Civil Rights History Project
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Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
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Interviewee: Gloria Arellanes

Interview Date: June 26, 2016

Location: El Monte, California

Interviewer: David Cline

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: approximately 1 hour, 35 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

David Cline: Today is Sunday, June the 26, 2016. This is David Cline from the History Department at Virginia Tech, and recording an interview for the Civil Rights History Project of the Southern Oral History Program of UNC, University of North Carolina, also the Library of Congress. And we have Guha Shankar with us today, and also the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. Behind the camera today, we have John Bishop of Media-Generation and UCLA. And we have a guest with us who we are quite honored to be visiting today in El Monte, California--Gloria Arellanes. And if I could ask you this. It's the one time I will coach you at all, if you could introduce yourself for the camera [with] a full sentence, "My name is," and where and when you were born.

Gloria Arellanes: My name is Gloria Arellanes. I live in El Monte, California. Have lived here all my life. I was born in 1946, making me a seventy-year-

old. [Laughter] And that's quite an accomplishment in my family. People don't live too long. But I went to school here. I went to East LA College briefly. Was not interesting. Wanted some life experience, so--.

DC: Mm-hmm. So, I know that we are in a house that your parents bought. And I wonder if you could tell us a little about--even before them, about your people and the history in this area.

GA: I am a Tongva elder, and I--my ancestors had this area. This was the village known as Hautngna. I'm not--. It's "The Place of the Willow." And there aren't too many willows. They're more near where the original mission site was. There's still a lot of willows out there. Of course, development has removed everything that was natural in this area.

But we had lived here, well, now it's sixty-five years I've lived here, and my parents were living in East Los Angeles. I came out of the Maravilla projects. And my grandmother lived on Mednick and Dozier. So, my father had a little wrought-iron shop right there in East Los Angeles, across the street. So, we were always right there in that area. And on his GI benefits, he came out here to El Monte to get this home. And went through the process of escrow and everything, and everything was approved.

And on the last day, my mother came to sign, and my father was very fair-skinned, very light, hazel eyes. My mother was very native-looking. She was native. She was a Tongva, and very dark, black hair. So, they had not seen my mother, but they had--were dealing with my father. Arellanes was not, and still isn't, a very common name. So, they didn't know what--they thought he was Greek, I think. [Laughter] And when they saw my mother, they said, "Oh, oh, no, no, no. Oh, we--you--we have to take

this house back." And my father went into a rage. He was a businessman. He was a wrought-iron person. So, he knew how to run a business. He was self-employed. And he says, "I will sue you. You have my money. You have put me through escrow. You are not taking this house back." And so, they couldn't do anything about it.

So, we moved into this house. And as I grew up, I remember my mother telling me that there was problems buying the house. They didn't want to sell the house. But she didn't give me the reasons why. So, about three years ago, I became involved with these El Monte--South El Monte, Arts Posse group out here. They wanted to do an interview with me. Well, a young man wrote an essay, and they wanted to meet me, and I spoke to a group here. And it was then, after I started reading some of their articles about El Monte, that I found out you could not buy homes, or sell homes to Mexicans and Asian people. And that was the reason why they tried to take the house back.

And I was--I was really shocked. I didn't know. And other people say, "Oh, yeah, that was really common." And I just had no idea, because I wasn't--as a child, I was never raised with any kind of racism or forms of hatred of people just because of their color or their looks. And so, to find that out was very shocking for me, even though, afterwards, when I got--when we lived here in El Monte, it was predominately an Anglo community. I did experience a lot of racism. And into high school, we had race riots where only the Chicanos would be arrested. And we were made fun of. We were embarrassed to eat our bean burritos. And people kill for [5:00] bean burritos now. [Laughs] They love them.

But that's how racist it was. And we--and when we walked down the street coming from high school, we stayed in large groups, because we were yelled at, and things were thrown at us. And like I say, we had fights in the high school.

DC: So how did your parents identify, and what did they teach you about your own identity as a little kid?

GA: Oh, they confused me. [Laughs] They confused me, because my dad would say, "You're Chicano." And I would say, "No, Dad, I'm American. School tells me I'm American." "No, you're Chicano." And I would, "Wah, Dad, I'm American!" And he said, "No, you're Chicano." So, it was very confusing as a child. And then, as I got a little older, I had gone to see one of my mother's cousins. And she had all this family genealogy. Because I had heard we were native, but nobody would talk to me about it.

And so, she showed me genealogy. She showed me photos. I have an uncle who wrote books in the [19]20s, and gave a lot of family history. Even put a rice-pudding recipe in his book. And he was a horseman, so he eventually went up to Bakersfield. And he said a lot of the families from here, to get away from the mission, went to Bakersfield. And he was considered a *vaquero*, an Indian *vaquero*. And his names were always buckaroos, about buckaroos.

And when I told my mother this, she goes, "Don't listen to her. She--don't listen to anything she tells you. You are Mexican. Don't ever say you're an Indian." And it was so confusing. And I go, "Well, why would she do that?" She goes, "Just don't listen to her." Well, as an adult, and doing my own genealogy, I found out I was Tongva, or Gabrielino, as some people referred to us, from the San Gabriel mission, from this area.

We have always lived here. My mother's family came from the Alhambra area, Pasadena-Alhambra area.

And she carried what we call cultural trauma, because they were punished for being Indian. When the Spaniards came in the 1800s, they put them to work in the missions, and they separated the families because the men didn't want to come in. So just the women and children were forced to come in, and they were not able to pray in the manner that they were used to praying, dress as they wished to dress or accustomed to dressing, speak their language, dance, ceremonies. Everything was taken away from us.

And women wore tree-bark skirts. Okay, we have beautiful climate in California, until climate change destroyed it. [Laughs] But we didn't have to dress from neck to the bottom of your feet. This is what the Spanish and the missions did to us. They wouldn't let us dress in our customary way.

And therefore, we had to change the way we were, and we had to serve them, take care of their children. We were their nannies, I guess. History always put us as the romantic missions. It was torture for us. People died, in huge amounts, of disease. You can go to the mission. They have mass burials. Everybody else gets individual plaques and so forth--Tommy Temple and so forth. But you look: "Thousands of Indians were buried here. They died of measles," or whatever disease it was--chicken pox.

So, it destroyed--it almost destroyed us. And history did say we no longer exist. We were extinct. And that's not true. And it seems like every day I meet--not every day, but when I go to some kind of a gathering, I'll meet somebody new who has just discovered they are Tongva. It's very exciting. So, we have a fairly large tribe now, and we've been able to get some language back. We've gone back to our regular regalia.

And we're learning language. We'll never have a full language. There are no fluent speakers, but we can say bits and pieces because J.P. Harrington recorded a lot of that.

So, it was confusing growing up.

DC: And how about your father's insistence on--? I mean, your father had a strong Chicano identity.

GA: Yeah.

DC: And you carried that into high school?

GA: Yes, into high school, yeah. And it's kind of interesting, because he was such a conservative man. Him and I clashed ideologically, you know? He just--. It was funny, because that's what he identified me [as], Chicano. And yet, he was a businessman. He belonged to the Elks Club, the Masons Club. And [10:00] he didn't--I didn't see him as a Chicano. [Laughs] It's kind of interesting.

And my mother just kind of went along with things. She never seemed to say, "You should be this," "You should be that." My father was more wanting me to go--. He wanted to see me be successful, but yet he wanted me to be married and have children. It was very confusing for me sometimes, from my dad. And he was hard to communicate with, because he was raised--his father died at a young age, and he had to take care of a large family. And I think that made him very hard sometimes. He wasn't an affectionate man. He wasn't like my mother. My mother was completely opposite. She was--up until her death she was my best friend.

But it was hard growing up with my dad. Although, I know he loved me. He provided for us very well. We were never hungry. We weren't--I mean, this isn't a castle here, [laughs] but it was a home. And he didn't--.

DC: Well, he brought you all out here seeking something better than ( ).

GA: Exactly, right. And he wouldn't let us speak Spanish. I had a brother. He would not let us speak Spanish because he didn't want us to have an accent. So, had he lived long enough, he would have known that's a benefit, to have--be bilingual, trilingual. But that didn't happen, and tells you kind of the thinking of those days.

And his family--his family was traveling musicians from Chihuahua. And they traveled on a burro--a donkey--and they were musicians. And one of my uncles was--I mean, the house they lived in, it was a castle, big house in East LA. And they had a[n] organ with all the pedals on the floor, and a whole pipe room. That's how big that house was. And we weren't allowed to touch that thing. Gloria used to like to go in there and push all the buttons and pump everything. And then I'd hear [imitates stomping] here came Grandma. [Laughs] I'd run and I'd go to the pipe--. They said, "Do not go in that pipe room." It was dark, and I used to just open the door and then push the pipes just to hear the sound. It was quite amazing. And it was such a dinosaur nobody would even take it when she passed away and they were cleaning out the house. And there was a baby grand piano in there, and those square kind of guitars. I think they're Japanese, some kind of string instrument.

DC: And all sorts of instruments, yeah.

GA: Yeah, that was uncle. He was a musician, so--.

DC: So, what about the sort of first stirrings of a kind of activist, Chicana identity for yourself?

GA: For myself? That was in high school, because of the racism that we were exposed to. We kind of stuck together for protection. [Laughs] And one of the parents--

she actually lived around the corner. She would say, "Come over to my house. You can--let's start a youth council. Let's do things." And we--I have pictures in my collection, I--no, those are not in my collection. Those are my personal things. [Laughs] But where we were doing the stroll--the dance. We would--she would let us play music and hang out there. And the--that would take us to do community-type activities, and I think that's where it started for me.

And then, the high school--eventually there was a counselor who took interest with us because of all the fighting that was going on. And the--I call them race riots--went on, and only the Chicanos were being arrested. Sorry, I went blank. [Laughs] Sorry.

DC: In the high school, yeah, and the counselor who took interest?

GA: Oh, yeah. This was--counselor Jack Barton took interest in us. So, he let us have meetings, and we talked about these things. Then he brought in the surfers who we were--that's who we were fighting. [Laughs] It sounds kind of funny now. But in conversations, it started as screaming at each others, and the hatred was coming out. And then, afterwards, you'd lose your wind and you'd realize that is just a human being sitting over there. And it's like--. And then the talk begins. And then we did several of those, and we went to the junior high schools to get the young kids involved to not come into the high school--. Because when you go from junior high school to high school, it's a whole different population. It's larger. It's many backgrounds. And it was difficult. And I remember in schools, even the teachers [15:00]--. When you raise your hand, you're all enthusia-- "I know the answer, I know the answer." And they don't--they look

at you and they just--. You know that teacher does not like you. I didn't know it was because of who or what I looked like. Those are things I learned later.

Plus, I'm five-foot-eight. I'm very big-boned. I weighed almost three hundred pounds when I was in high school, so I was bullied a lot. And that made me kind of tough, because I--all through elementary school I was harassed and made fun of. And I think I just reached point in my twenties when I said, "You're not--I don't care what you think about this. If you can't see this and you can't see this, I don't have time for you." But I had to fight my way through, and people were afraid of me because I was so big, or just ridiculed me. And it just makes you a fighter.

And I think that's why it was easy for me to go into the Chicano community, in the militant area. Because I was a fighter already. I was very mouthy. Never had to hit anybody. [Laughter] Never, because people were afraid of me. All you had to do, move.

DC: You'd just stand up? [Laughter]

GA: Yeah, and I did a lot-- I'm a--I love body language. And I did use my size to intimidate, honest truth.

John Bishop: Wait for a second. [break in recording] Okay, and we're back again.

DC: We were talking about high school, and we were talking about your size, and these questions, and being a fighter inside--a determined person.

GA: Mm-hmm.

DC: And how that may have benefited you or drawn you in to the more militant side.

GA: Mm-hmm, yeah.

DC: And so, if you could take us from high school and into your--the years just after that, and into the movement.

GA: Mm-hmm. One of my first jobs was the YTEP program--Youth Temporary Employment Project. In--I worked over in South El Monte, and worked with young people, and did the activities that we did. And then, from there, I worked a regular employment job, which was horrible--a factory with satin-covered Christmas balls and artificial-flower arrangements. And then, somehow, I got over to East LA, in the antipoverty program--Neighborhood Adult Participation Project, NAPP.

And the other thing I was doing was cruising Whittier Boulevard socially, for our social activities. [Laughs] We'd load up from El Monte and we'd go down the boulevard and just have a ball. And I don't know how I met these people, and I don't remember who it was that I met. But they invited me to go to a coffee house on Olympic Boulevard, and we were like, "Well, why should we go there?" "Oh, you'll really like it. It's really nice to go and just sit down and talk to people."

So, we went, and this was The Piranha coffeehouse. And it was completely dark. And so, we're like, "I don't get it." Well, somebody came out and said, "Oh, come in, come in. Be comfortable." And, normally, somebody should be afraid [laughs] to go into a dark place. I mean, we--we're--we weren't as threatened as people are crazy now, a little bit off-balance. That you can--I wouldn't dare walk into a dark building now, but as young people, "Hey, let's go, party," you know?

And we went in there. People were in there, but they were in the dark. And then it didn't take long to see why. There was the Sheriffs [Department] going by with their floodlights shining in the window, and people would just kind of sit back. And it was at a

time when the Brown Berets were being formed, and it was the Young Chicanos for Community Action group. And they did have a legitimate coffeehouse, and it was just going out of business because of the harassment. And it--because it drew young people, basically.

So, talking to these young people, I was hearing things that I had never, ever heard. And so, they said, "Would you like to join us?" And they weren't Brown Berets yet, and they just said, "Would you like to join us?" I go, "You know, let me learn a little bit more. I do not quite understand everything." It took me three times to go back and say, "Okay, I'm ready." And from there, I mean, it was Brown Berets--good group of young people who wanted to make changes; who were tired of the police brutality; were tired of not being able to go to college; were tired of not getting good jobs; [20:00] living in poor housing; knowing that people around them, their own family, needed healthcare and didn't have that. So, these were all things that touch my heart and I have passions for.

I developed passions at that time, actually. I mean, I was learning and--. Because here I came from El Monte, and I was in a comfortable home. I had food. My dad wanted me in college. He was working to put me in college, and I did go right--I went to one semester at East LA College, and I told him, "Dad, it's just not for me." I felt like everything just went [imitates airplane flying overhead] over me. And it didn't make sense to me, and I needed to get that life experience in my case.

So, that's what I started doing. And from there, it was protesting everything that was unjust. And then learning [about] other groups that were doing the same thing. In

high school, remembering what happened in the South to the black people, and the brutality that they were exposed to, and suffered, and were killed for.

DC: So, what year was it, roughly, those first meetings at the coffeehouse?

GA: Oh, in the [19]60s, probably middle-[19]60s. I don't--I--real bad with dates, but middle-[19]60s. I would say that The Piranha coffeehouse was the birthplace of the Chicano movement. There was nobody else doing that. There were organizations like the voter-rights people, things like that. And afterwards, what I noticed, they were just coming out of the woodwork, just starting programs and things like that.

But we were not accepted. It was very difficult. When people learned about Brown Berets as time went on, they looked at it as militant troublemakers. I remember in some of our sitting--our training, they would say--one of the things that always stayed with me my entire life is, "Never argue with somebody. It cuts your channel of communication." And that is so true. Once you start arguing, and you're yelling about your feelings, you're yelling about your feelings, and nobody's going to come together and understand anything.

So, we were told, "You're going to come across people that don't like you, and you're just going to have to take it." And somebody who's already a little pissed off, that's like [laughs]--you want to--you have to bite your tongue. And I remember we were sent to some gathering that was at East LA College stadium. And we were supposed to pass out flyers about the Brown Berets at an event. And I remember this family, and I gave them a flyer. And the man got it, read it. He crumbled it up. He goes, "Chicanos!" And he threw it at my feet. And I just--that was one of those moments. But I just maintained myself.

So, it was hard in the beginning. Young people were very attracted to this kind of movement activity, because we were--.

DC: It re--I'm sorry--it reminds me in some ways of the strategy of nonviolence, and having to hold yourself back.

GA: Yes.

DC: And you talked about being aware of the South and the sit-ins. And was there--are there other ways in which you were all paying attention to other movements?

GA: Sure, there was already UMAS, which--United Mexican American Students was already being organized in the colleges. So, there was some movement within the schools. And eventually we tried to meet with all these different groups. Eventually it became--ex-convicts came up with LUCHA, and other groups were forming, like the ones in the housing projects. La Junta was another group. But eventually, everybody began fighting each others. You know, "My philosophy is better than yours. I don't believe in what you believe in. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

And I always tried, to this--. And it's very me to try and get along with everybody. I always, even when I worked, would find the most difficult employee that everybody was, "Stay away from her. Oh, she's--oh--." I would try to find out what makes this person tick. And they would be my friend. And people would say, "How do you do that?" And I'd go, "Just talk to them." They're usually in pain, carrying some anger--real anger, [laughs] scary anger. But that's always been my--kind of what I do. So, I got along with everybody. Plus, it didn't--it helped to have an uncle who was in the ex-pinto. They came out of the prisons. He was in that group, so he told them, "That's

my niece. Don't mess with her." [Laughs] So I got [25:00] along with them just fine. And other groups that Brown Berets were fighting with, I got along fine with them.

DC: Were there connections across the lines of race, to the Black Panthers or to other organizations?

GA: Absolutely, yeah. We used to go to US Organization every Sunday, to their--they would have a gathering, and it was a cultural--and it was beautiful to me to see them in their beautiful regalia, and doing their dances and songs, and speaking their language, Swahili. And they welcomed us with open arms. Black Panthers--it was more the men got involved with the Black Panthers. We did have, during the Watts riot, a nonaggressive coalition pact. In other words, if violence goes down, we don't touch the Chicanos. If violence goes down in the Chicano community, you don't touch the black people. That was an understanding, so--and I do remember that. And I never went to any of the meetings, but I was aware of that.

And we just got so involved in the Brown Berets with community, and we opened a free clinic eventually. And that was started by David Sanchez, who was the prime minister. And he was meeting with the Physicians for Community Action and Psychologists for Community Action. They were mostly Anglo and Jewish people, and I had no interest in sitting down and meeting with them. So, David was doing all this organizing with them, and then he came to me one day. He says, "You're going to run the free clinic." And I said, "I don't want to run the free clinic." ( )

DC: Why did you have no interest?

GA: I don't know anything about health. To me, you should know something about health to open a free clinic. And he says, "No, you're going to run it." [Laughs]

So I said, "I'll try it. Okay, I'll give it a try." And it became my baby. And it was a good thing, but to get that clinic to have patients come in--we got the doctors. We got equipment from General Hospital and the health department. We got volunteering nurses, doctors, technicians. We had our own little lab. We had all the equipment to do simple tests. What we couldn't do there we would send to the health department. So, we had a real--and that took a lot of work, to set those things up, because it was new. Nobody had ever done that in East LA.

But the hardest part was going into the community and saying, "Hi." We didn't say, "I'm a Brown Beret." "Hi, we're going to open a free clinic here." We didn't go in uniform. "We're having a free clinic here. Services are free." People are like this in their door. "Why?" You're going to give me something free?" "Yes, this is a free clinic." It took very long to establish, because they were afraid of us. They knew it was Brown Berets, but they were afraid. I sensed that fear. But after we got established, we had--our clinic was always full. And we were located be--a bar on one side, and I think there was another bar on this side. So, we got a lot of people coming in with blood on their fingers, [laughter] hanging off, you know?

DC: What was the location?

GA: On Whittier Boulevard. And I recently have been involved with the LA Consortium. And they are trying to make five sites in East Los Angeles part of the consortium, that they're a historically registered site. The free clinic is one.

DC: That's wonderful.

GA: Yeah, it is. And the building doesn't look anything like it did before. That's why they kept saying, "Are you sure it was here?" "Yes, I--there's pictures of it.

Look at--here's the address, 5016 Whittier Boulevard." And they talked to the owner and he said, "Yeah, it was--there was a clinic here." And we built it--they built on and added it. They closed the bar and they built on. So, it does look different.

The route of the Moratorium is going to be one. I forgot the other--there's several--there's five that we've been working on. And that's been very interesting to work on that.

DC: And how long were you--how long did the clinic run, and how long were you with the clinic?

GA: The clinic opened in [19]67. No, no, no. That was in--yeah, I think it was [19]67 or [19]68, and it went a few years. Because when I left the Brown Berets, they didn't know how to run it. The men never worked in it. So, I kept telling David, "You've got to do something about these guys." They were partying in the clinic after night, and guess who the janitors were? [Laughs] The administrators and volunteer staff. And it was kind of a shame, because it was such a good little clinic, and we had a good clientele base, good volunteer base, professional [30:00] people. And I kept complaining that there was problems with the clinic, with the men. And he listened, but he never did anything about it. So--and I threatened him. I said, "I will leave if you don't change this, and I will take all the women with me, and maybe some of the younger men." And that's exactly what happened.

And so, I walked, I think, in--whenever the "Moratorium in the Rain" was, okay? I guess we had already planned we're leaving the day before, because we already had what we were going to wear. Our hair was in braids. We wore shawls. We were in black for mourning, and we carried a cross with the name of a Vietnam soldier that had

died. And I carried my cousin's name. And this was in pouring rain, and that's on a video. So, the day before is when I walked out, and so did all the women and some of the younger men.

But during my time with the Berets, it was very, very busy, very action all the time. Always at a protest, always going to a meeting, always--I went to the Poor People's Campaign. I went to so many events. Eventually I got involved with--after I left the Berets I became in the Chicano Moratorium Committee.

JB: Let me pause for a second. [break in recording] Oh, we're back.

DC: Okay. So, I wanted to ask more about the Moratorium, and also the Poor People's Campaign. But if we go back just for a minute to what you were starting to allude to in terms of some of, maybe, the sexism and--or the roles that were deemed appropriate--.

GA: Yes.

DC: --for women. Can you talk about what it was like to be a woman in the Brown Berets?

GA: Well, I knew--I was the only female minister with all the males. And so, I had a voice. I knew I had a voice. And, remember, I used the body language, so I would always make myself heard, and wanted my point to get across, and was not going to take no for an answer if I felt I was absolutely right. Unless somebody could point out that I was not right. So, they did listen to me and--but they just--I don't know. I started to feel the difference. We weren't included in the meetings. My title was minister of finance and correspondence--glorified secretary, that's all it was. That's all it was.

I have some pictures that I always point out to people, "I want you to look at this picture. Here is a Brown Beret conference on--look who's sitting at the table and standing against the walls, okay?" It was all men. The only person was a woman taking--scribing, okay? Then I took pictures in the kitchen. All the women with their Brown Berets on were back there cooking, and they're laughing, and having a ball, okay? But that's how it was. The--I think they would always say, "We walk side by side. We don't walk in front or in back of our men, and we're equals." But in reality, we were not.

And with Chicanos, they're very macho. They're very macho, okay? My father was macho. He was head of household. He had to have his dinner every night. He would call my mother from the back bedroom. She'd be over here. He'd yell for her, and she'd go running. I'd go, "Why do you do that?" So as a young girl, [laughs] I was already developing this, "No." She said, "You're going to fall in love many times. You'll see. I love my--I love him." And I'd go, "It's not right, Mom."

And there was nothing teaching me about feminism, or being this strong-headed woman. It was just what I thought was not correct. And so, I started sensing that in the Berets, and because of my position they really didn't really harass me. But from what I can tell now, because none of the women will talk or be interviewed or come out to events, they must have gone through something for them to say, "I want nothing to do with that." I find it kind of painful sometimes, because I had good, good friends, and none of them want to talk to me. I would love to just sit. Because we used to have so much fun as a group of women.

We did the newspaper, and we'd sit there and we'd do all the newspaper. The men got credit for the newspaper, by the way. But we did it all. That's why I had so

many photos. [Laughs] And somebody broke into my car one time, and I had all these photos. They were taken. I can only guess who took the photos. [35:00] And those, thankfully--the rest survived, and I donated that all to Cal State LA.

So, it was just very hard, always trying to--a lot of time spent defending. And these young women--I was told one was slapped by one of the leaders. And she just wants nothing to do with us. So, I mean, I just can't imagine what else they went through.

DC: Was there sexual harassment or pressure?

GA: I believe there was, because I felt it myself. I was set up one time in a meeting. They told me, "You're to come to a meeting." I thought it was with the ministers, so that would--there's--there was four males and then me. And I went to this house, okay? And there was, like--there had to be, like, ten or fifteen men there, and I felt so set up and paranoid. And the worst thing was--and I will admit this--I--they were smoking weed. I--normally, I'd never smoke weed or drink or anything. To this day, I don't drink or smoke. I don't use drugs. But then, I felt the pressure that I had to smoke. And so, maybe that's why. Maybe that made me paranoid. I don't know. I can't answer. But only one male--Carlos Montez--I really respect him very highly, and he has a wonderful daughter, and his ex-wife is a wonderful woman. He finally said, "Gloria, let me walk you to your car." And I was so relieved. I really felt like there was going to be a gang rape. Now, my head wasn't clear. I can't tell you for sure if that's--but that's what I was sensing. And I think most women know, because just by words that are said, and looks that are given, you just know.

Yeah, and a second time, there was a group here in El Monte, Brown Berets, and the leader called me and said, "I want you to come over here right now." And he goes, "Somebody shot me in my foot." And I go, "What do you want me to do about that?" And he says, "I just need to talk to you. I need to talk to you." And he was yelling. So, I went out there, and I should have never done that. Well, thank goodness nothing happened. But where their house was, there was a big, empty field, and it's like a dead-end. It's not a cul-de-sac. There's no other houses there. They're all on one row, and then his house was here, and then this field. So, I go in there, and I had a little Volkswagen. And he was with a younger--a young man. And he's ranting and raving. He's obviously drunk. You can't communicate with somebody who's high.

And so I finally said, "You know, I need to go." And he goes--tells the young men, he goes, "Help her out." And I said, "Oh." I had a bottle in my hand. I was ready to break that bottle and decorate him, but the young man said, "Hey, man, you don't want to do that." And I knew exactly what that was, you know? And I got out of there so fast.

Those were my two experiences. And in those days, you didn't report rape, okay? Because you asked for it. You were dressed inappropriately, so that's what happened. And those things stay with you. And I think, after forty years, I finally started revealing that. I'm not going to hide it no more. So, I physically would have fought though.

So, yes--there was--for--if--the way I kind of analyze it is, if I went through that as a minister, then I think my members went through that. And I--.

DC: So, that gives you some sense of why the women maybe pulled away?

GA: Yes, yes.

DC: And have still--have stayed away.

GA: Something traumatic happened to them, or something was so wrong that they can't--"Uh-uh, I don't want to deal with those people anymore." So--.

DC: Would you like to see them come together--.

GA: I would love to.

DC: --and have some healing?

GA: Oh, absolutely. I do a lot of women's groups, and we talk about these abuses, and women are in pain. They're crying, and I get so drawn into women like that. I have to give them some kind of comfort. And I'm not a trained counselor, but I feel I have the words to relax people and soothe them, and take them under my wing for a while. And that's worked really well for me with women.

But [40:00] I have been in contact with the brother of one of the younger women that I was so close to. And she did come down to LA to one of the Moratorium commemorative gatherings, and I didn't go that weekend. And I asked her brother--he goes, "You know, my sister is really messed up." And I go, "Why?" And he goes, "I don't know." And I go, "Was it from in the Movement?" And he goes, "I don't know, Gloria." Because he was younger. He says--I told him, "You know, I feel almost responsible that I didn't see that--things going on--and I couldn't help these women." He goes, "You can't blame yourself." And I go, "I don't blame myself. I just feel responsible as a leader, that I should have been there to put my foot on somebody's neck: 'What are you doing? [Laughs] Who are you? You want me to hurt you?'"

No, I wouldn't do that. But at least I would have nipped it in the bud if I could have. If I could have--I don't know. Who knows? These are--why people do violent things and abusive things. I know it starts in your family. I know it's a cycle. I

understand that. But in the movement, where we were supposed to treasure each others, and we were valuable, and the family was a beautiful unit, and so forth, and so forth, and so forth. And we were all very young. We were all in our twenties. Some were in their teens. So--.

DC: And there was also a lot of anger and a lot of stress swirling around.

GA: Cultural trauma, yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

DC: All right, can we, I guess, move for a moment to talking about the Poor People's Campaign, and the time in DC, and where this idea came from? Can you just, as much as you remember from the very beginning, [laughter] where this idea from the coalition came from?

GA: I'm sure you've read Gordon Mantler's article?

DC: Yeah, he's a close friend, yeah.

GA: Oh, nice guy--really nice guy. Well, he read--wrote an article, and I was surprised that he said I was nineteen. I thought I was older. Nineteen years old, I was really just out of high school at eighteen. And I went on this Poor People's Campaign, and I was the only female that went with six other males. And none of the leadership went, okay? So, these are just the members--the ones--the crazies that we always had fun with. [Laughs] We really did have fun in the Brown Berets. We worked very, very hard, but when we relaxed we had fun. Not getting high or anything like that. Just laughing, and that's always such a healing action.

So, we went, and I remember we got on a bus and everybody was Afro-American. And we sat at the back near the toilet. Big mistake, [laughter] after going through so many states. There was one guy, he used to come out with matches in his nose because

the sulfur would kill the smell. And we'd be laughing at him. He goes--[laughs]. And the other thing, they would give--we'd stop at some places. Either we had big rallies and were welcomed by the state, or else people were ready to shoot us. There was many reactions.

DC: So word had spread that this process--.

GA: Yes.

DC: Can we just go back to the beginning of what--.

GA: Sure.

DC: --was the aim? Who were the other people involved?

GA: Okay, the way I always describe it, it was Martin Luther King's dream to take the poor people to Washington, DC. And the front line was going in the wagons--covered wagons, with horses--horse-drawn wagons, and very symbolic. And--but from LA, we were leaving in buses, and we were supposed to cover a state every time. Basically, it was to take the poor people to the--Washington, DC, to bring out the problems of poverty, no jobs, no education.

And I wasn't involved in the meetings, as usual. The men went, and so they said we have an opportunity to go. So, I thought, well, I'll take time off to go to work for this. And I think I got two weeks off. And just traveling every day to a different state was really amazing. I think the first state we went into was Texas, El Paso. And we--they took us to a stadium to stay, so there was us and Afro-Americans. MEChA was hosting us, and they bought box dinners in. And it was just a very cold, icy feeling--big stadium, and we're going to sleep in it, okay?

And all of a sudden, there's a bomb threat. [45:00] So, they had us huddle in the middle of the floor. I can still see it very vividly. And I'll never forget, there was a woman with her child. And the look in her eyes--she was Afro-American--you knew she had been through this fear before. She understood this fear, and she was clutching that child, and just scared the bejeebies out of me. So MEChA says, "Okay, these people are staying, but you guys are going with us. We're going to take you to our place."

So, as we get into their car and we're driving out the parking lot--which is empty, right? But there is a Texas Ranger car out there. And there's this cop, if you ever want to say here's the stereotype of a cop. He was fat, in his uniform, drinking a beer with his gun on his waist. Scared the hell out of me, okay? I had never seen those kinds of things, you know? And I'm looking, and they go, "Don't look at him!" [Laughs] I immediately freeze up. They go, "Just don't look at him. Don't look at him." And they're laughing out there and having a ball, okay? And I was happy to get into their little apartment. I think they went to the--whatever city is on the other side. Juarez? I think Juarez is on the other side. I was happy to stay in that room.

And next day, we went back. There was a lot of people. And then we went on to, I think, Arizona. That was a nice reception. And New Mexico was my favorite, because there was a huge rally and a lot of speakers. And there was a 102-year-old Native American man who spoke no English. And he was talking away. His son is--his--how old, eighty-something was his son, translating. And I'm just in awe, okay? Because I had never been around people--Native Americans in regalia. There was never native events out here in Los Angeles that I was aware of, because I was Mexican, right? And

the food was good. The reception was good. The people were wonderful, okay? And then, we would go to other cities.

And the other city that is very memorable is Missouri. And it was very frightening, because the Minutemen were threatening to come after us. They had already kicked us out of Illinois. They would not let us into Chicago, because women were learning how to shoot guns. So, they said it's too dangerous. We're going to bypass that city. So, I remember those arches and everything, and I stayed with this beautiful elder black couple. The sweetest people. They were going to take me, and I was going to get a shower. [Laughter] I remember sitting in a--.

DC: Hadn't had one in a while?

GA: --bathtub. It was like, "Oh!" And then, the bed was down--feather down. Oh, I was a queen. And the food--oh, my goodness, okay? I just--I was treated so wonderful. But I do remember being, when we were driving, being, there was a van. And they had the Minutemen symbol. And there was a rifle sticking out the back door. And the man was aware of it. And I'm just like this. "Oh, no. Oh, no." [Laughs] These were things I've never experienced in my life. I've seen police beat up people. I saw my brother brutally beat up. I know the beatings that take place in jails and things like that, the arrests. But I had never seen them. I just, I was just a big-eyed little kid with fear when I saw things like that. And yet, on the other hand, I remember all the warm, wonderful experiences we had.

And then we went on and on and on. And we got up to Indiana, and Martin Luther King's brother was--we went to a church, and they were having this gospel gathering, and had everybody in there. And it was wonderful. I loved--I loved to go to a

good Baptist church. I mean, I'm not a Christian in any way. I am a traditional Native American. But Baptists--for some reason, when I go to them, I love their compassion, and their singing, and their words when they're talking, agreeing, agreeing.

So, it was very beautiful, but one of the children that went with the--we--I forgot Colorado. I should back up and go to Colorado, because that was a wonderful--.

DC: You're about to have a guest. There's somebody coming up to the door.

GA: It might be my son. [Interruption] [50:00]

I wanted to talk about Colorado, because there was a great Chicano leader who's passed--Corky Gonzalez--there. And he wanted his bus to be all Chicano. He took us off the other bus and said, "You're coming with me." And I remember there was a big sign on the side that said "Chicano Power." And I remember when we got to Indiana, one of the tours they took us on was a housing development. And all these black people were like--all you could see was their mouth trying to pronounce *Chicano*. "What is that?" They had no idea what a Chicano was. And we were just watching these people. "Wow, they don't know who we are or what we are." And we got to sing our songs, and just have a really, really good time. He was so wonderful. He was such a--was such a wonderful, warm man. I have many memories of him from the Poor People's Campaign, from the Moratorium. Just a really great man.

But anyways, going back. And then, Indiana was very memorable because one of the children got lost, and it almost started a riot. People were getting really--because there was neighborhood people out in the street. There was the church people. And then there's the Moratorium people. By now we're picking up buses. Every state we went into, one or two buses would join this caravan of these huge buses. And so, it was a

person from San Jose. They were called the Black Berets. And they had small, little girl who would, when we got to Washington, DC, be involved in another ugly incident.

So, from there, I don't remember other states that we went to. But we got to Washington, DC. I stayed with most of the Chicanos in a progressive school in Washington, DC. So, there was school time during the week, Monday through Friday, and we had to stay downstairs, okay? They had shower facilities and other rooms that we could camp out in. It was pretty comfortable. And then, during the weekends we were free, or in the evenings we had--we were able to go wherever we wanted to. And so--.

DC: So, you weren't on the Mall all that time? You were mostly at the school.

GA: No, only when there was an incident--I mean a gathering or a planned protest or rally. And the first one I went to, we were walking, and we had monitors. And they said cross or don't cross with the lights. Well, they--we were right there in front of the Supreme Court. And it turned red. The monitors: "Keep going, keep going, keep going." So we kept going, and police started coming in: "No, go back, go back." "Keep going, keep going, keep going." It was my mom and dad again, [laughs] ah, confusing me!

But I remember the little girl that they thought was lost--and she was asleep on the bus, by the way. She was never lost. This cop--they started coming in and rushing us, and he raised his billy [club] to hit the child--not the adults, the child. And I literally got his hand, and I--"Don't you ever do that again." By then I'd got blood in my eyes. And he did back off, but then all the monitors came. And that started a fight. And Reies Lopez Tijerina and his son, Danny Tijerina, was walking with us. And I remember they got--they pulled a station wagon up in the intersection, and they had him hogtied,

handcuffed behind, and just threw him in, and beat him up, and then threw--I had never seen that. Again, I'm like, I've never seen this, and it made me go berserk, I guess, in a way.

So, then they started lining up--the police, like that, in rows [55:00] like that. I remember going up there and screaming in their faces. And it was so interesting because I still have those vivid memories of one--his billy club was itching--he wanted to thump me so bad. I'm not touching. I'm just yelling, okay? My Constitutional right to [laughs]--[jostles microphone] I'm sorry-- to speak.

DC: Do you remember what you were saying?

GA: Oh, I'm sure I was cussing them out, calling them pigs, or whatever I could scream out. And then, there was another young man, an officer. And I'm screaming in his face, and he's like this. He was completely ashamed. Two extremes of emotions. It was very interesting to me, but I'm just going berserk. And then, when we were walking back, I was--people were trying to calm me down, and I was just between crying and anger. And I remember they were making fun of me, the cops, because, "Oh, we need the wide lenses for this one," because they were taking pictures. So, you'd let little fingers fly up in the air, you know? [Laughs] And just trying to ignore it.

But that was some of my experience. And then, staying at the school, we had our own dynamics within the people. It was a wonderful place to recruit and talk to people about establishing other Brown Beret chapters. And I think that's when we did the most recruiting ever, was at the Poor People's Campaign. And I would be taking names and--because I was the one that was going to send them all the information. And that was exciting.

And I remember we were preparing for another rally, and I remember, for the first time, I saw a Native American in full regalia with an eagle bonnet, which I know now is quite an honor. But he was so beautiful. And I'm like, [laughs] this only happened to me once before when I went to Mexico. I saw--because I--the love I had for the history of the Aztecs, and they used to put the boards here to flatten their nose and forehead. And there was a young man that--his face was the things I had been reading out. And I was like, [laugh] my jaw goes down to my knees. Well, this is how I felt when I saw this Native American man. He must have been a chief and--to wear the eagle bonnet. And I was just astonished and in awe. And he looked--everything I got from him was peace and love and calm, relaxed. Not violent, not "off the pig," that kind of thing. [Laughs] And I was just in awe. So, that was the first time I ever saw a Native American in regalia like that. And here I was, living with Native Americans all this time--my mom. [Laughs]

So, and then I, the day I had to leave because I had to come back to work, I never got down to Resurrection City. They said it was flooded out and muddy, and there was problems going on there, so we were better off where we were. And I didn't get to the Potomac River and see those things. I did go to the Washington Monument. I went to the--some marine--some museum they have there that was--they had scalps in there. It was kind of scary. A lot of stuff. We did get around. I did do some walking.

And--but the day I left, the bus that was taking us home, Corky Gonzalez came on the bus. And he thanked us, each one. Hugged each person that was leaving and gave us five dollars each. And I just thought, "Wow, nobody else." I mean, five dollars to--it was just a symbolic gesture that was so gracious of him.

And, because my experiences with Tijerina were a little bit different. He did show up. And I remember we used to go down into the dining area at night to sit with our group, and laugh, and talk--that kind of stuff. And the food we had been served was what was donated, so we were eating, like, processed eggs, not--in other words, mostly canned goods, not so much fresh stuff. And I saw his group walk in, and they were having steaks made for them. And I lost respect right then and there. I just--I did stay with his--I didn't stay. I went to his home in Albuquerque. His wife was there. He had a lot of kids.

DC: Is this Tijerina's?

QA: Tijerina's. He wasn't there, but we went into his bunk[er] underground. It was all metal. It was, wow, very elaborate. [1:00:00] And his wife was wonderful, and his family was wonderful. But Tijerina was just--I don't know. He--I--he always gave me a toothache feeling. So--and then, when I saw that--that he put himself above everybody else to eat a steak with his bodyguards, his entourage, and we're eating canned stuff. But we're surviving. We're okay. We're happy. But when I saw that I did lose respect, and I guess I've always been like that for people who separate themselves and live better, and then go help. I'm not quite sure. I'm not finding the right words.

But it's just--it's like nowadays, the homeless people. You want to give them food. You want to share. You want to donate. You want to help out however you can. I know, perfect example. In my clinic, one time there was a doctor there, and he was volunteering. He was Latino. And he says, "I feel so good about what I did here today, I can go home and have my wine and steak." And it was like [makes gagging sound]. [Laughter] "You don't get it." I mean, go have your wine and steak, but don't sit there

and brag about it. I've got to home and eat some taco tonight or something--some beans or something. [Laughs]

I'm not saying you shouldn't have comforts in life, and if you've got money that's good for you. But don't--watch how you talk around people who don't have, because it's very hard for some people. It's hard when you know some kids are not getting food. I would give up my food in a hot second for a child or anybody, actually. Anybody.

DC: Was there much--it sounds like you were all at the school, but in terms of interaction between the groups? You talked about seeing the Native American man in the eagle bonnet, but was there much opportunity for conversation, coalition building?

GA: Oh, all the time. Yeah, that's why I find--during--I think during that time we did more building the new chapters than at any other time with the Brown Berets. Because Michigan started a chapter, New Mexico started a chapter. I mean, all over. This was not just LA or California. Now it was becoming national. And I had never--having done all the correspondence, I could see who used to write in. We would get letters from Vietnam soldiers who liked what we did, and things like that, people who were interested. We would get hate mail, [laughs] lovely people.

But when you started meeting people from other states, it was really exciting. And then, to keep in contact with them, and send them all the information they needed. We used to have a brown book. It had ten points of, I guess, behavior. And it was our little bible. It's funny, I never stayed with one. I didn't keep that one for some reason. But it was an exciting time for building the organization.

DC: So, the brown book was basically the ten-point--your version of the ten-point program?

QA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was just a little mimeograph, and we used to use that purple-ink stuff on those little machines--smelly stuff. [Laughs] And we'd just cut them and put them together in the little brown backing and everything.

DC: Another similarity to the Panthers and other movements.

QA: Probably, probably, yeah, yeah, yeah. And one of the other memories I have of the free clinic is with immunizations for children. I would get the health department. "Can you give me a date where we can go do an immunization drive in a housing project?" "Sure, sure." Anything they wanted they would give me. It was amazing. And they'd provide a van, a doctor, a nurse. But the day before, we'd go knocking door to door. And the leadership never did this--the males. I would go with the other members. We'd knock on the door. "Here's a flyer. We're going to be down here tomorrow with a doctor and nurse. We'll have a little record book for you, for your child to get their immunizations free." Okay, nothing--no bindings, nothing. People came out, and we did that for kids.

So, while the Brown Berets were maybe not liked, I think the free clinic really gave them a good name. Because everything else was anti-police and demanding from other people of certain programs. So, like I say, we were always on the go. Always on the go. [1:05:00] The little Volkswagen was filled with people smashed up against the glass like clowns, you know? [Laughter] Clowns come out. That was us--big Brown Berets.

DC: Sixteen people come out of a Volkswagen, yeah. You want to take--.[break in recording]

JB: Okay, we're back.

DC: May I ask about the Moratorium? And can you describe for someone who has not ever heard the word [laughter] what the Moratorium was?

GA: The Chicano Moratorium was started by Brown Berets and Rosalio Muñoz. He was a draft-resister. He was also at UCLA, was, I forget what they call them. He was over the student council, I guess. And he was a--he was a scholarly kind of guy. And he did what he did, and that started the movement. And what we found was, when we started working on this, was there was a disproportionate number of Chicano men dying in the wars compared to all other races. And we always said it was the warrior part of the men that--because the--some of the soldiers would tell us that the Vietcong used to say, “Brown men, red men, you’re the same as us. Don’t kill, don’t kill.” And they would come home with those stories, but they were trained to kill.

And to this day, I know some many Vietnam vets who are so messed up, nerve-wise, from the Agent Orange. They hear helicopters and they start hovering--I mean, they just are freaked. And so, a lot of them stayed really messed up. I think the same thing with the soldiers we’re seeing now, that they have so many things going on with them--amputations; they lost limbs; they--post-traumatic syndrome. The VA is just filled with these guys. A lot of the homeless people are veterans now. That’s a sad statement. It’s like using tissue paper to blow your nose. You use them for war and then get rid of them. And they’re alone. They’ve lost their families. So, it’s really messed up, and I see a lot of people like that.

But we found that there was too many dying in numbers compared to other groups, and so we decided to use that as a statement and to protest the war. And the whole country was protesting the world--the war, I’m sorry. And we met with other

groups, and we started working on it. And we had a couple of small ones. The first one was at Obregon Park. It was a small Moratorium. And I remember going to the police--LAPD Commission to ask permission to have a permit to go down half the street. And I didn't identify myself as a Brown Beret. I didn't say I was a Brown Beret. I'm a member of the community. I didn't lie. And we went out there, had--it was a pretty good drawing. We went to the memorial--there's a memorial monument over there on First Street. And we went over there and we read all the names of the people who had died with a Spanish surname.

And it went well, so we had--the second one was in the rain, and I don't remember dates. But that one was quite large, and, I mean, it was pouring rain, and people just--it didn't stop them. It didn't dampen their spirits. And I went under the banner of Las Adelitas de Aztlán, and it was all females. And like I say, we had these crosses, and we dressed a certain way. And the--on the video, we're singing the Adelitas song. We're not singing it. We're humming it, because we had the words, but for some reason we didn't learn the words. So, we hummed it, [laughs] and that comes over the video very clear.

Then the third one was a big Chicano Moratorium, and by then all the females had left the Brown Berets. So, there was this office on what is now Cesar Chavez Boulevard, and we were working over there. We'd go over there every day, several of us. And I was working, so I would go in between or after. And I worked mostly on getting people to provide a home for people coming from out of state or from other cities, and I had thousands of names. And that--I have that list still, and that's with my archives. And [1:10:00] when I look at it, it's not titled or anything, and I typed all these on those old-

fashioned clunkers. We didn't have computers then. And we did posters there, and we met.

And one of the things we did was, we took a Moratorium film in the rain, on the road, with anybody who wanted us to go--Oakland, wherever. I know I went to Oakland one time with this film, reel-to-reel. And we'd say, "Put a sheet up on the garage or the house and we'll show this film, have a neighborhood gathering. Just invite people to your backyard. You don't have to have to put--." They'd put food out and everything, so it was quite nice. And we'd talk about the Moratorium, and invite them, and show this film.

In my archives, I still had the original in a canister--the film, in good condition. And I gave it to my archives, but the owner, Jesús Treviño, said, "That's my film. It should be mine." So, I told the university, "I gave it to you so you do what you want with it." And it's not mine anymore. So, he took it. He remade it, and made some changes in it, I've been told.

But that's what we did. And so, momentum was building, people calling all the time. And we knew this was going to be big. Well, thousands of people showed up that morning, and thousands were coming in. We had people taxiing people from LAX, from the bus depots. So many people coming--families. Families were coming in. And so, we--.

DC: This was [19]68?

GA: [Nineteen] sixty-nine, isn't it?

DC: [Nineteen] sixty-nine, okay.

GA: [Nineteen] sixty-nine, the big Chicano Moratorium. We came down Atlantic--no, not Atlantic. Yeah, Atlantic Boulevard, from Belvedere Park. That was our gathering place. And then onto Whittier Boulevard. I'm at the front of the parade, or, not the parade. The Moratorium, the march itself. And we were given the whole street that day, with the Sheriff's Department. Brown Beret men did not go in uniform, for some reason. I'm not going to say any more than that.

DC: And you had already left?

GA: Yes. I was long gone. And I remember my brother had my father's truck. And he was behind them, a little back from the main banner. And I'm sitting on the back of the truck with a megaphone, and I'm giving out these shouts and these greets and things like that. A whole wedding came out of a church and joined us. There's pictures where women in the hair salons would come out and they're giving us a power sign. And it was a beautiful, beautiful gathering with so many groups from so many states, and just marching in peace.

And we get to what is now Ruben Salazar Park, and it was going beautiful. There was little girls dancing, doing *folklórico* dancing. And it was very festive, you know? We're trying to take care of as many people with water-spraying and that kind of thing. It was very hot. And either I got up on the stage, or I was up on the stage. I don't remember, but I--when it started--something started happening. And I got up there, and I could see, like a wave, like everybody would come this way and then it would go back, and then come again. And, boom, I got tear-gassed. What I just learned--I didn't know this until I went to one of these consortium meetings, that there was helicopters shooting the canisters of the gas. And I didn't know that, because I got it and I was blinded.

All I know is, somebody pulled me off that stage, had a wet t-shirt, and said, "Put this on your face and get out of here." He threw me on a bus. I finally got--my eyes were able to open. He saved me, and I wish I knew who that was. I don't remember who it was, but somebody really helped me.

And as the bus driver--I mean, that's when it broke loose. People--oh, it was just scary, because people were screaming and running. I mean, thousands of people. And not knowing what happened back there, but knowing that the police were there. So, this bus driver is so scared. He's so scared he's driving like a maniac, and he's going over those parking things they have, the curbs. And Corky Gonzalez comes to the door. "Open the door." He goes, "No, no, you get out of here. You get out of here." And his bodyguards just pulled that door open. It was a school bus. And he gets in, [1:15:00] and he starts looking around. He goes, "No, no, no. I need to get out of here." He goes, "No, you're not getting out of here." [Laughs] He goes, "I'm getting out of here," and he pulls the doors again. He gets out, and he got arrested that day.

I get back to the office on what is now Cesar Chavez Boulevard, and people are coming in hysterical. Fire department's dropping people that are injured. We're trying to listen to the news, and then all of a sudden, we see from the direction of Whittier Boulevard, the smoke going up. And people are crying. They can't believe that such a beautiful event ended so tragically terrible. Because it took so much work to bring people out, and they believed in what we were doing, and they were supportive. It was the largest gathering I had ever seen the Chicano people do. And not only Chicano people--there was all kinds of people there. They were in support. And it was a real unifying force, and it was destroyed like that [snaps fingers].

And afterwards, you start learning what happened. And then, of course, the killing of Ruben Salazar, which I believe he was murdered. I really, truly believe he was murdered. In those days, there was a lot of police cover-ups. They did them well. They had an inquest. I worked at the coroner's office. I know what inquests are, and autopsies, and reports, and all of that. And you can put whatever you want on those report.

So, I just think it was very tragic--so tragic that so many people--not so many--not a lot of people, but some people were killed. To me, that traumatized me very deeply. And I remember coming home, and that's it. I cannot tell you what happened the next day, because everybody says, "Did you go to the meeting?" "No." "Do you go--?" "No, I didn't go." "Did you go to the march?" "No." I never went back for forty years to the Chicano community.

It didn't help that the--there was a young man out here, that there was--the Brown Berets here in El Monte, one of the younger brothers was killed. Lyn Ward. And I went to the funeral, and I was a little late. Everybody was gravesite already. And to see a bunch of detectives in the bushes taking pictures of everybody. That kind of did it for me. I said, "That's it. No more. No more. This is inhumane. This is not real. These people are not real. They're not human beings. They're--." I love animals, so I can't compare them to animals, because I love my animals and they love me. [Laughs] But this was something else.

And so, I never went back. And it--somebody found me one time. [Laughs] And I said, "Okay, I'll talk to you." And when they showed me the films of the Moratorium, I sat here and cried. And it brought back all of the ugly memories. And then, forty years

later, Rosalio Muñoz contacts me. He said, "We're going to have a commemorative of the Moratorium. We'd like you to come, blah, blah, blah." I go, "I'm a really different person now." During that time, I went back to my tribe, identified with my genealogy and my roots and tribal ways, and got active with my tribe, and did a youth council. Did a lot of things with the tribe. I did a lot of things. Plus, I had experience with writing grants and things like that, so I did a lot of that.

And he tried to get me back and I kept saying, "No, I'm different, I'm different." And he goes, "Well, how can you be so different?" I go, "Believe me, I'm different." And he said, "Well, you know--well, we want to use this picture and it's got you in it." I go, "You can use my picture. I don't care. Use my image. You want to use my name? Is that what you want?" He goes, "Yeah." I go, "Use my name. I don't care. If it will help you, yeah, use it." So, he did get me out to one meeting, and it was kind of hilarious, [laughs] because I always already having trouble with my leg. And I remember, I walked with this professor up a hill to get to his car, to go to--over to Father Luce's church. And Father Luce was already in New York. He was a great supporter of the movement, John Luce.

And everybody's aged by now, okay? [Laughs] So there's a lady sitting over in this corner, an old friend, Lydia Lopez. And I had been kind of losing my voice, and so my voice wasn't the strongest. It's not a real loud voice anyways. I developed a soft voice because I used to do counseling. And she says, "Can you speak up?" I go, "No, I can't." So, she's in a walker. And she goes, [1:20:00] "Well, then, you just come in the middle." And I'm hurting, right? And I go, "I can't do that." So, I say, "Oh, we're going to be throwing canes at each others, and walkers, because we're all older and kind

of broken now." And other people, "Huh? Huh?" [Laughs] So it was very interesting, very comical for me, to be aware of that. So--and Lydia is a dear friend. I love her dearly, and she comes out to all--anything I go to that I'm speaking at. So, it was very interesting.

And I got involved a little bit, and it was the same old thing. They couldn't come to a--any kind of a--. They couldn't decide what they wanted to do in a commemoration, so I kind of spoke up. I said, "Look, why don't you do the da-da-da." So, this professor comes back and he goes, "It's always the women. I go, "Yes, yes, [laughs] thank you." But what I learned in those forty years was, I had to reclaim my personal history that I was denying myself. And, because I didn't want to talk about it. It upset me. It made me cry. And it took me several times to sit in Rosalio's gallery displays, look at the videos, cry with them. But it got less and less. It was simpler and simpler. And then, talking to people, and listening to the interest from the people, that it wasn't this--it went back to that very wonderful celebration although it was a tragic event. And to see young people come in and say, "That's my dad right there," or, "My mom was sitting over here, and my auntie was over here. I wasn't born yet." And you're like, "Wow, I'm getting old."

So, I'm very thankful to Rosalio for bringing me back. It's been good. He knows I'm--.

DC: I--.

GA: I'm sorry, go ahead.

DC: I was just going to say, so you had reclaimed your Native identity, and then you had to reclaim--.

GA: Yes, yes--

DC: --this past as well.

GA: Yes, I did.

DC: Yeah.

GA: And people always used to ask me, "Are you a feminist?" And I'd say, "Oh, no, I'm not a feminist." To me, that was the Anglo woman doing that, burning her bra. And in the [19]60s, we didn't do that. And I said, "No, I'm not a feminist," but in reality, I was a feminist. I am a feminist. And I will stand for women's rights anytime. But I had to learn that, because we were--we were so under this illusion of we're equal, we support each others. No, we don't. I didn't get to go to all the meetings the men went to. Was I told about them? Yeah, afterwards. But they didn't say, "We want you to come to this meeting." To some of the things, where there was work, yeah, they would send me.

So, it's just kind of facing that reality, you know, "Wow." And now when I see, people--I--as a native woman, you're taught to be humble, to be balanced. And as you become an elder, you become more at peace with yourself. You're not out there fighting and yelling. "Okay, kids, you go out there and do that. [Laughs] You do the work. I'll tell you how to do it." And now I'm more in a teaching position. There's a point where you reach, and you give your knowledge away. And I have young people all the time.

And, in fact, I stopped doing interviews because the last book I was in, the author did such a bad job, misquoted me, and offended me greatly because I gave my grandson his traditional name when he was born. And we do it in a ceremonial way with protocols. And my son that was here, that's his son. And I named him Red-Tailed Hawk, but in our

language it's--I'm sorry, that's my name--*Pakesar*, which means Red-Tailed Hawk. And this author put Red-Tailed Horse. I was so offended. [Laughs] I even spelled it for him. So, I said, "No more interviews. No more interviews." But I will do it for young people. And, of course, I was very honored to do this one. This is, you know, I'm leaving legacies for my grandchildren and my two sons. So, I--.

DC: Yeah, no, no, no. [Laughter] And we're the--.

GA: I lost my track there.

DC: Believe me, we're the ones who are honored and grateful today.

GA: Okay, thank you.

JB: --pause. [break in recording]

DC: My final question will be where are we now, but I'm wondering if you could comment a little bit about what you've seen over the year until now, and some of the things that have happened in Los Angeles. And I'm thinking the LA riots and Rodney King and Martin Luther King--or, and the O.J. trial, I mean. And anti-immigration legislation that comes up and goes away, and--.

GA: Yeah, yeah. It's really amazing, the changes that are taking place. I've seen the full circles that we do in life. I've seen them from the time when we first got involved, [1:25:00] where, if you didn't have money, you didn't go to college. Higher education was not in your DNA. I saw where families would make their children work. Like, if they had a restaurant, the children weren't allowed to go to--on to school. They had to work for that restaurant. The parents just didn't have that thing of, you need to go to school. My father thought I needed to go to school, and I did return as a mature student in my late thirties, and I did--I took history as a major.

But the--. I lost my train of thought there. I'm just saying that what I've seen with young people now is, they're talking about the problem with education, and this and that. And I tell them, "You don't know how blessed you are to be in school right now. But I know it's coming undone, and I know it costs you more." And it's going--almost going back to what it was in the [19]60s. Yeah, they have--admission requirements have lessened, and people--minorities are able to get into school. But it's very, very expensive. And when you hear these stories that--who are--of kids who are homeless and they're going to school, I'm amazed. I'm amazed, but people--. It's harder now.

So, to me, I always remind them, "You're standing on the shoulders of giants. People who wanted better school education, they were arrested, they were beat up, and they were killed sometimes, trying to get those rights that you're enjoying now. Treasure those things. But it is kind of being taken away again, so you've got to learn how to fight for it." And I always remind young people of that, because they're our future. They're our future. And I talk to young people, and they're amazing.

I've seen--another change I've seen in the Chicano community is, it's so diverse now with people coming from the south, from other countries. Okay, but I don't know how to identify them anymore, because if I say "Chicano" they go, "That's old school. [Laughs] We're *veteranos*." So, I say, "Well, how do you identify yourself?" And then I get the, "Huh?' They don't know, but they'll say, "I'm Honduras." "I'm Guatemalan." "I'm from El Salvador."

So, I'm very careful how I address people now, and I say, "Well, I like to refer to you as being indigenous." And the other thing that I see is, people are returning to their cultural roots. They're learning to identify who they really are. Because I had a real

problem with the theory of Aztlán. I used to go--I went to two of the Chicano Youth Conferences in Denver, Colorado, in the [19]60s. And the second one is where the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was developed by a poet named Alurista and several other men, of course. They didn't let the women in there. We were sitting outside the door. In fact, we were laughing, and they came out and told us to be quiet. [Laughter]

So, it's a legendary--the first sentence is--to--"Aztlán, the legendary land to the north of Tenochtitlan," okay, is where Aztlán is. And so, when American Indians or Native Americans--we have a real problem with that, because you're putting another land on top of our land. And I used to get a lot of fights about it. People will get really nasty about it. And so, I finally started telling people, "Aztlán, okay, yeah, this is Aztlán? All the Southwest is Aztlán? Are you sure?" Oh, yeah, that's what they tell me. That's what I've been taught." And I go, "Okay. Does it matter that I'm from a tribe that was here ten thousand, fifteen thousand years B.C.?" And they don't know what to say. I go, "I'll tell you what. If you can't answer that one, show me where your ancient people are buried, because I can take you to burial sites right now where my people have been desecrated and unburied, and I've had to rebury them. Show me where your people are buried." And nobody can answer that. And nobody's answered that.

So, that's what I'm saying to people now, and they back off. And I'm hearing less and less talk, because I tell them, "All you are saying is another form of colonization." And colonization is not working. I belong to a group that--we're doing--Decolonize LA. And we're turning, like, Debs Park--which was in the news not too long ago because two young women were murdered out there. But it's this beautiful little park in Eagle Rock where you have no idea it's there. You just turn and it's all natural.

[1:30:00] You're in this little *barrio*, these little homes. And it's a little path where you walk, and they have--it's really pretty in there. But they wanted to turn it into a Tongva cultural center, so we've been working on that. We built a *kizh*, which is a house made out of tule reeds, and looks really nice. And they work on other things.

So, we do little things here and there. I belong to a *Ti'at* Society, which is a maritime culture--part of our maritime culture, the cultural--. We had *i'at*s, which are canoes, redwood planks that came from the island to the mainland. And it was redwood that would drift from up north, and it would catch on the ocean, and they would build little boats on it--*ti'at*s. And we'd travel back and forth. So, I'm involved with that.

I've done youth councils. I've done a lot of things with my tribe. I'm still an activist. In fact, I've been telling them I'm retired. My last health issue was pretty traumatic, and it's hard for me to get around. So I tell people I'm done, kind of done. "Can you come to--?' "Okay, I'll be there." [Laughter] It's in your blood. It's just the--it's your way of life.

I'm working on a Peace & Dignity right now. This is a run that comes--starts--some people start in Alaska, some start at the tip of South America, and they're going to meet in Panama. And they come from all these routes in the United States. And I'll be hosting on--I did it four years ago. They run every four years, and they have a theme when they run. And every step that they go on the pavement is a prayer. And this year, they'll be here on July 16 at our sacred site of Pavungna in Cal State Long Beach. It's *semillas*, or seeds. So, seeds are of the mind and of the land, of the earth. So, it's the growth. So, we'll be doing that.

And then, we have an annual Ancestor Walk. I still stay very active. I'm not as active as I used to be because I can't run around so much. I tell them, "I'm okay. I just walk funny." [Laughs] So--.

DC: But you're still going.

GA: I, yeah--and I keep saying I'm not. But like I tell them, "I still have most of this. I'm starting to forget stuff, but I got this. [Laughter] It never stops."

DC: Good for you. Good.

GA: And I got this. [Jostles microphone] Sorry about that. But I have to do everything out of passion, balance, and being humble. And when I talk to the young people sometimes, they make me feel like a rock star. "Can I take a picture?" "Will you sign this?" "Sign? Okay. I'll sign." And, like, on my birthday, on Facebook, they wrote tributes--mostly women, the young, young women--that touched me. And it made me realize I have impacted people's lives. And it was almost shocking to me. And I think the most beautiful tribute I saw was a young woman who said, "Happy Chicano birthday--Chicano power birthday, Gloria." Something, something, something. And she's like this, in a Brown Beret uniform. And I just thought, "Oh, that's me when I was a youngster, when I was a kid." And it was very touching to me, you know?

But I'm very touched by what people say and how they write about me, and how they view me. Because I don't see myself--I just see myself as a simple person who loves to do what I do. I'm trying to be sustainable, growing my own foods. I can't dig no more, so I use earth boxes. And I'm--water is so sacred to us, and it's being so destroyed. That's another thing that I'm very dedicated to, is preserving the water, stop the fracking, the destruction of the Mother Earth. So, that's what I do now, and I will

always speak up for those things, also. Not only women, but for the preservation of the land, of the Mother Earth. So--.

DC: Okay. Anything from you fellows?

Guha Shankar: No, I mean, you covered quite a lot of ground.

DC: Yeah, this was--this was wonderful.

GA: [Laughs] I did.

DC: Anything that I didn't ask that I should have asked, or that has been on your mind?

GA: I--not really. I'll think of it later. [Laughter] "Oh, I should have said it." It's like when I forget something. I'll forget a name or something. I go--in two hours, I'll be doing something. "I remember!" I'll yell it out.

DC: Well, then that just remains for me to say thank you, on all of our behalf, for that wonderful interview, for giving us your time.

GA: Thank you. Thank you. And I thank you for your time.

DC: And for all you've done, yeah.

GA: Thank you, thank you.

F1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

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