button and, I mean, he wiped the floor with them. And there's where you saw that training, police training. But nobody clicked it. It didn't click on people. I remember the night before, I guess, they were pulling his assignment. He was sitting in the office, and I go, "What's wrong with you?" He looked really sad and he goes, "I'm confused. I'm confused." I go, "About what?" He goes, "I'm just confused." I go, "That's not a good thing." [laughs] I was trying to talk to him, and he just seemed like he wanted to cry or something. Well, they were pulling his assignment, and he had gotten to know us as real people, not just these militants and people who do bad things.
Espino
How much time did he spend with you?
Arellanes

It was a long time. It was months. It was months. Then the next time I saw him, I was walking downtown L.A. with Andrea, and he was on foot patrol. I told him, "This is what you got?" In uniform, in uniform with another officer, and I go, "This is your reward?" He got really red-faced, and he didn't say anything to my big mouth. So he just told the other law enforcement person something and he laughed.

Espino

Did he harm the organization?

Arellanes

I don't think so. I don't think so. There was things that were going on that maybe were unlawful. I was not involved in those things. I've never been arrested. I've been wanted by Sergeant Armas with the walkouts. Andrea was big like me, tall, big, but looked like very different to me. I used to work for Neighborhood Adult Participation Project. That was one of the antipoverty programs. I worked for them for four years. They told me, "You cannot go to those marches, those walkouts, unless you're on your lunchtime, or we'll discipline you. You might lose your job." So I was very careful not to do that. My job was important. So everybody else was out there, and they were all getting arrested. They used to pull the big buses up to parking lots wherever these rallies were going on and these marches, and he got Andrea and he says, "I finally got you, Gloria." She had this insane laugh. [laughs] I still love her so much. She just had this really crazy loud laugh, and so she started giggling and laughing, and she goes, "I'm not Gloria." He goes, "Yes, you are." Then he looked at something on her neck. She said he did something like that, and he goes, "Oh, yeah, you're Gloria." And she just kept laughing, "No, I'm not Gloria." [laughs] They were just arrested and then released. I think no charges were filed. I don't remember her ever going to court or anything like that.

But, anyways, other times I remember we were having another fundraiser on Olympic. We had an office on Olympic Boulevard, and I left early, and then came in the cops, LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department, and I was always felt, thank you, I'm blessed, that I left just before it came down, because I never was arrested. So, but anyways, what my point was, the majority of us did not do things that were unlawful, but that's not to say that people didn't do unlawful things, but I just wasn't involved in those or told about

those things. Eventually I became a minister, the only female minister of the Brown Beret organization, and we were the national headquarters. It was, of course, modest. All I was was a glorified secretary, goodness gracious. I still did all the typing. I still did all the yakking on the phone. We did do the newspaper, La C_____, and I did protect my women because I saw they were not treated very good. I was very large in stature, very large. I weighed close to 300 pounds, I'm five-foot-eight, I was very big, and I was very bigmouthed. I think because of that, they didn't want to tangle with me too often. I know Carlos [Montes] had told Dionne Espinoza in one of her interviews with him, "Gloria had a way of talking, and you listened." [laughs] I think it's because I used to yell at him, you know. So I also had the ability to be in their meetings with the leadership and also to be able to tell them what I felt, even though they didn't involve me in everything.

Espino

You weren't intimidated by them.

Arellanes

Not at all. Not at all. No.

Espino

So if you disagreed with them, did you feel comfortable enough to—

Arellanes

Oh, absolutely. I had no problems with that. I'd hear the grievances of the younger males and the females, and I would take those in there because there was things not happening that were very good eventually in time. When I finally got the clinic up and running, David [Sanchez] was meeting with all these psychologists and psychiatrists. They were called Psychologists for Social Action, and that was a Rona Fields group, and they used to meet on Soto. So they were planning to open this clinic, and I wasn't involved in it. So he came to me and he says, "I want you to start attending the meetings." I said, "I don't want to attend the meetings. I don't like those people. They're very stuffy to me." He goes, "Well, you're going to have to." So I did, and it became my passion. The clinic became my passion because it really addressed a real need in the community. We went door to door to announce our opening on Whittier Boulevard, giving out flyers, and people were afraid of us, because we put it was a Brown Beret free clinic on this day, blah, blah, blah, blah, and they would just, "Put it in the mailbox."

[laughs] Because we'd go in our berets all the time. It took a while to build, but it eventually built. I had a lot of influence with County Hospital and the health services, the clinics that they have in the communities. I got to know a lot of the doctors and the administrators, and they gave me whatever I wanted because we were doing their work. Where people were afraid to go to them because maybe they didn't have citizenship papers, they had to give information, they were afraid of being reported and deported. In my clinic I said, "I don't care if your name is spider web, black widow, I don't care. Just fill out this little paper, put whatever you want," because I didn't give those to anybody.

I lost funding from the Catholic Church because we were doing abortion counseling and not advocating abortion, but giving alternatives to unwanted pregnancy. When they found out we were doing that, they took the funds, and I said, "That's unfortunate, because I wish you could survey all your parishes, and you might find that the majority are taking some form of birth control," not using the rhythm method, which is so antiquated, so unrealistic. But anyways, that was that.

Espino

Do you know how they found out?

Arellanes

I don't know. I think when they came, they would come and walk through the clinic at times and see what our services were, because we did cater a lot to the high school students, because we were trying to work with the venereal disease. STDs were pretty high, and syphilis was—we used to get a lot of positive syphilis from people, and so we'd run the blood over to—well, we had somebody pick up the blood from the clinic, and they'd do the testing for us. So it had a real purpose, and people came and it was always crowded.

Espino

I'm curious how you would protect their privacy. Did you have private rooms for them to be counseled in?

Arellanes

Oh, yes.

Espino

Can you describe that? Because I just imagine when I think of a clinic, I just think of this crowded place where everybody's sitting

next to each other and there's no real private space. Can you describe what it looked like?

Arellanes

Well, the first one was on Whittier Boulevard in between two bars. That was El Barrio Free Clinic. We were open, I think, every night, evening, because we had volunteer medical profession who worked and then would come over after work and provide their services, RNs, psychiatrists, psychologists, medical doctors, obstetricians, pediatricians. So we tried to set up specialty clinics and we had examining rooms. We had our pharmacy. We tried to keep it locked for protection. We had our own lab, little lab, and it was a tiny little place, but we had enough donations where we had microscopes and things where they could do some testing right there. It was very small, very small little reception area, one little administrative office where everybody crowded in. What was happening was while we were doing that clinic, because it became my baby and it was my passion, and the men were not involved in it. They didn't want to take the time to volunteer and help out. They let the women do it. So I started complaining because they started wanting to party there when the clinic was closed and hang around when I had patients with children, and I just was having real problems with that. This is when we started to feel the riffraff in the organization between the men and the women. I would complain to David, and I finally told him one time, I said, "If you cannot control the men, I will leave and I will take all the women, probably some of the men." And that's exactly what happened. I also had a gun pulled on me by one of the car clubs, the New Breed, because male Brown Berets had been down there at Chronis Hamburger Stand harassing them. And you know their cars were, oh, oh, oh, you don't mess with the cars. I don't know what they were doing, and they ran back into the clinic. I told them, "If you're doing something, get out of here." That night I happened to have a whole group of kids from Pasadena who needed their physical exams for Little League. So I told them, "There's a lot of little kids in here. Get out of here." So, sure enough, here comes two New Breed guys. I go, "What's the problem?" They said, "You got some sissies hanging, protecting in there." I said, "I don't have anybody protecting in there. You need to leave. I have patients in there. This is a clinic. There are children in there, and I need you to leave." It got escalated because that old

Gloria came out that doesn't shut her mouth and goes ballistic and [demonstrates] and explodes. There was one Brown Beret behind the door. "Gloria, he's got a gun!" "I don't care what he's got," because he pulled a huge gun on me. And I turned around. I said, "Look, here's my back. Will it make it easier? Come on." I have learned enough about people and body language, when they're serious, if you pull that out and you're just like this, and he was very nervous, I knew he was not going to harm me, I knew that, and that just made me go all the more ballistic. [laughs] So I mean, crazy. I don't think I'd do anything like that in these days. At that time, car clubs were sponsored by the local law enforcement. So I finally got him to leave, and he says, "I'm going to get you." I said, "Oh, yeah, okay. I'm really scared now." The next day, it was very interesting. I was with somebody I used to go out with, and we were driving, and I go, "There he is. That's him," because I started getting calls from people from the—there was an underground militant group that I don't know who was in it. I had my suspicions. But somebody called me from there and said they had heard what happened, and they were going to take care of it. Okay. That's what I was told. Well, they never did. It was a lot of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

I saw that guy the next day. The clinic had closed. It was already that time, and we were opening up another one on Atlantic. I had separated from the Berets and decided to open one up on Atlantic Boulevard. We were going over to the new clinic, and I go, "That's him! That's him!" And I'm saying it loud enough so the guy can hear. He sees me and he gets completely panicked, and he's trying to weave through crowds on Atlantic Boulevard. I had a little Volkswagen so I could [demonstrates] real easy. [laughs]

Espino

You followed him?

Arellanes

Yes. [laughs] I'm telling you, I was a different person then. All those years, I was so shy because I was so huge, and then when I reached that point where, "I don't care anymore. People want to look at that, too bad."

Espino

Did you wear your uniform every day?

Arellanes

No.
Espino
I was going to ask you if that uniform made you feel that kind of confidence.
Arellanes
No. In fact, in the clinic we never wore berets. We never did that. It was known that it was a Brown Beret clinic. Our cards said that, our advertising said that, but we never wore uniforms. Like I said, we had meetings there and not even with uniforms.
Some of the pictures that I had that I gave to Cal State L.A. [California State University, Los Angeles] shows we had a lot of murals in the building, and we'd do the newspaper. There again, some of the men would come in, "I think you need to do—," Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, no. We're here working. Get out. You want to work? Sit down." So I always was booting them. I didn't need mouthpieces. We would work on these, and some of the men did work on it also. But Andrea was a great artist also.
So when I see some of the c_____, I recognize a lot of my calligraphy, and my typos. [laughs] But it was a fun time for me prior to that, with the ladies and some of the younger men. We had a lot of fun. We really had fun. I remember laughing a lot.
Espino
What do you think the role of the men was then, the ones who weren't helpful? What was their purpose?
Arellanes
Well, you know, everybody was a number, so when rallies came up and protests and marches, and we learned how to do the military march and we were actually trained by somebody from the U.S. Marshal's Office who was an infiltrator also, it looked good in numbers. So you accepted all these people, and they were there to help. They were supporters. They were good to back you up and everything. But it was always that handful of leaders, the male leaders, and that would be Richard [Diaz], Carlos [Montes], Ron Lopez at one time, David Sanchez, David Salcedo kind of came and went. They were the leaders, and they would go to the meetings. They would meet with the Black Panthers. Because people would ask me, "Did you meet the Black Panthers?"
I said, "No, no. We would go to the funerals." Again, I was the clerical person, not what they were doing. They would let me know

what was going on, but I wasn't involved, and that wasn't to protect me or anything, because they definitely had the idea—we truly believed as women that we were walking side by side, on the side of our man. We were equals. In reality, we walked behind. I had some pictures that went to Cal State L.A. It was so typical. We had a conference, a Brown Beret conference at Father Luce's church in Lincoln Heights where out in the room this picture was taken. There was one female taking notes, okay, and I don't know if I was out there or in the back. In the back were all the Brown Beret females cooking, with their brown berets on, cooking. That was so typical of how they were treated. And I think sexually some of them were harassed. I know one young lady that was physically hit, you know. I, myself, I would have raped had it not been for another young man who said, "No, you don't want to do that." I was prepared to fight to the nail. I had a bottle, and I said, "I'll break it and I'll stab somebody's face. I'm going to protect myself." But that happened.

Espino

With your comrades?

Arellanes

Not particularly. It was actually somebody out here. There was an El Monte Brown Beret chapter, and they asked me to go over there. They wanted to talk to me, and he was drunk, so I didn't get out of my car. Then there was a younger guy, and then he said something like, "Well, help her out. Let's do this." The younger guy looked at him, he goes, "No, you don't want to do this."

I was, whew, like I didn't get arrested, I was very blessed that I wasn't ever physically hit and I wasn't sexually harassed. But other women, they were harassed. So that's why I always protected the women. This was told to Dionne, too, "You know, Gloria spoke for us." And I did, and I kept their interests and I protected them, because the men treated them bad in the way they talked to them or didn't look at them as valuable, and we're doing all the grunt work.

Espino

This is a really interesting question. How does that happen? Does it come from the highest level of the leadership, and they have that feeling so it kind of trickles down to everybody?

Arellanes

Yes.

Espino
Or is it vice versa, does it come from the bottom?
Arellanes
No. No, it definitely came from the top. I can say that. It really came from the top. So if you're telling your leaders, "You've got to change, you've got to improve this, you've got to make this stop," and you don't see the change, then why would you want to hang around? So that was my attitude, and I did walk out. I promised them, "You don't stop it, I leave. I take the women with me." Even though I didn't say, "Ladies, if I go, will you go?" they just followed. They just followed, and the younger men who were harassed also. They would ridicule them and make fun of them. They weren't big machos. In retrospect, it took me forty years to understand that what I did—and I do claim my history now because I denied it for forty years, I realize that I had something to do with the beginning of Chicana feminism, without realizing. Because people would say, "Well, you're a women's libber," and I go, "No, I'm not." To me, women's libbers were the white women who were burning their bras at that time, and we weren't doing that. We were walking with our men, not behind. [laughs] It took me a very long time to even understand that, and so now I understand it and I realize how important it was.
Then we went into Las Adelitas de Aztlan and marched in that moratorium in the rain with that banner, and we wore our hair in pigtails and we wore shawls. We made the crosses, and I carried my cousin's name on that cross because he was killed in Vietnam. I know we tried to start an organization and it just didn't take off. It just didn't take off. I know we started working with the moratorium, and for me, the moratorium was—oh, that was really exciting because that was huge numbers of people. But we had to deal with the Brown Berets coming and being intimidating. Rosalia would handle them, and we would just kind of ignore them. I guess they didn't like the thought that we were there, perhaps. I don't know. I don't know, because after that I never talked to the Brown Berets about what had happened, what were the feelings that they had. David, in one of his books, actually lied about a lot of issues. He claimed that I took everything out of the free clinic, and that is not true. I walked out of that clinic and left everything there. I went back after they couldn't keep it open. Because they never worked in

the clinic, they didn't know how to operate it, the basic operation of being a reception, taking the intake and getting the staffing of the doctors. I remember I went to a board meeting to explain to the board meeting what had happened. They were not happy, but they said it is what it is. I asked them if they wanted to come over to our new clinic, and very few of them did. Not very many came over. They just kind of disbanded. But I remember trying to go find files and furniture, anything we could get from the owner after the Berets had moved out, and he said there wasn't nothing there. Either he took them or they took them, I don't know. Nobody's ever told me. I don't know that story.

So we started again from scratch, and we had a huge two-story building. It was huge. We got a lot of people there and we had this whole new staffing, and a lot of young people who, because of the clinic, got interested in the health field and went on. I ran into people and they said, "I became a psychiatrist." I was like, "Wow! I'm impressed." I was always kind of sad that I didn't take advantage of that, to go to school and become some kind of a professional, either an administrative position, I mean administrative studies. I wasn't really interested in the health field per se. I don't want to be a doctor. I don't want to be a nurse. I don't want to be a psychiatrist. I just loved the organizing of it and making sure it ran good.

Espino

Pairing people with someone who could help them, making that connection.

Arellanes

Yes, yes, always doing that, and I just had that passion, and to see volunteers come forth was always a great thing. Somebody that came in as a patient, maybe they wanted to come back as a volunteer, and they didn't get paid. I think I was getting $350 a month, and I gave half of that to Andrea to help me. She was like my co-administrator. So money wasn't an issue; it was just the service that it provided. I know one time when the Berets had gone to Catalina, they sent somebody over, and the way he came over, "No, no, no, you don't talk to me that way."

It was like, "David sent me over here and I'm supposed pick up medicines," and blah, blah, blah. I said, "Tell David I don't have any to give." It was demanding. It didn't come in a good way, you

know, "Could you spare some of these things or can you tell me where I could go to get these things?" And I just said, "No. No," straight out. I ran into David at a party one time. It was very interesting. When I walked up, he started yelling at me that I was a women's libber. I went, "Please, I didn't come here to yell at you. Come on." Then one guy, David Tacos is what we called him, goes, "Calm down, David. Calmate. Hey, bro, calm down." He was screaming. He says, "I want to talk to you in the back." So I said, "All right. Let's go talk." And I realized at that time, I don't know if he was on drugs or what, but he was like [demonstrates], kind of gone. And I realized I cannot communicate with this person. I'm going to let him talk all he wants to talk, and he'll calm down. But he had a real resentment towards me. He feels that I ruined the Brown Berets. Historically what I read from other people is they realize who destroyed the Brown Berets in L.A., and we used to go to—like when I went to the Poor People's Campaign, I was the only female that went. There were seven of us altogether, six males and myself. Our bus that we got on was in South Central L.A. was all Afro-American, and we sat at the back like all Chicanos do, right? [laughs] I remember the bathroom was right there, and David Tacos would come out with matches in his nose because of the sulphur to kill the smell. [laughs]

Espino

That's funny.

Arellanes

Then they'd pass lunches back. Well, they would go through the lunches and take the fruit, and we'd get these old jail-type cheese sandwiches. They'd take the cookies and all this and that. So it wasn't until we got to Denver, Colorado, that Corky Gonzales said, "I want you on my bus," and it was a bus of all Chicanos.

Espino

How did you feel about that?

Arellanes

Oh, very honored, because Corky was really—I had not met him. We knew about him. Some people had met him. And to be on his bus, so I got to know Corky, and I had the greatest respect for Corky. I really liked him. When I left the Poor People's Campaign, because I had to go back to work, I was only there, I think, a week and a half, maybe, two weeks at the most, I remember he came on

the bus to say goodbye to everybody, and then he gave us $5 each. I had met Reyes Lopez Tijerina. I stayed with his family when we traveled. We would travel a state at a time going on the Poor People's Campaign, and we stayed in his house. He had an underground bunk lined with metal, and he had a lot of sons and daughters. I met his wife. He wasn't there, but he wound up in Washington, D.C., and I saw some things that really made me question his leadership, because we used to hang out in the kitchen afterwards. We were eating things that were donated, so the cooks made whatever they could out of whatever was donated. I remember powdered eggs, and to this day I hate powdered eggs. Even when I've been in the hospital, I think they put egg whites. I cannot eat their eggs. I'm not an egg eater, period.

But I remember we were down there. We used to go and sit at the table and just talk and laugh and all that. He came in, and people aren't going to like this, but he came in with his bodyguards, and he had steak. I said, "Wow. We're eating powdered eggs, canned foods," and I lost respect for that man at that time. Then it didn't help when we were up at the top. We were in a progressive school where during the day we had to stay in the basements while the school was going on, and then in the evening we could have use of all the school. A young girl came to me, I don't remember who the young woman was, and she started saying there was a man sexually harassing her. So I went after him, and he denied it. So then I said, "Look, he's doing this to this woman" and they wouldn't take her word over his. I was mad. So I threatened the man. I say, "You mess with her again, I personally will come and get you." And he, "I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything." I think he was from New Mexico. But I remember Poor People's Campaign. To me, I learned more about people at any one time on that march, and I learned so much from it and we did so much resourcing, because people came from all over the country. The things we did—it was the first time I ever saw somebody brutally beat up. It happened to be Reyes Lopez Tijerina's son who got really beat up. It was really weird. We were crossing the street and we had monitors, and there was Black Berets and Brown Berets and other people that were doing the monitoring when you could cross, when you had to stop. I was walking with two ladies from San Jose who had children, little children, and these cops decide they're going to come hit the child

with a billy club, and the mom grabbed his arm, and that started a fight. Okay? I was right there. They were Black Berets. They got Danny Tijerina and beat him up. I remember they cuffed his feet and his hands, and they just threw him in the back of, like, a station wagon. I had never seen anybody beat up, always heard about it, being out here in [unclear], always heard about it. I remember I kind of lost it. So there was cops who were on the curb, the round of the street were the curb kind of is circular. They were lined up like that in rows, and I went up there and I started yelling at them. It just struck me, the way they were looking back at me. There were some that had hate in their eyes, like, "Oh, I'd like to get you in and just beat the hell out of you," and the other ones like they wanted to cry. Their eyes were fluttering and kind of looking away. Others just looked at me like fear. I never saw so many looks. I became very aware of how they looked.

Espino

They weren't all the same?

Arellanes

No No. You saw their feelings coming out. So we walked back. We had gone to the [U.S.] Supreme Court that day. That's where we were picketing. But it was a big learning experience for me. It was the first time I was to see a Native American full headdress, and I was like, "Oh!" [laughs] Close my jaw. Come on. And just this beautiful man with this woman, and he went into our line to march. I always think, how interesting, I came across all these things that how was I to know that that's where culturally I would wind up at? So the Poor People's Campaign was very interested. I never got to the Poor People's—the city. What did they call it?

Espino

I don't remember.

Arellanes

They were in the mud and everything because of all the rains and all that.

Espino

Oh, gosh, I don't remember. That's where MLK, Martin Luther King [Jr.], was.

Arellanes

Yes. Yes.

Espino

Oh, no. He had died.
Arellanes
Well, he had been killed a couple weeks before.
Espino
That's right.
Arellanes
I got to meet Ralph Abernathy. Going into each state was very, very interesting because we were either wanted or not wanted, and you knew when you weren't wanted. In Missouri, sometimes we would have to stay in large warehouses, like. They'd put out a cot or something for us. Other times, homes would take us in. I was able to stay with this Afro-American older couple in Missouri, oh, on a feather-down bed, after taking a bath, eating this beautiful homemade food. They were just beautiful, wonderful, loving people. Other times we were told, "Don't go outside because there's people with guns out there. They want to get you." [laughs] So it was either you were wanted or you won't. Let me back up. From California, we wound up in Texas near Wattis [phonetic], and Mitcha [phonetic] was there, and no community was greeting us. So they put us in this big stadium, and then they told us, "Stand in the middle," because there was a bomb threat. Like I say, we were the only Chicanos on this bus with Afro-Americans, and I remember this woman grabbing her baby, her child, a little girl, and that fear on her face, I still see it today, that I'm used to this, I know about this. I mean, it told a whole story. The way she was clutching her baby reminded me how my mom, when she was afraid, would clutch me and I could feel all that fear. So, anyway, Mitcha decided to take us seven, "We're going to take you." Those people were going to stay in that terrible room while they search for a bomb, and they took us to their apartment. When we were leaving, there was a Texas Ranger car out in the parking lot. We're talking sixties now, okay? Remember how selfless? And I had never seen anything like this. I had never left El Monte in my life. There was these uniformed officers. Every stereotypical word you can think of to describe a pig, fat slob, in uniform, drinking a beer, and I'm like, whoa, they scared the bejeebers out of me. I'm looking and right away, Mitcha, "Don't look at them." There goes that warning again. [laughs] So I spent the night at their apartment and then went back in the morning.

Then we went on to New Mexico, and, oh, what a beautiful reception. They had Native Americans and Latinos, Chicanos, a very nice reception. Then we went on to Denver. Where else did we go from there? We just went through so many states. Went into Kansas, Missouri. Pennsylvania we just passed through. We weren't wanted in Chicago. The housewives were arming themselves because they thought we were a threat to them. At each state we went to, they would pick up one or two more Greyhound buses, so it started this huge caravan with all these po' folks. [laughs] I remember in St. Louis, we went to the Kentucky Downs, the horse—

Espino

The Derby?

Arellanes

Yes. We were sitting out there, and they bought us box lunches, really nice. Ralph Abernathy came over and introduced himself, came and talked to us. Then in the evening we went to a black Baptist church. This little girl, the same little girl from the San Jose people, they thought she got lost, so it almost started a riot, because people started getting really agitated. She was in the bus the whole time. I got to see the church where they were preaching, and I've always said if I weren't a traditional Native American, I would be in a black Baptist church. I just love that spirit in there and the liveliness of it, and that's what I got to see, the choir and the whole thing in this huge church. The next day they took us cruising in Corky's bus. We went to a housing project. We had this big sign on the side of the bus that said "Chicano Power," and you could see people trying to mouth like, "What is a Chicano?" They did not know what a Chicano was. We went through this housing project, came back, and that was so funny to see people trying to mouth it and not knowing what it was. So, anyways, we got to Denver, and we did a lot of things and we had a lot of meetings and did a lot of like setting up new Brown Beret chapters or people who were interested, did a lot of that. Then I came home. It was one of my biggest learning experiences of people, to be with so many diverse, so much diversity.

Father Groppi from the Appalachians came, and I remember him speaking. I had never even considered there was poor white people. I just thought—because we went through Arizona and saw the Native Americans, how they lived, and it was like, oh, my gosh. It's

these little adobes out in the middle of the desert, and they'd have, like, material for their windows and their doors, just all by themselves. Nothing out there. I thought that was extreme poverty. What I've learned of the Appalachians, they really are in extreme poverty. Their children suffer a lot.

Espino

That's what I was going to ask you, is how did your understanding of poverty change, participating in this march.

Arellanes

Oh, it changed a lot just by the traveling. Here you're experiencing firsthand and seeing firsthand, and you're just barely skimming the top, just riding on a bus passing through and just talking to people. It just was amazing, and it still exists today, the richest country in the world. It just is beyond my comprehension to know I've gone, I personally have gone to the Dine reservation, where there is no gas, no water, no electricity, no shade, and the elders are cooking on potbelly stoves. You go to a bathroom in an outhouse, and they close it up every year and move it, and it's either a parachute door or a car hood. I feel like if you expel gas, you might hear "ping, ping," and somebody has to call, "Anybody in there?" [laughs] But, I mean, I have seen extreme poverty. And then to know that the government limits how many sheep they can have, because they make those beautiful woven blankets, and they're controlled. It's crazy.

Espino

What do you think is different today than back then where you don't have a Poor People's March today, you don't have that kind of struggle with the government?

Arellanes

I think I've seen it probably within the last two months, more of an awareness that there really are children that are hungry in this country and they're starting to study it. I think there's an awareness coming about. I think in the sixties we realized there's poverty, people don't have health services, can't go to school, housing is an issue, police brutality is an issue. Then we kind of worked on those things and they got a little bit better. Then I think we relaxed. And now I see it all coming back. When I talk to students, I say, "We've made the full circle. Get your protest sign ready, because they're going to take everything away from you again." And that's what's

happening. I think there's an awareness that people are saying there's poverty and hunger. There always has been poverty and hunger, and I think our country just doesn't know how to give out food stamps, because I've seen people abuse food stamps. I think people are on welfare and it perpetuates generation after generation. I have cousins that they don't talk to their children about going to college; they just talk about surviving the next day, and it's all on a welfare check. I've been on welfare, and I could not stand that boot on my neck, because it was somebody controlling me. I went to school in my thirties. I was a late—what do they call it—mature student. I didn't get real far in my education, but I became educated and I got a fairly good job. I worked for the county for twenty-three years. I was lucky to work in the training area, skills I could take and use in my community, and I did.
The whole economic issue, I believe it's just starting. I think things are going to get worse. I like the 1 percent out there, Occupy L.A. and the Wall Street. I like that. I like the idea I heard today, take your money out of these banks, put it in a credit union. I'm in a credit union, thank goodness, but I want to see those big corporations hurt because all they believe in is the almighty dollar. You take that away from them, they're going to change their ways. But it has to be an organized matter.

Espino

Did you have any kind of ideology when examining the poor back in the sixties? Because this today sounds like a real class ideology where you understand that economics is at the root of a lot of problems.

Arellanes

Right.

Espino

Was that way back then, or did you feel government was responsible?

Arellanes

What we felt was responsible for a lot of people's suffering was the bigotry and racism. If you were of any color, you were not going to do well, and because of that, you lived poor, you didn't have health services, and you didn't eat right. When you go to some of the states like Louisiana, I look at what they eat and the food and their whole health, and you say, "That is so bad." I look at what I used to

eat, a lot of Mexican food, and yet Mexican people are fairly healthy. I was reading something where they don't suffer a lot of things. We do have a lot of diabetes. So do Native Americans. Alcohol is a problem. But it's learning how to eat, and that's why I believe in self-sustainability. Grow your own vegetables. It's not that hard. I use earth boxes outside, because my knees can't dig in the dirt no more. I grow—I'm really sad that they're kind of winding down now. [interruption]

Espino

Okay, we're back. I don't know if you want to start where we were talking a little bit off recorder, or you want to finish your story that you were telling me about—I don't know. The one thing that you said a while back was that the men in the Brown Beret, some of them would use the clinic at night to party.

Arellanes

To hang out and party, yes. I also feel during that time was a time when the Berets had really, really done good, and no matter what, no matter what my feelings are or anybody else's feelings, they were part of a movement and they created something that was very positive, but it became negative. Eventually the Berets broke up, and there are reasons for that breakup. Part of it, I always feel, is that when you have a leadership, if the leadership doesn't grow, it stagnates, and so when you want to learn more and more and more and you're not getting it from the top leadership, then you go and find it. You go seek it someplace else. I think a lot of people were starting to develop that kind of thing, plus they were getting arrested. Carlos Montes left for a long time. Carlos Montes is a good guy. I always had high regard for him. I still do. I've never had a negative problem with him. He was very supportive of the women, I felt. He still is to this day. David [Sanchez], I had my issues with David, and I talk to him now, but I could never feel close to David again. I don't trust David, honestly, and I think, like I say, drugs had a big part to do with them falling apart and they started losing that status within the community.

Espino

What kind of drugs, do you remember?

Arellanes

Well, what was really popular at that time was PCP, bad stuff. PCP. I don't know what else. It wasn't anything like heroin. Maybe

barbiturates. I don't know. I don't know, because I didn't take drugs. I just know that partying seemed to be more important to them at times, and they were just losing that face in the community and the organization ability to be leaders. Maybe they struggled within themselves, the males, I don't know. See, that I don't know because I wasn't privy to that. They used to involve me. When we had meetings, I was the only female allowed to go in there, and I did all the correspondence and all the contact and all that, but I never went where they went. If they went to meet with somebody, I didn't go with them. I was a good secretary. [laughs] But I don't know.

Espino

Do you think it was something that you could look at a big picture of what was going on with these young men, or was it something individual, do you think, in their own family life or their own personal experience that—

Arellanes

I think it was the fact they were getting arrested. They were getting involved in things that—I hate to use the word "unlawful," but they were involved in things that got them arrested or involved with law and the law enforcement. Law enforcement was out to get them, I will not deny that. I mean, I told you encounters about Sergeant Armas thinking Andrea was me, and I didn't do anything. I wasn't even there. [laughs] But when you have to fight, get an attorney and fight for your survival to not go to jail, it's costly and, of course, they weren't paying money. They were getting it taken care of. I think Oscar Acosta was everybody's attorney while he was around. But the time involved in courts and going to that and being harassed again and again, so I think a lot of that—maybe the drugs were a way to escape that reality of being arrested, possibly going to jail for a long time. I don't know. I don't know. I can only speculate about those things. I just know what I experienced in the clinic. People were hanging out and partying, and I had to clean messes. We were the janitors also.

Espino

You had to clean their mess?

Arellanes

Yes.

Espino

Like their empty beer bottles and—
Arellanes
Yes, things like that. I'm sure they'd try to do it, but we'd still find the mess. I mean, come on, it's supposed to be sterile, and you're examining people. It just got to be nasty, and I didn't want to do that. I didn't mind cleaning the clinic like all of us did, but not for the men. That was an issue, that was a problem, and I warned them about it and I talked to David about it.
Espino
What was his response?
Arellanes
I think he would say, "Yeah, I'll take care of it. I'll take care of it." So then you start to question, is this person capable of taking care of things? Can he really talk to these men, or are they controlling things? I just grew. I just felt I want to grow. I'm not growing here. It's becoming a problem. I'm fighting now. I'm no longer learning. I loved the clinic, but I wasn't getting what I needed anymore, and so I had to move on. I've always done that with jobs. In two years I've learned everything, and I have to move on. I've got to learn something new. I hate to be bored.
Espino
I'm like that myself. Did you want to be the leader? Did you want to replace David?
Arellanes
Oh, no. No, no, no. I had no desire for that. I felt my own leadership in my own way, because I knew they listened to me and they involved me to a point. But, no. I felt people followed me anyways. It's almost like it's natural. But, no, I never wanted to be like a prime minister or anything like that. Now I look back now and I say what silly titles we had, minister of, you know. That's not important anymore. I've learned how to be humble and to be balanced in life and not be egotistical and pound my chest, I'm this, I'm that.
Espino
Would you characterize that as something that was prevalent at the time, that people were pounding their chests?
Arellanes
I think so. There's a manner about you when you really think you're the leader, you're in charge, you're the super militant. "What I say

goes." I think there was for a while, but I think it was falling on deaf ears after a while, because people, they lost respect.
Espino
Was it something specific that happened that turned the community against them?
Arellanes
I think it was just a lot of things. I'm not sure what it was. I think because of other organizations coming up and things they were doing and how they were doing them, it was different from the way the Brown Berets were, because the Brown Berets were paramilitary. No matter what, we believed in guns. We believed in the right to self-arm yourself. I had my M-1 carbine. Yes, I did. We used to go to the mountains and practice. I am so anti-gun now, it's unbelievable. [laughs] I'm like the ex-smoker. I used to smoke cigarettes but once—
Espino
I used to carry mine.
Arellanes
So when you stop smoking and you smell smoke around, it's like, "Ew. You're the worst." So, yes, it's the same thing with guns. All they do is kill. I worked in the coroner's office for four years, and so I saw the accidents that happened with children with guns. You have a little infant crawling on the floor and they moved the coffee table where the gun is kept inside, and it discharges accidentally and kills a baby. I saw that over and over and over, so I learned a lot about life and death in the coroner's office. I always try to learn valuable life teachings. So those are my firsthand experiences.
Espino
Were you ready to use it? Were you ready to—
Arellanes
No. Could I shoot somebody? No. Could I kill somebody? No.
Espino
Was that part of the training?
Arellanes
The training was arm yourself. We believe in protecting ourselves, and we're going to overtake the country and we were going to run it and this and that. It was unrealistic goals and thoughts, but I think that's how they built themselves up, being in charge and we're going to overtake. What, 95 percent of your community is not going

to want you to do that. Other people in the movement were not militants. There were some other groups that were militant, but very few. Most of them were community organizations who were out to improve things. We were out to improve things, but it took this militant turn. Well, it was always considered militant. I shouldn't say it took a turn. It's always been considered militant. You wore a uniform, you marched, you were paramilitary, you believed in guns. But if I had to shoot somebody, no, oh, no. No, no, no. I value life too much.

Espino

It sounds like you straddled a lot of different lines, because you have the ideology of carrying a gun; at the same time you're working with this wealthy white woman who's helping you establish this clinic; you're on the Poor People's March, challenging the U.S. government to put more money into poor communities. So you wanted to overthrow the government at the same time you were working to change it.

Arellanes

Exactly. Exactly.

Espino

Do you remember what you thought was really going to impact the community? What did you see as a solution?

Arellanes

For me, it was direct services that were good. For me to get the County Hospital and the clinic to pick up my lab work, give me items, knowing that I reached people they would not reach was very satisfying to me. Not that I had control over them, it's just that I won them over and had them believing as I believed. So that was a real accomplishment for me.

Espino

Would you put that under the definition of revolutionary?

Arellanes

In a sense. It's not armed revolutionary, but in the sense that it was new, it was radical, it was different, nobody else was doing it, and I helped many people, many communities set up their own free clinic. San Diego, New Mexico, I remember they came out, just a lot of different areas came out. They wanted to do the same thing. So I gave them all the things that I had. I was all for that.

Espino

Do you ever remember having discussions with some of the male leadership about the importance, like on a day to day, like what was going to change the community? What was going to improve community? Did you ever debate with them?

Arellanes

Not debate. I mean, we were usually in agreement. Anything that would improve our community for our people at that time, we were for. Anytime you want to do change, there's a lot of work involved in change. You don't just say we need better schools. Well, how do you go about getting better schools? Who's responsible to give you a good school? Who do you go and talk to? I know I went to the Board of Education several times and talked about things with education. How do you get kids to go to college? Parents are not training their kids or preparing them to go to college. So it starts at the high school where they start to get prepped and then the parents have to really push. I really believe in that. I pushed as a single parent to my two boys, and I have a Ph.D. in physical chemistry, and the other one, he didn't want to work so hard, but he went to trade tech and he's in school now. So I believe in pushing your child. You have to tell them what's out there and you have to expose them to things. I remember taking my kids on nature walks, because I couldn't take them to Disneyland, afford that, or Knott's Berry Farm or anything like this, so we'd go over here to Rose Hills and in the back there's [unclear] College. There's some pretty natural areas out there, and they'd get excited over these big green spiders and just talk about leaves and things like that, exposed them to different things, because a lot of kids don't get that. Some kids have never even seen a cow. So I wanted my kids to experience very simple, very natural-type things that are life. I used to take my older boy to my astronomy class, and he loved it. So I gave him my book and he's the one that went on to be in the science field.

Espino

When did you decide that those were the important things versus the paramilitary stuff?

Arellanes

When I had my children, I changed. That's when I said no guns. No, it was all about protecting my children and exposing them to a life that would make them in time be responsible and successful. My

thing was—and my younger one always reminds me about this—I had two rules. When you turn eighteen, you have two choices: you can go to work or you can go to college. If you go to college, I will help you. You can live here. I can financially assist you if it's possible. If you go to work, that's great. You can either go move out on your own or you can live here, but you have to help financially. If you don't do any, get out. [laughs] I mean, I made it as plain as possible. No "and" or "if" "buts." I had to make them make a good choice.

Espino

Thinking about that question of no free lunch, the idea that you need to work for what you have, how did you feel about a free clinic? Why is that a little bit different?

Arellanes

Because we worked with a group of people in a community that there were health services available, but they were afraid because of their legal status. They weren't documented, perhaps. I don't know. I never asked them if they were, but there was a reason why they came to us, and I know young people came to us because they— [End of October 11, 2011 interview]

1.4. Session Four (October 17, 2011)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 17 [2011], interviewing Gloria Arellanes at her home in El Monte, California. Today I'd like to start with your experience during the period of the War on Poverty. Last time you mentioned just in passing that you worked with NAPP [Neighborhood Adult Participation Program] and Teen Post [phonetic] and some of those War on Poverty programs. Which would be the first? Can you start with your first involvement in a War on Poverty program?

ARELLANES

First involvement was fresh out of high school. That was my first job. No, actually, it was a factory, but in the summer the lady that had run our Youth Council here in El Monte suggested that we apply for these jobs that were available, and there was a Teen Post established over more South El Monte, and I worked there. I can

remember the building. It was in a school during the summer. It was like an elementary school, and we just provided, like, recreation for kids and I don't remember what else, what other specifics. I know we took fieldtrips, and I can't remember where.
ESPINO
Do you remember what the purpose was? Was it to just keep you guys and give you employment, or did you have a specific objective that you wanted to achieve?
ARELLANES
I think it was both. It was to keep kids off the street, give employment to young people, developing skills of employment. I know I developed some skills, and it kept me in that community activism kind of mode to start so young and continue to do that.
ESPINO
Would that be Teen Post or would that be—
ARELLANES
It was at Teen Post. It was at Teen Post. That's what I recall.
ESPINO
Do you remember the supervisors or anybody who was running that program?
ARELLANES
No, I don't. No. Then I think I went to NAPP program. I'm not sure at what point I went to the Neighborhood Adult Participation project, and I worked there for years. I remember working at the headquarters on Randolph Street. I can remember a street in Huntington Park. I also worked someplace in South Central. I moved from different offices. That may have been the first headquarters, because I know I was more in the Afro-American community, and I worked with a lot of people and had a lot of fun, always a lot of fun with the people that I worked with, because they were so funny and crazy. [laughs] I believe the one in—I'm not sure now, because I finally wound up in Boyle Heights. I can see the man who is the director, but I can't remember his name, a very nice man, but he's the one that told me I couldn't go to the student walkouts or else I'd probably lose my job or something, that I had to be very careful what I did. My lunchtime was mine, but if you're late or this and that because of your activities, then that would be a problem. But they did allow me to—I just recently found this this year. I found an old résumé, the kind that you typed on a one-key-

at-a-time typewriter and used onionskin for your copies. [laughs] I was amazed at the information that was in there, because I had forgotten that apparently NAPP allowed me to run and work in the free clinic while I was employed with NAPP, as a special assignment. So I just felt like, wow, they're really committed to community work, that anti-poverty program, to allow me to do that.

ESPINO

So you were getting paid through NAPP, and your time was spent in the clinic?

ARELLANES

Yes, and I probably had to do reports, some kind of reports, statistics and numbers, number-crunch things, but I think that was a fair tradeoff.

ESPINO

Do you remember asking for that? Do you remember if you were the advocate to make that happen?

ARELLANES

I would think so, because I would think they had it in their head, "Oh, Gloria, there's a free clinic there. We need to have Gloria over there." I think it was probably something that I probably kept talking about, talking about, talking about, and probably worked it out somehow.

ESPINO

Initially, what were your responsibilities?

ARELLANES

I was always the administrator of the free clinic.

ESPINO

But initially with NAPP?

ARELLANES

With NAPP, oh, gee, we did all kinds of community things. If we were asked to work on specific problems, I don't remember real specifics, but I know we were supported in a lot of community activities, and I remember a lot of meetings. I remember the meetings. I remember meeting Black Muslims, and I was so impressed with them because they considered me a sister. Then I would look at how they were dressed with their little bowties and always so respectful and so soft-spoken, because there was the crazies on the other hands who were kind of out there, right arm.

[laughs]. So it was a real mixed bag, but I loved it. I loved it. I felt very comfortable there.

ESPINO

Do you remember any of the issues? Was it education, health?

ARELLANES

Voters' right, voter education was one issue. I may have even done the canvass. That's where I learned the word "canvass," from NAPP, going out for specific community issues. I just don't remember the other things I did there. I'm curious now to see where that résumé is, to see what I gave as what my job duties were.

ESPINO

I might try to pick up a copy of that. I'll see if I can get over to Cal State Los Angeles and copy that before our next meeting so that we can see the specifics. I'm so curious if you would have listed any of the maybe propositions you might have canvassed for or specific candidates you might have canvassed for.

ARELLANES

That I can't remember.

ESPINO

Proposition 14, I think, was really big at that time, equal fair housing, that was huge.

ARELLANES

You know, all I can say is I had to have had some involvement in that, because that was just my whole foundation of my life at that time, was all those issues and all that activity, not being afraid to walk the streets and knock on doors. I did it with the free clinic. I did it with immunization drives.

ESPINO

Just to look at the chronology, you were a member of the Brown Berets before you started to work with NAPP? Would that be the chronology?

ARELLANES

I don't think so. I don't think so, because the Brown Berets came in, what, the early sixties?

ESPINO

Yes.

ARELLANES

No, maybe I'm wrong, because I got out of high school in 1964. That was my graduation, and then I took that first job at that Teen Post.
ESPINO
In 1964?
ARELLANES
Around there.
ESPINO
That was the beginning of the—
ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
Those were the very first programs, so interesting.
ARELLANES
Yes. They were very new, very new, new concepts and very accepted. I never felt that people were trying to shut us down or felt that they shouldn't be in existence. I never felt any political discontentment about it.
ESPINO
That's a very important point, because today the whole idea of pouring money into a working-class neighborhood is so controversial.
ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
So at that time, did you feel like—I don't know, I'm just going to throw this out there—that it was something similar to charity?
ARELLANES
Not at all. No. Probably because I didn't understand the workings of it, how the government is the one that had set it up and funded it and felt it was necessary. All I know is I had a job and I earned money doing something I liked to do. So at that time politically I wasn't very aware probably of how things work in that sense, government-funded programs and so forth. I think as time went on, I started to understand that a little bit more.
ESPINO
Do you think if you didn't have that job opportunity, you might have done some—what else would you have done? What were your other alternatives?

ARELLANES
Well, my dad wanted me to go to school, you know, college. He wanted a daughter who—he contradicted himself so bad. He wanted me to go to school. He wanted me to be a family woman also, have children, be pregnant and take care of your husband, have children, but yet be educated. So to me that contradicted, because if you have children and you're married, in those days how could you work? You weren't expected to do both. Most moms were stay-at-home moms. My mom was a stay-at-home mom. So I went to college. I went to East L.A. College, and it was just not for me. I would sit there and it just felt like things were just going over me. I didn't have very much relationship to it, and so I only went maybe one semester and went out and got my life experience. When I did return back to school in my late thirties, I was very ready for school. It made much more sense to me and I wanted it. But I had to go out and work and do a lot of community work first, and that's when I got involved in Poor People's Campaign and traveling to other areas and just meeting a lot of people from different areas, Brown Berets, all that.
ESPINO
That's an interesting response, because on the one hand, your father sees these two options for you, but neither one of them worked.
ARELLANES
No.
ESPINO
Because you didn't stop going to school and then get married.
ARELLANES
No.
ESPINO
Did you have a long-term relationship or boyfriend or anything like that?
ARELLANES
I did, but I never wanted to be married. I just had it in me. I remember my mom. I loved my mom so much. She was my best friend. She would tell me, "Oh, honey, you're going to fall in love with somebody and you'll see. You'll get married and you'll—," you know. Well, I fell in love with somebody and I had my children, but I did not want to be married. For me at that time, that wasn't very

acceptable. But most people would say they consider me very pioneering, because I said, "Now I will raise my children on my own. I can do this." And yet I had relationships. My first relationship was with a heroin addict, okay? So I had to make that decision the moment my child was born, that that man could be my son's father, I would never deny him that, but he could never touch my child if he was high on heroin. So the heroin was more important to him, and in time he would come back and try and see his son, and it was like [demonstrates]. "What do you want? You weren't here when he was sick, when he had good things happening at school. You weren't here to share those things." He came back when my son was eighteen years old and tried to make amends, because he became a born-again Christian.

ESPINO

He cleaned up?

ARELLANES

And for me, that wasn't good enough. I mean, time had passed and a lifetime had passed for my son, and he was trying to get to know my son, and I was so jealous, so angry. My son, being a very bright young man, he told me, he says, "What's wrong with you, Mom?" I said, "I gave you my life. I have been here for you all your life, and this man comes in and, 'Can I take you to lunch?' and you're happy?" He goes, "Do you want to go with us?" I go, "No. Hell, no." [laughs] When he called the first time, I told him, "What do you want?" He says, "Oh, I knew you were going to be hard." I said, "Really?" I said, "Yeah, Sherlock." I mean, he had no concept of what it was that I went through as a parent, and for him to want to dance in whenever he was ready to dance in was not good enough for me. I had been told all the time when I was raising my children as a single parent, "Don't ever turn your children against their father because they'll turn on you," and so I always had to keep that in mind. I would always tell them, "Whenever you want to see your dad, I can take you. Not a problem." And they weren't interested. Only one time we were barbecuing in the backyard, and my older boy goes—his father is gay. So I used to say, "Give me tools on Father's Day." I love tools. He was sitting there, he goes, "I wish I had a—." I go, "A dad?" And he said, "Yeah." I said, "You know, you have a father. No child comes into the world without a father. You don't have a dad, though." And he kind of accepted that.

So I had to accept him when he was eighteen saying, "I want to know my dad. I just want to know the man." Then he did the same thing; he just kind of drifted in out. My son, when you talk to him, he's rather bitter about it now, but I never said, "He's evil. Don't touch him. Don't go near him." He found out for himself.

ESPINO

Did your son know he was addicted to heroin?

ARELLANES

Yes, I've told him. I've told him, yes. I was very naïve when I got involved with him, because I didn't know anything about drugs, especially hard heroin. I learned a lot. I learned an awful lot. I got to know a lot of his friends who were all heroin addicted. It also helped me in the clinic. Some of them would come to me, they wanted detox, and I would help them and I would refer them for detox. Some of them would come over almost flat-lined from an overdose, and I would take them to the emergency room, and because of my reputation I could just say, "This guy was dropped off," and blah, blah, blah. They would take care of him.

ESPINO

No questions asked?

ARELLANES

No. No.

ESPINO

What was it about them that you felt empathy for? Somebody else might just completely dismiss them.

ARELLANES

It's that nurturing in me, the kind of woman I was, to want to try to save everything. I rescued animals. I rescued heroin addicts. I rescued anybody. I think I mentioned the last time, I'm always for the underdog. I've kind of changed with time. It's a different time now. It's a "me" time, for me, and I'm at the end of my life, so I'm trying to make the best of it and use that time wisely.

But I think it was always—I was always a drug and alcohol counselor. I had done that for a while and always wanted to save somebody, always thought I could save somebody, and had to learn basically you can't save anybody if they don't want to be saved. They have to be ready to save themselves. But when I worked in drug and alcohol, my thing was education, of what it does. Alcohol does this to you, fetal alcohol syndrome and so forth, and heroin is

horrible. I think I saw one time a person going through withdrawal, and that is the most horrible thing I have ever seen, the pain that body goes through, the retching and the vomiting and the sickness and the runny nose, and just the horrible, horrible pain they go through. You can kind of understand why it's very hard for them to give it up unless they do it medically. Cold turkey, as they called it, it's not very pleasant at all, and I only saw one person do that.

ESPINO

Actually get off or actually detox?

ARELLANES

Start to go through withdrawals. They were trying to detox, and, to me, you can't do it. It's probably been done, it has been done, but most of them had to go into programs. What I learned about heroin addicts is they would go into the detox programs just to cut back on their habit, and then go back out, so they weren't taking as much. In other words, as you take heroin, your need increases and there's even—I'm thinking of some legal prescriptions that have half-lives. You take one, and what stays in your system the next day is half of that medication, so you take another one, so you've got one and a half. So a half is going to leave, so you stay with one the next day. So your need increases and increases. Same thing with heroin. So I would know a lot of people that would go into the programs just to reduce the amount they were taking, never wanting to detox or clean up completely, and go back out so that they were using smaller amounts of heroin. So it's a really vicious and very ugly cycle of addiction.

ESPINO

Did anyone come in trying to get off and was successful, that you recall?

ARELLANES

I remember people who were successful, but in that success you have to cut away the friends or the people that you associated with, because they look at you. Anybody who's stopped drinking will tell you, "A lot of my friends just kind of went away. I'm not the party person anymore." They want to see you with a drink in your hand. I've never been much of a drinker myself, and I remember going to nightclubs and I would drink grapefruit juice to make it look like I had a mixed drink, and people would come over, "Can I get you another drink?" "Sure." "What are you drinking?" I'd go, "Grapefruit

juice." [laughs] The same thing with a cigarette, when you give up cigarettes. I used to smoke, and one of the habits I developed was chewing straws all the time. I cannot tell you how many people came over, "Can I light your cigarette?" "No, it's not a cigarette." [laughs]

ESPINO

Burn my face off.

ARELLANES

Yes, curl my hair up. But, yes, that's a whole other bag is that heroin and drug addiction and the dependency. I've met people who were able to detox from—we used to give Antabuse for alcohol.

ESPINO

In the clinic?

ARELLANES

Yes. Yes. Or we would be able to refer them to a clinic. We had all those resources available to us. I remember people who would maybe stop drinking, and they say you always have an addictive personality, so if you're not—and I have many friends who do this now, who stop smoking, and they'd go to eating, gain lots of weight. Some people, it's not eating; it's another habit. I only met one person who said he went to school and became a school addict. His thing was school.

ESPINO

Education.

ARELLANES

Yes, and he just continued and continued and continued, and he's got all kinds of degrees now. [laughs] But he's the only one I ever knew that talked to me about that.

ESPINO

I don't know if you were aware at the time that you were working in the clinic, but did you have a political analysis about addiction? Did you have any understanding of why alcohol and drugs were prevalent in East Los Angeles?

ARELLANES

I think because there's a lot of pain. It's a way to hide pain, and apparently it's a good high. Alcohol, to me, is a sloppy high. You either get very belligerent or you're very, very a happy drunk. I had an uncle who was an alcoholic. My own dad, he had his drinking problems. I can't say he was a real alcoholic where he had to have

that drink every day, but when he drank, he drank to excess. My uncle, I saw him do hilarious things. He was just completely hilarious when he was drunk, and I used to just love to watch him because he got away with so much. The community knew him as a happy drunk. He's the one who threw my grandmother's little Chihuahua dog on the parade float in the September 16th and proceeded to scream. He had a big sombrero on and went running down the street, "Mi perrito! Mi perrito!" chasing him. And everybody just, "Ha, ha, ha! Look at Charlie! Look at Charlie!" So in my own family and in like everybody's family, you have something that— [interruption]

ESPINO

Some groups at that time, some of the more leftist radical groups at the time were looking at drugs in the neighborhood as a part of the oppression, part of the oppression.

ARELLANES

Absolutely.

ESPINO

Did the Brown Berets have that kind of—did you guys, like, have points on these different issues, like a policy or a position or something even that maybe wasn't written but was spoken?

ARELLANES

I think there was a position to be anti-drug, anti-alcohol in the community because it was so destructive. Anti-reds. Reds were a big problem, you know, barbiturates. I'm sure there was a policy and maybe even an advocacy to not drink or use drugs. Within time, a lot of people didn't follow that. I can clearly remember it. There was a time when the community, gang activities, when the Movement got very strong and very widespread within the community, there was less gang activity. Remember all the youth that were coming into the Brown Berets, and they were giving up the gangs, kind of, even though we had one gang come and tell us to get out of the community because we brought too much police into the area, too much heat. But that reversed itself within time, and it was sad to see people revert back to what was so destructive in the community. Right now, to me, it's out of control when they just indiscriminately shoot. I mean, I don't recall indiscriminate shootings in neighborhoods now.

ESPINO

Like the drive-bys that you hear about today?
ARELLANES
Yes, yes, and children getting caught in crossfire. So it was very different in those days. It was pure gang activity.
ESPINO
Territory and graffiti.
ARELLANES
Very territorial, graffiti, dress. Now it's a little different. It's very different.
ESPINO
Would they come into your clinic with injuries from fights or gang fights, that you recall?
ARELLANES
I had people come in. I'm sure they were women that were abused. I had people come in with broken bones or they needed stitches on their forehead or something. So I don't think—maybe I should back up. There are pictures over at Cal State L.A. that I had of El Barrio Free Clinic where there was blood all over our door handle and the sign that we had and the floor. We took pictures the next day because we were trying to prove a point. Our hours of operation were very businesslike, and so being located between two bars, who knows what went on in those things. But somebody tried to come to the clinic for help and left their blood all over. So we knew all this stuff went on, and we tried to use that as a point to say services are needed twenty-four hours somehow. But that would be in an emergency room, and we weren't nearly equipped to be an emergency room.
But people came to us. I don't ever recall a shooting victim coming to us. There may have been some stabbing, and we would have referred them to the emergency room. Like I say, I saw broken fingers. I was helping the doctor give stitches. He said, "Just hold the light for me." Being very curious, I started—he was doing stitches on this man's forehead, and I got very curious and wanted to look, then I started, "Oh, I've got to go." I went outside and I slid down the door. [laughs] Because what I saw was [demonstrates], because I didn't realize that's what they do with stitches, which is cut some of your flesh out, because it opens, and so in order to close it, you've got to kind of take meat away, flesh, and then stitch

it. By then I was kind of like, "Okay, I can't hold the light no more, Doctor." But that's what we were, like a MASH unit.
ESPINO
It sounds like that. It sounds like that.
ARELLANES
We weren't chrome and tile. I mean, we were a real neighborhood clinic.
ESPINO
How about child abuse? Did that ever—
ARELLANES
Oh, I don't recall ever seeing anything. I think in those days that was hidden. That was very hidden. You did not discuss that, because you could get killed for that in the jails. That was not accepted to hurt children. I know when I started doing drug and alcohol counseling, I started a women's group because I started realizing women are in pain. They have things that they're holding that creates this pain, so they drink that pain away.
I'll never forget we got to the issue of sexual abuse, and to hear a woman in her late forties choke on every word, saying, "My father raped me," and I was [demonstrates] because I had never lived with that in my personal life, and to hear that, it was so emotional. Then for her to go on and say, "And we were this well-liked family in the community. We went to church with my father and mother. I hate my mother because she knew what he was doing to us, and he did all my sisters. He raped all my sisters." I'll never forget that, and I just, "Wow, how do you carry that?" In those days you just held it in. Now if it's suspected, you report it. I worked in Child Abuse Prevention for two years for the county of L.A. Day after day, I would read these cases, because that was my job, to do statistics. It's true what they say about abuse. It's usually somebody that knows you. And these children—having worked in the coroner's office with child-abuse-prevention cases, I couldn't understand why—I did statistics for the coroner's office. I couldn't believe. I did all these different reports, who's taking what drug, naming it, how much, statistics, and reporting it to certain agencies and looking at how many accidental deaths, how many homicides and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. The only report that I would say, "Oh, I'll do this one tomorrow," is the child-abuse prevention, and what I came to realize was it depressed me and yet at the same time, I would look

at some of these cases and say, "Thank goodness this little baby isn't alive anymore. No more suffering." That's a horrible thing to say, but that's how I got through it.
So then when I went to the Department of Health Services and worked with live child abuse, it was worse. I said, "These babies are walking around with scars, these children."
ESPINO
That's a lot to endure over a lifetime, all those painful stories that you started hearing when you were—
ARELLANES
Oh, it was horrible. What I did was take the information and use it as educational tool, and I developed a whole reporting process where I went to all the agencies that were reporting, first responders, hospitals, schools, even, and tried to put that together as a resource book and use it as an educational tool. I was able to work with—we'd have—what would you call them—classes where we'd have the police, the first responders, paramedics. I worked with SIDS [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome] projects, which is at that time everybody thought that baby was being abused because they have purple markings. My son had purple markings on his buttocks, and that's just something that ethnicity-wise is very prevalent in some babies. But at that time, they thought somebody was hitting that baby. To hear the first responders, they would say, "We knew that baby was dead, and we would still resuscitate till we got them to the hospital." Police, the same thing when it comes to children. Can't say anything about the jails these days. [laughs] But, yes, I got to work with a lot of different people in the hospital, the emergency rooms, the intake people, and so I tried to use that always, turn it around as an educational tool, because I can see how somebody could get buried in that and just come out very bitter.
ESPINO
There was a way of viewing the community at the time in the sixties and seventies as—well, it was a lot of blaming, and there wasn't a lot of education. So when did you first start to get involved in the education aspect of it?
ARELLANES
I think in the free clinic one of my favorite things to do was work with the young people about venereal disease and talked in their terms and made flyers in their terms that maybe were not very

professional or maybe parents maybe would object to, but our focus was go to the high school and pass these out. Get the kids, go to go up there, and that's what we did, you know. Just be aware.
ESPINO
Was there any way to monitor your effectiveness or the impact that you had? Is there anything quantitative or qualitative?
ARELLANES
The amount of people that we would have in that clinic, we were always packed. We always had a full clinic at night. I don't remember. I'm sure we did statistics, but I just don't know what happened because I never took anything. When I left the clinics, I never took anything. I left it for whoever takes over. That, I don't know. I think the biggest effective thing that I would say today is just awareness, education, not being afraid to come in and see a counselor, because we had counselors available. I think in the communities of the sixties, you didn't talk about problems. You kept them in-house. It's not like today. To bring people out was an achievement, but it took a lot of work too.
ESPINO
It seems like that time was still pretty conservative as far as premarital sex, particularly for girls, not really for boys. I think they've always been able to do what they wanted to do. There's no stigma. How did you get around that, as far as even your own values? Your parents must have passed some values down to you about that.
ARELLANES
Yes, yes, very much so, especially my mom saying, "Oh, you'll fall in love, honey. You'll get married." [laughs]
ESPINO
Well, I mean, as far as your sexuality, did they ever talk to you about wait until you get married and you should marry in white and that kind of thing?
ARELLANES
No, no, they never gave me the birds-and-bee talk. Everything I learned was from my friends, they're talking things and you're trying to look really like, "I know what's happening," and you don't, and you don't have nobody to go to and say, "What does that mean?" unless you have a really good close friend. But I think the majority of them were not told about sexuality and sexual activity.

You were told to be a virgin, but that's it. So I think what I saw in the free clinic was we would do the premarital blood tests, and we found this high rate of syphilis. Now, I do remember that very vividly, and, see, the county was so happy we were finding that because these are people that would not go to an established clinic run by the government for fears, whatever fears there were, but once we would get those results, then we'd have to talk to that person and then either get the treatment or refer. You can imagine, something like that isn't good for relationships, because right away, the first thing is, "Ah, you're screwing around."

ESPINO

So how did you get around that?

ARELLANES

Well, we didn't. All we did was take the test and give the results and then try to counsel the person or refer them for treatment, obviously, because people die eventually from syphilis. Syphilis isn't on the rise like it was back then.

ESPINO

It was on the rise, you felt?

ARELLANES

Yes, yes. I could not believe the numbers we would come across positive for syphilis.

ESPINO

Would this be from all ages, married, not married?

ARELLANES

That I don't remember. These were mostly through blood tests for their marriage license, for marriage. They have to have that blood work. I don't recall if people were surprised, because I didn't give the results, obviously. Were people surprised they had syphilis? Probably didn't even know what was going on with their own bodies, because you just didn't know those things in those days. You just went out and had fun and did whatever you did. I mean, now we have HIV, we have Chlamydia, I mean, there's so many venereal diseases now, it's really unbelievable.

ESPINO

At the time, were condoms popular? There's the stereotype, and it's not just for Latin men, it's for all men, that men don't like wearing condoms.

ARELLANES

Right.
ESPINO
Do you remember that being—
ARELLANES
Oh, yes, I remember that, and condoms weren't something that we promoted. I don't remember having them in stock in the clinic. I think we concentrated on birth control for the female. We provide birth control pills and classes. I don't remember condoms being an issue. I think that's one of those things that [demonstrates]. You know, one of those things. I just don't recall them being something that was really promoted within the clinic.
ESPINO
Also culturally, was it something—like today, my son, sex education, condoms are even given to the kids.
ARELLANES
That's right, at schools.
ESPINO
I mean, it's heavily promoted.
ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
At that time, sex education, even your own experience with sex education in the schools, do you recall what—
ARELLANES
There was no such thing.
ESPINO
No such thing as sex education?
ARELLANES
Oh, no, back in the sixties, no, because we were supposed to be good girls and good boys, and people just had babies and maybe got married. I don't remember. But, yes, there was no such thing as sex education. Can you imagine?
ESPINO
I can't. I can't imagine that. All these young people getting into relationships without really understanding their body.
ARELLANES
Exactly, and that's why we would always go to the high schools. We were near Garfield.
ESPINO

Can you explain or maybe tell me about a scenario one time you went and what was an example of one of your experiences at a high school? Do you recall?
ARELLANES
No. We would just pass out those flyer or we'd give them to kids who were volunteering and say, "Pass these out to your friends," because I think the schools would not have allowed us to do that.
ESPINO
To actually go in and—
ARELLANES
As part of curriculum or training or education. No. And then the flyer was geared toward young people, so I had drawn a lady—this is one of my favorite little symbols. It's like an upside-down heart, and then I had a little head with the little curly hairs and then the hand waving, and I had a peace [unclear], and then it would list the services at the clinic. To me, that was a way to draw in young people. They could relate to something like that, rather than a white doctor's jacket saying, "Syphilis can kill you. Venereal disease, gonorrhea is bad." Gonorrhea was very high in those days, gonorrhea and syphilis, and that's what we were trying to prevent.
ESPINO
Mostly would you get women coming in, young women, or would you also get men coming in?
ARELLANES
I think both. I think, well, once again, we didn't promote—condoms were not an item of promotion in those days. We concentrated on the birth control for young women.
ESPINO
Then let me just see if I can tie something in to what was happening nationally, because there were clinics opening up in different parts of the U.S. There was the whole Community Health Movement of bringing these small community clinics, and I don't know if your clinic was a part of that whole larger movement or something that kind of sprung out out of your activism in East Los Angeles, but family planning was huge.
ARELLANES
That's true, yes.
ESPINO

There was a lot of money being poured in. Do you recall getting money from the federal government for it, or where did the birth control come from? Was it something that you consciously bought?
ARELLANES
The county would provide all our supplies and all our lab requirements. I mean, we could draw blood in the clinic, but we would transport it to the county. They would have a courier come and pick it up. I know family planning, now that you mention it, that was a big thing, and perhaps we referred people to those clinics also. I'm not remembering all of that real good, but, yes, family planning was big and it was just starting. But once again, we didn't have what we have now in terms of the sexually transmitted diseases that we had. It was mostly gonorrhea and syphilis. Birth control was an issue.
ESPINO
I guess my question is, did they encourage you to push one thing over another by giving you more of this or more of that or any kind of instructions?
ARELLANES
I'm not sure. I'm really not sure. Just knowing me, I would base it on my needs for my community. Whatever I felt was a big need in the community, I would seek out who provides that and try and get it. I wouldn't want things that weren't useful to us.
ESPINO
Like, for example, you probably didn't have the capacity to insert IUDs [intrauterine device] and that kind of thing.
ARELLANES
Yes, we did.
ESPINO
You did?
ARELLANES
Yes, birth control, all forms of birth control. We had IUDs. What else? The pill. There was another one. The gels.
ESPINO
The diaphragm?
ARELLANES
Diaphragms, that was the other one, yes.
ESPINO
Do you remember which was more popular at that time?

ARELLANES
I think the IUD was.
ESPINO
Really?
ARELLANES
Yes, because I think a diaphragm is removable, if I recall correctly. IUDs stayed in for a longer period of time. So I think because some people would forget to take the pill, the birth control pill. So as I recall, I think it was the IUD.
ESPINO
Did you do any of that counseling yourself?
ARELLANES
No, no, I always left that to people who had the knowledge, the training, the education for it.
ESPINO
Do you remember who that was in your clinic? Was it a psychologist or social worker or nurse or doctor?
ARELLANES
Social worker, one of them. I had two social workers. Carlos Souza was one.
ESPINO
Really? He would counsel the women on—
ARELLANES
I guess, yes. And I had another male nurse, male psychologist, Luis Oropeza. My goodness, I'm remembering their names. I can even see them. Then we had other people who would do, like, education classes. So I would leave it to people who had that background, rather than try and do it all.
ESPINO
Would you give the requests, as far as the order of what you needed, the supplies? Would you order the supplies for the clinic?
ARELLANES
Either myself or Andrea [Sanchez], because Andrea was my assistant, and so I would tell her what was needed, and she used to love to go over to the county health clinic, for some reason. She used to love to do that, and occasionally I would go over there and just let them remember who I was and what my needs were. Also with the county hospital, I had administrators who would help me with things.

ESPINO
Do you remember a Dr. Robert Tranquata [phonetic]? Does that name sound familiar, Tranquata?
ARELLANES
Not at all.
ESPINO
He was running, at that time, the clinic within a clinic at the county. I don't know if you recall it. It was called Med Ocho, Med Eight, eighth floor. It was the all-Spanish-speaking floor on the eighth level.
ARELLANES
At the hospital?
ESPINO
At the county hospital, around that time in the early seventies. It was an experiment, kind of like what the Community Health Movement that your clinic sort of represents, is this experiment in bringing services to a wider population.
ARELLANES
I wish I could really be clear about that, but, no, I don't remember that. It was for all health issues?
ESPINO
The idea was to have one family doctor that the patient could see over time, versus going just for emergencies.
ARELLANES
That makes so much sense. That is so much more comfortable.
ESPINO
Did you have that kind of—exactly what was the objective of the El Barrio Free Clinic?
ARELLANES
Well, the objective was to provide health services. I just came across an old card that I did not give to Cal State L.A. because it was stained with something around it, and I will look for that for you, and it just said "El Barrio Free Clinic" and then the services that we provided. We had a well-baby clinic, from what I recall on there. There was probably about eight different little bullets there, so it was quite a lot of services. I do remember we had a pediatrician, Craig McMillan. He was our pediatrician, so he loved the babies. He used to love to work with the babies. So we had clinics for babies and children. We did have a gynecologist. I can't

recall his name. So he would do the female issues. Then we had lab people. We had psychologists. We had counselors. What else did we have? We had RNs that would come in. This was all volunteer. They never got paid for anything. They had their job during the day, came to the clinics in the evening. So we had regular clinic days, like every Wednesday would be well-baby clinic, maybe. I'm just giving an example, but I do know that we had a regular rotating schedule, so people could get used to, yes, the doctor's there on this day.

ESPINO

And have some consistency.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

How did you keep everybody—the morale? I'm thinking in any workplace, especially if you're not getting paid, did people just feel good about what they were doing? It seems like there needs to be a leader also to keep everybody's spirits.

ARELLANES

We always had fun. We always laughed. Dr. McMillan, he was hilarious. Afterwards, we would either sit and talk, kind of unwind. We had Christmas parties, things like that. I remember exposing so many people to tamales. They had never had tamales. [laughs] I'd have parties at my home that they would come to. I think it was the kind of personalities they brought were these people that loved doing what they did. Because they didn't get paid. They came after work and worked till nine p.m. sometimes, so long days for people who were very dedicated in what they believed in.

Then sometimes we'd get them on the weekends. "Can you come out? We're going to do an immunization drive." We'd go to the housing projects and we'd knock on the doors and say, "We're going to be out here tomorrow with a van, a nurse, and a doctor, and your children can get their immunizations, and there's no cost, nothing. Just show up." The next day, well, we'd bring the van, we'd go knock on the doors again, "Okay, we're down here," and we'd get a lot of people coming out. We went to Estrada Courts and did that. I remember that project, doing that. It was always a lot of work. We were always on the go and always looking for something to do. We also had fundraisers where we had fun. They were great

dances. We had a zoot-suit party one time. We asked people to come in zoot suits. We would go down to Pabst Blue Ribbon and buy really cheap beer, really cheap beer, and we'd take it out of the cans and put it into pitchers so that it would look like we were doing keg beer. The next day people would ask us why did they have gas and why were they farting. [laughs]

ESPINO

That's funny.

ARELLANES

We'd just laugh. We'd make foods, little snack foods. So we always had that going. It was fun. It was work. It was hard work, but we'd always sit and laugh. That's what I always remember is laughing a lot and just talking about issues.

ESPINO

A lot of the literature talks about how nationalistic, for example, the Brown Berets were, the cultural nationalism of the Brown Berets. Did you feel like you were working in isolation of other groups? Because it sounds like you had these white doctors, and I'm thinking white nurses as well.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

Did you feel like you were in solidarity with them, or did you feel like they didn't understand the community?

ARELLANES

No, I always felt they understood the community, but they weren't afraid to come into the community. I also remembered something. We had a group of nurses that had been nuns and priests. They left the church. I remember they came. I was just reading something about that group the other day. I mean, they were wonderful people, very, very dedicated to what they believed in. But once again, nationalism, okay, with the women we didn't promote that. I mean, we were proud of who we were. It was the men who were the very, you know—but they didn't run the clinic. They weren't there on the day-to-day basis and to do the daily work. So that's why when we left as women, they didn't know how to run that clinic. They didn't know what to do with it. They didn't know the staff that was working there, the doctors and the nurses and the lab people. They could look at the clinic schedule, but they didn't know

how to put that together. So that was their loss. But we turned around and opened up another clinic, and we didn't concentrate on that nationalism anymore. In art, we did. We always had murals and things.
I want to tell you a story about my father, who was very conservative, didn't like what I did in the Chicano Movement, he just thought it was horrible, because I didn't follow his dream for me to be married, have children, or be highly educated. I had asked him one time—he did wrought-iron work. So I told him, "Could you make me some bench frames, weld together some frames, and then I'll get them reupholstered?" He said, "I want to see your clinic first." I said, "Oh, Dad, I'd be so happy if you did." I called him Daddy. So him and my mom came. This is the one on Whittier Boulevard, very small, lots of murals of [unclear] Zapata, the front I had done in [unclear]. It said "El Barrio Free Clinic," and we had posters up. He walked through and he looked in each room, and he would shake his head [demonstrates]. I'm looking, like, "Oh, boy, he's liking it! He likes it!" He walks out the front door and he goes, "You are a communist." I did one of—"Okay, we're done. We're done." And I never got along with him. I think he went to his death thinking I was a communist because what he saw was just too radical, I guess. I don't know. "That's not what a clinic looks like." [laughs]
ESPINO
That's so interesting, because what does communist imply? What did it imply to you when he said that? I mean, you couldn't think today what does communist mean, but at that moment when he said that—
ARELLANES
In those days, communists were—well, first we had the [Joseph R.] McCarthy era, and then afterwards we had where everybody who was doing these revolutionary, radical things, militant things were considered to be communists. It was a way to divide people, make them fear you. My dad feared it, apparently. That's the worst thing his daughter could become. I remember one time my brother—my brother was a Brown Beret also. He's passed already. He went to the clinic. He was ill. We happened to have some news media in there that night interviewing patients, with my approval, and they had interviewed me. Well, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]

took that information and put it in the House of Un-American Activities Report and said that I ran the free clinic, Gloria Arellanes, Brown Beret, her brother had been interviewed when, in fact, he is a Brown Beret. So what? Brown Berets don't get sick? And because of that, I was put in that report. It's just that's what they did. That's what they did. Special Operations Conspiracy, Sergeant Armas, you know, a whole unit just out to get radical people, thinking Andrea was me, saying he finally got me. I mean, we were always having to deal with that, that harassment, and it was harassment. Here was a legitimate clinic function going on. Did people do illegal things? Yes, they did. But in the clinic, no. I was very protective of that clinic. I was Mama Bear there. You don't mess with my clinic or my clients or my patients or my services. The board had to answer to me, and I went to the board for certain things. It was composed of various medical disciplines and some community people. Se we had that board of directors. I could function on all those levels and deal with these people.

ESPINO

Right, with the grassroots, the young woman that needs some advice about birth control or abortion, or maybe not abortion but pregnancy, and then these high-level doctors at the County Hospital and everybody else in between. It's incredible what you were—

ARELLANES

Yes. I always was able to communicate at all those different levels, and I still can. I find when I sit with some people, I seek out certain people and I love starting to talk to them and find out information. It's very interesting. I love people, period, you know, and I just love talking to them, and I could never stop talking sometimes. [laughs]

ESPINO

So how did you feel when your father called you that? Do you remember your emotion?

ARELLANES

Oh, I just, "I'm done." I was like, "Why do I try anymore? This is what he thinks of me. I can't change his mind." I thought by going there he would see, "Oh, okay, you really do have a clinic here." No, he thought I'm a communist. That was the only thing he got out of it. But, you know, he built me those benches.

ESPINO

So on the one hand, he was supporting you, but he couldn't say it.

ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
Was he like that through his whole life?
ARELLANES
Yes. Oh, you talk about macho, head of household. He called my mother "Cuca," and he would lay in that back bedroom there and he would call her, not "Honey." He would say, "Cuca!" Her name was Laura. And this is why I never got married. My mother could not understand that, because I saw my dad the way he was, snap, snap, [slaps hands], "Come here," subservient, and I said, "Nobody puts a boot on my neck. Nobody." That's not really good when you get age sixty-five and you say, gee, I wish I had a companion to help me. [laughs]
ESPINO
Wish I had a boot on my neck right now. [laughs]
ARELLANES
I would love somebody to talk to, just a friend, companion. And then getting involved with a heroin addict didn't make it any better. I just said, "No games."
ESPINO
That was your first serious relationship?
ARELLANES
Yes. Yes. And it just left me—and I always tell women, they go, "Well, you seem happy." I go, "I am happy. I am happy." But there's things I would like in life, especially now, but I would never advocate to you to do this. You have to be very strong. I think you have to be very strong to decide I'm going to do this as a single woman, I'm going to raise my children. And I think I did a really good job. My kids did not go into gangs. They did not go into drugs. Maybe a little weed smoking once in a while, some beer drinking, but not to excess. Both of them got educated. One is a Ph.D., the other one works and he went to trade tech. He didn't want to work as hard. Now he realizes he's in school now, school is a better way to get around. So he's like me, took him a little bit longer. [laughs]
ESPINO
Everybody's got their own path.
ARELLANES

Yes. Not everybody can go to school. I completely agree with that, because when I was helping all those people in the clinic, "Pursue your education if you're really interested in pursuing this health career," and they did. Then all of a sudden I realized, I didn't take advantage of that. I could have, but I didn't. But it's okay, you know. It's okay. It is what it is.

ESPINO

Did you ever feel like you were so busy taking care of everybody else that you didn't spend enough time?

ARELLANES

Yes, yes, and that's that nurturer in me, that's that counselor, that's that one that's going to save everybody, and that is me. That is me. Now as an elder, people come to me and want my counsel and my advice, and one of the things as an elder you have to learn is to keep your mouth shut, listen, listen, listen, listen and just kind of, "Uh-huh, uh-huh," and try to ask a question here and there to make the person come out more, and then you give your opinion. I was always opinionated, period. So now I've learned how to be a little bit more relaxed and listen a bit more, and still be able to say, "Have you tried this? Have you thought about this? Why don't you do this?" I still work with people in that manner on a smaller scale, but I guess that's always going to be me. That's just my personality, my character, and my nurturing. Women are nurturers, period. All females who have children are nurturers. We're life givers. We give life and we develop life. If you have a man in your life, he also shares in that, but women have a very major role with children. Even with your parents. Because it kind of reverses, right?

ESPINO

Yes.

ARELLANES

Parents kind of become the ones that need to be nurtured. I find myself kind of reverting in some of behaviors to kind of childlike. I'm getting more stubborn than ever. I drive my sons crazy. [laughs]

ESPINO

I wonder if you would let them take care of you.

ARELLANES

No. I had a major heart attack and a triple bypass, and I came out of the hospital and I wanted to do everything. My son literally

moved from Arizona to come take care of me, gave up his job to come here, and I got him so angry because I couldn't—He wanted to do everything for me. It was like when I was hospitalized ten days, laying there watching TV, they cooked the food for me, I'm attached to the IV, I went bananas. I have to move. I have to do. That's my energy. I remember just heating some water for tea one time and I lifted the thing, and he got so mad at me. I told him, "I can do this." Because they gave me a big heart to hold against my heart, because they cut me from here down to here, mid chest, and literally took my heart out of my chest. They crack your—

ESPINO

Right, your ribcage.

ARELLANES

Then they took my heart out, put it on a machine, they bypassed and replaced arteries, and then put it in, super-glued me together. It's amazing. [laughs] I love medical things, and I always want to see. I wish I could have had that thing, though, the little mirror over me to see, but they put you in La La Land, stick a horrible thing down your throat. But he was so upset. And then I'd go outside and sneak and do yardwork. Same thing with my legs when I had the surgery. He promised me, "Just give me a week, Mom. Do nothing. Give me a week." "Okay. Okay." But he left one time, so I snuck outside, and he happened to come home. He goes, "You couldn't do it."

I said, "I can't stand it anymore." [laughs] I just have that kind of energy. I really believe the more you move, the faster you heal.

ESPINO

Right. That's the thinking. What was it like for you, then, when you had to leave the clinic?

ARELLANES

You know, I was pregnant and I was already in my thirties, and I kind of decided, you know, I needed to devote myself to my children, and that made me leave. I did try to go back to the clinic and they did not hire me, because I had such different thinking. I would not accept federal funds. I never allowed that clinic to have federal funds, because I wanted no control over our activities. That was one of their questions, "Would you accept federal funds?" And I go, "I don't want to accept them, but if I find something acceptable,

I would." They didn't like my answers. They wanted somebody—this is by the board.
ESPINO
What year would this be?
ARELLANES
Oh, gosh. Let's see. I was pregnant with my first son. He was born in '73, so I had left the clinic in '70, I believe.
ESPINO
In '76 you would have been thirty years old.
ARELLANES
I was older. Wow. I don't know. Dates I'm real, real bad at. But I know I did try to go back, and they said no. They did not rehire me. This is why I developed a résumé. I was reapplying to the clinic.
ESPINO
So the résumé that you have at Cal State Los Angeles is from that, that job application?
ARELLANES
Yes. Yes. I just wasn't giving them the answers that they wanted, because that's how I had run the clinic all those years. I ran it with no federal funds whatsoever because of the controls federal government put it on us and the information that they wanted in return.
ESPINO
What did they want in return?
ARELLANES
Oh, they want real specific, name, address, date, place of birth, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.
ESPINO
Of people who come in?
ARELLANES
Yes, of every patient, and I was not going to give them that, because I allowed people to give me whatever they wanted to give me. I said, "If your name is black spider, I don't care. Black widow, I don't care. Just put whatever you want."
ESPINO
Because it seems like you weren't opposed to the federal government's money, because you worked for Teen Post. So if you could explain exactly what was your opposition to the—
ARELLANES

My opposition was the information that they wanted. Now, when I worked for NAPP and Teen Post, I had no idea this was federal government doing these programs, even though I was aware of the anti-poverty program that was taking place, but didn't understand all the politics of it and I was not involved in any data-gathering. Did people fill out applications to be a participant as a teen? I don't know. I did as an employee; I'm aware of that. But I don't know if they took information on the kids, or did they just say we have two male, three females today? I don't know because I didn't work in that area.

With the clinic, I was very aware, especially when the Catholic Church withdrew its money because we did abortion counseling, and that didn't mean counseling that we were doing abortions. We didn't do abortions there. It was just alternatives to an unwanted pregnancy. They said that was not sufficient, that we had to promote rhythm method, which is—talk about caveman mentality. I remember a priest coming to our clinic and walking down those stairs with somebody else and then making the decision that after they looked at everything, they said no. He said no. I was just like, "I don't care." We were able to get grants. I used to write grants.

ESPINO

Then the grants would come from?

ARELLANES

Gee, I don't remember who I used to apply. Probably foundations.

ESPINO

Ford Foundation or Rockefeller [Foundation]?

ARELLANES

Foundations, I don't remember the names, and I didn't keep any of that information or any of the grants that I wrote, but I did used to write the grants, and then probably had the professional staff go over it and doctor it up and put the pretty words in.

ESPINO

That's a lot of work. Grant-writing is huge.

ARELLANES

Yes. It wasn't as massive as a request is these days. I belong to the Native American Healing Center, which is a Native American clinic, and every month we have these meetings. I'm on the board, and I hear about the grant research that they do, and it's just like, my gosh, there's tons of grants and most of them are saying no.

ESPINO
Even after you put all that work in, you still don't get it.
ARELLANES
Yes. There are some that say yes every once in a while. So I would imagine in those days it was just much easier to request grants, and there was a lot more available, perhaps. Now everybody wants one.
ESPINO
There was a real focus on the community empowerment, and health was one of the—maybe not for other things, but healthcare was one of the big—
ARELLANES
Yes, and the need, I think, was very evident, just by our numbers that we were able to draw, and we started with nothing. We didn't even have a pencil. Everything was donated. That's pretty amazing, when you think about it. Everything was donated, from the furniture to the supplies to whatever we needed.
ESPINO
That was you and Andrea receiving everything and asking—
ARELLANES
Yes, me and Andrea and other people saying, "Look, I got a hold of this today," or some of the doctors would come and say, "They won't miss this one." [laughter]
ESPINO
I love that.
ARELLANES
So I mean, we had all kinds of things come in to us. We had our own telescopes to look at slides, and I remember learning a lot from that too. "Look, Gloria, look, let me show you what this is." [laughs] It was just a great time of learning and sharing and fun and yet accomplishing something very major. I actually tried—based on what I had done in the past, I was working in San Gabriel with the YTEP, Youth Training and Employment Project, another anti-poverty program, and that was a summer program. They did the lunch thing and this and that. I had to hire the kids, and I worked with a lot of the kids from the neighborhood. But one of the things they asked me to do was start a clinic here, and I went to the people that had helped me with the East L.A. Free Clinic, El Barrio Free Clinic, the administrators at County Hospital, and they said, "You had an

amazing foundation for your clinic. I don't see it in this clinic," and they would not help me. Because I was just trying to put a little neighborhood check-kids kind of clinic, nothing really massive like the other clinic. But they said my foundation was so well built on the other clinic that they couldn't see investing in this little clinic. But eventually they did get a doctor and did the exams and those kinds of things, because there is a nursery preschool there at this Community Center, La Casa Community Center in San Gabriel. I had worked there for quite a while.

ESPINO

Did you have a problem with that, or did you think that they were wrong or—

ARELLANES

No, I understood what they were saying, because when I started thinking about it, yes, I did have a foundation. I had a board. I had a whole support group behind me. I had already people who wanted to "Let's get up and go." It was more than Andrea. It was a lot of supporters and workers. That's very true.

ESPINO

Can you remind me of the woman's name who was the initial, I guess, fundraiser?

ARELLANES

Psychologist for community action, Rona Fields. She's in New York.

ESPINO

Did she stay with it though the whole—

ARELLANES

She did, and she got to where she was driving us crazy. I remember somebody donated—it was actually an exquisite leather chair, beautiful red leather, and she kept on saying, "I want that chair." We'd look at her and say, "You've got a house, a mansion, in Altadena." She goes, "Well, [unclear]." And I finally told her, "You know what? Take the damn chair. Take it." She was like a whining little child, "I want it, I want it, I want it." It became just a material thing to me, "Take it. I'll ask my dad to make these benches." [laughs] She took the chair, and then we eventually kind of [unclear]. She started writing in her dissertation about us. We were Berets at that time, and she wrote some not kinds things, things like one of the women was involved in witchcraft, and she wrote some things that were not kind to us.

ESPINO
Were they untrue?
ARELLANES
There was somebody kind of dabbling with that on her own personal life, but not in the clinic. That wasn't a practice. She believed in [Spanish term]. She wrote some other things about people, and I just didn't like it because she hung around us and then took information about us for her dissertation. So I felt she used us.
ESPINO
Did you feel that she also misrepresented you and what you did?
ARELLANES
Absolutely, absolutely. When she first came in, she was very resourceful, very good to work with, but she changed over a couple of years to where I couldn't have her around me.
ESPINO
Was she trying to control things, do you feel?
ARELLANES
No, no, it was just her [Spanish word]. [laughs]. Wanting to know [unclear], always [unclear], then to find out she wrote about us was very upsetting. She didn't let us know that from the get-go.
ESPINO
You had no idea she was doing the research when she was spending time with you?
ARELLANES
No, no, and she may have said that, but I didn't realize at the level she was writing about us. It was not very appealing. From what I read and I know other people have read it and they thought it was very unkind, not very good. In fact, I may have a copy of that, I think.
ESPINO
It would be interesting to see that.
ARELLANES
I think Dionne [Espinoza] got in touch with her and I think I have a copy of that. That's really interesting. Why is it in my head that I may have a copy of that?
ESPINO
So you cut ties with her after—
ARELLANES

Yes, because she became so demanding and wanting things and feeling that she was entitled. This was something that was donated, and I couldn't see someone like that, who was financially very comfortable, wanting a chair. I guess I used it as a symbol to really judge her and say, "Yeah, take the damn chair and get out of here," which she did.

ESPINO

So she wasn't useful anymore, as far as fundraising or as far as—

ARELLANES

No.

ESPINO

Did she ever sit on the board?

ARELLANES

She may have. Now, this was one of David's [Sanchez] contacts. He's the one that brought her in. I got along with her fine, and she had a purpose at one time, but it changed over that time. So I just got to where, "You're in my way, lady, and you're not wanted here."

ESPINO

What was David's role during that whole early period?

ARELLANES

The early period, he was the one that kind of got these people together and organized for a clinic. I never went to the meetings, so I really wasn't given all the information. He may have talked to me about it, but it just kind of [demonstrates], free clinic. I'd never worked in a clinic. Health? I'm not into health. I'm more cultural, more community activism. He just came in one day, he says, "You're going to run the free clinic." I go, "I don't want to run the free clinic." He goes, "No, you're going to run the free clinic." In fact, on a panel a couple years ago, I had not seen David in years. He was sitting next to me. He was on the panel. So he started talking about the clinic, and I go, "As I recall, David, you did not give me a choice as to if I wanted to run that. You assigned it to me." Then he said, "That's the privilege of being a leader," or something like that. At that point, I wanted to kick him under the table. I just [demonstrates]. Everybody laughed about it. He's very interesting, very interesting, but he has a very closed vision to certain things, how he sees things, and doesn't recall the true history, because he always says that we took things from the clinic and left him without, and that's not true. We did not. I didn't take

anything. In fact, I lost a desk of my dad's in there, plus the benches he made. [laughs] I went in and asked the owner if those things were there, and he says no, nothing.
He also blamed white women's liberation, that we were women's libbers, that's what had created this drift within the organization. That's not true. It was something that had been building for a long, long time.
ESPINO
That's fascinating that your father is calling you a communist, David is calling you a women's libber, and if you really look at those philosophies, they're not really horrible things, and yet you feel like it's an insult. So what was it about him calling you a women's libber that was insulting?
ARELLANES
At that time, we had been promoting all this time, you know, [Spanish term], "We walk next to our man, never behind." In reality, we were behind, because we were doing the kitchen work, we were doing all the secretarial work, the cleaning and all the gofer stuff, you know, and some major organizing things, but not getting credit for it. I think I always had this philosophy, in order to be accepted, because they said, "They accept you, Gloria," and I said, "Because I work ten times harder than what is normal." I had to really work hard to be accepted by the male leadership and be outspoken and not take "no" and not step back, and be in the face, where the other women were not willing to do that, I guess, but they knew that I would protect them. They knew I would always speak up for them and protect them. I think Andrea had made that statement, "Gloria always took care of everything and us." So for him to call me a white libber at that point in time, white women's liberation was take your bra off, burn your bra. They were still activists, but we couldn't relate to that. Culturally it was just not something we wanted to do or thought it was liberating to do that. It was liberating for us to see our community come up, be organized, go to school and get better housing and health, get jobs. That was liberating for us. Stop the police harassment, the brutality that went on, the racism that went on. White women did not have to deal with all those things, had understanding of those things, I really believe, but didn't have to deal with them like we did. The poverty that was in the community, number one.

So for him to call me that was kind of insulting, but I didn't care what he thought about me. I really didn't care. I knew who I was, and whatever he had in his mind was his problem. So, yes, they would always come at the women. There was always something wrong with the women. They were never pointing out about the men.

ESPINO

Right, like sexism or sexual harassment or—

ARELLANES

Yes, the abuse they did. In the books that I read, it was always about the men. It was always about the men until people started to realize, oh, the women really did do all the work. People started finding me and wanting to write about me, and it was very hard for me to come back, in a way, and it took me forty years to accept my own personal history and to recognize that I had something to do with women or feminism. See, at that time, feminism would have been a—"Oh, no, I'm not a feminist. No." But now in understanding, yes, I was. Yes, I was, but was afraid to mention that because that was connected to something else. No, in introspect, I now say, "You know what? Yes, you were part of something. You gave birth to something besides a child." [laughs]

ESPINO

You didn't have that word to describe it.

ARELLANES

No.

ESPINO

Do you embrace it now or do you call it something else?

ARELLANES

I embrace it now, and it took me the longest time, because I know other women were saying, "Oh, Chicano feminists, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no." But now I understand, yes, yes, we were, and too bad we weren't empowered at that time. Maybe some of the women—the majority of the women that were part of the Brown Berets will not speak to people now. They don't want to be interviewed. Some have come close to getting—we almost got a reunion together and then they backed off. I'm the only one that's willing to talk, and it kind of hurts, because we had such good times. My memories are fading and I would love to talk to people who were involved with me, that were so close to me at one time. I

was very close to a lot of people. Lorraine Escalante, that's Alicia's daughter. Andrea Sanchez. Esther Sanchez, she baptized my son. Let's see. Yolanda Solis, she's passed away already. There's Dominquez, I saw her one time at a sweat lodge, and then I never saw her again. Just some of those. Arlene Sanchez has passed away; that's David's sister. Andrea and Hilda Reyes. I was in touch with Hilda for a long, long time via Internet, just emailing back and forth, and then, poof, she's gone, and I can't find her. Nobody knows how to get a hold of her. She was living in Tennessee, back in the South. But we had great email conversations. So now I'm the only one that will speak.

ESPINO

Sounds like you've made a huge impact in the community. If you could talk to some of those people who walked in there, what would they say?

ARELLANES

Yes, I would love that, because people have relied on the men to give their interpretation of me. Carlos Montes is very complimentary. He always was. He was always very supportive of the women, but, of course, he was gone for a very long time. I think he told one interviewer when he was being interviewed about the women, he said, "Gloria always had a way of speaking that you had to listen." [laughs] [unclear] listen. But I know I was very, very outspoken in those days, and I think with age I have mellowed a lot, plus being an elder and learning to live in balance culturally now as a Native American woman, it's a little bit different. Ralph Ramirez, I have not spoken to him. I've seen him a couple of times. I went to one reunion where there was a lot of people that I hadn't seen in over twenty years, and that was just wonderful. Then the last reunion was twenty years after, forty years after the Moratorium, the first Moratorium, and that was wonderful to see people that I didn't recognize because we're aging, and in your mind, your eye and your mind keep people—you look at them as you did forty years ago, and then when you see them, you're kind of like, really? Then you wonder about yourself. Wow, you know. [laughs] It's very interesting, but it was very beautiful to come back with people, and it's hard to try and explain to them who I am.

ESPINO

You don't think they can get it?

ARELLANES
After forty years, no.
ESPINO
They expect you to be that same outspoken—
ARELLANES
Yes. What they remember of me, I think they don't get the cultural change I've gone through.
ESPINO
Were you angrier then or did you carry a lot of anger?
ARELLANES
Oh, I believe I was, I was. Yes, I was mad at the system, mad at the system. I would go down the street yelling with everybody. I've always been very creative in my mind, always coming up with ideas. To this day, I'm still very creative. I see things very differently and think, "Try this, try this. Let's do this." I don't have the following I used to now, but I really have been very blessed to have a creative mind and to always do something new and not settle in with—I love change. Most people don't like change. I love change. Physically, if I could move all my furniture around every day, probably once a week, I would do that. I used to do that, because I can't stand things to be the same. Change is important.
ESPINO
So what was it about David's inability to understand your position, or was it he was responding to what the men wanted to do, or he just didn't get what you were saying?
ARELLANES
We always got along with all the men, especially the younger men, maybe the ones that weren't considered the top leadership, more the [Spanish phrase] ones. We got along fine with them. I think with him, with David, I don't know if he held onto his beliefs so strongly that he was not going to give in to any difference, and that was one of the problems that I found with the Brown Berets is the stagnation in leadership, because all organizations go through that, because you're always growing. You always have a core of your leadership. There's always a core. I don't care what organization it is, you know who you can depend on, who's going to be there and back you up and so forth. The other ones are there to be supporters and help. They'll always want to be there.

But I think when your leadership stops growing and you want to know more, I think that's when you start getting unhappy and trying to change it, but it comes out with anger and frustration. So then you decide, "Okay, I'm not getting anyplace here. I've got to move on." You might find something else that might interest you or pique you a little bit more, like we went from the Brown Berets to the Moratorium and Las Adelitas, which we started that, but it didn't really take off because we got into the Moratorium. There was a lot of women interested in that. I do know that. Alicia Escalante was part of our group. But I think the inability to grow anymore, the stagnation is like a pond that gets all that bacteria, because there's no freshness running through it. So you go on and you seek something else or you create your own thing. And I did both.

ESPINO

So it wasn't just the fact that—last time you commented that some of the Berets would use the clinic at night, that kind of thing. It wasn't just that.

ARELLANES

That was just on top of everything else that was building. I think that was the biggest thing, really, especially after the gun was pulled on me, and you just reach a point where "I don't need to take this anymore." These guys are down the street messing with these car clubs and running into my clinic when a clinic's going on with children. Then you've got idiots coming over with guns, and I can't keep my big mouth shut. So, yeah, it just got to where, "I'm tired. We're tired of this. I want a change. I want it cleaned." And it didn't happen.

ESPINO

Was there some sort of discipline that the Brown Berets fell under if somebody did something out of line or didn't show up or said they were going to do something? Was it that organized in that manner?

ARELLANES

No, not organized in that manner. It was just you were chastised, you were talked about badly. Like a schoolteacher bringing in a student, saying, "Why did you do that? What's the problem here?" More turn against them or just—we weren't that sophisticated. People loved the Brown Berets. When we would go to other cities, they wanted chapters over in different cities, because they loved what Brown Berets had done. And I give them credit. You can never

take that away. They did something at a time when it was so new, it was so radical— [End of October 17, 2011 interview]

1.5. Session Five (October 24, 2011)

ESPINO
This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 24 [2011]. I'm interviewing Gloria Arellanes, even though she doesn't feel well today. Thank you for continuing the interview. We are in El Monte, California, at her home. I was listening to your interview from last week, and you said something really interesting, because we were talking about how you felt at the time when you were involved in all those different social justice activities, and you said you were just mad at the system. I was hoping you could explain that a little bit more to me. Try to take yourself back to that time. What did that mean to be mad at the system?
ARELLANES
First thing that comes to mind is I was very angry that I saw somebody beat up, brutally beat up by the police in Washington, D.C. on the Poor People's Campaign. When I came back and told people what I had seen, they said, "No, that doesn't happen." I mean, I saw several people beat up, and I had never seen that before. Then later I was to see my brother, he was a big guy, real big guy, like a big teddy bear, he was just standing on the side, there was a party, the police came in, and they got him and beat him up. He had welts on his head, knots. That made me angry to see those things. Then to not file charges on him and release him and put him in jail. He was working. And that made me angry. So a lot of things in the system that were occurring with people that were not fair, were not right, and there was no way to let—that people believed, unless it was happening to them. So those things made me angry. I think as a young person I carried that anger, and it came out with a big mouth [demonstrates] in the protests and the different marches and the meetings we attended. To always have people deny those issues were happening made me angry. It made me angry that in those days there was a connotation, the haves and the have-nots, so the poor versus those who are not poor. There

was no understanding of that and no compassion for it, no compassion.
Going on the Poor People's Campaign, going through the reservations and seeing how Native Americans lived in brick houses with sheets over the doors and the windows was not fair, to not have running water, gas, or electricity on a reservation, and to be denied how many sheep you can have when your income is a woven blanket, a beautiful art, that you cannot make more with a limited amount of sheep, that made me angry. It hurts. It's actually a pain, I think, more than anything, but it comes out as anger. I was young, I was energetic. I have different passions now. I still get very upset with abused children, abused elders. I just heard about a case this week in my own family, unfortunately, my auntie. I wish I could take her in, but I can't handle it right now health-wise. But to know that her daughter would treat her in a certain way is not acceptable, and so what comes to bite her in the behind is she's going to have to make it on her own, and she's never been out on her own. If she goes to jail, she will not survive in jail. Because she was stealing all her mom's money, wasn't feeding her. Those things occur all the time. When I worked in the county, I worked in child-abuse prevention, and day after day I read child-abuse reports. These are live children, and you're reading these reports, and it's unthinkable, the amount of children that have survived abuse, how scarred they are. And did they get help or not? That hurts.
When I see my grandson, who is so happy and so healthy and so blessed that he has the parents that he has, they would never think of abusing him in any way, and sometimes kids, you want to abuse them. [laughs] I'm just saying that in a joking manner, because I raised two boys and it was very difficult. There was times when it was hard, very, very hard, but I went to Tough Love and I learned how to deal with that and I learned how to be consistent and stand my line.
ESPINO
That's a little bit off what we were talking about, but the idea of raising two boys alone, that's an important part of your life and your experience.
ARELLANES
Absolutely.
ESPINO

So how did you manage as far as the discipline? Because in those days, not that long ago, but still I think it was okay to spank here or spank there. How did you survive those trying moments?

ARELLANES

I am confessing right now. I put something up on Facebook about the Flying Chancla. We always joked about Chanclas. Chola con Chello, before she was Chola con Chello, she was Connie Chanclas, and I always giggle with that, because it brings up certain visions. But when my kids were little, I used to spank them with my slipper until—and I'm going to laugh about this one, but it taught me—one time I kind of slapped my own breast, oh, boy, did that hurt, and I said, "That's it. That hurts." That was beyond hurting, right? So I had to learn how to do it verbally without physical, and when my younger one got—teenagers were very difficult. He had more trouble than my older boy. Because every child, they're never the same. Each child is unique. One is compliant. One is noncompliant. My younger one was not compliant and I put him in Tough Love, and I think that was the best thing I ever put in. Parents go to one group, kids go to another group, and so you can't be defiant with each other and fighting. Then we had to set rules when we talked. No yelling, no screaming, no walking out, and when we can't deal with it anymore, then you stop, and that works. That works. When you let a kid—and they have things to say. As parents, sometimes we think they don't have things to say. They do have things to say. They may not be right, because they think the world, the way they see it is, adults don't know anything. They carry that little bitterness with them, and eventually they become mature, hopefully. Some don't. I would rarely say that. But it was very hard as a single parent, but I never gave up.

ESPINO

How about in their school? Were you involved in any of the parent organizations? Were they here in El Monte?

ARELLANES

Yes, they were raised here in El Monte.

ESPINO

How did you feel about their public school experience?

ARELLANES

Well, I'm a product of the systems, and when we first moved out here, this was a new house in the fifties, early fifties, and the

schools were new. I think I got really good education from elementary and junior high, then high school, and then eventually I would go on to college when I was ready for it. But my boys, the schools are more overcrowded now. I think, from what I saw of bilingual classes, I thought was a waste, because they had my son in a bilingual class. He's not bilingual. I did not understand that. Is he supposed to be learning Spanish? Why doesn't he have a Spanish class? So I didn't understand that.
But I participated all the time by going to parent-teacher conferences, always keeping in touch. "My son's having a problem. What's going on?" Go meet with the counselors and so forth, meet with teachers if I had to, fight with teachers if I had to. I had a teacher come over here one time unannounced. My kids were latchkey kids. I went to work, and they knew the routine. You get ready. Okay. When Mom's gone, they're going to crank up the stereo, right? And probably where the windows are cracking, almost. One was in high school, one was in junior high, and this teacher came unannounced. He had not called me to say, "I'd like to meet with you, talk to you about your son. We've having some problems." He accused my kids of smoking weed, that he smelled something funny. So I went to see the principal and I said, "Never is that man to come on my property without my knowledge to talk to my sons. You deal with me, the parent. If my house smelled, he's implicating that it's marijuana. My kids were not smoking marijuana. Yes, they listen to loud music, I listen to loud music. If he comes again, I will file a child-abuse report." And the principal got very afraid, and that's how I dealt with that man. So when I'd see that little man, I would give him the stare. I could see him just kind of want to go away. [laughs]
ESPINO
I wonder what would possess him to come knock on your door.
ARELLANES
I don't know. I think they bully parents. How many parents are going to speak up? He did the wrong thing. I know my rights and I'm going to stand up for them, and I'll fight if I have to.
ESPINO
So how about their education? Do you feel like—
ARELLANES

I think my younger one kind of squandered his education. He was the more defiant one, and his answer to getting away from this environment, my home, me, his dominating mother, his controlling mother, it was always a thing. "Can I go out tonight?" Nine o'clock he would come. I'd be laying in bed already. "No." "Well, my friends are out there." I go, "Your friends don't live here. I don't care. No." I'd always get the slamming of the door. Well, I took the door off the hinges. That's what Tough Love teaches you. So what are you going to slam now? I carried bicycle wheels in my car. I carried telephones. At that time it was Nintendo. I carried those. Those were punishments. The phone. Took it all when I went to work. [laughs] You earn them back. I even went so far as one time—and this was Tough Love teachings, and I really believe in Tough Love.

ESPINO

Can you explain that? What is that?

ARELLANES

Tough Love is an organization where they bring parents and teenagers together, adolescents, young people, and they have this process where they'll take the parents into different talk groups, form different groups, and then they take the teens to a different section and they had their own discussion groups.

Before you come back into one group, you have to write a love note. "I liked this this week. This was good this week." "I did not like this this week. This is what we need to work on next week." And your bottom line. You always had a bottom line. "I will not tolerate your manipulation," was my bottom line. Every week I put, "I will not tolerate your manipulation." [laughs] He grew to learn that. I have so many examples of what my younger son did. He came one time—his tennis shoes were falling apart. But he had a habit of not coming home after school doing homework. He would hang out with friends. I would be really upset, because I was at work and he'd come whenever he felt like it. We're talking—he was like maybe fourteen. Not good. So he came, "I need new tennis shoes." I said, "Oh, you sure do. Okay. You come home tomorrow right after school, I will take you to get a brand-new pair of shoes." He did not come right home after school, and "I need new shoes!" Started having a tantrum. I go, "I think I already told you I agree with you, but you didn't come home, so you have to wait till I get paid next time." He put duct tape around his shoe. He looked like an

idiot, okay? [laughs] I just, "Oh, well." Well, next time he knew. He was here. Another time he came home—I used to cook full dinners for my kids, never fast food. We only went out maybe when I got paid. But I remember making fried chicken that night, had a vegetable and mashed potatoes. Then I'd clean everything, put it away. He hadn't come home at dinnertime, so I was already in bed. I hear [demonstrates] the microwave. So I get up, I go, "Oh, no, no, no, no. You weren't here at dinnertime. I'm sorry. This isn't a restaurant. You've got to put that stuff away. If you want to eat anything, there's peanut butter and jelly." He was so angry, but he put it away.

I went back to my room, and he knew if he wasn't home, peanut butter, jelly. "You don't get what we eat. I'm sorry." And eventually they learn. "If I want to eat something good, some of Mom's home cooking, I'm going to have to do this." Or, "We're going to go out tonight. I'm going to be home on time." So it was always that. You're always doing that. Another thing one time he did—I don't know what he did, and I was told, "Take their bed away and let them earn it one week at a time if they give you a good week. Keep a diary, and if they had a good week, write it down, what was good and what was bad." Then you also do this in Tough Love. I remember the first meeting, he told me, "Mom, I don't belong here. These kids are really bad." I said, "Oh, poor little angel. You're probably going to be just like them if you don't stop it. That's why you're going. No, no, don't give me that little song and dance." So he had to go.

ESPINO

"These kids are really bad." [laughter]

ARELLANES

Like he was perfect, you know. The other one that really was a really, really good example was he was having bad issues, bad time with me, so you know how kids, when school comes around—in those days there was no uniforms. They were talking about them. I bought the older one all his things for school, and Cesar was never around. That's my younger son. So I told him, "Okay, when you're ready for your school clothes, we're going to the Goodwill. You can have all you want. Ten dollars, I can buy you lots of clothes, lots of shoes. Yes, we'll do that."

"I don't want those." I said, "I'm sorry, when I went shopping, you were not around." So then the other alternative was, "Give me a good week and I'll buy you a shirt. I'll buy you a pair of shoes." That's how he got decent clothes. I mean, there's nothing wrong with Goodwill. I like Goodwill myself. But new clothes, that's really important to kids.

ESPINO

What was in fashion.

ARELLANES

Right. At that time the Nikes were $75, expensive things, you know. So he learned how to get a shirt, get a pair of pants, whatever he needed, but it was one a week. Or we could go to Goodwill or a secondhand store, get whatever he wanted. He became like the model. The counselor would say, "Cesar, tell them how it's done." I don't know what he said, but they would use him as an example how to, and he was manipulating me, right? But in a positive way.

ESPINO

He was giving you what you wanted.

ARELLANES

Exactly.

ESPINO

But it was good behavior.

ARELLANES

He was earning it. He was earning it. So we did that. When he turned eighteen, he was already in Arizona. He wanted to go to a Trade-Tech and live out on his own. I said, "Good. You can learn how to buy your own toilet paper." [laughs]

He wrote me a beautiful card saying, "Thank you for doing what you did for me," because he looked at his friends who didn't have a mother or parents who held reins on them, and he says, "I am very blessed, and I understand what you were doing then. Didn't understand it then, but now I do and I want to thank you. I'm glad I'm not like some of my friends." So that was the best piece of news I ever got.

ESPINO

Where did you find the time to go to these classes and to cook home-cooked meals for them?

ARELLANES

I did. I worked, came home.

ESPINO
A typical day, what would that look like?
ARELLANES
I used to go into work really early, like at six-thirty. I always tried to get really early hours to get out about three-thirty. Then I'd come home, usually pick him up at high school, and the other one would come home on his own. Well, no, he was already out of high school, so he was going to college already. Then I'd start cleaning whatever I had to clean, you know, and then start cooking. If we had these meetings, they were once a week. We'd get ready for that and go. So it's amazing when you're young, you have time. I mean, you're busy, busy, busy, busy, but, you know. I was always team mom with the baseball, so I was always there for his games, any sports that both my boys were involved in, because my other boy played football. He played high school and college football. He was at University of Redlands and also Rio Hondo College. So we'd go, even if it was in the rain. We'd just be having fun sitting under an umbrella and laughing at them trying to dirty their white uniforms. So I always tried to support my kids. My older boy was in wrestling. What else did he do? My younger one tried football, but he could not handle the coach telling him what to do.
ESPINO
Can you say that they had some of those qualities when they were younger, when they were children?
ARELLANES
Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. My older boy was always the sweet lovable child. Everybody just loved him, you know, and he was the first grandchild. Then my mom passed away. She only got to know my younger one for about a year. He doesn't remember her. But my younger one, I can remember when I'd scold him, tell him to stop doing something, I remember I used to—my thing, because I wasn't working at that time, I was home on welfare, maybe I was going to school at that time, was plants, houseplants. My yard is filled with plants. I love greenery. He knew exactly what to do to me. I remember him just going up to the plant and looking at me and just crunch it. It was like stabbing my heart. That's how it felt. I had another plant outside. It was a daisy. I love daisies. It was right near my door. He did the same thing. He pulled it out of the roots. I just said, "This child is mean." And he still has an anger problem to

this day. He doesn't show it very often, but when he does, it's like, "You're not the child I raised. Wow."

ESPINO

Looking back, do you think that you could have used some help from their father or a male figure, a male role model?

ARELLANES

My brother was alive at the time, and he was kind of their Uncle Bill. That was the only male role they got. They loved him, but he wasn't really great at being a positive image. He had his own set of issues. [laughs] And I had friends that would always come and visit, and relatives also. I had uncles that would come and see them. But they didn't get close to anybody, I could really say, other than I had a really good friend, her boyfriend, they just loved him. We were always over at their house, or they were always here.

So they were around males, but, no, I was the disciplinarian, I was the one who would take them out and buy them things and things like that. I don't think I ever felt I needed help. I think I was so headstrong and felt like this is what I wanted, because I did it without benefit of marriage. I decided no marriage for me and that I could do this as a single woman. A lot of young women used to tell me, "I wish I could be like you," blah, blah, blah. I would say, "It is not easy." I would never say do it. I would never say that. You have to be a very strong person and know what you want, and my whole thing was teaching my kids to be responsible and to be educated and be comfortable in life. So I think I've gotten that pretty much, especially with the older boy. The younger one is a little bit—he's got to see it on his own. You can't tell him what should be done or how to do it. He's just at that point now. The last time, right before he moved out this last time, I told him, "I don't care what, I am your mother. This is my house. This is the way I live. You're welcome to leave anytime you want." He said, "I'm already planning to." He was. He was already planning to. But he takes care of himself. He's lived in Arizona for over ten years, and he's doing okay.

ESPINO

He doesn't call on you to come and rescue him?

ARELLANES

No, no. Well, we always say—my older son will say, "Has Cesar called you?" I go, "No. No news is good news, right?" [laughs]

That's how we see him. When he got paralyzed last January, he called, "Hey, Mom, I'm paralyzed." "What?" You freak out. I mean, that's something no mother should have to hear.
ESPINO
Oh, that's painful.
ARELLANES
Very. And then to go and see him. Then I was Mama Bear up there. People would come, "How are you going to pay this bill?" [demonstrates] Right away, I got one lady. She was so unprofessional. "How do you expect to pay for this?" I said, "Well, Miss Snotty." She was real short and I was real tall. I finally told her, "I can't talk to this woman." My son was upset. He was trying to deal with her real diplomatically, and I'm like, "No, I can't talk to her. No, no. I'm out of here. Keep that woman away from me." I was sitting in the room, and that woman snuck back in, because she said, "I have to have your son sign this." I go, "Do you not understand he's paralyzed? He has no use of his hands." "Oh, oh, I'm so sorry." I said, "You should have researched a little bit." "Okay." Then when she thought we were all gone, but I was in the room reading, she came back in. There was a nurse, and I go, "Yes, what do you want?"
"Oh, oh, I—I—I—I—I came to say I'm sorry." I go, "Fine. I'm glad you're sorry. Now get out of here and leave us alone." She goes, "Excuse me. I said I'm sorry." I go, "I don't care. Get out of here. You came to get my son again. Don't think you can play games with any of us." The nurse was just like, "Oh, my." And I never saw that little lady again.
ESPINO
Can you tell me about your time when you were on welfare, those years? Was welfare something that helped you survive a period, or was it something—
ARELLANES
Oh, it was horrible. If you ever want to know how a boot feels—you hear about people saying "the boot on my neck." That was the boot on my neck. It was somebody telling me what I had to do, and in those days that's when they used to come and check under the bed to see if there was men's shoes, check the closets and they wanted to know how many sexual relationships you had had, how many

times were you having sexual relationships and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It was horrible.
ESPINO
I had no idea.
ARELLANES
Oh, it was horrible. I threw a monkey in their wrench, a wrench in their wheel. I says, "Lady, I'm Native American. I don't answer to your laws." She goes, "Well, what does that mean?" I go, "I'm from a sovereign nation. I do not answer to your laws." She goes, "But the law says we have to—." I go, "I don't care." [laughs] She brought her supervisor in. She had this giant law book, and she goes, "Did you have a ceremony?"
I go, "That's none of your business." She's trying to find the law, right? I just told her, "Can't you get it? I don't go by your laws. You're not going to come in my house and look through my things. That's my private home." They never did that, but I had to answer all those horrible questions. It was awful.
ESPINO
So what was the point that led you to that, to apply for welfare?
ARELLANES
Because I wasn't working, I wanted to go to school, and I used that time to go to school. I was able to get work study, that was allowed on welfare, and my whole goal was get off welfare. I need to work. I can't finish school. It was obvious when my youngest one turned six, they said I had to go to work. So I went to the El Monte Adult Education and picked up my typing skills, computer skills, and office skills, and I had to drop Cal State L.A., because they said I couldn't go to school. I said, "So I should return to jobs that just I live check to check and never have anything else than that, where if I go to school and get a degree, I might get a better job and not have to live check to check?" They said, "The law is the law." So I—just to get off welfare. Oh, I hated it. And I did; I went up to the county and got a job.
ESPINO
Were you involved with Alicia Escalante when she was organizing for welfare rights?
ARELLANES
Yes. Yes.
ESPINO

Can you talk to me about that?
ARELLANES
Well, that was during the free clinic time, and I know we used to go up there and always make time for the protests, go up there and picket with her over there on Whittier Boulevard. We were always with her. I always supported Alicia.
ESPINO
Do you remember what her perspective was or what her position was?
ARELLANES
Not exactly. I've read things about her. I mean, she was a very powerful woman, a little tiny woman, too, but very powerful, very spitfire, lot of spirit, lot of spirit. I remember her speaking so many times, and she was such an eloquent speaker, very articulate, knew what she was talking about. Everything was in East L.A. She worked with the larger welfare rights organization groups. I didn't do that so much. I just went and supported her whenever I could, and she supported me. She still does. We are still in touch, and she's just amazing to talk to.
ESPINO
So in those days, she was one of a few women that would actually give the speeches and be given the microphone.
ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
So can you talk to me about what people thought of her or what the impression of her was at that time?
ARELLANES
I think she was held in high esteem by everybody. I never heard anybody talk about Alicia. I never heard anybody have a bad harsh word to say about her. They were always very positive and very supportive of her. Dealing with welfare rights organization and poverty and really dealing with it at the law level, so I never heard a negative word about her.
ESPINO
Her position was a bit controversial because some people thought that welfare was harmful, period. I don't know if you ever thought of exactly should people be on welfare or should they be—I mean, her position was that women should have the choice to stay at

home and take care of their kids and receive assistance, versus having to be forced to go out into the workforce.

ARELLANES

I have very definite views about that now, but maybe back then—I understand a woman wanting to stay with her children, but I don't understand wanting government support, because I hated it. Boy, I hated it. [laughs] It was, no, you don't control me. That's what it felt like, complete control. I don't know how it is today because it's been so long since I've been on welfare, and I can remember the day I got off of it. That was a good day for me. It amazed me that they called me and said, "We have the working mother's budget you can go on, and we'll still give you funding." I told her, "I don't want your money." I did not want that money or that boot on my neck. So in those days, I don't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing, because if women wanted to stay with their children and there was nobody to support them, then I could see going to the welfare. I did that. But just to say, "I would want the welfare money just to stay home," I'm not sure if I agree with that, especially now, because what I see is families who have taken welfare and then the next generation lives on it because they don't have anything else, and then probably it's going to perpetuate continuously because they don't get training to do any work. They don't promote education. I just see family and family, just generational welfare. That's horrible.

ESPINO

Do you think that there's a way—and I think this is also what Alicia's argument was—that there's a way to make it a humane funding versus the way that the system—do you think it's inherent? Because you as a person who was on it, is it inherent in the government system, or is there a way to make welfare humane so that people can maintain their dignity?

ARELLANES

I really think it takes dignity away from people, because you don't have the desire to want to work for an income or go to school or tell your children, "You don't want to live like me on welfare. You've got to go to school, go to college." I don't see that. I don't see that. I'm not saying there aren't people like that, because I did it. My whole thing was get up, go to college, back to college, go to school. No, we've got to work now, and I did. So that was what I pushed on my

children. "When you turn eighteen, you can work or you can go to college. If you don't do either, you need to move out of my house," and that made them make a choice. One decided to move out and go to Trade-Tech, and the other one said, "I want to go to college." He stayed here. I told them, "I'll support both of you, as long as you're working, anything you need." I had trust funds for them. I had established small little educational trust funds when they were babies. A little bit. I told them, "I don't care if you buy a million candy bars, it's your money," when they turned eighteen.

ESPINO

So that's something you decided on by yourself?

ARELLANES

Yes. Yes, with my life insurance, they offered educational trust funds, so I thought, why not? It's small, real small amount, but, still, it was something.

ESPINO

And it's also symbolic, what you were hoping for them, your dreams for them.

ARELLANES

Yes, yes, yes. So I just have real mixed feelings about welfare, and I think welfare has gotten out of control now. Back then, not everybody was on welfare like in the amounts of people now, so I really don't remember the issues, and I would be wrong to try and speak about them, but I just know what my own personal feelings are. If they ask the questions they ask me back in the seventies, I can't imagine what they asked in the sixties, and I think that's when they were checking the houses and the beds and the closets.

ESPINO

Unbelievable. I thought I heard something like that, but I thought, well, that's probably just urban folklore, but it was actually—

ARELLANES

No, it was actual, yes.

ESPINO

But she's definitely a historic figure, Alicia Escalante, and her work is very important in bringing the issue about women, mostly women, raising families.

ARELLANES

That's right. Single women, single parents.

ESPINO

That was one of the big things. Were you familiar then with some of the other organizations like the Chicana Service Action Center?
ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
Were you involved with them in any way?
ARELLANES
I was. There was a medical group out of there. I was trying to remember the name. I can't remember their name. But they would come out and I would go down there. I don't remember getting real involved with that.
I also supported LUCHA, the ex-con group. Well, my uncle was in that group, and I think he kind of put the word out, "You don't mistreat my niece." They would hang out and go, "Gloria!" They would hang out the window over there on Atlantic, and we had the Brown Beret clinic right there, and they hated the Brown Berets. I had no problem with any of them.
ESPINO
Why did they hate the Brown Berets?
ARELLANES
I don't know. I don't know. I don't remember what the issues were. La Junta did not like the Brown Berets. It seems to me more people that were into—I don't know how to describe them. Gangbangers? I don't know what you would call them. Pachulos? I don't know. Maybe that kind of culture didn't like the Berets who were not so much into that, although a lot of those young men did come into the Berets. But I know LUCHA did not like the Berets, but they never had any falling-outs that I can remember.
ESPINO
LUCHA is the group that they were the ex-cons?
ARELLANES
Ex-cons. Moe Aguirre—
ESPINO
Oh, yes.
ARELLANES
—ran that, and he disappeared. Nobody ever knows what happened to him. My uncle never knew what happened to him, and they were good, good friends. After all the movement kind of slowed down, he

actually stayed with my uncle for a while. Then after that, he just said, "I don't know what really happened to him."
ESPINO
There's some stories going around about that group bearing arms and pulling out arms at meetings.
ARELLANES
I believe it. I don't think I was—
ESPINO
But you don't have any direct—
ARELLANES
I don't think I was ever at a meeting where they did that. I remember going to meetings in their offices, but never saw anything like that. I saw kind of the chest going out and the words, but never a hit or a physical contact or guns.
ESPINO
There's a lot written about that kind of masculinity that you talk about, the chest, during that period.
ARELLANES
The chest, yes.
ESPINO
Were you aware of that at the time?
ARELLANES
Oh, yes.
ESPINO
Was it something that you noticed?
ARELLANES
The posturing, yes. Oh, absolutely. I mean, I just kind of accepted it in certain people. That's how they are. We see it in Native Americans, but we call them like, "Oh, look at the peacock," because they display their feathers and they're so gorgeous, and they had the bleached blonde following them. [laughs] But, no, this wasn't in that kind of light, but I saw the gesture, the posturing and the challenging, like, "Here's the line. Step over it, brother," yes, a lot. And I saw some fights. I tell you I saw one with a guy from La Junta, and the Brown Beret was an undercover cop, and he really tried to restrain himself, and finally they just went to it. He just mopped the floor with him. You can imagine his training. They learn how to fight. People would always say, "Get out of here! Go on, go

on, go on." There was men that would always try to protect us sometimes in those situations.
ESPINO
Did you feel like you needed protecting?
ARELLANES
Yeah, because you didn't know if it was going to turn into a big old brawl and police would come, and it was just better to get out of there.
ESPINO
Was it something that you were okay with, or was it something that—because it sounds like you started to become disillusioned with that whole organization, the Brown Berets, and their lack of respect. Was this part of that, or was this something that you looked at separately?
ARELLANES
To me, that particular fight was personal. But what I saw was I was able to communicate with La Junta, LUCHA. I never had problems crossing the line with any kind of a different group. We hung around with a lot of people who were like maybe ex-hippies, maybe the younger males. I just never had a problem with people, and I think that was a blessing for me, really, because I could go any place and be okay. There wasn't any place I couldn't go where somebody would say, "Oh, you're a Beret, get out of here. We don't—." Only wherever there were sheriffs. [laughs] We came from a Black Panther funeral one time, and we went to the store, I think. Now, this goes way, way back. It was either White Front or Zody's on Whittier Boulevard, in front of the welfare office, and we all went over there, probably to get something to eat and sodas and stuff. We came out, we had our berets on and our bush jackets, and this sheriff drove over up on the curb, on the walkway and got us all, rousted us. There was a lady, she said, "You're just harassing them because of the way they're dressed."
And he told her, "Lady, if you don't shut up, you're going to get arrested." She kept yelling and yelling, and we just told her, "It's okay, it's okay. We'll be okay." We didn't have anything that could get us in trouble. I remember this deputy to this day. He had red hair, mean, mean, mean, mean, and we knew him after that. He had us out there, and nobody had warrants, nobody had anything

they could get arrested, and he just was very upset that he couldn't arrest anybody. He could have trumped-up charges.
ESPINO
What, did he make you spread eagle and that kind of thing?
ARELLANES
Yes, yes, yes. I think if it would not been for this lady who was watching everything and letting him know, "You're doing this. You're wrong." And other people starting to gather, I think that was the only reason. But, yeah, we would get harassed all the time.
ESPINO
Would they search you, or did they frisk you?
ARELLANES
Probably, probably. I think you have to call a female deputy. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I don't remember anybody else coming out there. There was no other—maybe he called other deputies, but no, no, I don't remember. Maybe it was look in your purse or something like that. But that was just very common. That was expected. You go to a protest, be expected to be photographed, be expected to be harassed. You'd look up on the roofs, on the ceilings, I mean the top of the roofs, and you'd see them up there taking pictures. I have pictures that were in my collection of people up on the ceilings. It was to be expected. So, yes, there was a lot of harassment, a lot of harassment.
ESPINO
It sounds like it. So your first encounter with police brutality was when you were on the Poor People's Campaign?
ARELLANES
Yes.
ESPINO
But that didn't stop you from demonstrating, from organizing?
ARELLANES
No.
ESPINO
Then your next big demonstration, would that be the walkouts or would that be the moratoriums?
ARELLANES
I would think the moratoriums. I think that was the biggest organizing effort I ever saw take place.
ESPINO

What role did you play in that?
ARELLANES
I remember we had just left the Berets, so we went over to the office, Rosalio's [Muñoz] office over on First Street, what used to be First Street. No, Brooklyn, what is now Cesar Chavez Boulevard. I can't remember the organization that was allowing us to use this big room there. We did things like silk screens. We helped with silk screens. We helped with any kind of flyers, posters. I did a lot of graphics before, typing up different information. One of the most favorite things I used to do with the moratorium was get my little Volkswagen, load it up with folks, and take the video—not a video, excuse me. Film, the old-fashioned film, which I understand my film did go to UCLA. I had an original film in the canister that did not go to Cal State L.A. or maybe it went to—I told Dionne [Espinoza] to do what she wanted with it because it was hers, I think.
ESPINO
Oh, she had it.
ARELLANES
Yes, because—what's the artist? Oh, my gosh, I can see his face.
ESPINO
Filmmaker or actor?
ARELLANES
Filmmaker.
ESPINO
Jesus Treviño?
ARELLANES
Yes, yes. I think it went to him because he had all rights to that film, and it was the March in the Rain, but it was an original, the film. We thought it should go to UCLA because of their film ability's better. But he asked for it, so I told her, "You make the decision. I feel like I've given you all these things already." So she agreed to do that. But we would take that with a projector, flyers, and we'd ask anybody in the state of California to have a backyard meeting, gather your neighbors, your family, your friends, everybody. "Tell them we're going to go out there and we're going to talk about this Moratorium that's coming up and show this film, and they can ask us any questions they want." So we did that. We traveled up and down the state doing that.
ESPINO

Who's "we"? Who would it be?
ARELLANES
I would go with Andrea [Sanchez], my sidekick, anybody else that could fit in my Volkswagen. You know, my Volkswagen was one of those clown cars. You know how many Chicanos can you get in a car? [laughs] I mean big healthy people would get out, one, oh, that's a big one. [laughs] That little car got run into the ground, but it took me up and down the state. We'd go up to Oakland, Redwood City, San Jose, just really good. That was really, really good.
Then when we came back and got closer to the big moratorium, I did housing. So my job was calling people and organizations. "How many people, families, can you take in?" I had lists. My lists when to Cal State L.A. It's several pages. It's just names and addresses. Those were the people that I found houses for. I still have that. I talked to somebody from Los Illegals, one of the guitar players, because I always thought Los Illegals was much younger. They were there at the moratorium. They were going to perform on stage. When we went to the forty-year reunion, one of them was telling me, he goes, "Yeah, my job was—," he worked for Bert Corona. All he was supposed to do was pick up families from the airport, bring them to the moratorium and then take them to wherever they were supposed to be housed. Then they were telling me how they had to run, and they hid in somebody's basement. They were so afraid when the moratorium—when everything broke loose. But they were going to perform, so they were there, too, and it was amazing to talk to them, because I thought, I'm the only old one. [laughs]
ESPINO
Wow. They were around back then.
ARELLANES
Yes. That amazed me. And they were going to perform. They were onstage. That's why they've always been very pro-Movement. When they're asked to come out, they will do things. When they performed at Belvedere Park there for the forty-year reunion, when they were performing—because I was speaking right before they came on, and they're chattering in your ear, "You've got to hurry, got to hurry," so I couldn't say much. Because somebody said, "You froze, huh?" I said, "No, I was shut up." [laughs] But what they were playing was the videos of the riots.
ESPINO

Oh, in the background?
ARELLANES
Yes, big old screen. So that was pretty interesting.
ESPINO
Did you start with originally in the Chicano Moratorium Organizing Committee? Is that what it was called? Was it a formal group that you were involved in?
ARELLANES
No, because we weren't part of that when it first began. That was David Sanchez and probably the other males. We didn't get involved until we left the Berets and went over to his office and he took us orphans in. Rosalio. I remember Gracie Reyes, Hilda Reyes, even Arlene Sanchez, we would go over there, and Andrea and Esther [Sanchez], and work for Rosalio.
ESPINO
Were there any formal meetings? Because Rosalio doesn't remember some of those meetings happening and how the organization took place because he was so immersed in getting ready and developing his PR [public relations].
ARELLANES
I remember meetings in the office, all the volunteers. I remember those. I can't remember what was talked about.
ESPINO
Or who was leading them?
ARELLANES
Right. I don't remember. I know Ramses Noriega was there. The poet Alurista [Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia] was there. I don't remember who else. There was a lot of other people. Probably Javier Gonzalo? Gonzalo Javier? I'm sorry.
ESPINO
That's okay. I think I can probably find his name on the list, Rosalio's list [unclear].
ARELLANES
Yes. There was a lot of people, a lot of people, probably names that I don't recall at all.
ESPINO
How was the work divided?
ARELLANES

It was just kind of volunteer. What needs to be done, just get in and do it. There was never, "You do this. You do that," or, "I command you to do this." It was, "Here's what we need to do," and blah, blah, blah, and we just pick it up and do it and be happy about it.
ESPINO
So it sounds pretty different from your experience with the Berets.
ARELLANES
Oh, yeah. [laughs] Well, the Berets, towards the end, it was just me running the clinic with all the volunteers, and it wasn't so much the Berets being involved with that. There was meetings, yes, and they came in and hung out afterwards, but I didn't have a lot of contact with them. It was drifting. It was already drifting apart. I was reaching where my level of frustration was very high and getting tired of the games. I really believe in any organization when you want to know more, it's your time to leave, but before you leave, you get frustrated and you want to fight and it gets ugly. So going to the moratorium was like a fresh (sic) of breath air. Rosalia was just a great guy to work with, and the other people that were there. Ramses, I remember him being—I really liked him, very fiery, but I really liked him. Alurista was so artistic, and watching those silk screens and all of that, that was fun. That was a lot of fun. And the flyers that we made and people that would come in and out, come in and out, calls that would come in, people want information. So it was good.
ESPINO
It sounds incredible. But even all of your experiences during that time, even raising your kids, that's just fascinating.
ARELLANES
Thank you.
ESPINO
Was it you who decided that you wanted to travel up and down California, or how did that decision come up?
ARELLANES
I think it was just kind of a decision. We needed to do outreach. "Who wants to go up here?" They have people that want to get together, because we were announcing if you can get a few people together, have a backyard meeting, we'll go up there. "Yeah, I'll go. I'll go." I was single. I was free. I had my own car. "Let's go."
ESPINO

Do you remember what your position was before you met Rosalio, before you went, your position on the war? Had you been following it?

ARELLANES

Oh, yes. Oh, we had been already involved in a lot of the protests and the marches. The first one at Obregon Park, we were there, and I remember the women were way over here and the men were onstage, and we were just like, "Look at that. Look at him." They would help David [Sanchez] up on the stage. Oh, my god. [laughs] That's where we were attitude-wise. Again, I was the one that went before the Police Commission and asked for the permit. They didn't want to go, so I went. I remember I wasn't a Beret. I didn't mention Berets. I just said "the community." And they were all, "Oh, this community deserves this," I mean very supportive, you know. KTLA was there, the news channel. So when we were marching, the women, I was the drillmaster. I was walking on the side of them. That's embarrassing. [laughs] The newsman right away recognized me. "Oh, you were at the Police Commission." I just kept walking. I wanted to laugh so bad, and I just kept walking and looking at the girls. Are they in step? Didn't even care. [laughs]

Then I also read. Well, we took turns. We stood at that memorial over there on First Street and Lorena. Is it Lorena? There's a war memorial of all the—and we read the names, to show how many of our men were dying disproportionately in Vietnam. So we were reading the names of the deceased, and then you take turns. What they do at 9/11, we were doing that back there in the late sixties, seventies. So I remember I did that, and then we had been in the other marches. So, yes, it was an issue. We were well aware of it, so I had to have gone to meetings to know this information, because you can't talk about it unless you know what's going on. So for me to have information meant I was in contact and went to meetings, probably.

ESPINO

So when you traveled throughout California, did you set up those meetings ahead of time, or did you pop into a community and try to make contact?

ARELLANES

No, we did it ahead of time, because we would know exactly what home we were going to, and there would be people there.

ESPINO
How did you find these people?
ARELLANES
Well, they found us, I think. We were advertising with the newspapers, with however way we could do it, flyers all the time, and people would just call. Then, you know, word of mouth is faster than the newspaper sometimes, and I think just word of mouth.
ESPINO
That's interesting in the age before the Internet, how something like this can even spread as fast as it did, because you're talking a short period of time. From the time that you were doing these meetings to the time of the moratorium, it was months, not even a year.
ARELLANES
Right, and the fact that we had so many contacts outside the state, they were also calling us. Of course, we didn't go state to state. We couldn't afford that, and too much time involved in driving, but I think wherever we went, we would make this known, this event was going to take place, and the word just got out there, because, I mean, I never saw so many people. There was hundreds and thousands of people, to me. It's really interesting, I had not seen, until Rosalio made that poster—my brother, he had my dad's—when my dad passed away, he left a '65 blue Chevy pickup, and my brother used to drive it. I remember sitting on that truck, and it was the front of the moratorium, and I had a megaphone and going on down the way talking about that. I finally saw a picture, a poster of the truck, I finally saw it, because my son's wife, when she was going to UCLA, David Sanchez—no, no, no. No, no. This was somebody else. This was somebody else was showing that picture, and she said, "Can I have that picture? That is my son's uncle and he passed away." He said, "No, I'm not giving my picture away." And we didn't have scanners and things like that when she was going to school. So he said no, and I just thought, "Wow, somebody has a picture of my brother." But I got it finally. It's on the poster.
ESPINO
So your brother was also involved.
ARELLANES
Yes, yes.
ESPINO
What role did he play?

ARELLANES
I don't know if he was still with the Berets. He was always very shy, very sweet, and people loved him. I know he was in the Brown Berets when I was in the Berets, and I don't know if he stayed with the Berets, I don't remember, or if he just kind of, "Where's my sis going? I'll go over there and help her." Because I set up on his truck with some people, and we were yelling all down the way. Wherever the first banner was, it announced what it was, and we were right behind there.
ESPINO
Prime spot in that.
ARELLANES
So lazy Gloria didn't have to walk. [laughs]
ESPINO
Well, you did a lot of footwork, though. So how many people would show up to these meetings that you would organize?
ARELLANES
Wow. I can remember the rooms being filled, people standing, a lot of meetings, and, plus, Rosalio would do a lot of public relations, and Ramses. I'm sure they would go out more, and we did more of the community thing, passing out flyers wherever we could.
ESPINO
What was your position as far as the politics? What were you trying to convey, that you recall?
ARELLANES
What I recall is that too many of our men are dying in that war, and it's a stupid war. That was the main issue. What they were spending in that war could be—almost like today, what they're spending in the Middle East should be used for our economics here for jobs. Bringing all these soldiers home to what? Are they going to have jobs? I'm all for it. I'm all for it. But I don't know, somebody has to come up with some real creative plans what they're going to do with the military.
ESPINO
You're all for what?
ARELLANES
For them coming home, getting out, the war stopping. The billions of dollars that have been spent over there, and it was a stupid war to begin with. The [George W. Bush] administration at that time

was kind of whacked with their philosophies and their billings that mass destruction, ammunition, whatever they called it, and just—it's been a very deadly war not only for our service people, but the poor people in those countries. Those are the ones you don't hear about. I just saw a video on Facebook. It was so sad. I sat and cried with it. These two children, their hands and arms were cut off in Afghanistan, I believe, and they were adopted by an American couple. The young man was applying for American Idol, and he had this beautiful singing voice. Then somebody sent me, if you're interested in this, there's this whole organization of all these children that have been maimed out of cruelty, like in Africa, what they do to young girls there too.

ESPINO

Were you aware of what was happening in the war? Did you see images coming out of Vietnam?

ARELLANES

Vietnam was a very televised war. I mean, you saw the blood every day on your TV. The news covered it very heavy, and then they changed that in subsequent wars. But Vietnam was a very brutal thing to see. They didn't hide the American dead that came home, and they showed the napalm that was used on the children in Vietnam. There was horrible stories.

Then they say that the Viet Cong used to call out the Chicanos. This is what we heard from the servicemen, that they would call them out, "You're a brown brother. Don't fight your yellow brother." I wrote to some servicemen, and they were supporting the Brown Berets, and I had pictures that I put in the collection, one picture, I think, of somebody who was in the service and would write to us. So they liked the Brown Berets. They liked what the Brown Berets were saying and didn't really talk about anti-war or anything like that, but we understand there was a lot of support from some servicemen. It wasn't a popular thing to do, because when they came home, they weren't even honored as heroes like they do now. Vietnam was a bad war all the way around, and I know people who are messed up from the war.

ESPINO

Did you have a position against war in general or just against this war?

ARELLANES

Probably that war. That's a hard question, because here I was advocating violence, and then I'm saying I don't like this violence. I don't know. It was the thought of going into another country and imposing, trying to impose how we believe onto these people. These people were poor, and they were tough guys. The Viet Cong was kind of hard, right? They weren't little patsies over there. [laughs] So I think the whole thing of the colonialism of it, that idea, the United States going into another foreign country and saying, "This is how you're supposed to live and this is what you're supposed to do," and wasn't even aware that's what happened to all the tribes here in this country. I had to learn that within time after I kind of switched, kind of left that behind and just learned my own history and realized, wow, they did that to us and we never fought. We never fought.

But I eventually became very anti-war, anti-gun, anti-violence, especially when I had my children. That was what I did with my life, but now I was responsible for two children and was not going to allow that to be. They never had toy guns. I did not believe in those. I do not believe in them now. Probably all those games that they are so popular now, I probably would have been against those. I think those are real mind twisters.

ESPINO

That's very interesting, and several people have said that when they had children, their ideas changed, their politics changed, and everything was different from that point. It's been an hour. I don't know how you're feeling.

ARELLANES

I'm feeling good, actually. I don't even feel the pain because I'm not concentrating on it.

ESPINO

Oh, excellent. So this is a distraction for you.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

If you could recount that day of the moratorium, for example, in the morning, what did you do and how did you get ready and as the chronology took place and what happened?

ARELLANES

We probably went down to the office, probably—because I really don't remember, because all I remember is being on the truck and then getting there and seeing all the people and such festivalness, just a beautiful air about the dancers that were there, the songs were being sung, and just this great feeling of celebration.
Then there may have been a few speakers that were coming up, and then all I remember is standing up on the stage. I don't know why I was up on the stage. I wasn't going to speak or anything. I didn't like speaking. I really did not like public speaking. I think that goes back to when I was so heavy all those years. I'd always try to hide, make myself small, but I was a hard worker, so I was always behind the scenes. I remember being up on that stage and then just kind of watching this wave happen, people coming, a flood of people, and then it went back. Then it came back again, and then things were flying all over, and then I got tear-gassed. All I know is somebody, thank goodness—I don't remember. I know it was a young man pulled me off the stage and threw me on a bus, got a wet t-shirt and put it in my face. I was choking and my eyes were burning, and that bus driver was panicked to death. He was going over the curbs and just trying not to hit people and cars and things. It was a little orange school bus. There was a few people on that bus. Somebody came and started pounding on the doors to get in, and he wasn't going to open the doors, and they forced the doors open. It was Corky Gonzales and his crew. Then they got in, and he was like, "No, no, no, no. No, no. I got to go back out there." They were like, "No, Corky, stay here. No, stay here." He demanded to go back out into that crowd, and he did. I always had the highest regard for Corky Gonzales. I saw that he did two things in the lifetime that I knew him that just, wow, he's an amazing man. He went back out there, and we went to the office over there on First Street, on Brooklyn, and people were coming in. People were injured. We had to call paramedics for some people. Somebody had taken twelve tabs of acid and was just spaced. They had his legs in those air things, because he had broken his legs or something. I mean, it was bizarre. We had the radio on, and then we could see the smoke going up.
After that, I can't tell you what happened to me because I never went back. The idea that people got killed and the violence that took place, and it wasn't necessarily from the moratorium; I really

think it was law enforcement that created the violence. I just couldn't be part of that anymore. I went to one of the young men who was a Beret here in El Monte, Ward, Lyn Ward, I went to his funeral. I did go to his funeral after, and it even disgusted me more because I came kind of late, after everybody had already—the coffin was already put up near the burial place and people were already sitting down. I kind of went out there, and I don't know if I was alone or not. There was un-uniformed law enforcement—I want to say "pigs" so badly. [laughter] They were in the bushes taking pictures, and that disgusted me more than anything. I said, "I cannot come back to this. I am done with this," and I never went back.

ESPINO

He was one of the people killed at the—

ARELLANES

Yes, yes. He was a young man from El Monte here.

ESPINO

Did you know him?

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

Do you know what happened to him?

ARELLANES

No, I can't remember. I can't remember what happened to him. I think he died later of his injuries, if I remember correctly. I may be wrong, I'm not sure, but it seems to me that's what happened to him. He didn't die immediately, but what his injuries were, I don't know. If he was shot or if he was run over, I don't know. I don't know. It was just horrible. It was horrifying to see the people coming in who were horrified themselves and scared to death. Then I don't know what happened to all those people we had arranged for housing. I don't know what happened to them, how they got home, because they came from all the states. There was contingents of people that came from other states.

ESPINO

So you went back to the office that day, and after that day you never went back?

ARELLANES

I don’t remember ever going back, and if anybody called me, I don’t remember if I talked to them. I really believe I had like a post-traumatic syndrome, because it took me—first person that found me was Jaime Pelayo. So I agreed for him to come over, and his thing was about the anti-war activities. The little booklet he had, I told him, “That was my drawing.” He goes, “Really?” I go, “Yeah.” I never signed anything. I never put my name or initials in there. That was kind of like, wow, you know. This was probably decades later. I agreed to be interviewed with him, and I told him I don’t remember things. I think I shut so much out that I didn’t want to remember, and I told him, “I’m really bad chronologically with dates.” He goes, “I’ve already figured it all out.”
So I said, “Okay.” He actually shook my webs, my cobwebs. I got some memories. I showed him a lot of pictures that I had. That was the first one. Then the second one, I think, was Dionne [Espinoza] found me, and I was very comfortable with her. So people started coming more and more to interview me, but they showed me a video one time of the riot, and I just here and cried. Then when I went back with Rosalio, he always had those videos playing, and I told him, “These are hard for me to watch, Rosalio. I don’t know,” and I would sit there and cry. But I think the more I watched them, the better it got. It’s like talking about something that really hurts you, and the more you talk about it, the easier it gets. So I think I kind of got through that, but it took a long, long time. That was forty years already.
ESPINO
Where do you think the pain was coming from?
ARELLANES
The pain was the thought of people—I saw wheelchairs left on the grounds there, so you know a paraplegic was hit and injured, carried away or something, thrown on the ground. I don’t know. The thought that children were out there, that families were out there and that people got killed, I think that was the main thing, people got killed. I realized all my belief in the militancy that I believed in and guns and all that, no, I am not of that material, and it took something that horrible for me to realize that. It’s going to make me cry right now. I’m so glad I am where I am now, because my world is about all living things around me and the balance of nature and everything. I find great beauty in working with my yard.

So where I was forty years ago, I'm not there anymore, but I'm very happy who I am now, very happy. I'm in balance and I feel at peace with myself. For being the angry woman that I was and the very outspoken woman—I'm not saying that I'm not outspoken now, because I still am. I have no qualms about telling somebody when they kind of push me in that corner, don't expect me to come out, "I love you." I will come out and say what I have to say.
I did it in high school a lot with my sons' teachers. I had another teacher that one time she told me—my son corrected her about California history. She goes, "What would you know?" He goes, "Well, I'm a Tongva." She goes, "What is a Tongva?" He goes, "Well, if you knew your history, you'd know that that's the people of this land." Then all the kids started going, "Right on, Cesar! Yay! Tell her! Tell her! Tell her!" Well, she had him removed from the class without my knowledge. But before that, I went to a parent-teacher conference and we walked up. It was in the library so it was open, all open. She yelled, in front of people, "Oh, the Indian woman!" I go, "Excuse me. My name is Gloria Arellanes. I'm Cesar's mother. I didn't come here to yell, 'Oh, there's the white teacher!'" The kids were [demonstrates]. They loved it. She was so embarrassed. And he got kicked out of that room without my knowledge. I went in, raised Cain with the counselors. I'm supposed to be notified of these things, and I should have complained about that teacher when I had the chance to. So I will still speak up. Maybe not as harsh as I was before, hopefully.
ESPINO
Because you were advocating for something, like you said. You were advocating—I don't want to put words into your mouth.
ARELLANES
Violence.
ESPINO
Against—
ARELLANES
Overthrow. Overthrow. We thought we could overthrow the government. I remember one time—now, this was horrible and I've never talked about this. I was called to a meeting with all the men, and I thought it was going to be David [Sanchez], maybe Carlos [Montes] and Ralph [Ramirez]. There must have been about ten men in that room, a house, actually. They pulled out some joints. I

used to smoke occasionally, but never when I was driving or never when I didn't have control of myself. I thought, "If I don't smoke, they're going to start getting down on me." You know how they pressure people, "You think you're good," and this and that.

ESPINO

"You're not one of us."

ARELLANES

Yes, if you don't take a drink or something like that. So I smoked, and that was the wrong thing to do, because you start tripping. And they started getting down on me. See, things were already starting to get strained in our relationships, and they attacked me. "What is it you want? Why are you a Brown Beret?" and this and that. I told them—and this makes me laugh—"I'm only part of—after the revolution, I will help build us up." Spoken like the true secretary I was. [laughs] Carlos Montes, always a gentleman. This went on, this went on, and I stood my ground. I stood my ground against all of them, but just because I'd smoked that weed, I was not feeling like me. It was very hard, and then you get a little paranoid sometimes. So when it was finally time for this to end, because if I would have been smart, I could have said, "Well, what is it you want? What is it we're supposed to be doing? You tell me, since you're in control." But, no, I wasn't there because of the weed did not give me a clear head.

I never drink or use drugs whenever I'm in any kind of that kind of a situation. Socially I used to drink, and then I stopped drinking. I went to grapefruit juice, and I've never been a drinker and a drug user. Did I piddle with it? Yeah. When I had the free clinic, my parties were known for my brownies with weed, honestly. [laughs] I would clean out my closets afterward. There would be a little stash. Somebody had hid a brownie in there. People just loved my parties. They would bring me the cans of weed to make them these brownies. So, my Alice B. Toklas days, that's a name. [laughs] But that was very temporary, and I've always just had this thing about not being out of control of my mind, my head, and that day I was. I remember Carlos saying, "Let me walk you to your car." Once again, I almost felt threatened about rape. There was just something in that room that made me feel that way. And I think because the way Carlos said, "Let me take you to your car," I think he sensed it also and saved me. Okay, now, I'm not in my right

mind, and I didn't smoke that much, so I wasn't completely gone, but everything I remember about the feeling I had was this is very threatening. I don't know what was being said to make me feel that way, and for Carlos to right away say, "Let me walk you to your car," and he walked me all the way to my car, and I've always had the highest regard for Carlos. I've always said that.

ESPINO

The next day, for example, did you reflect on what had happened? Do you remember thinking about "I think that that was not good"?

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

Or did you just go about your—

ARELLANES

No, no, no, that was something, I mean, to this day it bothers me. Just like the other incidence of possible rape, but in that time I was ready to fight. I was going to stick that—break that bottle and put it in their face, and I probably would have been killed for it afterwards. But this time, it just felt, "I don't have any control here."

ESPINO

These were your comrades.

ARELLANES

Yes, and they ganged up on me. There had to be ten men in that room. And then to smoke weed before? This is what destroyed the Brown Berets, because they started going into the angel dust and the drinking and all that. I mean, I talked to David one time and he was [demonstrates] gone, and then you realize you can't talk to somebody who's on another planet, no speak the language.

ESPINO

Do you think that marijuana might have had something else in it?

ARELLANES

No, no, because all of them were smoking it, all of them. But my mistake. My fear was if I don't smoke, I don't know what they're going to do. That was the fear I had, believe it or not. I never drove when I was high or anything like that, and I didn't get high that often. I mean, it was rare when I would do that. I dabbled with it. I experimented with it. A lot of young people do. I just always remembered that, and always that fear of something was going to

happen here, and why did they just call me? That was what they did. They didn't have the anatomy to stand up to me one-on-one. They had to take me before ten men or however many men were there, and get high in the process and want to talk about business? Come on. But that's what destroyed them in the end.
ESPINO
How soon after that meeting did you leave?
ARELLANES
I would think pretty fast. I think by then I was reaching some realities in the fact that these people aren't going to change, this is what they do, I can't be part of it, I can't relate to it. I've never talked about that. I only felt threatened twice during that time, and that was the second one.
ESPINO
Have you ever talked with Carlos about that, that night?
ARELLANES
No, no, I haven't. No. I guess I just try to avoid thinking about it. I mean, I feel so blessed that I was able to get out of it, but it had to mess with my head big time, because I felt fear.
ESPINO
That energy. ARELLANE: Yes. I mean, you could sense it. I'm pretty sensitive to energies anyways, but I knew, and here I was trying to talk my way out of this thing, and then feeling something's going to happen here and having Carlos step up because he knew. I feel he knew. I'd like to ask him now. Now I'm curious. [laughs]
ESPINO
If he remembers.
ARELLANES
Yes, because I respect him very much.
ESPINO
Was he married at that time yet?
ARELLANES
I don't think so. Yes, he was still single, and he wasn't gone yet, obviously. I think things changed when he left also.
ESPINO
So you would view him as the right-hand man?
ARELLANES
One of them. I think Richard Diaz was more David's right-hand man. I'm not going to describe him, how I feel. I know he has

changed a lot. He's a businessman now, but I haven't talked to him since. I've talked to Carlos, I've talked to Ralph. The other men, I don't know what happened to them. But, no, Richard, I think, was really David's right-hand man.

ESPINO

So then when you were involved with Rosalio and Ramses, how would you describe the difference? Because Ramses was kind of like Rosalio's right-hand man, too, so the dynamics.

ARELLANES

Ramses was very fiery. I remember him being very passionate and fiery, very dramatic. And Rosalio was easy kind of going guy, kind of laughing always, wanting to know how you're doing, very just easy, like he is now. He's the same way. Probably we laughed a lot, because wherever we went, Alurista was very funny. So we always laughed a lot wherever we went. Then I think as ex-Brown Berets, we probably sat there and laughed about our things that we did and about people, probably, just knowing young women, what we would have done. I think we did that a lot.

ESPINO

Did he try to call you afterward? [End of October 24, 2011 session]

1.6. Session Six (December 13, 2011)

ESPINO

This is Virginia Espino, and today is December 12 (sic), 2011. I'm interviewing Gloria Arellanes in her home in El Monte [California]. This will be our last interview. Thank you so much for agreeing to sit down with me. It's been a wonderful experience. Today I want to talk about your work life, what you did after the moratorium. You said you retreated. It was a traumatic experience for you. If you can walk me through what you decided to do next, was it getting a job, going to school? What were your plans after that activism?

ARELLANES

After that, I had children, two sons. They're like four and a half years apart. But I went back to school during that time. I figured I had had jobs that you live check to check, you're barely making it, always struggling, always struggling, and I thought, well, I'd get education, get a better-paying job. Well, I went to two years at Rio

Hondo College, and I went in with the attitude, "Don't give me classes I don't need." I went to a counselor. "Give me what I need. I want to come in and out fast, because I'm already a mature student." I was in my thirties. And I did that. Then I transferred over to Cal State L.A., and I had the worst instructors, professors. This woman was just bizarre. She would put a can of beer on her desk every day, with a thing of yogurt. I guess that was her lunch. She just ripped us to pieces. Nobody ever pleased her, and she wrote the most insulting notes. This was a—was it a literature class? I think it was literature. It was so negative for me, I just wasn't getting anything out of it, and I only got one kind of positive response, and it was like, "Oh, I thought you were starting to get it, but you blew it." [laughs] I kind of dropped out.

Then I took algebra. I had never been good with math. I know my basics, but I kind of psyched myself out, so I took algebra and wasn't doing good, so I got a tutor. He says, "You learn so fast." I go, "Thank you." Then I go to the test and sit there, I don't get it. So I know I was doing it to myself, because I still remember parts of algebra. In those days, when your youngest child turns six years old, welfare—and I was on AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children]—said I had to go to work, no matter what you were doing. If you were going to school, it didn't matter to them. You need to work, get off welfare. So I just couldn't take welfare anyway. I wasn't a good recipient. I hated it. So I did go to college. That wasn't going to work out for me because they were taking me out of it. So I went over here to the El Monte Adult Education, and I brushed up on my clerical skills, typing, calculator, things like that, computer skills. They were barely getting into computers then. There was a job with the City of L.A. that I was interested in. When I got up there to the personnel, it had closed. I said, "Well, I'm downtown L.A., might as well go up to the county, see what they have," and I was tested for a clerical position, the entrance clerical position. Because I was typing something like ninety words per minutes, they gave me the higher item, which was from typist clerk to an intermediate typist clerk. So I passed that and I got into the county of Los Angeles.

You put more or less what area you want to work in and what you're interested in, and I started getting calls. I had the choice to say, "No, that's too far," or, "Yes, I'll go for an interview." I wound

up with the coroner's office, and I worked for the coroner's office for four years. It was extremely interesting, and I learned a lot about life and death there. It can be a very hard place to work, so people had this sick humor, I think, and I developed this sick humor also. To get yourself through it, we laughed a lot, and so it was a really great place to work. I worked with some really funny people. I was doing statistics, so I was getting to see all the drug deaths in L.A. County, making reports on that. The other thing I did, and it was one of the reports that I would always leave till the last, was child-abuse reports, because when you talk about heinous, I think I saw the most horrible things human beings can do to little children. They put me on this—it's called ICAN. I think it still exists, Inter-Agency [Council on] Child Abuse and Neglect something, I think. I used to go to monthly meetings and present different—they would select one horrible case of child abuse, and then all these components of the county would come together, social work, law enforcement, first responders. It was a large group. So we would talk about these cases. That agency was actually a Child Abuse Prevention Program under the Department of Health Services, under the County of Los Angeles, wanted to take me from the coroner's office, and I was just about reaching my end. I've always had this thing that I usually learn a job in two years, and then I get kind of bored and then I have to move on or learn something new at least.

I was given the opportunity to more or less do what I want, run my own office, had my own staff and everything, because I had done things like their coding of all the coroner cases. I automated their systems, actually, and that was just the very beginning with computers. That seemed to be one of my fortes, whereby when they would give me these projects and say, "Here's what we're doing. Can you make it automated and better?" and I always took something and changed it and automated it and made it more—instead of working so hard, you could work easy just by punching numbers in instead of writing by hand all this information. So I seemed to do that wherever I went. I had other jobs before the county. I worked for drug and alcohol counseling. I did that for a while. For the City of South El Monte, I worked in their office and did some things. Because of my free clinic experience, San Gabriel asked me to help them set up a free clinic, and I was always asked to kind of assist in those areas, which I did. It was really

interesting. One time I was trying to get things from L.A. County Hospital, and I met with the administrator. I used to have that luxury of being able to go over there, "I want this, I want this, give me," and they would. [laughs] The doctor looked at me, he says, "You know, we were very supportive of the free clinics in East L.A. because they had an extremely strong foundation." In other words, he was telling me, "You don't have that foundation that you had over there," because I had a board of directors there, I had volunteers, we were doing these immunizations drives and so forth and so forth. So, anyways, going back to the coroner's office, that was in 1984 I started working for them, and I had to develop this attitude, because they'd take you down to what they call the service area where the decedents are brought in. I just said, "These are no longer human beings. Their spirit has pretty much gone." I understand spirit a little differently now. But I had to develop something to be able to work with it. I worked upstairs with records and things like that, and I did that for four years. Then I went to Child Abuse Prevention Program, and that was almost worse for me, because here I was working with dead children, because I used to look at these cases and I'd say, "Thank goodness this baby died," because it was so horrible what they were experiencing, what they were going through, from infants to adolescents. It was just a nightmare.

ESPINO

[unclear].

ARELLANES

Yes. So then I went to Child Abuse Prevention, and we were taking all the child-abuse reports that were happening in L.A. County from the hospitals, from anybody who dealt with them who suspected it. We would get those. That was worse for me, because those were live babies. Those were babies who were abused or suspected of being abused and still walking, where the other one was out of its pain and misery.

So I did a lot of—in fact, I just found a paper that I was reading, how I used to go to all these hospitals and anybody who was doing child-abuse reporting, county hospitals, which were more established than the private hospitals, and first responders and things like that, and asking them what did they expect of our agency. I was trying to develop public relations. I put a book

together, and I remember that book. I updated everything and made it something you could go to and say, "Okay, here's where I go for this."
Then from that, we had a lot of training. It was very interesting to work with first responders, paramedics, fire, police, because they would see a baby—take a SIDS [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome] baby. One of the things about SIDS babies is they have either purple around their mouth or on their buttocks, so it looks like they've been hit, and it's not that at all. Back in those days, way back then, they really didn't know what SIDS was, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Just seeing the emotion of them trying to tell you how they would go to these babies and try to revive them when they know they were dead, they would just continue, continue on the way to the hospital, knowing the child had already passed. It was very emotional, but it was very interesting, so I enjoyed doing that.
ESPINO
How would you, and also the people you work with, how do you think people cope with that kind of reality, those unspeakable acts? How would you come home and—
ARELLANES
The point is, it is reality. I drove my kids nuts. One time there was a horrible child abuse, I mean horrible, where the skin was taken off and this baby was dismembered. It was out here in this area, I think in Covina, maybe. I came home and I told them, "Here's why you shouldn't be walking out there," blah, blah, blah. They go, "Mom, you only tell us that because of what you work with." I go, "That's what I work with." The investigator, because I went down to the service area, he says, "I'm warning you, Gloria, be prepared for what you're going to see." The saddest part was this child had in its shirt little toys, and they were there. I think that was the most disturbing thing, because I saw horrendous things.
I worked the Cerritos air crash that week. It was really interesting. When that plane crashed in Cerritos, it was a weekend, and that morning I had fallen in gasoline. I went to get gas and somehow my foot slipped. I didn't see the gas on the floor and I fell. The guy was kind of nasty. I'd gone for years to that gas station, and he was kind of nasty with me when I told him. So I said, "Well, I'm going home." I had to change, because I had gasoline all over my knees.

As I kept using my clutch, Volkswagen, the leg kept getting worse and worse and worse until I got home. I couldn't walk anymore. It was gigantic. My son was the one that cut my pants and my pantyhose off. [laughs] I called them and said, "I can't go in." I was working the coroner's office. "I fell and my knee's pretty banged up." Couldn't get to a medical facility, nobody to give me a ride. Never thought about calling an ambulance. The director of the coroner's office, she says, "I'm going to send one of the vans out with some wheelchairs." I go, "No, you're not sending me that van. Oh, no." That's what they pick up the bodies with. So she got me transportation and to go to the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center to take care of me. That's the only way I was able to get to a doctor. But, anyways, that weekend, I worked that flight disaster. They said, "Are you well enough to come in?" I go, "Not really. I'm on crutches." They said, "We really need you to come in." So I did go in. Another horrendous thing to—my realization was how fragile the body is, because there was people who were only identified by one tooth. So I guess in my lifetime I've seen those horrible, horrible things, and I've seen beautiful, beautiful things, and you reach a balance. This is why I've always had a very dark humor, not so bad now. It was pretty dark.

Anyways, from the coroner's office I went to Child Abuse Prevention, lasted a couple years there. I really worked for a really wacky doctor. He was wacky. I think he was self-medicating, and his eyes would look all shadowed, like he was not sleeping for days. It was time to move on. One of the girls I had worked with had worked for the sheriff's department. She kept telling me, "Gloria, you need to go over there." I go, "No, I don't want to go over there." She goes, "They're really good to civilians, the pay is good. You should really, really apply." I said, "Well, I'm not really interested in that." I didn't really know what I was interested in, but I did apply. I even went so far as to take a test for a reserve. I was in my best shape then. I was a body builder. I was running, and I was in my early forties, so I wasn't no spring chicken, but I had built myself up. So I felt, well, maybe I do have the stamina to do that. So I took the written test, passed it, and then I went out there. My friend told me, "Go out to the field, because they're practicing," and her friend was training everybody, so he kind of took me under his wing. Well, it was pathetic. [laughs] I tried to

keep up. It was like run the track, come and do ten pushups, run the track, come and do ten jumping jacks, run the track and come and do mountain climbers. I was beating myself up big time, and he saw it.

He said, "Okay, come here. Come here. I want you to do this. I want you to jump over the wall. You got the legs for it? If you have your upper strength, you'll get over fine." So he showed me. He had a woman show me how to do it. I ran and—wham!—I just crashed into the wall. He goes, "No, no, no." He goes, "Show her how to do it." So I try this other way. No, I'm not getting my body over. So then he says, "Okay, I want you to walk up. I'm holding the top. Walk up." I walked up, and my knees are here, and I tell him, "I can't move." He goes, "Put those legs over. You've got that body. Come on!" "I cannot move." The next day I had bruises. I said for a dollar a year, no, thank you. Because you're a volunteer. I said no. But I did apply for the sheriff's department, and one of the things they told me was be honest about your background, because I had the Chicano Moratorium, Brown Berets and all these things, so I was honest with them. But it took a really long time. So somebody said, "Why don't you just call." You get an investigator who goes through all your background, so I called her and I said, "I just wanted to know if there's anything that's in my records that would prevent me from getting hired." She goes, "What is it you're worried about?" I said, "Well, I was a Brown Beret in the Chicano Moratorium." She said, "Oh, no, we're not worried about those things. That's for people who are doing communism and socialism and things like that." I go, "Well, no, I didn't go there."

So eventually I did get hired, and I worked for the sheriff's department, and I don't say this very often, but I worked there probably for sixteen or eighteen years. I had a total of twenty-three years in the County of Los Angeles. It was very eye-opening for me. Just like when I worked in the coroner's to learn about life and death, I learned things about the sheriff's department. There's good and bad. I think anyplace you work, there's going to be good and bad, but I think the bad is more—I mean, I heard horrible, horrible war stories. These cops like to sit around and talk about what they do to people, and you want to, "No, no, no, no, I don't want to hear that," but you listen to it, or you're listening to it. Then I would speak up to them. When I first started, I wasn't so brave, because I

thought, no, they can find out where I live. I'm afraid they'll go to my house. I worked for Temple Station, and there was a racist sergeant there. Because I first tried to do 9-1-1 dispatch. That was horrible for me. That was a career change, because I'm very accustomed to working with people directly and kind of administrative-type work, and I tried to do this, working with this huge console that you push buttons and you're speaking to a deputy in the field and you're relaying information. When a station gets a call, it goes to this radio center, and then you send it out to whoever you're going to put the tag on, as they call it. I got to work in the station, and here the dispatcher's talking to the cops, and they'd laugh at them, because they were making mistakes and so I know they were laughing at me. So I just couldn't handle it. I wasn't good at it.

So they sent me to Temple, and I worked in their 9-1-1 station again, taking the calls, and I was trained one-on-one. People who are on light-duty work in there. But there was a sergeant who was from the South, and he was a racist. I used to sit there biting my finger like, "I'm going to tell him to take a leap" or something, or something not so pleasant. It took a lot of stamina for me to not do that. After two weeks, I could not handle it. When I was leaving, one of the secretaries said, she goes, "You weren't here very long. How come you're leaving?" I said, "It's kind of hard here." She goes, "People?" I go, "Yeah. I don't take women and gender insults very well or about racism. I don't handle that well." "Oh, I know who you're talking about. Oh, don't pay any attention to him." I said, "You accept that? That is disappointing. That is really disappointing." She goes, "No, we're used to him." I said, "I'm not and I never will be." So when I was leaving, the sergeant command called me in. He says, "You're leaving us so soon." I said, "Yes, I had applied over at Sybil Brand [Institute for Women], and they didn't have the position available, so I came here. But I called her and she has a position now, so she took me." He said, "Do you have anything to tell me?" I go, "No. No. I know it's just a short time. I don't have too much to say." He said, "Did you have problems with anybody?" He knew exactly what he was asking me.

I said, "No problems." I don't want to say anything. I just don't want to talk about anything. I just want to go on to a new job. Again, I was disappointed, because they knew what that man did,

what he yelled in front of everybody. I told an Asian family to come in. When you're in a traffic accident in the street, if you don't require 9-1-1 emergency services and you want a sheriff to roll out, then you tell them it's going to be long because you have all these other priority calls. "So it's going to be a long, long wait out there, so if you want to go home, we can send them to your home." "No, we want now." "Then you'll have to come into the station." Because this was an Asian family, that sergeant stood up and said [imitating southern accent], "Somebody sent these Asians in here. I don't like 'em." I'm like, "Oh, no." I mean, just out there, and nobody—it didn't faze them. He said, "They said Gloria sent them in." [laughs] He scared me.

ESPINO

I was just going to ask that. Were you afraid of him?

ARELLANES

He scared me. Had I known what I learned in my tenure in the sheriff's department, he wouldn't have scared me. I would have made hamburger out of him, because we came to a time when you can't do that.

ESPINO

Did you feel powerless?

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

What about when that one superior was asking you—were you still afraid to—

ARELLANES

My feeling was—and I can't prove who did it, and I only can assume it was him who did it—said that I was not trainable. He said, "You know, they say you're not trainable." I go, "Really? I don't see how that can be. Anything that was asked of me, I did, and I handled the 9-1-1 calls on my own. I'm sorry to hear that, but I don't believe I'm not trainable." So I know it was that one sergeant, because there was another one that was really good with me. I ran into him years later. He goes, "I remember you." I was just disappointed that people accepted that at that time. They didn't find anything wrong with that. I remember one time—what did he say? He says [imitating southern accent], "My dog, he don't like darkies." I'm like, "Darkies? We're in a cave." Then he made a comment one

time that women were breeders. That's when I went [demonstrates]. I wanted to tell him something so bad. He had really dark eyes and really dark hair, and you know he was mixed. He wasn't pure white. He was from the South, and he showed that horrible southern racist behavior that so many southerners have towards people of color.

ESPINO

During the sixties and seventies, you had a critique of the police. Did you find that some of your ideas before you started working for the sheriff's department were supported or debunked? Did you find that, yes, this is true, or, no, we were completely off?

ARELLANES

I think what any law enforcement did out there was beat people up and got away with it, even in the jails. Somebody I used to date, I went to visit him in jail, and he told me, "There's a big deputy coming this way. He choked somebody with a towel, killed them. "Don't look, don't look." So those things went on, but you're like who's going to believe you? We went to court on so many abuse cases and civil violations, and we never won that many because they had the upper hand. They had the attorneys. We had attorneys, but we had to borrow, like, ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] and different organizations that would help us. And I still see that. When I see Lindsay Lohan going to courts and getting sentences, I don't see that with other people. They aren't given that leniency, and her money speaks. So I was critical in ways, but yet I learned a lot. I got to learn another side to it. I think that was the most beneficial thing that was given to me. Like I say, in the coroner's office you learn about life and death. It's not all death. You learn about life, how fragile life is, how it can be taken from you in an instant. You're sitting in a car and a cop comes flying up the street, and—bam!—you're gone. I saw that. The suicides that I saw, you just sit there and scratch your head. The homicides, just unbelievable sometimes. You think, "I read the worst case," and here comes another one that just—wow. So I got to work more on the administrative sides, not in the streets, and I learned a lot. I had a lot of respect for some people, and some I had no respect for. I just—nuh-uh. I was able to joke with people, like deputies that would tell me—when we saw something about school walkouts one time, this is years later, and I said, "Oh, I was there. I did that."

They go, "We know you did, Gloria." They would laugh. So they accepted me for me. Also I know when I worked in the coroner's office, because I prepared all the paperwork that were going for homicide filings, so the detectives would come in from all the different PDs, from all over, and I got to see their human side, how much they wanted to get this suspect that did this crime, and so I got to see that other side. I would tell them, "You know, I bet you, I bet you I stood on a picket line and called you a pig." And they would just laugh. [laughs] Because I did, you know, and they would laugh about it. I think the work I started to do like in the child-abuse suspect reporting and the drug reporting, the different projects that I started doing, I got respect. I was also given credit for—because I did statistics, and they asked me, "Can you run," blah, blah, blah. Well, I found something on Richard Ramirez that was not noted before. Then I also found there was a serial killer on Skid Row. Just based on the statistics I was entering, I was able to come up with similarities and they were able to find somebody, arrest, and I got credit for that. I would walk into the lunchroom, "Hey, congratulations." I go, "Thank you, thank you, thank you. What did I do?" I didn't even know what I did sometimes. They would say, "Oh, you did this." I'd say, "Oh, I didn't know that." I learned to, overall, like most of the deputies, and then because I worked in the offices, you don't get the street guys, you get more the administrators, the older. They're very dedicated to their families, their wives and their children. When you work with the deputies, like when we would be at Sybil Brand, you would be shocked at why a deputy who had this gorgeous wife would take an inmate into a closet and get caught and lose everything.

ESPINO

An inmate?

ARELLANES

An inmate, a female. I worked at Sybil Brand. Females. You would just be, "I don't get that. What is so thrilling about an inmate?" I'm not saying inmates are bad, bad people, but I had some bad experiences with inmates myself. They told me, "Don't talk to them, Gloria, because all they'll do is create problems for you." So I had to ignore them, and you want to really tell them something. Then others were pretty cool. You could deal with them, the trustees.

ESPINO

What did you learn about the human condition? How did you still have faith in people after you experienced all this horrendous behavior and attitudes and all the hate?

ARELLANES

Because there's more good. What you find is not everybody is a real pig. Not everybody is a real racist. There was more good that I found, people who were genuinely very, very nice.

I used to have a friend that used to come over here. She was a tall blonde deputy. I mean, blonde, blonde, blonde, real tall. We had a lot of drug addicts living across the street one time, so I was telling her about them. So she came over to me and she goes, "Now, is that where all the druggies live?" I go, "Do you want me to be killed? Shut up!" [laughs] My sergeant one time wanted to come over when I had my first carpal tunnel surgery. She goes, "I have to make a home visit." I go, "Okay, come on over. Don't wear your uniform and don't wear your gun," and she did that. So I had that kind of a—I could talk to them at that level. They know as a civilian employee you're not sworn. You don't have to be, "Yes, sir," "Yes, ma'am," that kind of thing, or follow their rules. So as a civilian, you're just treated a little bit different. I guess I'm more relaxed around the civilians also.

ESPINO

They themselves, the officers, call the clerical staff and people who work in the office civilians?

ARELLANES

They don't call them that, but they refer to them as that, if they're writing something, civilian employees. Non-sworn employees is another word they would use, yes, but they wouldn't say, "Gloria Arellanes, civilian, come here." No.

ESPINO

But you could definitely see a separation in expectations and treatment and that kind of thing?

ARELLANES

Not really. As I started putting more and more years in, I always felt equal to them because I had gained enough expertise on projects. I mean, I rewrote big programs. So they treated me—I would never be a sworn person because I'm not in a uniform, I don't wear a gun, but I had a respect from the commanders and the chiefs. There's the sheriff, and then it's the chiefs and then it's the

commanders. I did a whole training program with them and I worked with roomfuls of them. All you see is they put that away for that, and they are that human person. So I got to go into a lot of areas that way. One of the most interesting things I did was racial profiling.

ESPINO

How did you get involved in that?

ARELLANES

I was in a training program where it was their baby, and they knew my background. I had worked in a diversity program, so they asked me to be part of that, and that was pretty—I don't want to say shocking, but, that one kind of, wow, I can't believe it, because they would take groups of deputies and have a meeting, then they'd sit down and explain what was going on. They became so defensive by saying, "That's the news media always after us. They're always after us. We're always to blame," and blah, blah, blah and blah, blah, blah. They don't racial profile, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But guess who the biggest complainers were? The Latinos. I was always just, "Oh, my gosh, why do they do that?" The blacks would agree, obviously. The whites would agree. They'd say, "Yeah, yeah, we know." I mean, I heard a black deputy one time saying they went to Denny's, and Denny's has a reputation anyways of racism. He said he was with a big group of deputies, and I don't know if they were uniformed or plainclothes, and he was the only black guy. They came and took everybody's orders, took his order, and they served everybody except him, and then they started making fun of him, you know, "How come you're not getting fed?" and blah, blah, blah. He said, "Well, I think this has something to do with it? Excuse me, I haven't received my order."

"Oh, okay. Right now. Right now." They never brought his order. So it's real out there, kind of subtle in a way, but you become aware how come he was treated that way. So what I saw in those groups was amazing. They did it where they took the deputies first, or all the sworn first, then they took community organizations like ACLU and other community organizations and watchdog groups, and then the last group was the community. So I was able to go to some of these. They were very interesting. The last one I didn't go to was a community one. A sergeant was telling me, he says—and this is a black sergeant. He says, "You know, I can't believe it. There was an

old couple that went to the meeting, and they said they had been driving. The lady was driving and the man was the passenger, and there was some deputy sheriffs on the side. The man looked at them, and his wife freaked out and said, 'Don't look at him! They'll stop us and you'll get arrested!'" and this and that. I grew up with that. Don't eyeball them. They would say, "You're eyeballing me." So I would tell my kids, "Don't look at them. Don't look at them." [laughs] I grew up with that, and I told the sergeant, "I grew up with that." He said, "I can't believe that." I go, "Believe it. I'm surprised you're not aware of it." But he grew up not in the ghetto, I guess. He didn't even have—I don't want to say blacks have accents; they do have a manner of speaking. He didn't have that. So I learned a lot of things. It was very interesting.

ESPINO

What was the purpose? Was it education, informative [unclear]?

ARELLANES

Oh, no, the department had to change, based on some commission. I forget what commission it was.

ESPINO

Was it after the Rodney King thing or before?

ARELLANES

I think it was before. Or maybe it was part of that. I don't know. But racial profiling and diversity was a big issue. I worked with some great Chicano. I mean, there was one commander, he's now chief, I swear he looked like a homeboy. He talked like a homeboy. He had a big brush like a homeboy. He was always, "Hey, Gloria," you know. I had two people like that in the department, and they were very down-to-earth and they always liked my ideas. "Yes, that's what we need to do, celebrate. Come on. Let's have celebration." [laughs] I mean, I met some really, really good people and some people that I didn't care to associate with.

ESPINO

You know what they say about the military. They say that just the whole training from the time a young man or woman enlists, that kind of training that they get almost creates the kind of ugly soldier that you might see causing violence in other countries or crossing the line of human rights. Do you think that a similar thing happens within the—or even now what they're saying about the football

culture, that it creates this idea that some people are above the law. Do you think that that kind of culture [unclear]?
ARELLANES
Absolutely. Absolutely. And I'll give you one simple example that happened right before I finally left the department. I am disabled, and so I have the blue parking thing, and I would park in a disabled thing. If not, you know, sometimes I would walk. "Okay, you have to walk today," you know. But when I saw a black and white parked in the handicapped parking, I said, "Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no." So I went to my sergeant, lieutenant. They didn't—"Oh, we'll mention it," blah, blah, blah, blah. No, I went to the top. I went to the captain's office. Oh, heads rolled. Heads rolled. They're not supposed to do that. They're not supposed to smoke in their vehicles. I've seen them smoke in their vehicles. They're not supposed to have mustaches. They're under a lot of—they have not codes, but they have rules and regulations, and they're pretty strict with them. But they do it. They try to get away with it, and they think they can do that. Yes, I think they think they're above the law when they do things like that. What if somebody were in a wheelchair and really needed that handicapped parking? I think that goes for anybody who parks in handicapped parking. Look at that basketball player. That was bad, because there are really people—and sometimes you can't see a person's disability. You might think, "Why did they need that?" But they do need it, I believe, and I think there's also abuses of that anyways.
ESPINO
Did you find that the women officers were different or did you find they had a similar mentality?
ARELLANES
Well, I'll tell you, when I went for an interview—because, remember, I moved every two years, because I get bored and I'm not challenged anymore, I need to learn something new, and I would get jobs like that because of my experience, and I had youth. When I reached fifty and if a male interviewed me, I knew I wasn't going to get that job, but if a female interviewed me, she looked at my experience, not at the package. And it was very obvious. You can't prove it. It's discrimination. I talked to other women in their fifties, they understood exactly, so it wasn't because I was overweight and they were nice and thin. It was just an age thing.

Then I'd have some that knew me personally and would say, "Gloria, I want you to apply for this job. You'd be perfect for it." Then I'd be almost ready to pack, right, and then somebody else got it. They'd call me, "Well, they wanted somebody else." So it got to where my age was speaking for me, not my experience anymore, and that was very unfortunate, because as a mature person, my children were already pretty grown now. An older person just doesn't have those problems. But, anyway, it's something I could not prove.

Overall, I enjoyed my time in the sheriff's department. I learned training. That was the last area I worked in, and I really loved the training department because I was able to take advantage of so many training things that I brought out to the community. I always shared what I had. I did things like Job Fairs, education reimbursement. We did diversity programs for the entire county, just a lot of different programs that I really, really enjoyed. People knew it. I did work on a mentoring project. They knew if they gave me a project, I would come up with something. I designed a training program for the chiefs and commanders, and my director, he was a civilian. He'd say, "Here's what I want." I'd write it up, take it to him, and he'd kind of tweak it and then we'd put it out. I did manuals and things like that. So I enjoyed my work. It wasn't just pounding on a computer typing or doing statistics. I was able to do a lot of different things, and that's me. So that's what makes me stay in this life. If I had to do the same thing over and over and over, don't last longer than two years.

ESPINO

Do you think some of the skills that you developed as an activist helped you in that role?

ARELLANES

The organization, yes. I've always been an organizer, since I was in high school, and I'm still an organizer. I see something and I see how it could be done. Like I say, they use me to make things more efficient. I would take projects and, "No, no, no, you're going to do it this way, save time." It's easier, much easier." People always bought off on my programs that I developed.

ESPINO

How about your politics? How did they influence you later on in—

ARELLANES

Well, by then, having had the movement behind me and going back to my tribal traditional ways, that's more the internal thing. Like I would tell them, "I work in the sheriff's department. I never bring that home with me." I am a traditional person, I bring that with me, and it also goes home with me. I always left the sheriff's department over here. That's something I learned early on, not to bring that work home. Some people get really—there's words for it, where their work is their life. Mine wasn't. I had a whole community life and very active and took off a lot and traveled and did things. So I loved my job because I got good benefits, I got decent pay, and I loved my work. I really liked my work.

ESPINO

Can you describe exactly what it was that you loved about it, what was it about that job itself?

ARELLANES

The diversity of the jobs themselves. I wasn't just stuck at a desk just doing, "You're in charge of this report." I did a lot of reports. I did all the personnel files, and they just, "Oh, they're so beautiful." Everybody comments how beautiful they are because I put everything in order. I can't do that in my house. [laughs] I was able to show results for what I did, but I didn't have to stay stuck in that, because they would let me do graphics, artwork, contacts, go out, talk to people. So I never had that just sit at the desk eight hours a day, and I was able to move about and get involved in things. If I told my director something that was only for directors, "Can I go to that thing?" "Sure, I'll get you in there," and he would put me in there. Very good to me, very good to me, especially the last spot I was in. I had worked with some really, really good people and people who I worked with the same program, which is the Sheriff's Anti-Drug Program for kids. It was a great place to work in. That was a new unit, so they gave me all their systems to build, and I did.

ESPINO

So in the sixties it was really about social change through grassroots organizing.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

Did you feel like you were effecting change in your work life later on? Was that something you were interested in doing?
ARELLANES
It has to be, because you're driven. I mean, when I think about the movement in those days, the sixties and seventies, it was very brutal, but yet it was exciting because it was very new. Again, it's that people, you're always working with people and you're always trying to come up with ideas. Then you get a project like the clinic and the moratoriums, things like that. Those are big, big things. So for me to go to the sheriff's department, I didn't feel that free to do those things. By the way, it was very interesting that most of the Brown Beret women went into some form of law enforcement. I think only one did not, of the certain group that we had. But all of them went into some form and will not talk for interviews, and I have no problem doing that. I have had problems talking about the sheriff's department. I've only used that to intimidate some people. "I work for the sheriff's department." "Why would you work there?" "Why not?" But it did teach me a lot in terms of not only law and what law enforcement does, whether it's good or bad, because sometimes it was bad. I just thought of something really funny. My brother used to stay in the garage. He lived in the garage. When he passed, we tried to clean that out. He's been gone about twelve years. He was a Brown Beret. One day we were cleaning out the garage, so I told the boys, "Move everything out so we can clean everything and throw everything away we don't need or get rid of it." My son called me, "Mom! Mom!" I go, "What, what, what?" [unclear], "A mouse, a mouse, a mouse!" He goes, "Mom." I go, "What?" There was a hand grenade under a desk out there. [laughs] It's really funny. "Oh, my gosh! Don't touch it! Don't move it!"
I came inside, called 9-1-1. They said, "Get everybody out of your house." I go, "My animals." "Get the people out of your house. We don't care about the animals." I was like, [demonstrates]. [laughs] So, anyways, I told my brilliant son, the Ph.D., picked up the—he put them on a pooper-scooper, those two hand grenades, and put them on the front lawn. So, Virginia, when the police came, it was like one of those comedies, because they came, "Okay, where are they, ma'am?" I go, "Well, my brilliant son moved them over here. I'm sorry." "Well, you're going to have to move down the street. Move your vehicle out." I had a truck. "Move it down the street." I

said, "Okay." "You're going to have to stand way down there." I go, "All right." But they came down the street with guns and rifles like [demonstrates]. That block wall out there, they're peeking around it. We're standing there, right there. [laughs] My son's girlfriend, his now wife, they put us way down. They evacuated the entire neighborhood. They didn't know if they were live. She brought us chairs, folding chairs, and sodas and chips, and we were down there watching them. All these neighbors out there, "What's so terrible? What's going on? What's going on?" [laughs] I could see on the other end somebody walking down the street in their bomb uniform. Where our office was, the bomb squad was two doors down. I started thinking, "You know what? Oh, my gosh, they're going to put it on the news. Oh, my gosh, oh, no, no, no." They didn't, thank goodness, and I didn't say where I worked or anything like that. Then somebody went down there and interviewed me. They had the streets blocked off. Took hours for them. It was inert, which means he bought them at Army Surplus.

ESPINO

Do you think they were from the sixties period?

ARELLANES

Yes, they were.

ESPINO

They were?

ARELLANES

They were. I just know he had them out there. I remember when they cleared it and I came back and he goes, "Can we have permission to go through all this stuff?" I said, "Certainly," because we had all the driveway lined up with stuff we had taken out. "You can see we're cleaning." He goes, "Why would your brother have those?" I go, "I don't know. My brother's been gone ten years." He goes, "But why?" I go, "I don't know."

ESPINO

But you knew, right? [laughs]

ARELLANES

I knew. I knew. And I would tell the boys, "Uncle Bill's up there laughing at us. He's having fun with this one." [laughs]

Then I went a couple days later, because I knew the lieutenant who ran that section. First they tell me what deputy had come and removed them. It was a female, and she was so sarcastic and

nasty. I didn't tell her I work here, blah, blah, blah. "That was my house you went to and those things. Is it possible to get those? I think it would be a great conversation piece." "No." I left, I came back and I talked to my friend the lieutenant. I told him the story. He was laughing. He goes, "That's really funny, Gloria." I told him, "Can I have them? Just one?" He goes, "No. What if somebody breaks in your house and then takes that and fills it with dynamite or something and it becomes a real weapon?" I said, "Okay, I understand." He goes, "But that's really funny." Then my lieutenant, the next day, the morning when I went in, they put out incident reports every morning, everything that's happened, so I told him, "Ask me how my weekend was." He goes, "How was your weekend, Gloria?" I told him. He goes, "I just read about that." It was in the report. [laughs] See, I had more of those instances than the bad, nasty, ugly things that I saw, the horrible things that I heard went on in the jails, the things they do out in the street, how they treat people with disrespect. Like I say, I didn't work in the street, so I don't know, I didn't get to see that, but I know it exists. You never can convince me that they are good.

When all these jail problems were coming up with [Sheriff Lee] Baca, those things have been going on for years. That's nothing new. I mean, I talked to guys, they do this, they do that, you know, and that's nothing new.

ESPINO

I don't know if you can answer this, it's a pretty big question, but do you think that there's a way to curb that kind of abuse? Do you think there's anything that anybody can do, like from Baca, to people like more the lieutenants and the sergeants on the ground?

ARELLANES

It will get dealt with, but I don't believe it'll ever be perfect because I think any place you are, if you're given some power, like these coaches, you're over people, you have power over people and control over people, you're always going to abuse them. Even this Occupation L.A., they were bragging, [Antonio] Villaraigosa and [Ralph] Becker, "No violence." Did you see the pictures of the people's hands that were beaten with the clubs and people who were punched in the stomach? That's here in L.A. So there's always going to be the ones that are going to do what they want to do anyways, and maybe the majority might be okay trying not to do

any violence, but there's always going to be those that are going to say, "No, I'm not going to take this." So I think that anything we do, there's always people who want to have power, and with that power comes abuse. Look at our Senate and our House. Look at what they're doing. Politicians having control over people's lives, to cut 160 million people's taxes or raise their taxes, and here they're saying, "I'm not going to take taxes from the millionaires," that's power. That's control. That's "I have authority to do that."

ESPINO

It also seems like there's no—I think this probably even happened in the sixties with some of those organizations, people don't want to complain, people don't want to seem like—

ARELLANES

Troublemakers.

ESPINO

Yeah, like troublemakers. They don't want to lose the respect from their—they want to stay part of the "in" circle.

ARELLANES

Yes, yes, I agree with that. You know, some people are not afraid to speak up, and sometimes they get very some bad treatment because of it, lose their jobs, whatever, but if the word gets out, then you've accomplished something, if people are aware these things are going on. It's just like all this abuse that's coming out from these [Pennsylvania State University] coaches [Jerry Sandusky]. That happened a long time ago and nobody did anything about it. A little boy screaming downstairs, and the wife [Dottie Sandusky] was upstairs, and she didn't go see what's wrong with that kid? She knew what was happening, unfortunately.

ESPINO

Looking back on that period then, the sixties and the seventies, the Chicano Movement and all the movements that were happening, what do you see as some of the great accomplishments?

ARELLANES

Some of the great accomplishments?

ESPINO

That were recognized.

ARELLANES

The longevity of a lot of it. When I see Rosalio [Muñoz] still hammering away at what he does, I think very highly of Rosalio.

And when I look at Occupation L.A. and all the Occupation Movements, I smile, because I say, "I did that." I'm too old to do it now. I mean, I'm not really, but I don't want to go out there now and be cold and that kind of stuff. If I were between twenty and thirty, I'd be out there. Forty, actually. But that makes me happy, although I don't know where they're going with it, because they have an awful lot of numbers of people to create some really major impacts if they do it correctly. That's what impresses me. And they're doing it nonviolently. We were violent, or some of us were very violent in our times, but I think we were pushed into those corners. Nobody wanted to listen to us. We were troublemakers. We were all troublemakers. Even our own people would throw—when I'd go to rallies and pass out something that would say "Chicano," I'd have people who wad it up and throw it, "Chicano!" We were troublemakers. You don't say you're a Chicano; you're American of Mexican descent, Mexican American," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. How many changes, evolutions of the name? So, sixties and seventies, some of the things, I do see a lot of unraveling, like everything that we did for education, to finally get kids to get an education, is being undone because of the way they're raising tuitions on the young people, taking away Chicano Study classes, Native American Studies. There's classes that they're taking away. Some states won't even allow them. So I see unraveling in that area. Housing, everybody is suffering under housing, everybody, from people who buy homes, to people who rent. It's just so expensive now, it's ridiculous. Economically we're suffering a lot. I believe in self-sustainability. I want to do more, like capturing rainwater and things like that. There's some bill that they want to pass that would not allow people to grow their own vegetables and share them, sell them, or anything. I give away my vegetables, because I'm one person and I get tons of stuff, and I share everything I get. My neighbors always get beautiful tomatoes, zucchinis, chilis, whatever I can give them. Me and the birds fight over the blueberries. [laughs] I kind of am really looking at this country now in terms of how I see what would be called third-world countries, what Syria has gone under, Egypt has gone under, the people in the street and rioting and fighting the government, the government fighting back. I really see that here now. I see more and more of our rights being taken away. They're using the police

departments as the military now. I mean, I do see a lot now that this country is not going in a good direction. It's very sad.
ESPINO
Do you feel like things are better, worse, the same, similar as at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement?
ARELLANES
I think it's just very different now. Like I heard something today, a Tea Bagger Party group from one state put a picture out of [Barack] Obama as a skunk, because he's half white, half black and does nothing good, and yet had the audacity to say that's not racist. So, yeah, it is racist, it's very racist, and they can justify it in their own minds that it's okay to do that. These are people who are either politicians or will run as politicians and will run this country. I just think the whole thing—I don't understand our Senate and our Congress, the bills that they're voting for and the bills that they're not voting for. I don't understand it, because it keeps coming down to that the elite and the rest are ignored. That's why I say occupation, I'm not a real big fan of going out for votes and things like that. I vote every year. I vote, but I'm not going to knock on a door or call people. I find when you talk to people about politics, you're in a war. They're either for or against. It's like abortion, either for or against. You're not going to change anybody's mind. But I still watch these things and I have opinions and I read things, and I just am amazed at how conservative this country is becoming and how a Congress and a Senate, how our politicians are not voting for things, for jobs, for lower taxes, help the rich help out the poor a little bit more. I'm amazed at how they can get away with that, and I really don't see people, other than the Occupy L.A.'s and the Occupy Movement, saying, yes, the 99 percent, the 1 percent. That's the only one I hear. I just hope they harness that energy and use it in a positive way.
ESPINO
Do you think the best strategy is within democratic politics, is within voting, that's the best way to make change, those kinds of great, large scale…?
ARELLANES
No, because they just do bills, and they have the filibustering and they have those people that go and—what are they called?
ESPINO

The lobbyists?
ARELLANES
The lobbyists. A lot of power there, a lot of money, and I don't think the population in general understands that and how much power and how much decision making they have or influence they have and how the politicians buy off on it. I just think it's getting more conservative. I think it's getting harder for people to survive. Economically, things are not getting better. I know my own personal case, I am experiencing hardships now. I'm really experiencing hardships, and I'm having to learn how to live differently because I've never had to live differently. So it's a learning experience for me. It's not an easy one if you're used to living a certain way. But then on the other hand, I'm trying to reach that point in my life I don't need stuff anymore. I'm trying to be more basic now, and hopefully I'll get there. Every day I work on getting rid of something, and starting to realize I don't need all that stuff. There's so much stuff.
ESPINO
Is it because your bills are increasing, your light bill? Food's more expensive.
ARELLANES
My bills are increasing. Food is more expensive. I don't need clothes. I only wear Levis and long skirts and comfortable tops, and I don't need suits anymore or fancy shoes. I need comfortable shoes for my poor feet. But I see people with health issues who can't get taken care of. I'm very blessed on my retirement benefits that I have and my health benefits, because I've been in and out of the hospital and didn't pay a cent. My copayment was zip, only paid $5 to the emergency room, so I can't complain about that for me. But other people don't have that.
When I first left the county, didn't retire yet, I didn't have any health benefits. I have gone to the county health clinics and I've sat with hundreds of patients and watched how bad they've been treated and how much attitude those county employees can have, because I was a county employee and I understand it. When you're burned out, you're burned out, and nobody's there to kind of help make it better. Because I was told one time when I went, I told them, "I'm actually a county employee, but I'm out of work right now. I had a surgery and my benefits ran out." "We can't serve

you." I go, "Why? Show me in writing where that's a rule." "We can't serve you." I said, "Okay, we'll see." I called Gloria Molina's office and I called the administrator, and, "Oh, no, no, that's not true. No." But you've got to sit there and put up with mean nurses, mean receptionists, crowds of people, for hours and hours and hours, and then you see a doctor who's really kind of goofy, you know, not what I would consider a quality doctor. That's the county.

ESPINO

So I guess we're going to wrap up now.

ARELLANES

Okay.

ESPINO

But there was one last thing I wanted to ask you that we didn't get to in some of the interviews before. That was, you mentioned something—I'm not sure if it was off the record when we were talking before or after the interview—about femininity and about wanting to look feminine. You mentioned that about body building.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

I think that was on the record. But the Brown Berets, their whole look, even though it was sort of what they called paramilitary, it was very feminine.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

Was that self-conscious? Was it something that you thought about, that you all talked about and decided, "This is what we're going to wear and this is how we want to look"?

ARELLANES

Sometimes we did that, like when we did that Brown Beret wedding when Bonnie and Sabu got married. We made our own dresses, so we all went and got the material, chose the designs, what would be the trim, how we wore our hair. We wore those big hairpieces that were bouffant. What were they called? They weren't falls. They were just big hairpieces that we curled. All of us had our hair the same and all of us wore a lot of makeup. But that was kind of the period. That was the Twiggy era, actually. I remember painting on eyelashes, putting fake eyelashes and the whole thing. I think that

was just part of the period, the time period. People wore a lot of makeup. It wasn't a natural look.
ESPINO
Right. But then when you look at the late sixties and early seventies, you're looking at women, maybe it wasn't—I don't know if Chicanas were impacted by it, but shedding all that, shedding the makeup, shedding bras, shedding conventions about sexuality and beauty and all of those things.
ARELLANES
Yes, I agree. You know what? I kind of attribute that to the Hippie Movement. I mean, I went to a lot of love-ins. I used to be fascinated, and I've always been a rocker, love the rock music, and still do. Last concert I went to was Stevie Nicks. Awesome. [laughs] People are amazed. "You went to—?" Why not?
ESPINO
Beautiful voice.
ARELLANES
She's awesome. But I think because of the hippie period who went no underwear, no makeup, but then they also didn't clean themselves. They weren't into having to have a bath every day. Because I went to those love-ins and sometimes—not that people smelled, but that was just kind of their—they weren't looking for convention. They were kicking all those conventional manners away. So I think because of that, people started to return to more non-makeup, non the hair, the whole thing. But also people started becoming more indigenous, returning to their indigenous ways, and that meant getting rid of all that stuff. It's not important anymore. I know now it's very strong with women. Women are very beautiful now. I was just reading this thing about hair, that this girl was saying that there was an article put out about why Indians do not or indigenous people do not cut their hair. Well, I was taught not to cut my hair because we have maná, which is power in our hair. So when you cut it, you're like a tree, who when you cut a tree the sap comes out, so your power comes out of your hair. So as you get older, your hairs tends to get a little bit kind of skinny there. But I don't cut my hair. I only cut my hair when I have a loss, because that's my offering for the person. If somebody passes that I'm very close to, then my hair comes off. I don't go to a beauty shop, because I do this. I've had it like this for years.

I also don't believe in letting people touch my hair, especially strangers that I don't know. And I was taught also that when you do cut your hair, bury it or burn it, because it's your power. People may want that. So you never let them have it. So my brushes, when I take out all that hair that's falling out of my head, I put that in a special place and do something special with that. I've always been told, "Let your hair grow long. Let your hair grow long." That's why you see the men with the beautiful hair. I don't know how they get that beautiful hair. The women don't get it. [laughs] But I do have a grandmother, Grandma Morning Star, her hair's four feet long. It goes to her calf. That's how long her hair is. She asked me to brush it one time, and that's an honor to brush an elder's hair.
ESPINO
I'm going to pause it for a second. [Interruption]
ESPINO
I'm sorry for that interruption. You were talking about hair and the importance of hair and how that's your power, your power's with that, and we were also talking about some of the conventions of the sixties, fifties, I guess, that was shaken off with the Hippie Movement. I was wondering if you could explain a little bit more about a love-in? What exactly was that, that you went to?
ARELLANES
A love-in were things that the hippies put together in San Francisco. Actually, we went up there for a Peace Walk one time, and you could still see the love-ins going on. They were at Griffith Park, and people were kind of walking around kind of spaced, actually.
ESPINO
On drugs?
ARELLANES
On drugs. I remember getting little gifts, little shells sometimes, or little beads, and it was supposed to be love. There was no violence, and everything was cool and copasetic and things like that. I used to go because there was great rock groups that played. I saw the Moody Blues over here at Griffith Park one time. I saw the Mamas and Papas up in San Francisco. Who were the other groups I saw? There was some other big groups.
ESPINO
Jefferson Airplane?
ARELLANES

Yes, all those groups. It was just really, really great. You would see these people just out there dancing like these free birds, just dancing and things like that. So everything was about love, and there was no violence, but I went mostly for the rock. I enjoyed the atmosphere.

ESPINO

Did it feel authentic?

ARELLANES

Yes, oh, absolutely, whether they were high or not. It was just a great feeling to sit with people who weren't going to harass you or be mean or negative or anything like that. So I enjoyed that. I enjoyed that. That's my music background too. I just love music.

ESPINO

How about the idea that they were—were they primarily white folks?

ARELLANES

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

ESPINO

But did it feel like that was—when you look back, was it a place where you felt safe to be yourself, be Chicana, or did you feel like you had to be—

ARELLANES

Yes, I never felt discrimination or stares or anything like that. I felt those more just in the street. But in those areas, no, I didn't feel that, no intimidation whatsoever, no paranoia, no is this person going to freak out or something like that. No. Very nice.

ESPINO

Finally, the last question, it would be access to birth control. That was around when you were with the free clinic. It was around Roe v. Wade, the passage of Roe v. Wade. No, I guess it was not quite yet, because we're talking '69, '70. The pill was in use, but abortion was still illegal.

ARELLANES

I think the IUDs were—IUDs, intrauterine device, yes, IUDs were more popular. There was something else, a ring. Those were in big demand. We got a lot of requests from the free clinic. I have to speak from the free clinic aspect. I think women were trying to prevent pregnancy without having to go through an abortion or abortion counseling or adoption, whatever choice they made in terms of pregnancy. Because a lot of people have had babies when

they were still babies, and the results aren't always that good. Sometimes the parents wouldn't even want the child to live in the home that was pregnant. But I do recall a lot of birth control. We had a gynecologist once a week come in.

ESPINO

How busy was the gynecologist that would come in once a week?

ARELLANES

I don't think he was overwhelmed, but I think there was a good flow of females that would come in. Unfortunately, at that time, you know, it always fell on the woman to prevent, to protect herself, use a form of birth control.

ESPINO

It seems like at that time IUDs were—did you ever feel like family planning people were trying to have you push some of these birth controls on the patients, or was it something that they would come and ask for it and then you would want to provide them with the service?

ARELLANES

Because of how we advertised for it, I think they came in on their own, and this is why I always said when the Catholic Church didn't want to fund us anymore, that had they taken surveys, that the majority of our patients were Catholic, using birth control not—what is it—rhythm method, a very antiquated form of birth control."

ESPINO

So it was more of a demand that you supplied versus—

ARELLANES

Yes. Yes.

ESPINO

Because in some situations, there was so much money being poured into public and community hospitals for birth control, that some women felt it was being pushed on them, certain methods, like the IUD. But that's interesting.

ARELLANES

Yes.

ESPINO

I guess that's it. Is there anything that you want to say before we end, any comments you have or—

ARELLANES

I really enjoyed this, and I'm glad it's being done because I don't have to write a book. [laughs] And there's a lot of things that weren't touched upon that are deeply personal, and I'm glad. I don't want to put too much personal stuff out there, but there were some areas that I was glad finally got out, like the rape, something that I hadn't talked about in forty years or wanted to acknowledge really, and I finally have and I'm glad. Those things happened, and they still happen. But it's been a pleasure, Virginia. Thank you very much.

ESPINO

Likewise. Thank you. Okay. We'll stop now. [End of December 13, 2011 interview]

Date: 2014-01-30