

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Gloria Alvarez**Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes****Date: August 8, 2006****Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola**

EV: I am interviewing Gloria Alvarez who is with the HR/Katrina Community Liaison. The interview is on August 8, 2006. It is being conducted at her office at 2723 Houston Avenue in Houston, Texas. It is approximately 10 a.m. Let me explain about what we do with these archives. These are like your time capsule, your personal time capsule, what you did in Katrina. We are not gathering this to write any kind of book or anything. This is a historical account. Other people will come in possibly if they want to hear or research Katrina, they will come in and listen to these tapes or order the transcripts. So, all we are trying to do is put together what you experienced and your infrastructure of what you did in your company, what your company did during the Katrina experience. So, if you don't understand a question I ask you or you want a time out, let me know, we'll put the pause, I'll explain it or whatever. We will make a transcript out of this and when the transcript is done, I will send you a copy of it so you can edit it, look at it and all that and I will try to get you a copy of the final draft. I need you to sign and release this saying that you are releasing this tape to the University of Houston Library to be used for the archives. Will you give me your full name please?

GA: Gloria Ann Alvarez.

EV: When were you born?

GA: March 16, 1956.

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

EV: Here in Houston?

GA: Here in Houston.

EV: Can you tell us a little bit of your educational background?

GA: I went to Incarnate Word High School downtown in Houston, Texas, and I went to the University of Houston and graduated with a degree in business, a minor in Spanish. That is as far as my education goes.

EV: After that, what did you do? Give me a little bit of an idea of what your work history is like.

GA: I left in 1979. I moved to La Paz, Bolivia, South America. I married a Bolivian that I met at the University of Houston and I got a job at the American Embassy in La Paz and worked there until we returned in 1986 and worked with the American Embassy until I returned. And then, returned here to Houston and worked at Enron for 14 years and was one of the 5,000 that was laid off and lost savings, retirement, everything.

EV: Oh, just recently?

GA: It has been 6 years now. After Enron, I started teaching again at HISD part-time. I started doing translations for judges here in Harris County. I started selling jewelry, my own jewelry business, until I got back into the oil and gas business again. I was at Devon Energy for 3 years and then went to Marathon and from Marathon . . .

EV: Are you talking about Marathon Oil?

GA: Marathon Oil in January of this year and was laid off, changes within the department in Human Resources and started working here one week later, PMG – Project Management Group which is also an asset company who works for different companies.

We have contracts with the City of Houston and I am the HR manager for this company.

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

EV: What was your subject that you were teaching?

GA: I was teaching computers and I was teaching Spanish to Spanish-speaking parents of the kids at HISD.

EV: Tell me a little bit about PMG in terms of you said what they did but give us an example of what kind of services _____

GA: We have a contract with the city. When Katrina hit last year, PMG was involved in the initial program of getting all the evacuees settled back in Houston. And so, they had a program with the city where they were setting them up in housing with different houses and apartments here in Houston and we were contracted by FEMA through the City of Houston and that is where we came in, where we did invoicing, landlord resolution, problem resolution, all the apartment finding and payment of apartments was done through the contract with the City of Houston.

EV: Well, were you like the middle man between FEMA and the City of Houston?

GA: Yes, we were.

EV: And so, but you are working on behalf of the city to get FEMA to respond . . .

GA: Yes, we were. We are still located at the City of Houston and over at Town & Country. We would work for FEMA. We were getting all the rents paid and everything and classifying all the differences in all the different FEMA payments. Eligible and ineligible and trying to differentiate all the different . . . because at the time when they came last year, it was a mess because no one had numbers, you were just given a voucher number and that was it. There was duplication of numbers. There were problems with families having two numbers, two different families but the same family living in different households, so it was really . . .

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

EV: Let me go back. Your service to the Katrina evacuees was to organize whatever happened in terms of their apartments or in terms of their money that they were getting from FEMA?

GA: Money, no. It was all housing. We were with housing. We had, since I am also the community liaison, we do work with all the different agencies and have meetings like the United Way and all the nonprofits that would have case managers work with the different entities of all the different evacuees.

EV: So, these housing nonprofits were under you all? Did they have to come to you?

GA: They were depending on money like from United Way. They were getting funding from United Way. So, there were many coming from different places that the nonprofits were going to United Way to get. Catholic charities had a lot of money. They were disbursing it. But they were using it for needs for a lot of other things. For job finding, for helping counseling, a lot of counseling, for food, helping people just to start up again. You know, to get started, giving them Wal-Mart cards. I mean, when this happened last year, it was pretty chaotic, it was pretty traumatic for these people as soon as they came in. So basically, what different organizations were doing is helping these people find a place and find their place back here at least until they could get settled in with anything.

EV: Did you all have any relationships with Interfaith Ministries that had the Neighbor-to-Neighbor program? Did you all participate in that?

GA: We worked with Interfaith Ministries, yes, we did. Definitely.

EV: I may have asked this question before but in a different way but what experiences did PNG have that would put them in the Katrina . . . did you have to make some kind of

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

mental adjustment or administrative adjustment to handle this kind of situation, a disaster situation?

GA: Yes. All of a sudden, we were faced with having to hire a tremendous amount of people, just contract because we were all contract employees, and having people . . . you know, everybody was at George R. Brown at first and then it just kept expanding – the city working with building management there at the city. They gave us a lot of space. I mean, we had literally almost the whole second floor just talking to the landlords. Not the evacuees. It was all strictly landlords.

EV: So, you all lined up the landlord people who had extra houses, empty apartments?

GA: Yes, because I remember at the time that I was a volunteer for Katrina, I was working with the City and the Southwest, with a lot of the Hispanic evacuees, and they were sending us people from the city with like PMG to help and do mobile units out at the hotels and at the apartments where they could give them housing at the time, providing them that.

EV: Do you have what percentage of the evacuees were Hispanic?

GA: Hispanic? Oh my gosh. We just had a community for them about 2 weeks ago over at the Tejano Center for Hispanic evacuees. We didn't get a whole big turnout but we were expecting at least 2,000.

EV: Really?

GA: Yes. There are a lot. I helped get them apartments. A lot of them have already gone back and started working. They didn't want to stay. They stayed at their apartments but they didn't last very long. A lot of them are still here but a lot of them

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

are back there working already. Or their wives are here with their kids and the father, the husbands are going back and forth every weekend.

EV: Are they like Mexicanos . . .

GA: A lot of them Hondurans. Not very many Cubans. There are Colombians. Mexicanos, not a lot. Not a lot at all.

EV: And were they like migrating there or were they permanent . . .

GA: They were already legal there. I did work with illegals also. I did. They were Hondurans. The majority were legal. They all had their permanent residency. They had come from Honduras but they had already taken care of other paper work. They were all able to get voucher numbers and things like that.

EV: You said they were Afro-Hispanos?

GA: A lot of Latinos that were there, they are black. Yes, they were black.

EV: _____.

GA: They were, because a lot of the Latinos that are there, they _____. There is a mix of a lot of Latinos that are black. But they had a lot of Latinos that were there that weren't. It was kind of a half and half.

EV: Were they like the first generation or did they have an established Latino community there? Did you ever get that far?

GA: Yes, I did. There was. They all told me. There was a big established Latino community there. A lot of them Hondurans. It is weird that their area code in Louisiana is 504 and in Honduras, it is 504.

EV: Oh, is it really?

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: Yes. So, it is kind of like . . . I would never believe there were so many Hondurans. Really, I didn't. Incredible.

EV: I understand there was a substantial Vietnamese community. _____.

GA: Yes, I did. I went over to several of the hotels and helped them. The Vietnamese were awesome. We helped them a lot. As well as the Latinos were. The Latinos, it was incredible how they helped them.

EV: I had heard that there was a nun here that . . . a Vietnamese nun.

GA: She was, and I don't know her . . . I never even met her. I don't even know her name. But I could get it from the boat community because there are some boat people that . . .

EV: Yes, I would really appreciate that.

GA: Do you know what you might be interested in doing is Thursdays, every other Thursday, we meet at United Way at 1 o'clock. All the nonprofits for Katrina.

EV: Oh, really. You are still meeting there.

GA: Oh, yes, we still do. There are still a lot of issues. Oh, yes. I don't know if we are going to have it this Thursday but I know for sure. I can find out. I can give it to you.

EV: Earlier, you said that you all are problem resolution. Can you narrow that down or describe that for me a little bit more?

GA: FEMA gives us the money to pay the apartments, so we are the one that does all the asset management. We do everything. Through the city, we handle, for instance, _____ apartments. They have, let's say, 500 evacuees and they got an apartment so they will come and bill us and tell us, "We need our \$17,000 or our \$1 million for the month

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

of January or the month of February.” And so, we do that. And we handle that because we had a lot of problems getting the money for a few months to the city to pay us.

EV: I heard.

GA: Yes, it was a big thing.

EV: So, is everything running fairly smoothly on that right now?

GA: I think so. We have this every week, every day that it comes out, it is a web site. And it has different numbers and statistics and things that come out and all these things for evacuees.

EV: Did you download this for me especially?

GA: I did. I printed it. It is on the web site though. You can pull it up.

EV: O.K., I'll keep those and write down the web site. Is this for me?

GA: Just for you. I get those all the time. That is part of the liaison part that I do.

EV: So, your social work that you have done either as a board member or whatever has kind of prepared you for just handling this, is that . . . let me back up. There is such a thing as VOAD. Do you know what VOAD is?

GA: Yes.

EV: Did you participate in VOAD?

GA: We did.

EV: Did you go to meetings and all that?

GA: I did, and I still do. And very much, we participate. Actually, it was kind of ironic because last year and when the hurricane started, someone called me in September and said, “Gloria, there are a lot of Latinos that need help and they have no one to help them.” And I was like, “Well, where are they? I didn’t even hear about them.” They

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

said, "Well, there are a lot at this hotel in the Southwest over off Hillcroft." So, I was at Marathon at the time and on my lunch hour, I went over there just by myself and went up to the lobby and talked to the lady at the front desk. It was a Days Inn or something like that and I asked her, I said, "Are there a lot of people here from Katrina?" She said, "Yes. There are some people in the kitchen feeding them pizza right now if you want to go in and talk to them." So, I did. I went in there by myself and I started talking to them, just making conversation with all of them. You know, "How long have you been here? What happened? What do you need help in?" I had a notebook and I just started writing things down. So, one of the pastors of a different church was coming and helping, too. I got the pastor's name and I got his number and I went back to the office and I started doing emails saying that I was reaching out to the Hispanic community here in Houston and saying, "We have a majority of Hispanic evacuees and they need help. They have nothing. They have no clothes. They are in a hotel that is getting paid for. There is no food." So, I mean, I built this huge network. It was incredible. I was able to get Food Bank to deliver, immunization to come out and bring their truck. I was able to get them . . . we had a big picnic for them. We were able to take them downtown to George R. Brown to get medical help at the beginning. I know the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce sent me taxis that they paid for, for me to be able to get . . . it was incredible. I had different restaurants and different organizations, different churches every day coordinating . . . I had a calendar of who was going to bring food for lunch and who was going to bring it for dinner, who was going to help with this, who was bringing . . . Catholic Charities came on site there giving them cards and money. I had nurses come. I even had doctors that were coming from out of the country that were coming to see about

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

Katrina and they heard about it and they wanted to come visit with them. They came and checked them out. I mean, it was incredible. It was like a little community there. We were able to get the mobile unit out there to come and give them . . . you know, at the beginning, you had to first help them and see what was their situation. They were just like in total shock. Then, by November, we were already starting to get them into apartments. Probably October or November is when we started helping them. And someone at two different apartments gave me an apartment to use with a computer _____ people donated. They were donating food and bringing me clothes. It was like a regular program going on. I had volunteers helping. We were like doing case management helping people with different issues. And the church was real involved. They were taking them out, getting them furniture. We got them free mattresses, furniture before the city was really able to get furniture like they did. I remember Catholic Charities had like \$50,000, they said, "We'll help you," for some of these people. To help with furniture and things like that that they needed. It was just incredible how everything kind of pieced together.

I had no idea about PMG. I mean, I know my boss, Ben Mendez. I did know he was helping in the Katrina effort. But I was doing this all on my own and still working at Marathon. And just constantly . . . I would go on my lunch hour because it was right there in the Southwest, and I was located right there on San Felipe. And what I was doing was going right there working and coming back every day at lunch time and in the evenings and helping them – whatever they needed. Anything they needed, we were helping them with. That was the end of the year. Then, we got them apartments. Then, we were getting them furniture. Then, I connected with an organization in California that

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

flew down and met me several times and we went and visited family. She bought them everything they needed for their apartment as far as sheets, comforters, dishes, towels, bath utilities – I mean, everything they needed and was even giving them Wal-Mart cards. I mean, this was to a lot of families.

EV: Who was that?

GA: She was with another organization. I have her card. She is a lawyer but it was through her mother's church and helping them. And she came again in December and helped at Thanksgiving. They had a big dinner at another church. It was all different churches that came together. It was just incredible how they helped.

EV: You said the churches came together under your efforts or were they part of that Operation Compassion under the Second Baptist Church?

GA: No, there was another church, a Lutheran church. It was all different churches meeting. It was all different churches meeting different ways. I had different pastors helping me from different churches just because they were going to help. They all came through. They were all Christian pastors, Hispanic, and, you know, they were trying to get a congregation to go with them to church. They'd take them to the services. They would come and pick them up. But it wasn't anything about trying to make money. Nothing. It was just all so, so generous. Just incredible how they opened their hearts and everybody.

EV: Were these Pentecostal and Catholic primarily?

GA: That's exactly what it was – Pentecostal.

EV: Do you have the name of that pastor that you mentioned? Earlier you said you got a pastor to help you.

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: I have all their names. Actually, I have a whole binder of everything I did with them. I had a binder of so many contacts that I was working with. I can get you all their names. I have all their numbers and everything.

EV: O.K., that would be really good.

GA: They could tell you all the pastors. I know that one in particular is there every Thursday. His name is Tim Barr. And he is with the Minnonite community. And he still works with the Hispanic community a lot because he is trying to help a lot of them right now that are illegal and they are not able to get vouchers anymore.

EV: Really?

GA: We are not able to help them and it is really sad and all. We are going through case managers to see if they'll help them pay their rent.

EV: These are the ones who don't have papers?

GA: Yes. But he works with a lot of this. He is the one who helped organize this. Tim Barr.

EV: I met my first Mexicano Minnonite about last year.

GA: There are a bunch of them.

EV: I never, never knew they were around.

GA: You cannot believe, I met a bunch of them. There are a bunch here. He is awesome. And he speaks Spanish. And, of course, he says, "Gloria, they'll listen more to you than to me because I am _____ with blue eyes," or whatever. But he is a great guy. And he is at the meetings. I can give you his information.

EV: So, when PNG saw you were doing this work and they said, we need this little angel . . .

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: Actually, no, not at all. No, what happened was in January . . . well, when I was doing the volunteer work, I was also working . . .

EV: This January?

GA: This past year. When I was helping all these people last year, I was working with a lawyer, a Puerto Rican, and she was coming and giving a lot of people help and things and getting restaurants to help me and things like that and I met her that way. But, at the same time, she knew a lot of the same people that I knew and I didn't know that she was on the NHBO board with Ben Mendez and also a very good friend and things. So, in January when I was laid off, I called her and I said, "Necessito aiuto. I need a job." She goes, "_____ Ben Mendez?" And I said, "Oh, yes, he is a friend." And she goes, "Well, he needs somebody right now to work in HR." "Well, that is my background." And so, he said, "Gloria, I probably can't offer you the same as a corporate and it is contract so when all this stuff ends, you know" . . . "But you are welcome to come until you find something or whatever you want." And at the time, it was going to be temporary, I never looked for another job. It was just right up my alley. I mean, I love human resources, I love working with people but at the same time, I was actually in contact with the Katrina people but it was all about Katrina. And since then, the work load got a little bit less in HR and the media group that works with communications with the city asked me if I would like to join them on board to work as a community liaison because they knew what I had done in the past with the volunteers and that I knew a lot of people here in Houston and they felt that I would be a good fit. So, that is what I do as a community liaison. They kind of have me, not because of the Hispanic community. It is with everybody. I go to all the mayors meetings on Monday mornings at George R.

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

Brown. I go to all the meetings where they coined VOAD, Catholic Charities, and mostly the United Way meetings.

EV: Are they still having those regular meetings?

GA: Yes.

EV: I mean, the mayor still meets every Monday with these folks?

GA: Oh, yes. Every other Monday now. Oh, definitely. It is a big meeting because we are starting now the resettlement phase. So, it doesn't end. It hasn't ended yet. We have laid off a lot of people. We are transitioning now because FEMA has now gotten CLC which is another housing organization that is doing what we were doing. We were doing the same as Jefferson Wells and Sunland. There are three of us. So, we all kind of subcontracted from the city. And now, the FEMA has gone with CLC which is another company.

EV: When you say you were HR, you were human resources for this group or for the city?

GA: Human resources for PNG. Project Management.

EV: And how many full-time employees does it have?

GA: 187 right now. Now, we just started PMG Engineering also, so it is expanding.

EV: Has it sort of become a verb, PMG?

GA: It has. And our employees are not all here. We have them at the city and we have then at Sunland over at Town & Country.

EV: What size staff do you have to work with, with this group?

GA: Right now, we have an office manager, our operations manager, Ben Mendez, who is the CEO of the company doing business development. We probably have about 7

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

staff because I do all the HR. We have a person that does our payroll. We have an accountant that does all our books and everything. We have the operations manager. We have the girl at the front. And then Ben.

EV: About how many people were you all able to have or to get taken care of on your case management concept?

GA: On that concept, it does not matter because we always have availability as far as with the city or the company that we subcontract from which is Sunland out of Town & Country. It is a tall building right at the Beltway and Town & Country.

EV: Well, if someone were to come by and say, "How many people did you take care of" . . .

GA: Oh, yes, because that is what we do – if you want us to come in and take care of 1,000, 2,000, we can. It doesn't matter. We have the capability to do it.

EV: How many evacuees did you all handle? I suppose when you came on board, you already had your little entourage of people you were helping, right?

GA: Right.

EV: And I assume you brought them with you _____ continued to work with them?

GA: I continued working with them on my own, which I still do and helping them because I have a lot of information and contacts for them. You know, I can help them with a lot of things. But on the other hand, they don't come here to this office. We work with the city and with FEMA. So, we strictly handle all the asset management part, the invoicing and the problem resolution, paying all the landlords. That is what we do.

EV: Did you follow that formula, I think, of Abraham Maslov, I think, the theory of hierarchy or something?

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: I heard about that.

EV: You sound like that is what you all did – you kind of first took care of whatever you perceived to be their need of having basic stuff.

GA: We did.

EV: Do you know who Dr. Mattox is? Kenneth Mattox?

GA: Yes.

EV: He is the head medical director at Ben Taub and he is the one who organizes things for the Dome, all the medical stuff, and had to . . . you know, like in a matter of very few hours, they set up a complete clinic out there.

GA: Oh, yes, it was great. I took a bunch of people up there because I called Rick who is a good friend, _____, and told him I needed buses. His wife was down there working, too. I said, “I need some buses. I have people that are diabetics. I have senior citizens. I brought like 3 buses of people. It was like a whole hospital system.

EV: Did you happen to run into a Dr. Viona, the Spaniard?

GA: There are a lot of doctors I do not remember.

EV: So, you took them to the doctor’s office and took them back, I take it, right?

GA: Yes. One of them we had to take to a hospital because he was having a stroke. So, we drove him over to the hospital from George R. Brown.

EV: Did you have any kind of an idea, if this were to happen again, what changes you might make? Apparently you all are still planning so . . .

GA: I think we may do things a little bit different. I haven’t been in that phase of it. I know my boss goes to all those meetings _____ John Walsh and who is kind of the head of it that works right under the mayor. You know, it was so chaotic at the time, no

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

one really even knew. I think what we did was great but yet, that there could be changes definitely. That we could do things differently? Oh my gosh, yes we could. I think that one would be . . . I don't know if they would do what they did at the Astrodome again. I don't know how they would do that. You know, I know that a lot of apartments don't want to help anymore because it took them so long to get their payments and there was so much . . . you know, one can mess it up for many. So, we had different problems with apartments.

EV: Problems with violence and drugs?

GA: And people coming in and doing things, messing up their property and things like that. So, we had a lot of that also. If we could change anything? You know, Houston had such an open arm to help out.

EV: Well, I realize that probably you can't really prepare for this type of thing. I mean, if El Paso would keep getting flooded and flooded and we'd have to move them out, that is going to be a lot of things in common with what happened here.

GA: Oh, definitely you can see that.

EV: But on the other hand, they may have a little bit different thing for a variety of reasons, just having subvariations. But I guess what I am saying if you all of a sudden had to have this type of a calamity again, what things would you suggest to make this a little bit smoother, I should do this, this, this and this? Just based on your own experience, do you have any idea what that might be? Or do you think the way it came down is okay? Were they right the first time?

GA: No. At the beginning, there were a lot of chiefs and not Indians. We are still doing a lot of the same things so I don't think that we are doing anything different

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

because we are still helping people in the same way. And also, I wanted to mention that we helped a lot of Rita. We have helped a lot of Rita. I have a lot of friends that were landlords and helped me let them stay there because it wasn't as bad as Katrina but we had a lot of Latinos that we helped with Rita. A lot. And that was sad because it is a mess down there and they are not getting a lot of help. Mainly Port Arthur and all that area.

All the meetings and discussions that I have been to . . . you know, I know that they are not going to give money away as freely as they did. That was a big mistake. Others have to pay for the mistakes one made or two or four. Because of the fraud that was committed and billions of dollars that were lost by FEMA to government money, I think that they want to do things a little bit different as far as the disbursement of money and help. Louisiana is not being helpful with them like we are. They still are not because I have a lot of people that go to Louisiana and they still have just a little trailer on their block where their house was and they are not getting any help at all.

EV: You told me they are telling you that they intend on going back.

GA: They want to go back. Some have told me they want to stay but the majority want to go back. But the ones that do go back and say they want to go, they say it is so different, so expensive and that there is nothing there. They can't find anything. They've got to drive out to go find things. Just the devastation that there was.

EV: You said the ones that go back, are they working the construction, the rehabilitation in New Orleans generally?

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: Some of them that want to go back or that go back right now are all in construction. All in restaurants. Some of the restaurants have opened that they have gone to. They have all come back and in construction.

EV: Did you bump into any professionals who were doctors, attorneys, dentists or anything, or was it mainly the working class that you dealt with?

GA: That were here _____ Latinos or just overall?

EV: Just overall?

GA: Oh, no. There were policemen that the wife is here with the family. Lawyers. Doctors. Nurses. A lot of nurses. Teachers. A lot of teachers. They still can't get jobs. They bring that up at the mayor's meeting all the time. And they've got a lot of credentials. And we need a lot of teachers so I don't understand that. We have people working for us that are Katrina.

EV: Really?

GA: Oh, yes. They are our employees and they are good employees, too.

EV: This is really a silly question because I kind of get a funny look every time I ask it but what was a typical day for you when you were working with the evacuees?

GA: I can tell you on a Saturday or Sunday.

EV: Yes, that's fine.

GA: I would get up with my granddaughters because I raise my 3 granddaughters who are 6, 10, and 11. We'd get up and I'd say, "We have to go because I have to go spend the day at the apartment," which was an office. Going through food and mainly case . . . every one had different problems. Every one. Either they needed phone cards or help with lawyers or help with getting IDs here in Texas, getting a license, getting a car fixed.

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

I mean, Houston was so devastating for them, too, because it is so big. And we Houstonians are used to it. Louisiana is little. Everybody is all together. So, this kind of just blew everybody away – all the freeways. They just have one freeway there. The locations and all the different things. That was kind of hard for them. So, I mean, my typical day would be just helping them out with all their problems, taking them places, doing things for them. They had all kinds of problems.

GA: Gloria, how was it that the Mexicanos or the Hispanics all wound up in kind of the same place?

EV: I don't know. That was so weird how they all ended up at Days Inn. There were several hotels. I went to like 3 motels and they all ended up at the same place, all the Latinos.

EV: Did they come in buses?

GA: No, some came with rides. Some were walking because they got flooded and they were walking on the roads and they were picked up. Some in their cars. They had nice cars, some of them. Nice cars. I mean, nicer than mine. And they were there. Big families. A lot of families of the brothers and sisters and the kids. We had one family, one husband and wife who had their 4, 5, daughters and all their daughter-in-laws, son-in-laws, all their kids, their kids' kids. It was a lot of family.

EV: Did they live in a barrio, a certain barrio?

GA: Yes.

EV: So, it is conceivable that they all got together and said, "Mira, we are going to all go here," and they all left at the same time?

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: Some of them just met or they would contact each other . . . you know, when you got them, they had their phone . . . they were like, ‘everybody come over here, we are here.’ And if not, we’d send them to another place if the hotel was full.

EV: Now, did you stumble across any that were Hispanic in the Dome?

GA: Oh, I did. I had some Cubanos that were at the Astrodome and they are in an apartment now off Beechnut. They could tell you a lot of things.

EV: The Cubanos?

GA: Yes. Well, he is a _____, she is a Cubana.

EV: Why are you saying they could _____?

GA: Because they have been through so much. They don’t have a car. They are walking everywhere.

EV: _____?

GA: No. They had a car and it broke down. I had helped them and given them a car I had. And they have been going back and forth now to Louisiana to take care of stuff. They live here. Their apartment is off Gessner and 59. They have a nice apartment. FEMA is still paying. In the meantime, they’ve gotten married. They weren’t married before but they have gotten married. I went to their wedding, maybe in November or December.

EV: Were you the madrina?

GA: I was the madrina.

EV: Were you, really?

GA: Yes, I was. I really was.

EV: I was just kidding.

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

GA: I have pictures and everything. I really was. It wasn't anything big but they had like you know the dinner and everything at the apartment.

EV: You kind of kept your own personal notes and diaries, didn't you?

GA: Of everything. I have a big notebook. I made a binder because I had so many different people that I spoke to, so many people that helped me, that came on board, gave me money for medical things, for the medicine. Izzy Gomez, I don't know if you know him. He is a retired police officer but he does _____ barrio and he came through for me incredibly. He bought backpacks and T-shirts and briefcases and all kinds of stuff for them.

EV: Is this written in your own personal shorthand, your notebooks and stuff?

GA: It is my notebook of all my things, different things. I had numbers I had written down. I didn't do like writing it as a story of things, you know, I have all the different things. It mainly was contacts. You'd go to one tab for food -- who do I contact who is going to donate food; who can I contact for my medical things, for schools to help the kids with school things.

EV: This is your working notebook?

GA: Yes, I have that every day I go to the hotel.

EV: Well, sometime maybe you could let us Xerox that stuff to include in the archive.

GA: Of course, yes. Oh definitely. It grew. I had just notes and it grew to something really big.

EV: Are you still adding to it? Does this thing continue?

GA: No, I haven't. Since I put it here, I have not. I put it away. It is in my closet.

But no, I never did anymore because I . . . I did have to do one thing that was kind of bad

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez

Interview: August 8, 2006

but I had another cell phone line but I was getting so many calls from Louisiana from the 504 and my phone bill was just tremendous.

EV: What is the 504?

GA: The area code. And my phone bill was just . . . I don't know if I told you but someone had my name on TV in Louisiana for any help or anything you need, like call 1-800-Gloria. _____ my cell phone – that I'd help families connect that were lost. They'd call me and I'd get them in touch with the media here. You need Univision and Channel 13 helped me a lot – with food, with help, with media things. It was so funny because they said, "Yes, we saw it in Louisiana. It said on one of the channels if you need assistance and you are in Houston, call Gloria Alvarez at 713" . . .

EV: _____.

GA: Go figure! I was like on my God! And so, I had to end up cutting that line and changing my phone line. And I have run into people since and they are like, "Glorita, _____."

EV: It makes you feel bad then.

GA: It makes you feel bad but I said, "I had to. I had so many people calling me." It is like a line. Somebody tells them, "Call Gloria. She will help you." Chiama la Senora Alvarez, _____ aiuta." It was like that.

EV: (Speaking Spanish)

GA: Definitely. I mean, it was just incredible.

EV: Did you have the experience of staying up . . . let me back up a little bit. When you came home late at night and you were sitting there, when you finally have a moment

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

to yourself and you were reflecting, was there anything that really got to you, made you worry, you were happy about?

GA: You know what? Actually, I lost a lot of weight because I was not eating right. I was going from work. My mother was helping take care of the girls because I wouldn't take them in the afternoons, only the weekends. I would get home like 9:30 or 10 and, you know, people would say, "Why are you doing this?" And I just said, my thought was, if it would happen to me, I would want them to help me like I helped them. And that was my reward because I knew that every day, I helped touch a lot of families, I helped them feel better about where they were at here in Houston and not so . . . I mean, they wanted to vent sometimes. They had problems they wanted to tell you about, things that were going on in their life. They were married. They were having problems because they were grouchy with each other. Just the situation was making them that way. And no, because I am single, I was able to do this. Really, I know that, too. But I know in my heart that there was a reason for me going into that hotel that one day and starting it, and giving me the drive to continue to help them and not to leave them. When I did stop doing everything, it was after the holidays because I thought I had done enough already and they were pretty much on their own. I think that my last thing was getting them furniture for their apartment, seeing them in an apartment was like, for me, O.K., enough is enough. I've done this. I've been there. And they all said the same thing. They told many people that interviewed them that when they go . . . I mean, I helped them a lot, I really did and I know that I touched a lot of their lives. I even went to their apartments. And, I mean, I was in all kinds of apartments, because some of the apartments we put them in were horrible, they really were. And, you know, they were nice when they got

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

them but I didn't know about all these neighborhoods and how bad they were. And I heard later. So, a lot of them would move out. There were shootings. I didn't know, you know, but, of course, we had such an open market of apartments that were available so they jumped at the chance. Landlord. That is a way to make our money. Bring them in, do this and this and, you know, we were kind of caught in between that, too, where I think, you know, we may do things a little bit different in that sense.

No, I will never have a regret of anything that I did. Never. As far as sometimes I would get emotional and feel bad but most of the times, it was always rewarding. I felt good. I was tired but I felt good.

EV: I have had the experience where you see a lot of suffering and you can't do anything about it at that moment but you still take that thought with you.

GA: You do. You take it with you and you think, oh, well . . . I always thought, you know, I have my house with my roof. I am blessed. I am lucky, you know, and I could be without one day. And actually, hard to believe and my parents know very much, I don't know this therapy – I don't know what they call it. I lost a lot when I lost Enron at the top. To me, I was on the top of the world. I had reached the American dream. I had a house on the beach. I had 2 cars. I was making good money. And it was all about the money, helping everybody and doing the right thing, although I was still _____ to the community but that was like a wake up call. I never thought I would be in the situation I was in of losing everything and being . . . I am 50 now so that was like 45.

EV: Oh, you are a baby!

GA: Yes, I am now. And so, I thought at the time, you know, I am already supposed to be thinking about my retirement and now it is time to think about what am I going to

Interviewee: Gloria Alvarez**Interview: August 8, 2006**

do, where do I go from here? But, you know what, when you look back on everything, there is a plan for everything because it was meant for me because I think had I not been in the situation I was in, I wouldn't have been able to have helped and been there to help the Katrina people, and done everything and met all the people I have met and made the friends, made the contacts on the networking and had a job like this.

