

Interviewee: Caram, Dorothy

Interview Date: July 1, 2010

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Dr. Dorothy Caram
University of Houston Oral History Project
Mexican American History

Interviewed by: Natalie Garza
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NG: This is Natalie Garza. I am interviewing Dr. Dorothy Caram on July 1, 2010 in her home on Glen Haven. Can you please begin by telling me your full name?

DC: Yes my full name is, in Spanish or in English?

NG: Either.

DC: Okay Dorotea Elena Farrington Santander. That's my full name married to de Caram but here I'm known as Dr. Dorothy Caram.

NG: When were you born?

DC: I was born in 1933. My father was a Houstonian, my grandfather and his relatives, they all came from the Heights and from Harrisburg. But he was Anglo and married my mother who was Elena Santander Lopez from Mexico City. During that time which was still the depression era years he was a bilingual radio announcer on the border between Mexico and Texas at Reynosa. So I was born in McAllen but I was back in Houston by the time I was like 6 months old. So I consider myself a Houstonian.

NG: Your mother, how did her and your father meet?

DC: Okay my mother's father was the Adjutant Colonel to Porfirio Diaz so in 1910 when the revolution started he had to flee and he left his four daughters and my grandmother in Mexico and my mother was like maybe 3 months old when he left. He

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went to Cuba and then New York. Then he returned to Mexico in... in like 1915 or '20 between those years I'm not sure exactly the date and started in, in the government again. He became mayor of some small little cities with who they call jefe politicos of the regions. Then there was another problem with the Cristeros movement and all that so in 1924 he came to Houston with my grandmother and my mother who was 15 years old. They came because of the problems they were having over there. The other three sisters were all married to military men and they stayed. It was ironic in that family they had family on all sides. You never knew which side they were on but they were all military as far as the husbands of my aunts. The mother was... well my grandfather was one of the founders of the Club Mexico Bello. That was founded by a group of professionals and businessmen that came from Mexico who wanted to have a social and an organization that would also remember the history of Mexico and celebrate the 15th of September and the 5th of May or what other events they wanted to do and they started what they call the Black and White ball here in Houston. It was the popular event in San Antonio but it was started by the Club Mexico Bello here in Houston. Later on in the '50's one of the presidents of the Club Mexico Bellow, Ignacio Salmeron started the Quinceañera ball which Mexico Bello was famous for, for many years, they still have it. There are maybe 5 or 6 members alive, not the original, original ones but the children, the sons and daughters of the original ones that are still running the program. So it is interesting to see what happened there.

NG: And those balls are completely social events?

DC: They are social events. The Quinceañera is held usually in November and it's a... it gives it people who do not have the money to try to have a big Quinceañera ball for

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their daughter, the ability to present her to society in a formal setting with the father and the mother and then the dance and all the waltz and it's... it's just a wonderful volunteer effort that the Club Mexico Bello always had because that continues our tradition of a Quinceañeras. The black and white ball was a big social event. I mean the mayors and city council and other politicians all attended as well as for many years people from River Oaks came to the black and white ball because it was so beautiful. All the men wear black tuxedos and the ladies all wear either black or white gowns or a combination of black and white and it's long, very formal.

NG: So the black and white ball was mostly people involved in politics or of higher social status?

DC: Not necessarily. When I chaired it I remember one of the waiters... I'm losing my voice again. When we were rehearsing at the Shamrock we had a lot of the balls there and I chaired it a lot. I don't know how many times. Then I would meet with the girls and we would have a tea at my house and we would have publicity for the ball and we would practice regularly for about two months the waltz and that was the one, two, three...one, two, three... but anyway one of the waiters there told me he said, "I have a 15 year old daughter." I said, "Why don't you present her?" We did. So it was anyone who wanted to be presented, or wanted their daughters presented was welcome. No one was turned away. The cost was minimal because I think it was just it was like \$60 to be in the ball and that entitled them to bring an escort the girl, to two balls. So I mean it was minimal charge.

NG: Do you know why your mother's family chose Houston? Because it seems like many people chose San Antonio or other places further south.

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DC: They chose Houston because there was a Mexican born very, very wealthy man that lived here. Roberto Autrey who owned... who was a real good friend of my grandfathers. Roberto Autrey owned a brewery and a nail company. He started out as a provider of fruits and vegetables to the restaurants in Houston; he made a lot of money. He was a real good friend of my grandfather and he invited him to come here. So that's why they came to Houston. My father met my mother because since childhood he loved the Mexican community even though my grandparents were hard shelled Baptists and didn't like Mexicans, my father loved them. Since he was a young teenager he hung around with everybody in Magnolia and then he liked performing arts. So while he was at Rice he joined the... at Rice University he was a student there. He joined AlbinoTorres' Orquesta Típica, AlbinoTorres is one of the most famous orchestra leaders we had in Houston. He played all the social things, the River Oaks balls, everything but he also had a Orquesta Típica and they performed at all the functions for the Mexican Americans, the Mexican and the Mexican American groups here in Houston. My father played the accordion and was the promoter and the announcer with them. Later on my father went on to New York because he was also a professional model and became real good friends with Clark Gable and when Clark Gable came to Houston they had a theater here called The Palace Theater and he performed with him there. That's where he met my mother. That's why I brought that up. Because Clark Gable had a one of his plays that needed someone to dance the Mexican hat dance. So my father learned and my mother was 15 years old and very beautiful so she danced with him in that production and that's how they met. So that was kind of interesting.

NG: That's an exciting story.

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DC: It is, it's fun... It's a fun story.

NG: Was your mother educated as well?

DC: My mother only went to the 3rd grade. That's what most Mexicanas were allowed to do. Especially during those turbulent years of the revolution. There was just nothing for women. They were slated to grow up and get married and have children. That was their... that was supposed to be their role in life.

NG: Where did you grow up?

DC: Here in Houston.

NG: What area of town?

DC: East End off of Telephone Road. On Beatty Street. I started out by going... since my father's two sisters were teachers in the H.I.S.D. district they took me when I was like 5 years old to Eliot in Denver Harbor area to kindergarten. Then I went to first grade through 5th grade at Brookline school and that was real interesting because we were the only Hispanics in that whole neighborhood. Everyone else was middle income white people. So I didn't have to suffer the things that the students in Magnolia and other areas of Houston suffered in which they weren't allowed to speak Spanish at school. On the other hand since my father was a professor at the University of Houston, first at the Houston Community College when it was... it was the University of Houston pre-runner it was called the Community College of Houston. Then he went on to the University of Houston as a professor of Spanish. So I mean we... the principal in our school who had 6 grades in one classroom, it was remarkable how she could teach. She allowed me to always perform in Spanish for the kids and I liked being on stage. So she would let me perform and dance and make up plays and whatever and use my Spanish and no one ever

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said anything to me. So I didn't have the problem that the other children had who were punished if they spoke. So that is why I grew up bilingually.

NG: I'm not familiar with all the schools in Houston but that school that you talked about what area of town was that in?

DC: It's on Telephone Road and it's now the Houston Media Center for the H.I.S.D. It's a little one... a two story red brick thing that was built way back in maybe 1915 or '20.

NG: So you were saying that the East End was very different from what it is now?

DC: Oh yes completely. The area that I went to was Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Riverview Baptist Church. I mean you could probably count on your hand any Hispanics that lived in that area. Now it's completely Hispanic. Even in... after I graduated from Rice I became a teacher. When I went to H.I.S.D. and asked to get a job there they asked me where I would like to go and I told them I wanted to go to DeZavala school because I had been going over there to pick up students while I was a student at Rice to take them to dance class with me across town. I was the chauffer for everybody. So I was real familiar with that area and I thought it would be great if I could teach at DeZavala because I could communicate with the parents. Well the first thing that they said was that would be the last place they would send me because no one was supposed to be able to speak in Spanish ever. This is in 1955. So I mean you think about it boy we've done a lot in less than 60 years. But Magnolia near north, the Houston Avenue and Washington Avenue and Center Street and all those areas, those were the two main pockets of Hispanics because even Denver Harbor didn't have any. I don't recall any when I went to Denver Harbor to elementary school. Then later on I was the lifeguard at Denver

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Harbor pool. Then I had a few more Hispanics. This was in the early '50's at Denver Harbor which is now all Hispanics too.

NG: Where did you go to high school?

DC: After I went to Brookline I went to Henderson Elementary which was in East End also . I don't recall any Hispanics there either. Now it is 100% Hispanic. Then I went to Jackson Junior High School where I finally met some of the other Hispanics because they were living in the East End around Navigation and Canal Street and Milby, Milby area, Milby Street area. So I went to Jackson but my parents then moved to Puebla so I went two years... I went in the 8th grade at the American School in Puebla, Mexico. Then the next year the 9th grade I went back to Jackson and got there and finished. Then I went back to Mexico to Puebla and I was going to go into high school the 10th grade and there was no 10th grade at the American school but they needed a first grade teacher so at 15 I was teaching 1st grade, poor students! But they must have learned something. Then I came back and instead of going to Austin where I was zoned I chose to go to Sam Houston High School when it was downtown because my grandmother on my father's side and my father had both gone to that school so I said, "Okay." It was called Central High School for them and it was called Sam Houston for me. So I went there and I also had... I also realized that I had to be in a smaller school with better access to the teachers so that I could make up for the lost time that I had had in Mexico. So I finished high school in two years because I went all year round. I was a big fish in a little pond. That was... I knew I had to get a scholarship somewhere or I couldn't go to a university. Because my father was back teaching again. In those days a professor made like \$400 a

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month. So with three children to educate it was going to be hard. So I did, I was able to go to Rice.

NG: Was there ever any question of you not going to college or was that always understood that you would go?

DC: That was always understood that I would go. I never varied from that. I wanted to go and I wanted to have a professional career and my brothers also went to college. They both went to the University of Houston.

NG: At Rice what did you major in?

DC: I majored in romance languages. But because then you didn't have Spanish as a major at Rice it was not... you know it was always the low language on the totem pole. Where all the athletes took Spanish but all of us, if we entered into that field of romance languages or even at Rice because all of us had to take another language. You took either German or French your first two years at Rice. So I said, well... I really wanted to go to medical school. So my first year at Rice most of my studies were geared toward pre med but then I put the pencil to the paper and decided there were probably only three medical schools in the state of Texas and all of them were very expensive and I would never have the money to go. So then I said, "Well what is the best thing I can do? I've taught before I like to be with kids so I'll go into teaching." I went into romance languages and then at night I took the four semesters of educational courses that they offered at Rice and then at night I went to the University of Houston and then the summers to get my teachers educational courses out of the way. So I went to both schools. But I graduated from Rice.

NG: Did you get your Master's from Rice as well?

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DC: Well here's the long story on that. So then I decided to get my Master's in Spanish at the University of Houston even though my father was the head of the department which made it even harder for me. But we had such wonderful professors coming in especially Don Americo Castro who was a renowned Spanish teacher. Well not Spanish teacher but he was just a wonderful person who knew everything about Spanish and Spain and central and history and everything. Anyway I don't know if you have ever been familiar with him but his name is Americo Castro and it is worth looking into some of his writings. But he was teaching there. So I went to courses there and then they opened up in the summer of '57 they opened up Spain, the United States and Spain finally had relations because before that they had not been able to do it because Spain had been fascists during the war under Franco. Well Franco finally and the United States made peace and he offered scholarships and I got a scholarship to study all summer in Spain. Being the Hispanophile that my father was I had to take my mother with me because otherwise I couldn't go. She had to chaperone me while I was over there, which was really great because we both enjoyed each other and she had a great time and learned a lot and I did too. But anyway we came back and the only thing I was lacking was my thesis. In those days you couldn't take courses you had to do a thesis. I had met my husband to be who was from Veracruz, he was Lebanese born in Veracruz so big mixture. So we married and I got pregnant and 4 babies one right after the other so I couldn't finish the thesis and when I went back the University of Houston, the head of the... my father had died by then... the University it wouldn't have mattered anyway the dean I mean the chair of the department said I would have to start all over. That she would not recognize any of my courses (even though they were all A's). So I kind of

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said, "Well let me see what else I can do." So I went to Rice and they welcomed me in open arms and gave me another scholarship and let me finish my Master's at Rice in Spanish, which I did. Then I couldn't go to the University of Texas because that is the only place that had a doctorate in Spanish so...because of the kids being so small. So I went to the University of Houston into the education department and finished in leadership and education, educational leadership.

NG: So what year did you get married?

DC: In '58.

NG: And growing up you said that you knew that you wanted to be a professional.

Were you ever fearful that getting married and having kids so close together that that wasn't going to happen?

DC: No because my husband was a neurosurgeon and he was very... he was so busy with his career that I could more or less do what I wanted. I was very fortunate because after daddy died my mother was able to live with us. So she helped me with the children and we always had a nun or somebody else to help with the kids too. So I could go back and I was... I waited until the children were... well let's see it was in '70 that I went back to the university for a number of years. But in between that time I never stopped working. I taught at Saint Mark's Episcopal school for two years and then I substitute taught at Saint Vincent's Catholic School until I went back to the university. Well I did do a about a six month work thing at Kelsey Seybold Clinic because I told my husband I was going to run for the school board. He said, "Oh no they need you at Seybold to set up a foreign student... I mean a foreign patient office because they had no way to deal with all these patients that come from all over the world. So they need you to go there."

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So I said okay. I set up the office for him and everything. Then when I finished doing that and saw that it was all running well. I said, "No I want to go back and finish my doctorate... I mean my Masters'. That's when I went back and got it at Rice. So I graduated from Rice in '72. I think that's right. I always get the years mixed up. Anyway it was either '72 or '74 one of the two I think it was '72. Then after I finished with that I went directly to the University of Houston. But by that time I was working. I had finished all my course work in education but I could not find a dissertation topic that I liked. So I went to sociology at the University of Houston and did all their work and then finally between the sociology department and the department of education I found a topic that I liked and it took me four years to develop it because it was a questionnaire with 12,500 teachers. And in those days you didn't have the computers that we have now it was those punch cards. So it took me two years just to get through the punch cards and do all the analysis and get through my doctorate. But I enjoyed it. Meanwhile I was serving on a lot of local political things...like I served at... well in national too. At that time I was on the board of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Little Rock which covered five states okay, I was appointed to that by the President. Then... I served there seven years (seven or nine years) anyway a long time! Then at the same time I was appointed to the National Institute of Health board for a neurological and communicative disorders and stroke in which I had to go to Washington every three months and stay there five days and go through all the things for the advisory boards are the ones that decide who gets the money that are giving to NIH, the National Institutes of Health. So it was a real great opportunity for me to meet a lot of wonderful people who are dedicated to science and it was my husband's field. So he should have been the one appointed, but I was! I

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enjoyed that. But I do want to say something about the Federal Home Loan Bank Board... Louis Welch was the mayor here in Houston and he called me up and he said, "I have someone I want you to meet Dorothy." I said, "Okay." But I never... my grandfather was a city councilman from East End. So politics was always in my veins also. He said, "I want you to meet someone." I said, "Okay." So he introduced me to the president of that savings and loan board and they... the problem they were having, this was in the early '70's when I was finishing Rice and starting at the University. He said, "We need to break the all male image of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board and we are going to start with you." I said, "Okay." "You're a woman (which they never had before) "and you're a Mexican background." So that takes care of the minority. They never had a black they never had anybody from any of the other... you know Asian or anybody it was always white men. So I walked into that. Oh and he said, "What do you know about banking?" I said, "Well I know how to write checks and balance my check book sometimes." He said, "You're perfect." That's what they wanted somebody who didn't know anything. But in order to prepare. I couldn't walk into something that I didn't know anything about. So I went and took courses in real estate because Federal Home Loan Bank Boards are the ones that work with the savings and loans to give loans for mortgages and in those days the saving and loans were not like banks. They were just dealing with mortgages. You could do a savings account there but you couldn't do any regular checking or anything else. So I served on that one I guess for about seven years on that bank board. But by the time I left they had everybody... I mean it was balanced. It was better than it had ever been. But then I was lucky because I left just before they had a lot or problems with the savings and loan. Because they became banks and they

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couldn't handle it. So it became a problem and I was glad I was off of it by then. I was lucky. I had an angel that watched over me. Anyway that's in a nutshell. My four sons are all professionals. There was never any doubt they were going to go to universities. So and I didn't have them in public schools because they were four boys all close to each other in age and I wanted very strict teachers with them. So I had worked with the nuns over here at Saint Vincent de Paul Catholic school so I put them in there. Then they went to Saint Thomas High School. But I never stopped working with H.I.S.D. and served on various of their committees starting with... once they had the integration when they had the schools what do you call it, it just went. The schools that they had instead of mixing whites and blacks they mixed blacks with Mexican Americans. The huelga schools. So when they started the huelga schools I also realized that that was a good movement because it made a statement but also I could see that unless they had qualified teachers in those huelga schools the kids were going to fall further and further and further behind, which they did. So I was very adamant that instead of all going to huelga schools that they stayed and worked so we'd break that stalemate at H.I.S.D. so I was on the committees that disintegrated the schools. That made it... that took integration and put it back where it should have been where the schools were no longer.

NG: Can you talk a little bit about that the huelga schools.

DC: The huelga schools?

NG: Yeah how that happened and why it was justified?

DC: Okay when the ruling came down in Brown v. whatever. It said that schools were started because in order to integrate H.I.S.D. they had all the black children, African Americans were going to black schools. They got the left over books...no white teachers

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could be over there only African American teachers. They were all trained at T.S.U. and at other schools but not all of them were the highest training that they could do. They were not... even at the other schools they weren't always well trained. But anyway (I'm very critical). The school board decided that in order to fulfill the law that they would pair Mexican Americans and blacks because Mexican Americans were white and leave the whites alone. So many of the schools like let me give you an example. Poe Elementary which was an all white and upper middle class they took three grades from there, or two grades and were bussing them over to a school that was all black and so that they took the students from that school and bussed them over there in order to integrate. In every effort that they could make it was always the ones chosen were always the one that were Mexican American that they were going to bus so a bunch of our leaders and rightfully so objected to that. They said, "No it should be across the board everybody should be considered to be the ones that integrate not just Mexican Americans." So they started a huelga schools. They were all over town. I remember visiting one in the near north side and then the George R. Sanchez High School that Alma had was started at that period too and it was over there off of what was it? Off of Navigation and Canal. I could see that some of the schools were very well done. The equivalent today would be looking at charter schools. Some charter schools are just excellent and they are going to get a good product out. Other charter schools are just formed because somebody decided that this is good money making thing and they really don't care if the people that teach are qualified. They don't care if the students really succeed, discipline is poor. They just want that daily money coming in because it is a charter school. I mean this is the comparison that I make so you have some huelga schools that were very good and others

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that were not so good. I looked at some of the not so good and I thought, "Poor kids they're never going to get... they are always going to be on the bottom of the economic ladder because they are never going to get an education. They're not getting it at H.I.S.D. and they're not going to get it at the huelga schools." So I wasn't exactly loved in those days by some of the people. Because I said, "Instead of huelga schools lets just work with H.I.S.D. and get this thing solved the right way?" Which they did soon after that. They had the... I don't even remember what the name of the committee was started but we formed magnet schools afterwards. Out of that committee came the concept of, "Let's take some schools and pour more money into them and make them attractive so that the rich kids in River Oaks will want to go to it even though it's located in the black part of town." And that's what we did and that's what worked. It did work. People didn't object to bussing if what they were going to get at the other end of the bus line was going to be a great education. That's how the High School for the Visual and the Performing Arts the... that was the model. Then what developed was the medical centers the one for the health professions that is in the medical center and the engineering magnet school and also Vanguard schools which were... they had courses in math and science and English... English mostly those three things that were pushed. There were also, it started in that period came the bilingual education movement. Again, I can see the need for bilingual education. I believe in it but I want the teachers to be really bilingual and to really teach the kids both languages and shove them into English as soon as they can while they maintain the Spanish. But unhappily they were certifying teachers who took six weeks of Spanish. So how could they be bilingual if they had only taken one course or two courses in Spanish? They couldn't! I don't know what harm they might have done

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to those kids growing up but we see the high dropout problem starting at that time. We see it starting at that period. Now I love the concept of dual language because it really prepares the students to get the concepts of every topic clearly in both languages but it takes a very talented teacher to do that.

NG: At the time of the huelga schools what was your position within the H.I.S.D.?

DC: I was a major volunteer, community member. I served on about four of their committees and one for Harris County too.

NG: So it was like a political position?

DC: Well yes it was a political position because the people who appointed the committees appointed me and I volunteered. I never got any money. I never did anything for money. It was because I wanted to see something done... solutions. If you have a problem, let's all work together and find a solution to it.

NG: Where did your theories about education come from; how did they develop?

DC: Basically from personal experience. I mean total immersion was easy for me to comprehend and yet I could see why some people might have a problem with it. Because every summer as soon as May 30th came and school was out, by June the 3rd, starting when I was 5 years old I would be in school in Mexico all summer. My mother would take me to Mexico. We would go into public school. I didn't go into any high falutin' good school. You know not "good"... they were great schools because they taught well but what they call "high society" schools? No. It was public school. I really, I used to tell my children, "I failed Mexico, I failed first grade three times because every summer I'd go back to first grade." So I was still in first grade when I was 10 years old. But it was total immersion. I'd get to Mexico City and even though I could understand

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everything and everybody was saying to me, I would hesitate to say anything for two weeks. By the second week I was totally immersed again. Then when I'd come back to the states my grandfather would just really and he didn't speak Spanish on my father's side, he'd get really angry because I knew what he was telling me but I could never answer him. It would take me two weeks to get back on track again. But it didn't hurt me. The concepts were all there it was just a question of feeling comfortable in annunciating the words. So I think students, children absorb they can absorb five languages at one time and never get them mixed up. People shouldn't fear knowing languages. In fact, I mean look at Europe I mean everybody speaks more than one language.

NG: You were talking about dual language courses now. Can you tell me what that is?

DC: That means there are different ways of doing dual language but the best way is like for instance on Monday I'm going to teach Spanish in Spanish I'm going to teach Math. Then on Tuesday I will teach Math, the continuation of that concepts of Monday's concepts Tuesday in English and Wednesday I'll go back to Spanish on the concepts and Thursday English. So you are alternating the same course work, adding to it every day but in the other language. So the concepts are just the same no matter what. The same thing would be through for science. The same thing... the only thing that would be limited is English would be English and Spanish would be Spanish you know as a course. But in writing skills I mean one day you would teach the writing skills in English and the next day you would teach the writing skills in Spanish in elementary. There is a school right up here, not too far from here, Mark Twain and even the Rice School down the street on Kirby they do dual language and they are doing it quite well. Mark Twain is

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just excellent. I really think that is the easiest way to learn a language. In Mexico when I taught first grade. Everything was done in English all day at the American School but one hour I would teach Spanish every day. Of course the kids when they spoke to each other they went from English to Spanish. They wouldn't mix the languages they would just normally flow and those kids were all bilingual by the time they got out of the 8th grade at the American school even though their parents may not have spoken English at home. They were bilingual by the time they got through. They were totally immersed, except for one hour a day into English with Spanish speaking students there. But of course you have to also put in that due to economic status they had more help and more support from their parents than children from low economic status would have... so what we have to work for is make sure that the parents are getting help so that they can encourage the students. We are doing that with the Mexican Institute of Greater Houston. They are doing those courses... they are doing computer classes and English classes and parenting classes for these parents at the different schools and at Ripley House and different places. I'm real proud of that. That is a good program. We graduate over 1,000 every year. I don't know if you are familiar with it or not.

NG: No you graduate over a thousand?

DC: Parents... every year from those schools. They have computer classes in the school, the elementary school where their children go and the parents can come and take classes there free. They don't pay anything and then they have a big graduation ceremony. This is the Mexican... Mexican Institute of Greater Houston. It was called Mexican Cultural Institute for a while but now it is Mexican Institute of Greater Houston.

NG: How long has that been going on?

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DC: For about 15 years.

NG: I'm sorry you said about how long?

DC: About 15 years. The one that is the head of the program right now used to be with the University of Houston. His name is Dr. Carlos Lopez, interesting person. But it wasn't started by him it was started by another man.

NG: Do you remember who started it?

DC: I can't remember his name.

NG: You spoke earlier about dance class and I think somebody told me that you were involved somehow in dance, maybe at Ripley House or something like that?

DC: Well I started teaching dance. I always took dancing since I was a little girl because my parents loved culture and I had to take dance. I had to take piano. I had to take violin and cello. But dance was always my favorite. So I had... after I was at Rice I was taking Spanish and ballet dancing with another interesting person here in town her name is Norma Casas Pavon and her parents were the ones that owned the Santa Nita restaurant which doesn't exist anymore downtown. She had taken dance in Mexico and dance with Bellas Artes de Mexico as a ballet in Spanish dancer. Anyway, Norma was teaching at a studio so I would pick up all these kids from Magnolia and take them over there and we would take the dances together. One of the students ended up dancing with Greco's Spanish a big company that toured all over the world. But and then he taught somewhere in Corpus Christi but he was from Magnolia. The... since I liked dancing I was always in recitals and I was always doing stuff. In Magnolia there was a group called the Junior League... no the Junior Forum, not the Junior League the Junior Forum, they had a community center close to DeZavala school and mother, who was very artistic

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and taught porcelain and ceramic, went over there to teach that to the ladies and men who wanted, the older men who wanted to learn. Every day I would go over there to teach dancing to the kids free. I enjoyed it so much. Then I continued with this group from Magnolia that I was the chauffer for and we formed this little dance troupe and we would entertain at night clubs. Anyplace we could dance we would dance. We had such a good time all of us together. Then after that I helped with the choreography when I taught at Bellaire High School. Because I taught at Bellaire... at Bellaire High School I taught Spanish for approximately five years. So there I did the choreography for all their plays. There was a very famous drama teacher at the University of Houston but he was the drama teacher there at Bellaire. Cecil Pickets who went later to the University of Houston. He did all the plays, the musicals and I did all the choreography and enjoyed it. So I always liked dance.

NG: What do you think is meant for students from Magnolia or at the community center to be exposed to something like dance that they might not otherwise have been exposed to?

DC: Well I think it gave them a sense of cultural pride and also accomplishment because as I say most of them enjoyed the classes. They liked at the end of the year they would have a little recital and party for them. There was never a lot of money for costumes or anything like that but they all had their little skirts they could use and we had a number of young men who took classes. So it did build cultural pride and they were able to perform at their schools as they went on. And then some of them as I said became professionals. So that was... it was nice. Between that and swimming those were my two things. I was the first woman life guard for the city of Houston.

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NG: Really?

DC: Yes because they didn't allow women to be life guards. So I...

NG: How were you able to get in?

DC: Well at Rice I had an after school starting in my... the last part of my freshman year I took water safety instructor training. I worked at the gym at Rice to make extra money and so my second year, after my freshman year I decided I wanted to get a car and my father could never afford a car and he didn't like women drivers. But anyway, I said, "I'll get a car because I'll go find a job. What am I qualified to do? I'm qualified to teach swimming and to be a life guard." So I went down to city hall. Of course remember my grandfather had been a city councilman. So I was fearless I went into the Parks and Recreation Department head and I told him. "I'm going to be a lifeguard." He said, "No you're not, women..."

End of Tape 1 Side A

DC: ...Ruin my complexion and I want a job. So he gave me a job and I opened MacGregor pool as the first women life guard. After that a lot of my friends from Rice who were trained like I was were able to get jobs and become life guards and women are very good life guards. They feel the responsibility of the little kids. A lot of those pools the parents... it's like having a summer babysitter for their parents because they drop them off at 9:00 in the morning and they don't come and get them until the pool closes. So in those days it was 9:00 at night so it was a long day. We had a break at noon for a couple hours. But it was... I mean I had my share of adventures as a lifeguard; lots of them. Things that make me laugh afterwards. They were funny even then and some that were not so much funny either. I was chased one time by drugs... drug people. I didn't

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even... I was so naive and since I don't smoke and I don't drink I never thought about anybody using drugs. It never occurred to me! One day when I was lifeguarding at Denver Harbor I would notice that a kid with a radio would come around the pool right at the time that the break was going to start at 12:00 and the kids would all get out of the pool and go way in the park with him. I thought, "I wonder what they are doing back there?" But it never dawned on me. Well there was this great looking man who used to come and swim and he was sitting below my lifeguard stand and I said, "You know that kid comes around every day with that little radio and the kids all leave." I didn't know he was an undercover policeman. So they raided the park, picked up the kid. He was the drug deliverer. So that night when I got through lifeguarding I had no idea what had happened. I walked out of that and there were two men on either side of the door when I walked out of the pool area and they chased me to my car. I was just lucky that my angel was there that I got away from them. From then on I was escorted every time I left and entered the building by the manager of the pool and what I call the basket boys. They are the ones who take the clothes and the kids that went to swim and locked them up in those days and helped to keep the pool working. But I was always escorted but I did get chased. That is when my first encounter with people with drugs. Because even in high school I didn't know kids were... I was very naïve; never dawned on me that there were drugs around because to me even smoking a cigarette was just, "Aww!" because I had been a swimmer all my life so. I was swimming competitively and that would be awful to ruin your health by smoking and drinking but anyway that was one of my adventures as a lifeguard.

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NG: Since we are sort of on the topic of women, being the first woman to do anything, how... I know you have been involved in a lot of different, you know, political organizations, community organizations, how was it as a woman taking leadership in those roles? Did you ever find any difficulties?

DC: Oh yes, there were sometimes...in the early part I guess it was because I figured everybody, I mean when someone had a good idea and we all got together and worked on it I didn't feel like I was in a leadership position. I felt we were getting to wherever the goal was. So it didn't bother me. I remember once or twice I was brought back down to the earth by people and their saying, "Dorothy you live in a bubble." You know, "You live in this bubble where you think everybody's going to be wanting to do the same thing that you want to do and want to get these things accomplished and it's not like that." So but that didn't stop me. I still live in my bubble. I still think that people want the best for other people. And I think that we have to just work together. I realize that criticism has got to be there. I have one or two goals that I didn't accomplish when I wanted to and that was... but then if I let that get me down then I would never get anything else done. So you just move on and go to the next challenge.

NG: Can you think of an example of a negative encounter perhaps, I don't know if I want to phrase it that way but a difficulty that you have had with somebody in an organization because you were a woman?

DC: Because I was a woman?

NC: Yes.

DC: Well let's see. I guess that one of them I was on the board and I was president of the Houston Hispanic Forum and I read while I was in the hospital with my husband, he

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was recovering from a stroke or something, that a beautiful building that I had been to as a student at Rice called the Houston Light Guard Armory was going to be sold in a closed auction. I thought, "Oh gosh this is the perfect place for the Houston Hispanic..." well I wanted it for the Institute of Hispanic Culture but I thought an organization, a Hispanic organization should take that building, redo it and make the Hispanic Cultural Center of Houston in the museum area, close to the museum area because we are the only ethnic group that is not in the museum area, and we are still not in the museum area. So I took the idea to the Institute of Hispanic Culture where I had been instrumental in them having a building of their own and said, "This is your opportunity to move from this building into a bigger building." But the people there they didn't want to hear anything so it was, "Oh there is this woman talking." That was the first... we're not going to move, we aren't going to do what she wants us to do. We aren't going to try and raise money and get this building. So then Felix Fraga who had just finished his term as counsel person and I met about this and we went to the Houston Hispanic Forum, we had been on the board there and gave them the idea. What we were doing is we were going to go to the city of Houston, which we did, and get community development funds to buy the building. It was done because the first bid auction one of our famous athletes bid on it but there was some problem in the bidding procedure so they reopened it. By that time the city got involved so he backed off and the city got the property. So then the city had a contract with Houston Hispanic Forum that for a dollar a year for 5 years we could develop the building and then we would own it. I started raising the money and we got \$600,000 or close to it. We had architectural renderings, we had the engineering done, we gutted the building, we started doing all the work so we could put in the elevator and

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make sure we were accessible to the physically disabled or whatever. We got everything done but the third year one of the board members decided that he wanted the glory of doing it and the honor of putting together the committee and so he kind of shoved Felix and me out. So two years went by, they didn't raise the rest of the money. Some of that money was money that would have been collected, not a lot but enough so it kind of hurt me, but when my husband died people gave in his honor to that building. The city took it back. Now I'm glad that the Buffalo Soldiers, which is a black organization, has been able to do a new arrangement with the Houston Community College who originally owned the building by the way. They are going to develop it into the Buffalo Soldiers museum and main headquarters. The person who was instrumental in the end, the last two years was able to make sure that Hispanic soldiers have a place of honor in this building whenever it is finished in exchange for the \$600,000 plus that we put into it. So that was a big disappointment to me because until this day we can't get our Hispanic groups together to really have a nice place where Hispanic culture can be featured. The Museum of Arts, the Houston Museum of Arts has a Spanish speaking curator but her interests are more contemporary Latin American and Argentinean, Chilean, South American art, Spanish art. She leaves out the Mexican art. I mean it's an afterthought. That's her interest and she's in charge of it so as long as she is featuring Hispanic arts I guess I should be happy. But I would like to see that we have a cultural center some day in Houston. In which we can put the oral histories that you are gathering and everything and have them available for other people. That's my dream. I'm disappointed that I haven't been able to achieve that dream yet but still have time! Still have time that's right!

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NG: Have you ever run or been elected for political office?

DC: I ran for city council. It was a great experience but I ran for my area which is the medical center area. It is "C" and in my race there were five people running. One of them was the favorite of the mayor, another one was a ex school board member who had been on city council... no she had never been on city council but she wanted to be. She had been on the school board. Another one was a man who represented Montrose area and another one was a lawyer who lived in my neighborhood who I knew and then I was asked to run. I was asked to run by one of the former city council members because they needed a woman to break the other two women's strength. But when they asked me my naïveté didn't realize that's what they were doing. They were going to make sure that neither one of the other two women won. So anyway I lost but it was a great, great experience. Because I learned to appreciate how hard it is to run for city office. Also to appreciate the people who volunteer in campaigns who really write the envelopes, who send out... you know who do things to help a campaign. It made me appreciative of that. So I was glad that I did it. Of course, afterwards I had always been active in voting but never really declared myself into either party for many years. So I declared myself... this was way back in the early '70's I decided to help at the election so I volunteered to be a clerk in my precinct and then later on you have to decide which party you are going to be in, in order to work within the system. I had a real good friend who was a Republican. She said, "Look Dorothy..." She said, "If you don't declare as a Republican then we don't have enough strength in this party to ever make it change. Everybody is going democratic let's you and I stay as Republicans." This was Olga Solis. She was really very strong willed. I said, "Okay Olga I'll be a Republican." Anyway from way back in

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the '50's I had been voting for some Republican people but my grandfather had been a big democrat. So we grew up when Houston was just one party really. It wasn't until John Tower that anybody worked with the Hispanics to make them Republicans. So it was in the early '70's, late '60's early '70's when I really became active. I was a clerk for many years in my precinct and then when the precinct chair and the judge of that precinct retired then I ran for the office and I was elected. No one else ran. No one did run but at least they voted for me and I got elected and I served as a chair and a judge for about 10 years and went to all the meetings and went to national Republican things and state Republican things. Anyway, district Republican things. I'm still active in the oldest women's Republican group in city is the Braze Republican Women and they just celebrated their 50th anniversary. I've been with them for about 40 of those years. So it's been alright. I still criticize the party because they are so prejudiced. I have been in meetings in which they have said, "We want those Mexicans to leave!" and I was the only Mexican there. So that didn't go well with me many times. But I also realize that if you don't work within the system you are never going to get anything done! So I'm still there. I'm just a clerk now. I no longer take the responsibility of running the precinct but I do clerk for them. One of my neighbors who lives across the street from me is the Democratic chair and she is the judge now and so I work under her. But that's the way the system goes and unless our people get involved in the system, I mean it doesn't do any good to be up there complaining if you don't vote and if you don't work within the parties. You've got to do it and most of our people don't do it. Now I'm not talking about the ones that are not legal citizens. I'm talking about the ones who are legal citizens and just never bothered. It doesn't go far from home. I mean even my four sons

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seeing how adamant I am about that they won't be active in their party. They will go vote but they won't be active in a party. They are not at that stage where they feel they can have the time to give to it and take the time. So I can see other people's point of view. But I'm going to continue.

NG: You mentioned the Institute of Hispanic Culture and the Houston Hispanic Forum. Can you tell me about those two?

DC: Okay the Institute of Hispanic Culture was formed in 1965 by a group of professionals, my husband was one of them, who saw that we had Two Mexico Bellos, but we didn't have an umbrella organization for all the countries that were being, the people that from different countries that are Spanish speaking. There would be an umbrella organization that would celebrate the culture of each country from Spain, Portugal, Brazil all of them that were Hispanic. So they formed this group. We had had two balls to celebrate Columbus Day at the Warwick that Dr. Angelo Igleasia had started that raised... we celebrated Columbus Day. But on the second ball I co-chaired it. It was really... in those days, you know you couldn't order drinks in hotels and stuff you had to take your bottle and it was... the interchange between a non Hispanic person and the Hispanics was very limited. These two balls started the ball rolling in bringing along with Club Mexico Bello, bringing in non Hispanics into our social settings. So the Columbus Day ball was very high falutin', high society thing. That and the Consular ball were the big things that brought in Hispanics to the non Hispanic world of Houston. The second year which was 1965 we formed the Institute of Hispanic Culture and one of the goals was to raise enough money for scholarships. So the first year we raised \$1,000 and it was given to a young man to study guitar in one of the Hispanic countries, we sent him

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off to study. It was really, he was very talented. But from then on we started raising more money and we started presenting cultural programs at the universities and bringing in professors from all over the world to give lectures, art exhibits with different galleries. We did a lot of things having no home, no office except my house. That's where everything was happening at my house for about the first 10 years. There was another Dr. _____ who in that interim also used his house. But most of the stuff was, the meetings and the social events, whatever, I was lucky to have a larger home than this one so we could handle 400 and 500 people at a time and have parties and stuff. So anyway, that was a fun era. The institute grew by... oh in the early '70's the late '70's one of the big oil men in town decided, Keith Jackson decided that he would offer part of his office as an office for the Institute. So we moved from my house to an office building on Gray for a while and then Keith Jackson offered this space. Then three lots close to his office on the same street came up for sale and he said, "I'll buy two lots if your members will buy the other lot and when we sell the whole street I'll give you the proceeds from my two lots with yours; so enough of the members pooled our money so we were able to do that. That established a fund for a building fund and that grew. When we sold the building we had... I mean when he sold the lots and everything we had about \$300,000 that we made. That was put in a restricted fund and it stayed there until the '80's, late '80's, early '90's (I'd forgotten when) and finally I didn't want to see that fund be used for general operating costs so we found a building and with the support of some of the board members of the institute and the president we were able to purchase a building that had been a law office on Sul Ross and then we got a grant. I was able to write a thing for... and I say it not bragging because it was a great experience I learned a lot during

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that time, a grant to Houston Endowment and with that \$50,000 we were able to get the building and fix it for the institute and they are still there at 3315 Sul Ross. They have lots of programs there. They teach, during the years they've taught Spanish. They've had lots of arts exhibits, social evenings like a Puerto Rican night where they serve Puerto Rican food and have an orchestra play and they dance and have singers. I mean we have that Argentina night for Peruvian night, whatever. So the Institute is still there. It's... it also, the other thing I started when I was president of the institute was Miller Theater, I was on the board of Miller Theater appointed by the mayor way back in the '60's and I have served since that time on that board. We had two, three events, well two really happening at Miller Theater and that was the Grito and the 5th of May, Comité Patriotico, and I was on their committee. We needed to highlight the other cultures so we decided that on Columbus Day which is El Día de la Raza or El Día de Hispanidad, that we would have a big show and bring in a star. So 25 years ago we had our first production there and we brought in Cantinflas. We had big stars Pedro Vargas, Rocio Jurado, just on and on every year for 25 years we have been able to do this. This will be my first year where I'm not going to be involved with it. It was very successful and I was real happy with the committee. We all worked together and got that accomplished. So that was one of the big things of the institute. They've done, through the institute we organized two Good Will tours to Galecia, which were really great. A spin off from the institute was a group called La Orden de Caballeros y Damas de Galvez in honor of Galvez who Galveston was named for. During the American Revolution the colonists would have never succeeded if Galvez had not done a lot of things, mostly given \$3 million dollars worth of gold to Washington. All the food for the colonists, all their

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weapons, all their uniforms, blockade the Gulf so that the British couldn't get anything through the Gulf, fought 8 battles or more that they won with Spanish soldiers and do you ever hear about it?

NG: No.

DC: No! So we formed this group so that we could start forcing them to put something in the history books about the contribution of Spain to the American Revolution through Galvez who was the Viceroy from New Orleans. We've been able to put in a paragraph. All these years we've got one paragraph! But every few years we go as a group to Spain and meet with the king. So that's kind of fun. So for doing that, way back sometime and it's on the wall in my room, the king gave a decoration to my husband for founding, being one of the founders and organizers of the institute which is the highest civil award that a man or a woman, well a man can get from Spain. So he got that and then two years later the King named me "A lady in waiting to Isabel from 1492" so mind you I'm still back in 1492 and there is my bubble! I was glad to be able to help in what I did but I really enjoyed culture of any kind. I enjoyed every culture of every country that I ever visited no matter if it is Hispanic or not Hispanic. But the Institute was very prominent during the '80's and '90's I mean it was still, until we have the ability to raise money and have open balls and stuff, other organizations were not doing it. Now you can go to a ball three times or four times, or five times a week in Houston from one of the other non profits but in those days there were very few. I mean you could count on your fingers how many big social events were held in Houston and the Institute was one of them. Alright Houston Hispanic Forum: in '85 a group of us got together and decided that we needed to attack educational issues and employment issues for Hispanics in the

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city. So we all met at a beer bottling company, what's the name of the beer bottling company? Anyway I'll remember it in a few minutes. It's still a popular beer because they made a little bar room available for us and there were about 30 of us that went and we met there and we formed, we called it the Hispanic Round Table but then when we incorporated it we called it the Houston Hispanic Forum. The very next year was the bicentennial no the sesquicentennial of Texas which is the 150th year in the founding and that's when we had the event in which the 80 people spoke and that I took the video I mean the tapes and then heard them and anyway it was a whole two years, three or four years of work afterwards. But we had a wonderful event. In fact it was one of the best events to celebrate the founding of the state of Texas and the city of Houston that was held that year. I was on the committee named by the mayor for the one for the city. So I was active in other things that were done like at the... all over we did a bunch of events to celebrate Houston. But that one was one that I was the most proud of. That's when we built tranquility park downtown. We built Tranquility Park and we started some other renovations to downtown. The Houston Hispanic Forum then had two educational summits with lots of our leaders for two years and there was a big pull out section from the... I think it was the Houston Chronicle that highlighted what we did, it was a symposium, an all day symposium on education and why we had high drop out. Then we said it was 50% we haven't improved. This was '86 and '87. Then we also had health fairs. We had receptions honoring Hispanic leaders like judges and elected officials. We tried to bring out the best in the Hispanic community of Houston with these forums. We had one big forum in which we invited the Secretary of State and another political leader from the Democratic party and they debated on whether a Hispanic should be a

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Republican or a Democrat. That was real successful. We had a bunch of forums. At that time we had the Mexican Chamber of Commerce and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce but they weren't very strong. They weren't strong entities at all. Now I don't even think the Mexican American Chamber of Commerce exists. We have these... the big success has been the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. But it started in those days too. The Forum's job is now being taken over by other groups because now the Forum, the only thing it does is the career and education day that was a concept that was started at the Albert, old Albert Thomas Convention Center for two years, moved to the University of Houston. When it got to be 7,000 or 8,000 people then we had our students that were involved and we had to move it down to the George R. Brown Convention Center and it's still going; this is their 25th year. The concept was a convention for students and their parents, grades 6 through 12 just to try and introduce them to universities and colleges and careers and its now expanded to a scholarship information area, how to apply to colleges, where they can do application online, how to get financial aid online, parenting classes for the parents all in one day. So it's been very successful and I'm real proud of that but that was the Houston Hispanic Forum. I'm no longer on their board. But I served for many years and president twice I think. But those two organizations have been real... then the other one is Hispanic Women in Leadership. We started that organization back then too with Mary Almenariz and Olga Solis and some of the others that were in town. That's been successful and it's still going pretty strong. Another spin off from the Houston Hispanic Forums health fairs, because we did two health fairs at Austin High School and two health care symposiums at Rice University

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was a spin-off from the Houston Hispanic Health Coalition. I don't know if you know what that is?

NG: No.

DC: It's a group of health care providers and they meet regularly and they have health fairs at Mason Park and it's a group that is very dynamic and it's moving. It's a spin off from the health symposiums that the Houston Hispanic Forum had. So that's another one. Of course the Mexican Institute of Greater Houston with the Mexican Cultural Institute. So that's still going and we have the Latino Learning Center, the Chicano Community Center that is now called Community Centers, Inc. and of course Ripley House. When I went to Ripley House as a 12 year old for my Girl Scouts and for my piano recitals there were no Hispanics at Ripley House. Sometimes it really moved. It's been interesting.

NG: I want to talk a little bit about terminology of the use of the word Hispanic. Why use that?

DC: Why do I use Hispanic? Because I think it is a globalization word. It's origins of course comes from España from the Hispanic Iberian peninsula includes Portugal and Spain and all of the different communities that make up Spain because Spain is not just Hispanic it is also Catalán, Galicia, etc. So you have the Iberian Peninsula, Iberia Hispana okay. So the Spanish language started there and it kind of a umbrella name...

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DC: I've forgotten I just ramble on.

NG: Well we were talking about your choice of using the word Hispanic.

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DC: Oh yeah. Hispanic because it's an umbrella word; Latino all people whose languages come from Latin are Latino. So you are going to say that the Romanians are Latino? Are you going to say that English people, there are a lot of words that come from Latin in English. So it's Latino. French is Latino. You know you can go on and on so I decided that Latino is a people who live in South America, Central and South America refer to themselves as Latinos. But where that came from? It's because I guess whoever was English speaking decided that anybody who had a language that came from the Latin language more directly like Italians and Spanish speaking people were all Latinos. Where else did that come from? I don't know. So it's okay I don't... the one word that I hated and I never liked people to use it, but I've gotten more use to it was Chicano. That's not because I can't agree with some people who agree that they came from the word Mexicano which is the tribes of Indians. The Mexicanos were a tribe. But it's because in English the word Chicano is more relevant to chicanery which is a person who is a thief and a liar and a whatever. So mentally as a linguist it bothered me to use the word Chicano. But I mean those who want to that's their right they can use it if they want to. Mexican American I think describes me because I am a Mexican background and American background. But to me Americans are anybody that lives to the top of the Americas to the bottom of the Americas. They are all Americans. We are citizens of the United States of America. Just like my grandparents are citizens of the United States of Mexico. So, but anyway, my preference is Hispano.

NG: Okay.

DC: Because it is more global, it's kind of an umbrella word. But that limits it to Portuguese and Spanish. Okay?

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NG: What has been your involvement with LULAC?

DC: Okay LULAC I've been involved on the periphery. I was never a member of it while my husband was alive. Because all of the members of LULAC were also members of the Mexico Bello and my husband was president of Mexico Bello about eight times so I ran around with all of them anyway. I guess I admired them. Especially I admired Hernandez and Tijerina who were personal friends. Especially Mr. Tijerina I remember having long conversations with him on the little school of the 400 because he was so proud of that and it is the forerunners of the schools that we have now.

NG: The head start?

DC: The head start schools. But they were to help the little kids have 400 words in English so that when they got into kindergarten and first grade they were able to handle the language well. Which I thought was a great concept. When Olga was alive she formed a counsel and I paid my dues and I've never been an officer in it I just support whatever works and send my dues in every year. That particular counsel never has meetings so that's okay too. But then I support counsel 60 and 402 or 403 I've forgotten what it is but... because they are the ones that are more active. Richard Reyes is in... I've always been supportive of Richard Reyes who is Pancho Claus. I don't know if you have ever interviewed him?

NG: No I haven't.

DC: You should sometime he is interesting. He is a character. He is an actor. You know his profession is acting but he also started the Talento Bilingue of Houston, that was way back in the starting when it was under another... somebody else and then Richard went on and did it at Ripley House and then we got the Oscars and I was

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president of it then. Now it's really a wonderful cultural center in the east end of town which I support greatly. I just wish I could do a replica of that and put it in the museum district. But anyway... Okay, what was I talking about now?

NG: Just your involvement with LULAC.

DC: LULAC okay. So now I was very honored that they recognized some of my work at a big event not too long ago. I'm supportive of anything that we can do to better education and I think LULAC takes a standing role in that.

NG: There have been over the years I guess fighting between a lot of the Mexican American organizations. What is your opinion on that? I guess had it been detrimental?

DC: It absolutely has been detrimental because I say we have never been able to get a cultural center because of the infighting. Whereas you look at let's say the black community. The black community may have their different groups that in-fight but when something comes out that they feel is going to be recognizable for all of them they all unite and help. That's true in politics. When they... usually they will find a candidate that they will all get together with and they will help that candidate and get him elected. They're very unified publically whereas they might have their fighting underneath. The Hispanics, we are very open about our fights. The thing is that we pull people down and we shouldn't do that. We should be supporting them. I'll give you a for instance. Right now Mary Almendarez is one of the big leaders in the union effort in the Democratic Party. I watch what she does. She is doing her best to try to address issues in the Hispanic community. I have to be supportive of her so that she gets those efforts done. Because she may not be in my same party but I admire her for what she is doing. Her ways of doing things are not like my ways of doing things but if she is getting them

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accomplished okay. I'm never going to pull her down. I have been in meetings when big political leaders would be on the podium and they would look and they would see me there and I would be at a meeting where 99.5% of the people were Democrats and they would say, "Oh we have a Republican in our midst." To me I was there as a community member supportive of what we are doing. Not because of being a party representative. That is what I would like people to recognize that no matter what political party we might be in, if we are looking for the betterment of everybody in general we should be supportive. LULAC tries to do that but on the whole LULAC in my perception is more Democratic party leaning than it is anything else. But I am not going to be... I'm going to be as supportive as I can of local candidates as I can. I have had my differences with some of our big political leaders. One of the people that I value highly because of what he was able to accomplish in his time era and what he was doing was Ben Reyes, who went to prison. But, you know, to me he did a lot of things that no one else could have done. And yet there were times when I would come up to him and I would personally not publically tell him how I felt of things that I didn't approve that he was doing. He may not have liked it but he respected me and we are friends still. That's what I have to work for. I can't... I want to be sure that people are recognized for the good they do for others are there are a lot of people who do. Unhappily some of our people have used their positions for personal gain and not really, in giving us a bad reputation and that's sad when that happens. But any of us could fall into that category we never know. So it's just a question of where your priorities are placed. I don't berate anyone wanting to make a good living for themselves or better themselves but not at the expense of other people. That's the sad thing that does happen sometimes.

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NG: On a completely different topic. I was thinking as you were talking about education, the changes in the Texas History books that are happening currently. I wanted to get your opinions on those.

DC: I think they are not... they are letting it up to the teacher to be inclusive of things. When the teacher doesn't have the back-up materials to be inclusive; I mean they have taken out some very important people and put in some others that I didn't... I didn't recognize. The last thing that I read was that as I say they were letting it up to each teacher to be able to be inclusive instead of really putting into the text books that... the truth. We look for truth. Man as a whole looks for truth and we are not finding it always in what we give our kids to read in history. I don't know if you found that or not. But I have. I mean we gloss over the fact that after the... here in Texas that after we got our independence from Mexico we had land grants. We had Mexican citizens who became Texan citizens living here forever. What did we do? We found that the people that came in during that period from 1836 to 1876 or 80 or even afterwards, would come in and kill the people and take away their land. That's not right. They had every right to be owners of their land. Of course we can argue back... they say well after all they took it away from the Indians. So I mean... you know. But it doesn't mean that we can kill each other for what we want to take. We should do it under some sort of set law and of course maybe they made the law so it was in their favor. I think some of those families are fighting back now, the descendants to get some of that land back. Or get recognized that they should be paid for it. A lot of people were killed, many more than they ever recognized. So we'll see. Right now my big issue is immigration. That is my number one issue right now. I really believe that we must have a way of legalizing the people

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that are here. I don't want to legalize the people who continuously break our laws because they are not the ones who we want here. But I do want to recognize the ones that have been here without papers working at terrible wages with great injustice done to them, living in fear. There is something has to be done! Now I recognize the fact that our borders are porous. But it's not just Hispanic, Latinos, Mexican that are coming through those borders. It's all the other people. I mean we have lots of Asians, lots of African Americans, Caribbean, Canadians coming in from the other side. Some of them even come in from Mexico. Muslim coming in from the Arabic countries...

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DC: We need to do something to secure our borders so that we do have some orderly way of keeping up. But borders will always be porous no matter which country you are in. There are always going to be some people that are going to be sneaking in and out of different countries. That's the movement of mankind. They are going to look for some place that they can make a living and support their families. The... I'm not unfamiliar but not too familiar but enough familiar with all the immigration law. But I can criticize. For instance the H1 Visa or any kind of work visas that are legally recognizable, we have too few of those that are given out and they are given out immediately so that people that are wanting to come over, even people with substantial money that want to come over here and invest and start a business here and live here, especially right now, Mexico, there are a lot of people from Monterrey and from all over Mexico that are moving into The Woodlands with lots of money who want to do business here and invest in the United States but they can't get legal papers because none of those categories are available to them. So they come up here on visitors visas and they buy a home and I don't know what

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all they do, open bank accounts and everything else but they have to go back and forth, back and forth and that's not a good situation either. These are people who are professional and educated. The other people that are coming here from Central America and Mexico for years upon years upon years who have been granted amnesty twice but every year we escalate the amount of money it takes for them to renew their amnesty. It's getting to be prohibitive to make enough money and sustain their families. I've written, along with a bunch of other people with a start from my parish priest who gave me some ideas: policy that would make it a blanket amnesty but without the right to vote for this generation. In other words, a window of opportunity for three months, anyone that was here without papers would go to (this is where I've been criticized) a church or a social agency and get a paper, fill it out. They would get this form for themselves. The social agency or church if you could use the churches would send it to immigration. They would enter it in and then they would be issued if their criminal check was okay, they would be issued a brown card. This brown card would allow them to live here, travel in and out of the country, have everything that a citizen would have except the right to vote. Because why? Because somehow they are going to pay for having been here illegally to satisfy the Republican Party. They can't vote. The Democrats want them to be able to vote because they figure they will all be Democrats; so the Republican Party that is why they are fighting on that issue. The other thing, the other "punishment" that they have been demanding is that they pay a fine. Okay they pay a \$5,000 fine but they could pay it off at \$20 a week until they paid it off and a processing fee of \$250. This would also include anybody and their family, their wife, their children... anybody who was here would have to be registered in that window of opportunity. Or children

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born here are citizens. I would never support anyone who wants to take away citizenship for a person born here. I think if they are born here they are citizens. True enough in other countries you cannot be a citizen sometimes even if you were born in that country. My husband was born in Mexico. His parents were Lebanese. He had his parents... his parents had to go and register him and get citizenship papers for him even though he was born in Mexico. He was a naturalized; he was considered a naturalized citizen because his parents were from Lebanon. If he had been from Israel or had been Jewish no matter where they were from if they were Argentinean Jew and gone to Mexico and had a child there, that child would have had to be naturalized, never been a citizen from birth. But that's not our law here in the United States. Our law here in the United States is that if you were born here you are a citizen and I don't want anybody taking that away. Children who came here as an older age and went to school here, the Dream Act. I fully support the Dream Act. I think that they should be able to continue their education. They should register just like everybody else and get that brown card but then they could... when they finish two years of social work like they could go into the armed services or teach for America or do something else after they finish college, they would automatically become voting citizens because we've invested too much money in their education not to give them full rights as a voting citizen whereas their parents who didn't go to school here, we've not invested in their background. So I don't know if you agree with that or not but that's my dream. I've sent this to the world! They say, "Why are you involving the churches in this?" Well that's true why should I? We could take the churches out and make it a social services agency like Ripley House like Chicano Family Center or community centers or any of the other organizations that are non for profit. Any of them

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could do it. The churches don't have to be involved. But people who are here illegally are more apt to trust a church than they are other people that's why I involve the church. That is my dream for immigration.

NG: Is this... you said your main thing right now is immigration, is this writing proposal that you've done is that your main effort at working towards changes in immigration?

DC: Yes and going to meetings or whatever and speaking out. I've sent this to immigration lawyers and everything. I recognize that we you have to continue the quota system that is set up for each country although for Mexico, if I want to bring in my son and I apply right now it's 18 years before his name will come up. Now that's ridiculous! That's truly ridiculous! So that has to be looked at, the quota system. I also believe that people who are here should not be able to bring in their mother, their father, their aunts, their cousins, their best friend, their ahijado from now on. I mean limit it to the family structure. The full family structure a mother, father and children period. Right now any... for instance. Let's say Rebecca, she's 25 years old. Say that she were my daughter. I'm a citizen but she was born in Mexico. I could never bring her in right now legally. She'd have to wait 18 years. She'd be 50 before she could come in; if she could. Now in a professional status she can get an H whatever visa. That's what the lawyers all want. They want to be able to negotiate all those other kinds of designated things. Also the guest worker program: I think the guest worker program should continue giving the ones that are agricultural people but they also should know that it is for a limited number of years. If it's a one year period they've got to go back and then reapply and come back again. If it's a three year period that's the same but the majority of them have just stayed.

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Most of my friends who are Mexican American whose parents came in as agricultural people just stayed. They didn't go back. That's when they violated their right to be here. But I think if you're here and you've been here all these years you better be able to be here and not live in fear. I think it's ridiculous the way we have everything right now. I see too many people frightened. Even my son will say, "Mother they don't pay taxes." I said, "Yes they do. If they rent a house they pay taxes because that rental property is paying taxes and they are paying into the rent that pays that and they pay sales tax on everything they buy. So they do pay taxes. They don't pay income taxes. Well I've been vocal about everybody getting an ITINS number do you know what an ITINS number do you know what that is?"

NG: No.

DC: ITINS it's I-T-I-N-S is I think they way you spell it. It's a number that the IRS gives someone that doesn't have papers who gives them an identification number. That information cannot be shared with immigration. But how many people are going to believe that? They fear that. Now from January through April the 15th Ripley House and a bunch of other areas in town have offices where people could go and apply for that number. Now I know that when the politicians get through with this immigration thing they are going to give preference to the people who got the ITINS number because they thought if you get the ITINS number you can file income tax on your earnings. The majority of them are not going to make enough so that they pay anything. In fact, if anybody had withheld anything under that ITINS number which you do as an employer you withhold just like you do a social security number, then you get it all back. But it establishes a recognizable person who is paying income tax. So they will be the

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preference ones when they start doing that. They will be the ones that get permission first and there aren't very many of them. So that's what we need to push. We need to educate our people. I mean they try. I went to meetings at the Mexican Consulate when all this was explained to us. You know we tried and tried to get this word out to everybody but they are still afraid. They are afraid that the IRS will tell immigration because they have their address and everything on it. But they are not supposed to. Just like the hospital district is not supposed to tell anyone that gets a gold card that doesn't have social security. They try to limit it to only people who have social security but they don't share this information with anybody, with anybody. So I don't know but again we are dealing with human beings and we all have failings. So but that's my big push right now. I'll be glad to give you a copy of my immigration thing.

NG: What about your work with the United Way, when did you start working with them?

DC: Oh let's see I was on the United Way board for 7 or 8 years or 9 years I don't remember. This was way back when I was at the University of Houston in the early '90's. When I got on that board there was one other Hispanic on that board Servando Ramos. He was leaving and I was being put on. There were no blacks. Again, it was a board... but there were women but they were white. Everybody was white. So I looked around and I said, "You know why aren't there others here?" So we realized we looked at all of the non-profit agencies and unless they were black agencies or Asian agencies or Hispanic agencies the other agencies like the American Red Cross, The Salvation Army... you know you name them, the others that get money from United Way, none of them had minorities on them. None of them. So we started, there was a grant proposal

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put out, this was true all over the nation. A grant proposal came out from the American United Way and, well U.S. United Way and they funded a thing called Project Blueprint that a few of us started here in town. That is to train minority leaders to take leadership positions on committee, commissions, agencies, non profits, anyplace. But once they are trained there they can get on corporate boards. So Project Blueprint has been going on for 22 years I think and that is one of my favorite things because we have trained... I don't know they told us the other day how many 600 or I don't know how many, quite a number of people who are now on service. They are all mid... the ones that are chosen out of the applicant pool are all mid level management people that are rising in their companies or lawyers or engineers or teachers or nurses whatever. But they are leaders in their field and they are professionals. We've made some inroads on that and I'm glad.

NG: And there is an award named after you?

DC: Yeah. It always embarrasses me.

NG: Why does it embarrass you?

DC: Well it does. It's called the leadership award but anyway. It's really nice. They recognize a lot of my friends and I'm real happy. One of them has passed already away Norma Benzon passed away not too long ago. She was a leader in the Philippine community and she was also head of the "Y" the Women's "Y" but anyway we do what we can. So it's a fun thing. I go every year to give the Dorothy Caram award. I'm glad my husband doesn't know about that one. Its fun and it's nice of them to honor me that way it really is. As long as the organization Project Blueprint exists my name will be there so that's nice. One of the funniest things that ever happened to me... I always like to think of funny things that happen because you have to laugh at things that happen to

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you. You know they teach Spanish to the Houston police officers. The movement started with one of the professors at the University of Houston Guadalupe Quintanilla, Dr. Quintanilla started teaching, she got a grant so she could teach... this was after a big case in which a Mexican American was thrown into the bayou and drowned as a prisoner of the H.P.D. so the movement started after that, that we need to have better communication and the only way is for the police officers of the Houston Police to be able to speak Spanish. So we started, Lupita started the classes there. They had graduation at Ripley House. Lee Brown was appointed the Chief of Police, this is before he came... he came to Houston as Chief of Police. So he comes to the graduation and I'm the speaker. So I introduce him and we have all these recognition of all the officers and everything and they have an organization at Ripley House called a Senior Citizen, Ripley House Senior Citizen. Well they always make a nice bouquet of flowers and another little memento and they are there at the graduation thing and they give it to the guest of honor who was the police chief. So after all the organizations all finishes, now mind you he had just come to Houston so he hadn't been here very long. I'm standing next to him and the senior citizens come up and they give me the flowers and they say, "Mrs. Brown, here are your flowers." I just looked at him and he looked at me. I said, "Take them home to your wife. That's okay right now let's let it be." So every since then when I see him I say, "Hey mayor your second wife is here!" It was a funny thing that happened with the senior citizens. Who would know that he would become mayor later on?

NG: What role do you think Houston has taken in the state or the nation in leadership in minority communities?

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DC: What role in the state or the nation? I don't think Houston has been recognized through our local leadership as it should be. When we... even in the Spanish speaking media when they highlight Spanish speaking cities, you know where a bunch are Mexican American or Latino or Hispanos, they always gloss over Houston. When you really look at it Houston has more Spanish speaking people than San Antonio in the population and yet we are never recognized. When you get the Hispanic business magazines or Hispanic whatever that recognize nationally very few Houstonians, mostly Californians, New Yorkers, Floridians... if anything from Texas it is going to be people from San Antonio and maybe something... one or two from El Paso but Houston is always left out. And yet we've had the leaders of the National Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, we've had I think two or three of our Hispanics locally been head of that organization. Again, it's a question of wanting to share power. I think if these national leaders would recognize some of the others and bring them along so that when they are honored the others are honored too or recognized, then it would be, we would get better recognition. But we just don't get it here in Houston for all that we do and for the strength that we have because we have done a lot of good things. Again, Austin has a Hispanic cultural center. San Antonio has a huge one. Dallas has a huge one. Where is Houston? Back to the same thing; we don't work together to get common things done that would bring us national recognition. It just happens that way. Whether it is just personal rivalries or what I don't know but it could be changed. Are you comfortable in that chair I'll put a cushion in there?

NG: I am.

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DC: Because I had to put a cushion in and it's back there. See so I don't really think we are really recognized for what we do, I really don't. From Houston we've had a lot of religious leaders who were Hispanic go from here to state and national leadership. Again, no one ever thinks about them. For instance, Bishop Arch Bishop Flores he was just a plain little parish priest here. He went to San Antonio as the first Mexican American Bishop you know?

NG: He was from here?

DC: Yeah he was from here. Here I think from the Humble area; from that area. I mean there's a lot of them that have come from here and yet we don't recognize them. It just... it's just too bad.

NG: I've seen in articles and various things that you have been described as an educator, community leader and activist for the Hispanic community. How do you see yourself? Do you feel that those accurately describe you?

DC: I would hope that they accurately describe me because I've kind of volunteered in that area for so long and I've been the so-called "sample" and I've tried to... and if I was going to be the "sample" one. I'm trying to keep it on a higher plane so that there would be no negativism that could be attributed to me. I've tried. Never know if you've succeeded or not. But, you know, I have had nothing to gain. I mean I could have been the rich doctor's wife and done nothing, just enjoyed myself playing bridge or traveling or whatever. But I didn't choose that. That wasn't me. I didn't choose to do that. So I hope that I can recognize other people who are doing the same thing, who are choosing to do something for others because we just can't go through this world and never help anybody.

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NG: What do you mean you were the “sample”?

DC: Yeah, for instance, as I said, when they wanted to put someone on the Federal Home Loan Bank Board they wanted “the token” person up there. Well I could have been a token that did nothing or I could be a token that tried to do my best and that’s the difference. I see a lot of people take a position from our community and just be the token but never do anything. Unless it’s going to line their pocket they’re not going to do anything. Of course, I have real good friends who say sometimes, “Well no one helped me get anything so why should I help anybody else?” You know... “No one gave me a scholarship so why should I work to give anybody else a scholarship?” But that’s... you know that’s their right if that’s the way they want to feel but it’s not mine. It’s not what I feel. I think I... I had real good examples in my parents because they had to battle discrimination within their own family structure. My father did it quite well. He died young. He didn’t... he was only 54 when he died but my mother was always a very proud person who did her best to excel in everything she did and you know she was very supportive. Sometimes she complained a lot because I was gone and she was the one taking all the four boys. But anyway...it was, you know. I was very blessed. I was very blessed. It’s not always been easy and there have been great disappointments like when I couldn’t get my Master’s thesis done and finish that degree and had to virtually start over but I didn’t start completely over at Rice they recognized my studies I had done in Spain. So, you know you take the... you learn from the things that disappoint you as well as you learn from things that make you happy. In fact I think you learn more from things that disappoint you. Look at this rain!

NG: It’s getting dark out.

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DC: Can I fix you a sandwich?

NG: No thank you I'm fine.

DC: You sure?

NG: Just a couple more questions. What have been your... the things that you are most proud of either personally or professionally?

DC: Most proud of? Well of course I'm very proud of my family. I'm very proud of the fact that I have been blessed to have four great sons. I had a husband who was a great provider. I had parents who were very supportive who gave me great opportunities. I'm most proud of having the ability to learn from everybody I've ever met. That's what I'm proud of. Of course, professionally, I was real proud of the... whatever students that gained anything from being in my classes. That made me real happy and their achievement. I often run into students who said, "I had you 50 years ago!" No you're not 50 years yet! Over 50 years ago as a teacher! "Ahh!" So that makes me real happy that people remember. That makes me very proud. But again, it is just a blessing. I've been very blessed that's all and I can't... you're not supposed to be taking pride in blessings but I am. I'm very happy that I have... that my parents gave me strong moral values and my religions because I went to both the Baptist and the Catholic Church so I was able to be a ecumenical long before anybody else and be able to absorb the good things in most religions. You know I've been proud of my friends, the friends and people that I've met all along.

NG: Is there anything else that you were hoping to talk about or that you think are very important for people who are studying the Mexican American community in Houston that they should know?

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DC: Well they should know that we came in waves. That even before the independence of Texas from Mexico there were Mexicans living here that were not recognize in Heights and in Harrisburg, especially in Harrisburg. I mean DeZavala had his home in Harrisburg and he was the first physician to practice after Texas became... for six months because he died early of... I don't know if it was cholera or yellow fever or whatever but he was a physician from Mexico and the first Vice President of our country of Texas. He was a diplomat. We must recognize in history the people that brought their skills in that were Hispanic. There were property owners. Moses came in and... Moses Austin and Stephen F. Austin and the area of the Texas Gulf Coast is where they settled. They didn't settle in Austin. They settled here in Columbus, Texas and in Lake Jackson and in all that area. All that area, they were Mexican citizens when they were brought in. So we have to recognize we were an accumulation of all sorts of people from everywhere that became the first Hispanic or Texans here. That the next wave was when we started building the railroad tracks, the railroad system which Houston was a railroad hub and the Port of Houston when we dredged that. Hispanic soldiers were the first ones to dredge the swamps for Houston. They were the ones... the prisoners that were taken and they were taken alive, they were the ones that stayed and were used as laborers to dredge all this area of Houston. How many people know that? They don't know that. The Allen brothers hired them. I don't know what they paid them, they were probably slaves but who knows. But anyway we just have to recognize that Hispanics have been here since before the city was founded and to be proud... the next wave as I said came in with the railroad tracks. I don't know if you have ever heard of the Sarabia family. Okay the Sarabia family was very instrumental. They had the contracts to bring

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in all the workers that were laying the tracks of the railroads and that were dredging the port of Houston. They brought them in railroad cars full. There are the descendents here. One of them that you should put down as a person to interview is Dr. Emilio Sarabia because it was his father who had the contract. The Sarabia brothers, I think there were four of them that were Jesse, Felipe, Socorro, maybe there were three. I thought there were four but anyway I can't think of the other one. Anyway they had the contracts and they had the grocery store. They had the theater. They had all the newspapers, the magazines. They had the curio shop. Anything that had anything to do with the Mexican community they were the owners and this was in the 1920's, Sarabia family, very important. Then there were other families too but that was the one that was started way back then. So Emilio was still... he has pictures, he has everything. He loves the history of his family. So you ought to try to get him for sure. He was active in the Historical the Mexican American Historical Society or the Hispanic Historical whatever it was called. He was very active in that organization.

NG: Why do you think it's important for people to know their own history?

DC: We learn from the past. If we can learn from the past and also be very proud of the accomplishments of the past, no matter what the accomplishments were people struggle and they did things that made a chain to us. I mean we are just part of the chain from way back who knows where down to Adam and Eve but we need to know what our immediate ancestors did. One of the other things that's kind of funny in my background is on my maternal side also in Mexico, because I'm very active in the Mexican celebration of independence in the war and the revolution. But also the Cinco De Mayo. Do people really know why we celebrate Cinco De Mayo here. Do you know why?

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NG: Yes I do.

DC: Because of what, because of the birth place of Zaragosa in Goliad because he was the leader. He was the leader he was the general who put together the peasants who defeated the best army in the world at that time. Why? He came from Goliad, Texas. They don't... they celebrate Cinco De Mayo in Puebla where I lived but they don't celebrate it in the rest of Mexico. They celebrate it more in the United States and it's because of that but nobody knows. You think, "Well it's a Mexican holiday." And it kept Napoleon and Europe from having Mexico, delayed it for two years but that didn't mean that they didn't stay there longer. Maximillian and Carlota, when they came into Mexico after the battle of Puebla when they came in and went all the way, Maximillian knew that in order to win some of the Mexican people to his side, because he really wanted to rule Mexico well. He didn't... he wanted to be a true leader for Mexico. He had I don't know 11, 12 families I don't know how many families of people who were pretty wealthy in Mexico. One of their wives or mothers or daughters was appointed from those twelve families as a lady in waiting to Carlota. My great, great grandmother was one of those. So you know I feel like I have to know that history. I have to appreciate what they went through. Because I'm sure after that, after Juarez had Maximillian killed, I mean people who had been in their court weren't exactly thought of as the greatest people on earth. Even though they had a lot of money I'm sure they lost a lot of it. But it was interesting to me. So in a few minutes I'll show you something historical. So I mean I'm tied to the history of Mexico from my mother's side and I'm tied to Texas from my father's side. I have letters that family members... a letter that a family member on my grandfather was writing telling him how they were raided by the

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Comanche's here in Texas. You think about, "Wow!" All these people were fighting Indians then and it wasn't that long ago. Anyway... does that answer your question more or less?

NG: It does.

DC: It does.

NG: Is there anything else that you want to talk about?

DC: No but I'm thankful you all are doing this because a lot of people, even my own children don't know everything. They keep saying, "Mother, write it down." So the other day I started writing it down. What was I doing in 1934 what was I doing in 1935 so I have an account or a better recollection of what some of the things... so that they would know.

NG: Because you've been involved in so many things.

DC: Yeah since I was little.

NG: And I think to talk about all of them would take many more hours.

DC: Like I can remember the first time that I ever danced at a Cinco De Mayo I danced los viejitos and I remember that it was so darn hot with the masks on! You know because we were always... I carried the train for the queen of the Cinco de Mayo, you know I was always involve in stuff in the Hispanic community. So I'm tied to it. So it's fun. Well thank you very much for taking time to listen to all of this babbling.

NG: Thank you.

End of Interview.