

Interviewee: Reyes, Richard

Interview Date: August 6, 2010

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Richard Reyes
University of Houston Oral History Project
Mexican American History – The Arts

Interviewed by: Natalie Garza
Date: August 6, 2010
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Richard Reyes 509 New Haven Drive, Houston, Texas

NG: This is Natalie Garza interviewing Richard Reyes on August 6, 2010 in his home on New Haven. Can you please begin by telling me your full name?

RR: My full name is Richard Ellis Reyes.

NG: When and where were you born?

RR: I was born November 5, 1951 in Oakton, Texas—that is in west Texas.

NG: Olten?

RR: My mom was a cotton picker and she was picking cotton.

NG: Did you grow up in west Texas?

RR: No. Immediately after I was born my mom moved down here because she had relatives here. So I have been here since I was 2 or 3 months old. I've been here every since.

NG: When you and your mom moved to Houston what area of town did you move to?

RR: We moved to an area called Cottage Grove which is in west Houston and predominantly was an Anglo area—a bunch of little bungalows and cottages and maybe there was like two Latino students in every class room. But then... can we stop for a second?

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NG: So we were talking about Cottage Grove.

RR: Cottage Grove, yeah. There were probably about two Latinos in every room and I didn't realize it at the time but I would always be asked... I would be given the circus tickets when the circus came to town or the rodeo came to town. I would be given a lot of food at Thanksgiving and at Christmas they would always bring me to the office and would ask me what did I want for Christmas and they would give us boxes of toys and I just thought you know we were real popular and people just liked me. I didn't realize at the time that we were the poorest family in the neighborhood. Now since then Cottage Grove is like 99.9% Latino and it is a very, very poor neighborhood. It doesn't get a lot of city services.

NG: Was your mom from the U.S.?

RR: My mom was from Mercedes, Texas which is in the valley. But people there would go... you know migrant farm workers and they would travel around like that. So I still have relatives that live in west Texas. Now the funny thing about me being born in Oaktown, Texas was that when I was born there was only two other babies born that week. Mothers used to stay in the hospital longer. My mother, she gets angry very fast and she was getting angry because the lady next to her kept saying, "Look how beautiful my baby is," and, "Look how precious my baby is," and, "Your baby looks so skinny," and she was getting mad about it. She didn't know that they had made a mistake and switched the babies. The nurse came in and told my mom, "You know what? Your baby looks so skinny for the weight it is listed here." My mom was already mad. She's like, "I don't want to hear it. It's what they gave it's what I'll take" you know. Then she got the baby home and she was staying with her sister and my aunt says, "Irma what did you

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say you had? Did you have a boy?" My mom was really mad by this time. "I don't even want to hear it just leave me alone!" She said, "Irma this is a girl!" So they took off running in a blizzard, it was November, and it was a little hospital but it was two stories tall the way my mom tells it the doctor had like one leg and when he realized his mistake he went hauling down the stairs into an old Model T because he was going to the labor camp where the other family was at because they were Mexicano, Mexicano. My aunt and uncle tried to follow him but he was going so fast they couldn't find him. They got to the labor camp and they had already left. But they had told the next labor camp they were going to pick up some people so he went and he caught them there. My mom said that when they got me home, got me back, switched the baby and that when they got me home I was full of all kinds of mess. They hadn't changed the diaper, washed the baby, nothing... So otherwise I might not be sitting right here. But what if it had been two boys born that day instead of a boy and girl they wouldn't have even noticed.

NG: Do you have siblings?

RR: Yes I have a sister and a father and a mother. She lives in the valley still and then my mother remarried and had four more children, two girls and two boys. The youngest girl, when she was 18 she was shot in a drive-by. She was a very, very plain girl. She didn't go out. She didn't even go to her own prom. She worked at a flower shop owned by one of our relatives down the street; so just movie stereo type plain girl. She babysitted for the little girl next door and the little girl next door was about ten. My sister just graduated Sam Houston High School and the little girl asked her could she take her to buy some candy at a store like two blocks down. So they went and when they came back the guy tried to pick them up for a ride and they said no. My brother, who was a

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little older than her, like 19 came running out because he happened to be on the street and told the guy off. I guess that made the guy mad because he came back around and he started firing shots at them. My brother was shot in the hand and they started walking to the house but he didn't realize my sister... she was very timid. She didn't even say she had been hit. I guess she just wanted to go home to mom. But she collapsed like a block before and really that is when I started working with gangs because the gang problem was just getting really, really bad. One of my favorite students who still works with me today since he was seven...did you go to the Christmas in July?

NG: Yes.

RR: The guy who was emceeing.

NG: Right.

RR: When he was going, Rick Margo, when he was going to Jackson Middle School he came up to me the same year, all this happened the same year. He said, "Richard what do you do if somebody has a gun in their locker, like a friend of mine at school?" I was like this is really getting crazy, you know. So then we started a gang prevention program that is where that started like around 1983 probably... no further down '87 something like that.

NG: So that was around the year that your sister was shot?

RR: Yeah.

NG: What happened to her?

RR: Well she died.

NG: She died?

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RR: You know she was shot before I really knew about politics. I grew up not knowing about politics or my community our Chicano power. Because I left home when I was about 15 I had a real abusive step father. I left home at 14 or 15 and I really was on my own. I mean I went and rented my own room. I always worked after school. I mean I graduated from Reagan High School. I went to U of H very briefly. But I always had to work after school. I didn't mind I always liked working. But because of that I wasn't involved in after school activities whether it was sports or social clubs or Chicano power... all this hippies... all this stuff was happening you know in the '60's and I really wasn't involved in that. So it wasn't until I got into the arts that I had to get political you know because we have to fight for things for our community and the arts. So when my sister got shot it was my first year with TBH I think it was '81 when she got shot. I really didn't know how to speak up for things because it was really... the way the police department acted, in the newspaper they described it like she was some *cantinera* walking home. From the way they put it in the paper it was a little one inch column. You know the police department did no investigation. My brother in law went there like three days later to find the casings where he had shot at. They didn't even bother to look for that. A lady two blocks down called my mother a month later to tell her, "Hey you know I called the police and told them I had a description of the guy and the truck but they never came over here." And things like that. So things were a lot different then, even then. So, no, the guy who shot her was never found. But it lit something in me. She was an artist. We sold a lot of her art work. She won art contests at the livestock show and things like that. Being so young, just graduated... but she was an artist and I was already inspired by art, but more the performing art side of it. But I got more

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inspired by visual art. You see all the paintings I have in my living room and front room. So I started helping a lot of kids with art, it's part of my program isn't just performing arts. The violence part of it kind of grew me to it. Over the course of those years more and more stuff was happening.

NG: What was your sister's name?

RR: That sister?

NG: Yes.

RR: She is named after my mom, Irma Lopez.

NG: You said that you graduated from Reagan High School.

RR: Yeah.

NG: Can you tell me what the high school was like at that time, ethnically and socio-economic?

RR: It's a lot different than it is now. I'm raising my god son right now and he goes to Reagan High School. So I get to see a comparison you know. The buildings are completely different... almost all the buildings are torn down. It is more like the *latino* now, but luckily for them it is a magnet school and they get a lot of resources so they do have a lot of resources. It has been quite the opposite. Usually the school runs down when schools were not predominantly... you know minority schools, poor and now they are. But this school seems to have a lot of resources. I am very happy. He is very happy going there. It is not a school in our district really, but they have a lot of stuff for him to take from technology to the arts. So... but it is nice to see Latino people there because there wasn't a lot of Latino people there when I went there. Also as I said, I was not

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involved in a lot of after school activities. I just went because I knew I should go. I wasn't there early or late.

NG: But it was more.... Was it more white at that time?

RR: It was definitely more white at that time. When I went to school, the school I went to before that was George Washington Junior High which is in that area and is now called the law enforcement school. It is over there on Shepherd. I always made A's and B's. I never missed school. So back then, I don't know if they do this still... when you went to junior high they would separate you into three or four groups. Group A would be the A and B students and all the way down the line. Group 4 would be the D and F students. You know they kept you with your... so I was in group A and I was proud of that and then they told us we are going to meet a counselor. He was a very friendly, jovial Santa Claus looking guy. He was bald, no beard— very nice man and he was going to help us guide our career. Not for say a four year plan yet but help us decide what we are doing, start us thinking about the course we would be taking to guide us that way. So he sat me down and was very nice to me and he said, "So what kind of career do you want to pursue?" I said, and I thought it was not a big problem, I said, "I want to be a doctor." He said, "Oh well you know that's going to be hard for you to do because you know your parents probably don't make that much money. I see here you have a single mom so that's kind of out of the question." He got my hand and started looking at my hand and he said, "You know you have long fingers. You should be a piano player." And you know at that age, just out of elementary school, teachers were God to me. Teachers were like my heroes. I believed everything they said. A couple of years later I met drunk teachers and teachers on drugs and racist teachers but up to that point I had never

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encountered a bad teacher. So I believed him. I took his word as God like and really from that day on I was like, "I guess I'll be in the arts." I didn't think of it as the arts but I thought I'd play the piano and perform, sing and really that kind of stuck in my mind. I mean he did a bad thing really by discouraging me to get into a more lucrative profession I guess but you know in a roundabout way it was a crazy good thing I guess.

NG: You said you left home at 15...

RR: Yes.

NG: Where did you go?

RR: Well I was working at the Rice Hotel and just... I had a real abusive father. He abused me, my mom, his kids. It was just really bad. I was working at the Rice Hotel at the time. So I just looked for an ad in the paper and it said, "Rooms for rent." I'm surprised I didn't look... I didn't look old. I mean that's me at 18 and with my Pee Wee Herman prom jacket on. I didn't look old, especially at 15. I looked 14 then. But this lady, she was like a Mrs. Robertson type lady. She was like with a cigarette... just the whole look of that. "Oh yeah we'll rent you a room. We have a lot of young guys staying here and you'll have a good time." So I stayed there like two or three months and then my mom finally got mad and she called the Rice Hotel and was like, "You better get home" because they wouldn't let us accept calls. It wasn't like it is now cell phones and mass communication. But they got me on the phone and she said, "You better come home or I'm going to send the cops over there." So we compromised and I went and lived with an uncle. He was never home so it was like I was on my own. He was a truck driver. So that was the compromise and about a year or two later I did move on my own when I was like 17.

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NG: So you finished high school?

RR: Yeah.

NG: How was that you know living on your own and trying to go to school at the same time and working?

RR: It's funny because one of the first stories that ever was done about me there was a half page article in some page of the city section about Pancho Claus and they took a picture of me with a low rider car and a bunch of kids around and I'm performing at Stephenson Elementary which is in Cottage Grove. So it was like he went back to his school and this is Pancho Claus, this is the beginning of Pancho Claus. So I had that paper. Now as you are asking the question as to how it was, it was really tough because I would really sleep. I would work at a place it was called Copper Penny it was at 24th and Shepherd, it's still there across the street from Fiesta. And they were really nice to me but I really liked working. They only hired girls there and they hired me because I made a good enough presentation and everywhere I worked I was always made like manager right away. So I had the keys to the place, took my job seriously, I liked it and I was there for a couple of years but I worked late. They closed like at 10:30 and I'd have to clean up so I'd get home at midnight. I was tired. So I did not do very good in high school. I did not make good grades. I remember, I remember in middle school at Marshall Middle school some teachers whispered, we were taking our IQ test and they were whispering that I was way up there in the IQ test. I mean it was kind of scary really because they were like staring at me like I was a freak or something you know. Then I did very minimally in high school. I barely did homework. I barely... I got kicked out of the drama class let's put it that way. I got kicked out of the drama class. I remember this

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history teacher, this lady, she reminded me of Bee Arthur the actress Mauve of the Golden Girls. She looked exactly like them, she was very nice. She joked a lot with the kids. Then one time I always sat in the back, typical... she turned to me in front of all these white kids and said, "And you..." she didn't know me that well I never really talked to her. She said, "And you... I saw your IQ scores you are supposed to be doing a lot better than this! You should be ashamed with the IQ you have..." But the way I look at it in retrospect is I did have an IQ but I never did my homework so I was able to, you know... same thing when I went to the U of H and had a job at U of H. I didn't have good grades but because my SAT was so high they let me in at the University of Houston Central. So it was a little tough. I didn't realize it at the time. You know I was just enjoying myself doing what I wanted to do. I went to school because I wanted to go to school. Nobody was making me get up. So I enjoyed it for what it was. I didn't feel like I was missing anything. I liked my little social. I had my little friends where I worked it was a hamburger stand. A lot of teenagers would hang around there. Actually at that hamburger stand is where I got my name. Because my name, my real name... that is why I kind of hesitated when you asked my name, starts with an "E" and it's in Spanish and it is a hell of a long name. And all my students know this and they are always trying to get my real name. For me, if they ever meet my mom... but when I was going... when I went to Stephenson Elementary in kindergarten they couldn't pronounce my name. So the teachers there started calling me Ellis. So I didn't know any better. My mom started calling me Ellis because they started calling me Ellis. I really thought that was my name. My dumb self went out and got my social security card under Ellis Reyes and then I got my driver's license at 17 under Ellis Reyes. Then one day it dawned on me, "Wait a

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minute my name is not Ellis.” I started hearing this brown ray, Chicano power... even though I wasn’t involved. It started making me think about my Latino roots, you know. They are Americanizing us, we are losing our culture and we didn’t have [] like the kids now a days in school. I started thinking about that and I thought, wait a minute, “My name’s not Ellis.” I never liked the name. I’d be called Alice and Elvis and you know it was a stupid name to have. Then I said, “I’m going to change my name.” That year I was working at Copper Penny, like 18. I thought, I’m going to change my name and I’m going to change it to David, Richard or Michael because I liked the way those sound in Spanish. David, Michael or Ricardo... I liked the way they sounded. All the sudden I had in my mind that I was going to be the media and there’s names like, Richard Reyes like the devil. That’s silly now but that’s what I had on my little young mind.

Well like I said at Copper Penny they would never hire boys and because they only hired girls the lady in her orientation would tell all the girls do not give these boys your real name because they will be calling on the order phone to go orders and they will be asking for you. So if you give your real name we’ll say we don’t know who you are talking about. So that was the rule. So I was the first guy that worked there but she told me the same thing. It really didn’t have the same meaning but she told me the same thing, “Don’t give them your real name.” I said, “I’ll have fun with this.” So kids would come up... a lot of teenagers would come up and they would say, “What’s your name?” I thought I was clever and I’d say, “What’s your name?” They’d say, “My name is David.” I’d say, “Damn my name is David too” and that’s what I did with everybody. So whenever anybody came up and said, “Hey David!” I’d go, “Hey David.” It was a good way to remember everybody’s name too because to this day I can’t remember

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names. Well it just so happened some kid came up and said, "What's your name?" I said, "What's your name?" he said, "Richard." I said, "My name is Richard too." Well it turns out that that Richard and I ended up being best friends. It turns out that his mom used to babysit me when I was little. Somehow my mother figured this out. She knew his mother. Turns out he was on his own too. He was living by himself like at 14... he was living at his aunt's house but they locked him out of the house and he had to sleep on the porch. I was... like right then we would run into each other at the laundry mat at midnight, like after I get off work and there he was doing clothes. We were the only ones there. They would just keep it open people were more honest then, people didn't break into stuff. So because we kept the same kind of background we got close, went to school. Then because I was new to the neighborhood in the Heights, it was in the Heights and my people were up on 27th when I was staying with my uncle. He started introducing me to all his friends. It was summer, school hadn't started. So he started introducing me as Richard. I was too embarrassed that I had lied you know, so all of those people started calling me Richard. I liked the name Richard it was going to be one of my names anyway so that's how I went with Richard.

NG: So you don't tell anybody what your birth name was?

RR: You know Rick Comargo who was... I'm going for another picture I know this is audio... but let's see here. But Rick when he was... he has been with us since he was seven. He was really curious about what my name is and one time he got my mother on the phone and he asked her my name. And she didn't know she told him. He was just so happy. He was yelling it out to the van window like, "His name is..." And it just so happened that we ran into an accident. Some car had rolled over with some kids in it.

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We just ran out of the car to help him like that. Everybody was alright. We got in the car we are headed back where we were going and then he goes, "Oh no!" I go, "What?" "I forgot the name!" Since then all these kids have asked my mom too. It's a silly thing but... it's a story.

NG: How long were you at U of H?

RR: A year.

NG: You said you were not at the main campus?

RR: No I was. They had a real good program. They had a lot of commercials on television. If you want to go to college come to [REDACTED] for progress. It was at the corner of Texas and Fannin and I went. I had a high SAT... they told me that they didn't think... back then there was not community college. I don't know what you did if you didn't make it to college. But I had a very high SAT score and so I got in. So they helped me get some grants and then they put me in a program that was for Latinos and it was a summer program at U of H before college started. I did very well there. I got an award. It's such a bragging thing. But I got an award for being outstanding, doing my work. I was a good writer. Now that I think about it I think it was mainly a writing type class. I always liked writing and I always liked reading. So I did very well there but then when I went to the real college. I mean I was still trying to go to work to support myself. I took too many hours. I didn't have good study skills because I never studied you know. It was too... nobody prepared me. Why should they? But you know in high school they are on you about doing your homework. There they don't care, you know. You show up and you are in a crowd of 200. So it was just too I don't know what the word is. I should have taken more responsibility and I didn't. So then I became a hippy. So...

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NG: So what does that mean you became a hippy what did you...?

RR: I started enjoying life AKA Michael Jackson. No childhood. Having a tough life from the beginning. I had a great life when me and my mom were by ourselves. But then when she was married and had all these kids I was like the babysitter and I started working when I was 12 at stores after school, things like that getting up early. Getting up... school started at 8:00 I'd have to be at the store at 6:45 and work for one hour there unloading this Chinese little grocery store and stuff he went and got to the market. Then right after school for Marshall I'd walk, just to save a dime, from Quitman and Cochran to Hardy and Calvalcade where I lived, that's a good 4 miles. Then as soon as I'd get there I'd work until 9:00 and then... Monday through Friday and then on weekends I'd work Saturday from 9:00 in the morning to 5:00. So... all for \$15.00 it was like \$1.50 a day and on Saturday it was \$5.00. So I always worked since I was little and before that my mom had kids so I felt like you know I was the maid. Then high school I always worked. So then after the college thing... well the hippy thing it was like a commune type situations. I mean it wasn't as crazy as glamorized orgies and all that. No but we did live together. We rented house together, you know. People were more accepting. I lived with some white kids, you know college student type kids there was like another Latino there. But they were more accepting because that was the whole hippy experience was, was acceptance and you know protesting against racism, protesting against war, "love," "rock and roll," you know things like that. So it was easier for me because you didn't have to have anything. It was like no uniforms at school... I mean like having uniforms at school. You don't have to compete with the Nike's and... you don't have to compete. And there was free music anywhere. You could go to Allen's Landing

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downtown, you could go to Hermann Park, there was a teen club called Of Our Own that was free at Richmond and Kirby where the Half Price Book store is now. There was all kinds of concerts, Jimmy Hendrix, Rolling Stones, all of those people came to the Sam Houston Coliseum and my friend Richard Stanley, the person I got the name from, he had a hook up on how to sneak in so we snuck into every concert free, didn't need money you know. A lot of people living together there was always food. So I was able to relax and enjoy life and be a hippy you know. Sometimes I didn't even stay with people I would stay in the park, in Hermann Park. There were a lot of people sleeping in the park back then. You climb a tree and hang your bag, tie up your bag on a tree branch and go out and all day there was something. There were a lot of churches out there feeding me. You know we are the baby boomers so it was a lot of kids. More kids than adults. So a lot of adults came out with churches like they do for the little bums and winos they would do for us you know make little soup kitchen...not soup kitchen but they had food. They even had a place where you could take a nap. They were in a little warehouse and they and they would have a come off the drug experience something like that. So I enjoyed that.

NG: What did you do after this period?

RR: In there I was driving a cab. I started driving a cab real... I grew up on Terry Street and the cab company is on Terry Street. The cab company Texas Fiesta is my sponsor and they are part of Yellow Cab, it's a big company. Greater Houston Transportation owns Yellow Cab, Texas Fiesta, United Cab and they owned that same situation in Austin, San Antonio, Galveston, Houston, etc. Well Ramon Martinez, who was a state representative, I didn't know him when I was driving a cab but I did know

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him working in community projects, stopped driving a cab for 20 years and then when I lost my spot at TBH he wanted to help me and he offered me this position in marketing, which basically means he offered me a salary, which is a decent salary, but still I thought I deserved more than that. I said, "It's not really that much for the experience I have in the community." He said, "Yeah but Richard you don't do anything but drive our cars and we give you a cell phone and we pay your gas and..." so it is a very good deal. I get to drive their low rider, their Hummer or the other Cadillac that they have, the convertible or the HHR that I have out there right now. So I always drove a cab because a cab was perfect for a hippy. You worked one day a month or if you needed money, three days. You met a lot of people. So even though I was a hippy I was still a responsible hippy. You know I had to pay some rent. So I did that. I may not have worked for a year. But then I started doing that. I mean after the hippy thing. Then disco came in and there you go it's another big party.

NG: Were there a lot of disco clubs in Houston?

RR: Oh yeah there were disco clubs all over the place, especially for Latinos. You know the Golden Fleece in Market Square. Downtown there were just a bunch of them and all over the place. Even in the north side. Even the Chicano dances I still love going to Chicano dances. That was real hot too. Starlight, stardust, Pan America and all those places were still bombing because for the longest it was just Pan America. But everyone is like, "Oh my God they opened up something called the Stardust on Fulton." Then they opened up the Starlight on Shepherd and so La Mafia, Mas, Agustín Ramirez, Little Joey and La Familia, they were raking it in, they were making good money because Tejano

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was in. It's not now but it was then. So I never lost sight of my culture. I like both of them.

NG: Did you ever live anywhere outside of Houston?

RR: When I lost my job at TBH after being there 25 years I was really disappointed but I did take the opportunity to go to L.A. and I did live there like a year and a half or two. I really enjoyed it. I would like to go back there. But so many... I've gotten so many blessings here in Houston that it would be crazy for me to go back there. Things are going so well here right now. Maybe... a couple of years I can settle down some stuff here, some projects I have that I am really caring about and still go over there. That is the only place that I've ever lived. I've lived in Houston longest. I love Houston. Houston has the best of everything. We are the third coast in between New York and we don't really have any big natural disasters, what a hurricane every 25 years compared to earthquakes and you know... the crime in New York City. I think it is a fabulous place to raise your kids, be in the arts, club scene... everybody knows that Houston, next to New York has the most theater seats in the country. Not all... a lot of people know that not all cities have a symphony and an opera and a ballet and so many theaters and so many venues and blues and jazz and all the Latino things you know are Mexican American culture here. So it is a good place to live whether you are in the arts or if you are in technology, NASA, oil whatever.

NG: You said that you first got you know kind of focused with the arts when you had the counselor tell you, you should be a piano player but when did you start more practicing?

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RR: In 1980 I believe there was a movie that came out. It was the first mini-series of its kind. We didn't have cable TV, three major networks. Not even Fox was around. It was ABC, NBC, CBS... ABC came out with something called Roots, An American Story or something like that. It was all about Alex Haley I believe is the author's name and he went back to find his ancestors in Africa and he wrote a book about it. It was a mini-series, so like a nighttime soap opera but with a big budget. So first Kunta Kinte is in Africa, then he comes to America, then the Civil War, then civil rights and I'm skipping stuff because it was long. It had a fantastic impact on America, positive and negative. Kids were rioting in the school because the violence against African Americans was so graphic and the injustice that kids who hadn't thought of it... it awakened a lot of people's minds about things you know like, "Hey this isn't right" a lot of white guilt too you know. So there was riots going on, little disturbances and the genealogy business really flourished. There were ads everywhere, "Do you want to find your roots?" People were looking for their roots, everybody sparked an interest and "Where did we come from?" I watched it religiously and I had the same feeling, "Yeah what is my roots? Where did I come from?" I would ask my mom, "Don't we have any relatives in Mexico because she was born in the valley and all my relatives are in the valley and she'd say, "No, no we don't have any relatives in Mexico." Later I did find some of our relatives there. But it sparked my interest that I wanted to do something Latino. When I grew up in Houston there was no... there was one and a half Mexican stations. There was no *La Temenda*, reggaeton all these stations that you have here now. There was no Telemundo, Univision. Television wise there was one program called *Cita con Carlos* and it was a little variety show and he bought his own time on channel 39 so this was right when UHF

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came in which is another channel. So it wasn't there when I was growing up, it wasn't there until I was a teenager. But, so it only came on once. It had some local singers. The other radio station was Morales, KLVL and it was right there on Canal and their big thing was *Se Busca Trabajo* in the morning. That's why to this day there are migrant laborers at Canal and Sampson looking for... like in front of the Home Depot, they are there.

People don't know why they are there because of the Home Depot there but it is because of Morales, because for decades he would let them in the morning to his deal and they

could say, "I'm a carpenter I'm looking for this and that." There wasn't as many then too

so it was a big help to the community. But this guy had his own band, he was like 80 or

something. It would be, "*Y aquí está señor Morales con sus muchachos, ándale*

muchachos!" then they would be saying "[indistinguishable singing]" and it was terrible

to me. You know this Tejano music. The only place to play Tejano music was a place in

Rosenberg called KFRD, Rosenberg and they would play from 12:00 to 3:00 so I was in

school and I didn't get to hear it. But I knew about it because in the summer we'd get to

hear it and that is where you would hear Little Joe and Sunny at KFRD in Rosenberg. So

my point is you didn't have a lot of Mexican culture. My mom as many people came

from the valley used to get hit for speaking English in high school or school, you know

they would get spanked. So she didn't want me speaking Spanish, I mean speaking

Spanish. So she didn't want me speaking Spanish. So she wouldn't speak Spanish

around the house. There was no radio or TV that listened to in Spanish. Everybody was

white at the school just about, they didn't speak Spanish. I didn't know how to speak

Spanish. I didn't know much about my culture. I never saw a *mariachi* or *baile*

folklórico until I was about in my late teens there was just no opportunity for it. So I

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really wanted to do something. So in 1981 one of the first big stations opened. It was *La Tremenda* and they had the first big Cinco de Mayo that I knew of, there were probably some but I didn't know of them in the neighborhood that I was living. So it was at the Albert Thomas Convention Center. So I went to the Albert Thomas and I was just like I had just seen Roots and I was like I want to do something that has to do with my culture. The first thing I got to was a *baile folklórico* called *Zapata* and I went up and I said, "I want to join this." They were like, because I had seen them perform and they had like swords and they were hitting them and they were making sparks like, "Yeah!" I said, "I want to join this." They were discouraging they were like, "Well we don't really take new members right now. You get somebody you train them and they leave. We don't want to go through that right now." So then I go to the next booth and it's that time it is called Teatro Bilingue de Houston and I changed the name to Talento Bilingue I called it TBH because I was working with kids and I was trying to get an acronym but at that time it was called Teatro Bilingue de Houston they only did like four adult plays a year and they were in a little stage at Ripley House. Anyway, so a guy was there named Ernest and they were real... I said, "How do you join this? Can you join this or volunteer?" He said, "Yeah, yeah we need volunteers as a matter of fact we need a stage manager." I was like, "Dang I want to be a stage manager." I didn't know that mean like sweeping the stage and washing the props. But I still enjoyed it I got to read lines to the actors, you know. So I joined that and I was a stage manager for the first play but after that I had the lead in every play from then on until I became director. Then after I became director I felt like I was taking advantage so I was never the lead in a play again or directed a play at Talento Bilingue once I was director and I was director like 20 years. I did... my

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artistic juices went to other places. Like I did things at The Alley, Main Street, Emsemble, Stages, you know stuff like that. The only play I did sponsor was Pancho Claus.

NG: Can you tell me more about that history of the Talento Bilingue you said it was started as Teatro Bilingue?

RR: It started as Teatro Bilingue in 1977. A guy named Arnold Mercado got a grant. I think it was a [] grant or a [] grant, government grant. He got to hire some college students to work there full time. This started at Casa de Amigos which is on the north side. Then after that for various reasons they moved to Ripley House under Felix Fraga. In '77... I came in, in 1981. I came in, in '81 like in April and right away I wrote Pancho Claus. The first year Pancho Claus was at Christmas. The director there said, I was looking at their schedule and on there it said Pancho Claus. I said, "What is this about?" He said, "We don't know yet. All we know is that Ripley House does not let us use that theater on Christmas because they have too many holiday parties with the seniors and the kids. So we have to travel. So we are going to parks and libraries and things like that. We need a play that is attractive to kids, maybe teenagers. I was taking writing at U of H at the time. So they said, "Okay why don't you try?" So I wrote a poem, a Chicano version of The Night Before Christmas. "And what to my wondering eyes should appear but eight low rider cars all jacked out on the rear." Another line is, "*mama y papa* mom in her night gown, and *tu sabes* dad don't wear pajamas." So I wrote this poem based on The Night Before Christmas. I sent it to the director. The director was the campaign manager for somebody, Ben Reyes I remember and I went to the campaign headquarters because that is where I had to meet him. So I said this poem and I acted it out. I had a

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hat and glasses like Pancho Claus. I had an idea of what I wanted to character to look like and he laughed and says, "That's great! Now go write the play to that." So I did and that was that. You know it's funny it's hard to get acceptance in your family and I remember I told my sister and she was like 18... she was the first person I ever tried the poem on. So I did the whole poem for her. I was about to go do it for the director, who ended up loving it, the whole thing started from that. But I did it to her first and she looked at me after I finished and she goes, "That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard. You're not really going to do that are you? That's dumb!" But luckily I had an appointment an hour later or else I might have had time to think about it and back out. So... they say you have to go outside to get acceptance you know! So that is where it started. It became a play. We did the play for about five years. It got popular and then people wanted us to go to like Astro World Holiday in the Park or the Navarro at the Astro Hall, Post Oak lighting. Well a little play doesn't lend itself to that kind of venue; you know thousands of kids running around. So we made a band. I always was musical, I felt like I was musical. Anyway, so we made the band. We made it out of students at first. We made Ronnie Alejandro, who has gone on to earn golden globes and stuff was one of the first, was the first young manager. He was the first little boy in Pancho Claus. He said he would help me get the band together. It was all students. Now they are all professional... the band members are, the students stay. We started the band and then we started getting in the parades like the big Thanksgiving Day parade downtown. Then something funny happened along the way, about eight years into it, I've been twenty years into it... people, the community actually started thinking I was Pancho Claus. This was something I made up. I'm a performer but I started getting these tear jerker calls

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like, "Our mom just died and there's eight kids and...another one the house caught on fire or these people got deported and all their kids are staying with the grandmother and she has nothing..." Like oh my God! So I started having a little fundraiser to set aside a little money getting toys here and there and it grew bigger and bigger and now we give out thousands of toys, you know. So Pancho Claus now, it's a play that we do every couple of years at The Alley Theater because I don't have the budget to do everything (or the time) you know it is just hard to do the play and the band and the parades and the parties, the toy giveaways... all the stuff. It's so much stuff that we invented Christmas in July although I found out later that a lot of people do Christmas in July. We do Christmas in July, which is great because people say, "Why do you do Christmas in July?" I said, "Our slogan is because our kids deserve two Christmas's." When I grew up it might have been tough but I could stay out at the park we didn't have gangs and terrorism and AIDS and all this stuff kids have now, you know. So they need a break. They need a every once in a while a surprise here comes Pancho Claus with all the constables and low riders making a lot of noise handing out presents. So and we actually do a lot more performances in July because in Christmas everybody has a lot of stuff going on. In July, they are looking for stuff to entertain the kids, you know in the summer programs and stuff.

NG: So the Christmas in July is more about entertainment?

RR: Its entertainment and we still... it's fundraising and it's our big fundraiser and it's giving out presents, we do toy cruises, toy cruises. We go through the neighborhoods with the constables and the low riders and give out presents. But we also go entertain to summer camps and summer session summer schools and most importantly for Christmas

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and Christmas in July we provide a lot of jobs. More importantly then providing jobs for the band members who really charge us a really minimal token, we pay each of them \$75 for them to come across town and stay... but the kids get jobs per hour. All the decorating at Ripley's House, on the walls and stuff, it takes two days. It's good we don't really need that, people would still come but it gives the kids a job. They get to get the presents together on the toy cruises. There's dancers, they get to rehearse, put up sound equipment... so you know stay with the low rider's, keep them up... all kinds of stuff. They provide jobs for them.

NG: Where does the money come from?

RR: Our biggest sponsors are Taxis Fiesta, Mambo Seafood and Union Pacific right now. A lot of little, I'm surprised how many of these we have. We have like 100 of these back, you know people saying they want to be on committee. You know I hate... I want our community to help so I have a lot of options here. There is a card I'm showing on the tables at the function and you know it says, "I want to volunteer. I know where you can put a collection box. I want to donate a toy. I'd like to be on the committee." So out of six things one of them says I want to give money. So it gives people an opportunity to be involved. We've got like 100 of these back. It was great, Rick did a great job I was so proud of him. A young man that was the emcee he told me, he said, "Rick let me be the emcee this year." I said, "What are you talking about I'm the emcee?" He said, "I know but it was too chaotic last year." I said, "No I think I did a good job emceeing" "No but the community leader commented at the last minute, some of them had not rehearsed. You have to worry about the food, the tables, where people are sitting, everything is volunteers so, you know."

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End of Tape 1 Side A

RR: "...stage manager" and I said, "Yeah that's what I'm talking about it." I said, "Okay you can be stage manager and emcee." So, that was great because anybody came in, counsel man got there, the food got there, "Talk to Rick." But he did, my point was he did a real good job getting people to sign because in the past we would get maybe 10 or 15 back. With his little spill... Rick travels all around the world now with what he learned here in Second Ward.

NG: The show at the Ripley House for Christmas in July can you describe that for people who don't know about it, who is involved in the show?

RR: Well Christmas in July is a laid back time when we have time to do fun things and try get the community involved. It is more important to me, like on that card, to get the community involved. That way they are having more of a sense of ownership of it. It is more important to me than to go up to a counsel man and say, "Raise \$10,000 for us." It is more important for me to say, "Can you come be in our Christmas in July show? Yes you are going to do a rap, you are going to do a poem, you are going to do jokes. Something talent wise. You don't have to be talented. You'll do some corny jokes or you will be Pancho Claus and say the poem or you will come in a zoot suit but if you can perform like the judge can sing and the other judge can sing, if you can play the guitar or dance." So this year we had the mayor, two counsel people, two judges, the director of Hispanic calendar perform and others. In past years we have had almost every state representative. Mario Barrada, Judge [], Ed Hernandez and almost every counsel man you know and we've never had the same person twice. So it is just a chance for the community to get together. It is a great fundraiser. The tickets are very cheap, I mean

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compared to a gala, gala's I've seen have been \$250 to \$500 a seat, ours is like \$35. But because we have real good sponsorship from Taxis Fiesta, Mambo and Union Pacific we are able to do that. And that keeps us... a lot of people don't get to see Pancho Claus perform because we don't perform out like in a club or even a festival really. We perform at festivals at our... they are giving out toys like Sheila Jackson Lee's Christmas party or Mariano Navarro's Christmas Party or Rick Trevino's senior citizen Christmas Party, George... they have thousands of people there. But it is not the invited public. It is just the poor kids or seniors. So the typical person really has never seen a Pancho Claus performance. We don't charge for the performance but we basically do it for inner city kids that are at some kind of function getting toys. So this is an idea that... I mean we get city grants in the past and state and looking for government money sometimes. This gives them a chance to see what we do and get to know them a little better and get a sense of ownership and we get a good meal cooked by some of the moms and a lot of other stuff and it's a lot of fun.

NG: What happens during Christmas for Pancho Claus?

RR: Well Christmas kicks off with the big parade downtown. Then we might this year I think we are going to start a tradition of having like a little kick off at a blues club with big music. But after that it is just a lot of performances, a lot of visiting. You know we go to Texas Children's Hospital we go to orphanages, we go to halfway houses, we go to big parties we go to elementary schools, just wherever people request us in time. We give away about ten performances and after that it is like the free performances are gone and we charge a very minimal to have the... I will go anywhere for free. If they want the Pancho Claus character so I am really busy. I go to a lot of car shows and where they are

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giving out toys at a church. But I am saying if they want a performance then even though the band is charging minimally, you know, and I want to get paid they are artists and they work hard, you know. They do a lot of free stuff as it is, you know. But we are pretty busy and then the parades. There are a lot of little parades: Pasadena, South Houston, the big one downtown...Meyerland, little communities like Deer Park.

NG: The emcee this year his name was?

RR: Rick Margo.

NG: Rick Margo... he mentioned when he was on stage how he started very young. I guess working with you what were you doing, or what was your role when he started?

RR: Rick's brother started with us. He was the first, in the first band of Pancho Claus the students and he went to HSVPA. His parents, particularly his father, I don't think they will mind me saying this but had an alcohol problem and his mother was taking like Alanon classes at Ripley House where we were located and that is how we got to know her. She wanted him in the program. So his brother was with us for a long time. I always knew Rick since he was like three years old. I saw him growing up. Then when it was his turn he was upset... actually the first time that I met Rick now that I think about it, I saw him but I didn't really see him, you know, I just knew who he was. But when he was maybe six, now [] Navarro which is a big thing now they do it at the Astrodome or the George R. Brown but when they first started they did it in the field at Jackson Middle School and you go out there and they'd have 1,000 kids, now they have like 3,000 and they have all these little circles where they were giving out, we do a Pancho Claus performance and then they have these circles where they are giving out a lot of presents. Each kid gets like 5 presents and bicycles. So Miguel's brother was in

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our band and Rick came because he didn't live too far from there. I don't know maybe he came with his mom I don't know who he was with. But I didn't know him really at all. All I know is somebody came up to me and said, "There's a little boy over there crying by the goal post." So I go over there and it was Rick and I go, "What's your deal dude?" [crying] "I want a present." The presents were only for the ones that registered and come with the school. So me and Pancho Claus we got him some presents. I told the guy in charge of it and he gave me a bunch of presents to give the kid. Like we said we gave him presents and we haven't been able to get rid of him since. That's what we say. But it didn't work with him. So that's how we met him. He was a little boy in our little *mariachi* serenaders and he is very talented. He is very funny, he is a comic. So he always had good leading roles in our student productions. He learned hip hop with us break dancing. Now he travels, he goes... he just came back from Thailand and before that he was in Iraq for about a month working with inner city kids (I thought that the whole place is inner city). But he goes over there and he does several things. He'll either be a teacher (and this is done under the U.S. Embassy's program like Ambassador or something) he is either a teacher or he performs. There's a lot of places worldwide like Japan that have these big hip hop contests. So he will go with a group to compete or he will be a judge. He is high enough up there that they ask him to be a judge or he will do an exhibition. So that is what he does and he gets paid very, very well for it too. He is married now and has a baby. But you know he teaches here also in between and he goes to school he is still going to school. He is going slow because of all this travel but I know he is enjoying what he is doing.

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NG: So people like him, kids that were involved in performing started out through the Pancho Claus program?

RR: Yeah well there's a lot. You know our most high profile ones are like State Representative Carol Alvarado. She was in Pancho Claus when she was a little girl and she was in our program when she was a little teenager. So she grew up with us. [] who is the past president of the Houston Community College for his second or third little boy is in Pancho Claus and he traveled around the country with us through New York City, Washington D.C. we did a tour all over with a bunch of kids. Diana, who I don't think she is the past president of HISD she might have been but she is on the school board in one of our kids. Ronnie Alejandro who I mentioned before he has won a Golden Globes and Emmys, he writes music, like theme music for TV series like The Shield he wrote that, Thief and he tours with names like Stevie Wonder and that girl That's So Raven he tours with them like a music conductor. He arranges music. He works with a lot of bands in LA and Los Vegas like show bands that put together musical arrangements for things like that but I always like to say that I'm the most proud of the kids that were in our program and learned the importance of being a good community person, knowing how to treat their spouse whether it is husband or wife, knowing the importance that their kids have got to go to college or go to school every day and you have to take care of them. That's what I really see because I really do see it. These people they know right from wrong, they know good from bad. They know... they have morals you know? Because all the plays that we do, all the plays that we do that they were involved with had to do with AIDS, or gangs or poverty or community centers not being open (I got in trouble for that one). It has to do with community concerns. Even

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Pancho Claus the play the message is: don't judge somebody by the way they look. Respect your elders. Respect your family's love. Don't want a bunch of things for Christmas, realize things that are important that you have love and your family with you. So all of the plays that I have written, right now I wrote a place called Zoot Toot Boogie and The Baylor College of Medicine commissioned me to write that. It's about colorectal cancer, which sounds boring which is why I have the name Zoot Toot Boogie because nobody would come if I called it the colorectal cancer play. So that is what I am known for. I've written plays on inhalant abuse and that kind of stuff.

NG: Was that your intention? Did you envision the impact it would have on kids when you started?

RR: I wanted to be a star. I wanted to be in media and be a news reporter or be a piano player or something like that. I didn't think I was going to work with kids. I was just naturally drawn to them. You know because I had such a hard life when I would meet these kids... what happened is I wrote Pancho Claus. I didn't work with kids when I wrote Pancho Claus. I came and joined TBH and I was stage manager. I was working with adults. After I wrote Pancho Claus in order to publicize it I would go from school to school so they would know who I was and I would go and ask permission to go from room to room and say, "I'm from Ripley House," that was my credibility, "We're doing a play called Pancho Claus and we want the kids to come see it." Well they are thinking of a Pancho Claus with a sombrero and I come in here looking like a gangster. So I tell them on the phone and then I get there and they are like, "Wait a minute we didn't talk about this." You know that used to throw me off because I'd go in and do this Pancho Claus poem and there would be a teacher sometimes... the kids would be going crazy

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because they never heard anything like that. They had the symphony and the opera and the Alley Theater but there would be a teacher sometimes, the kids would be going crazy because they never heard anything like that. They had the symphony and the opera and the Ally theater and they... they didn't see this kind of thing about their culture. You know dad don't wear pajamas. They really get a kick out of that because they know their dads don't wear pajamas. But there would be a teacher in the back and not necessarily a white or a black teacher. Sometimes it would be a Latina who just didn't like Chicano things you know too stereotype. But they wouldn't get the context of the play. They didn't know they had messages and stuff. You know they just thought it was [] and they would glare at me. The power of Pancho Claus is the sunglasses. Nobody can see your eyes and you can look at people and it just makes you feel more comfortable. Because you can see a lot more people laughing. But it did at the beginning I would concentrate on that teacher in the back that wouldn't smile and I would try real hard to make her smile and I would try so hard that I would mess up, you know I would stumble lines or physically. Then finally I figured out that you are not going to please everybody. Otherwise we'd all vote the same party. We'd all love the Pope. We'd all love country music. Not that any of it is bad but we just are all different and you're not just going to please everybody and I got that into my head finally that as long as there are enough people that want to see it and come and support it, it's okay. You know, it's a little edgy for the times especially. But at the beginning it was hard to get people there so I was going from school to school, room to room saying, "Come see Pancho Claus" and it worked kids would come like crazy. We are doing free performances at Ripley. Oh but we are doing them at the libraries. We will be at Cliff Tuto, we will be at Flores and we

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did maybe two performances at Ripley. So what happened after Pancho Claus, this was 1981 I had just joined the theater. Ripley did not have an after school program at that time at all. So kids started coming... we were under the stairs in a little office about maybe half or a third the size of this room. So we are talking about 5 by 5 or something. But our door opened right into the hall you could see us. So all these kids started coming after the deal, "Where is Pancho Claus? Where is Pancho Claus?" And I didn't know exactly what to do with them but they were just standing there waiting for something to happen because they didn't have nothing going on and Ripley was hanging around and it is cool inside. So I decided to pull out tables from the auditorium, place them in the hall and put colors or crafts. I didn't really know I'm not really an artist so I couldn't teach it but we would have contests, you know, we would paint this or that. Then Felix Fraga took notice of this. He didn't know me. He is a very nice man who really cares about his community. If he sees a need he helps. So he came and he said, "Hey Richard look at all of this, what is this?" and all this, I said, "I don't know what it is." He said, "They are your kids actually. This is your neighborhood. I don't even live in this neighborhood to do something with them." So he came up with this idea. Somebody donated like 10 game machines and there was a room in the back. So we made an after school program there. He hired me. I was working for free for Talento Bilingue and driving a cab. So I was happy to, you know, make some money. It was really more of a financial thing. Then Ruby came to me one time, who was the director then and says, right when I was doing this, the beginning and says, "We don't have no money. Our grant didn't come through. We are out of money. I don't know what we are going to do for our play." I said, I thought it was so easy. I said, "I could write a play I wrote Pancho Claus." She

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said, "Well what would it be about?" I said, "Well I'm working with these kids. What I did was I got the kids some of these book and they would answer the question 'How does it feel when someone says I love you?' 'how does it feel when someone makes you cry?' 'how does it feel when somebody dies?' you know and before they could play games they had to sit at the table and fill this out and I just got a wealth of material from inside these kids' heads. So the play was called: From Second Ward to Ben Taub in 30 days. I'm always about catchy names. So it was called From Second Ward to Ben Taub in 30 days and it had to do with bilingual education. I was against the way they were doing it at the time. At the time I had a lot of kids that only spoke Spanish. Their parents only spoke Spanish. I went to visit them at their class and they only spoke Spanish in their class and then when they went to Jackson in the 6th grade, 7th grade bilingual education is over and they don't know English. All their friends after school speak Spanish, they didn't even try. I am for bilingual education at the time but there's got to be a weaning period or transition and they weren't trying they just had a teacher teaching them in Spanish all day. That's no bilingual education. So it dealt with that. It dealt with the community centers not giving a place... poor Mr. Fraga I was writing stuff against the community for not having a place for these kids to go. You know the machines would come alive at night after the kids were gone and they would do this song and dance we made the machines that would shoot out their hands. They would talk about the kids and what they noticed and stuff like that. It was about a social worker, me I played that part working with these... we had like 15 kids at one point. So that is how I started working more with kids. Then we had... right when the summer program started and I happened to work with kids and then I just kind of fell into it. It was just a natural thing to do.

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There was money to work with kids. People would support that like United Way and stuff like that. Where I ran into problems later was that I was attracted, bad kids, kids who had committed crimes, kids that were on the street, kids that were on drugs. I was attracted to that because I lived on the streets literally and I knew those kinds of kids and I knew how they felt. Whenever they came to me with a problem, "You know what my dad beats me" and stuff like that. "You know what? There's a lot of things worse believe me you know." I could emphasize with them. What I found out was there is money to work with good kids. There's not money to work with bad kids. I've always had that problem. Right now Richard Trevino gives me 10 hours and God bless him to work with kids that are in jail but nobody else, I can write grants until I'm blue in the face and statistics... it has been proven that 8% kids who are incarcerated before or while they are teenagers will never graduate high school and all kinds of statistics in Washington but people just don't support and that is where I ran into my problems. That is why I got run out of TBH because they didn't like that I was working with high at risk kids. Where the money is, is what they are doing now which is summer camp or stuff like that for kids... it's a babysitting thing. You don't get it... I did summer camp at TBH because all the kids that play couldn't pay. You won't find one of those kids there now. They are all kids, community leaders kids you know, high profile people's kids that can pay. I did classes there. They don't have classes there anymore. I did classes in all the arts at TBH all the time I was there. I mean it really expanded to like 40 different classes two semesters and in the summer. And every... from accordions to hip hop to *baile folklórico* to ballet to jazz to drawing. I mean we built a beautiful place, an art room in the back, two dance rooms a stage... but 60%, 70% of the kids that I had couldn't pay. It wasn't

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the smartest thing to do but it's what I do. So that was the problem. It has always been a problem to work with those type of kids.

NG: So do you think it was problematic because it wasn't generating money?

RR: Oh no it was politics. You know I work with nothing, with no salary for about ten years and quite the opposite. When I left TBH owed me about \$100,000. If you look in my... that's not from salary either if it was salary it would be a lot more than that. If you look at my web site, my resume you will see that I've been in 10 or 15 movies, not as a star but even if you're not the star you get paid \$600 a day and I did movies like Bad Girls and Lonestar where I worked there a month, you know and I would make some good money doing these movies and I would lend the money to TBH. I would tell the board, "Here's a loan from Richard. Here comes \$10,000." So it didn't have to do so much with finances or money it had more to do with politics. I always tried to stay out of politics. Like I tell you I hate politics. But then one day Eladia Navarro was running for city council. She helped me a lot get the building. She was the president of my board. She was in a run-off with Gabriel Vasquez. She said, "Richard could you please stand in front of Jeff Davis High School? People know you. Could you please stand there for the run off? One or two hours?" Against my better judgment. I had never done anything political for anybody. They always call me, "Can you have the kids perform for our...?" I'm like, "No we don't do that." But I did that for her. I stood out there an hour or two and who was by me the whole time? Gabe Vasquez the whole time. He was mad. He was saying that we were doing this illegal and that illegal. I didn't understand the politics of what he was talking about. So he won. So we lost. Then what happened? He infiltrated some people from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on my board who said,

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“Oh we’re going to help you.” I didn’t know them from anybody but they were with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and my naivety I thought this was good. Having business people we’ve never been able to get the money, you know. But they knew nothing about the community. They knew nothing about me. They knew Gabre Vasquez. Their mission was to turn TBH into a more professional, you know like the Alley and not this inner city thing. The first... what I did that year was I raised.... Because I was getting a little bit of power and I was able to get \$50,000 to hire a book keeper, an accountant a CFO. I was making \$20,000 and I got \$50,000 I knew we needed somebody good. So I hired this guy named Joe Cooper and he came in, at the same time this happened I had just got a grant, I was Vice President of the Convention and Visitors Bureau that is a big thing because those are big power players in the Convention group and I was President of the Multi Cultural Arts Society, I was up there now. I was established sort of and had credibility. So somebody gave me \$50,000 to hire an accountant. Somebody else gave me \$25,000 to make a 5 year plan. Here I am thinking we need to stop this day by day thing and make a plan and be more professional. We need to get our books together and all this. So this guy Joe Cooper comes and I give him the books and I say, “Here you go buddy this is the worst thing I hate.” From there on... he was there for a year before I left. I never touched another check or did anything. But he wasn’t from our community and I hired him on his bookkeeper merits. But what happened was I had Gabriel Vasquez with this committee trying to get rid of me and what they were doing was, “Look what happened Joe Cooper came up here and saved TBH.” Oh I had just told you I just got a grant from the city to put us... TBH is now under the city along side the Alley Theater, the George Brown, the Jones Hall and The Ensemble. I

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said, "It's only fair." And they did it and they went for it and they gave us free security, free cleaning. The ladies who clean there are from the George Brown, security too. So for the first time TBH was really, really clean because we were just doing it, they paid the bills. So it was like, "Finally rest!" you know and the place is looking great. But they flipped it on me. They were like, "Look Joe Cooper came and look how nice the place looked. Look how nice the books are. Look how nice the security now because Joe Cooper's here." They wouldn't see that I raised the \$50,000 to pay this guy that's his job. Anybody would have done that. I'm the one who got this grant and got it to happen to start the same month he started but it took me two years to get it. Things don't happen with the city overnight. I'm the one who got the million dollars to build the building, you know? So... but it was politics. They got the board that was there... four of my board members that are still with me today left and when something like that happens there's always little rumors, "must have done something wrong." That's why the first thing I did was a I went to the George Brown, I'm showing you a poster and I put on that poster you will see two counsel people, a law enforcement constable, and a congresswoman. As my co-chairs and from my next years on up I always put their pictures there. That was the second year the first year was Gordon Quan. Gordon Quan had just come off a scandal of Kids Care about them misappropriating money and he's from the board and he sure wasn't going to get mixed up if anyone was doing something shady. So to me that was credibility, putting their pictures up there and I mean I did real well. They put me out of my misery. I used to tell the board member that I'd get a board member they would say, "You know we should fire you." I'd say, "You know what? Put me out of misery because I come here seven days a week." We rent this out. I had my own programs, I do

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my own producing and I rent this place out too. I feel when somebody rents it to do a play, if the public comes to see their play and there's 10 people in the audience it is going to reflect on me because they don't know if it's my play or somebody that rented the place to play. So I was working on everybody's project, anybody that wanted a dance recital or an art show or a play. I'd have to work with them. So there were three or four of those... instead of doing three or four plays a year I was doing a lot of stuff publicity wise and trying to get ready. I didn't have to be there I just wanted to be there. So it really put me out of my misery it really did. I was really devastated when it happened. I came to work and they were like, "You know what we don't want to do this anymore? Here's \$25,000 you go on your way. We figured \$25,000 (because they owed me \$100,000). This is a right to work state. We don't have to have a reason to fire you. If you don't like it and you make trouble then you're not getting your \$25,000 you're not getting nothing and we have these IRS statements that show that you didn't fill out your 990..." Well yeah I know I didn't fill out the 990 but we're not profit. We don't pay taxes and that's why we hired this guy to fix this and it's fixed, it's been fixed for a year. It wasn't nothing like we misreported or anything like that. It was that the "I's" were dotted and the "T's" were crossed. So the very first year I left there I did Pancho Claus at the George Brown, we did a festival for four days. We did the play at the Alley Theater. Do you know what a jump that is from doing it at a little community thing? In other words I was holding it back because I wanted to stay with TBH, you know. I went to L.A. to get that out of my system. So it was a blessing. I don't regret one minute of being at TBH because it gave me my credibility community. I've been asked like behind the scenes do I want to come back? I've had counsel people that, it's a facility. I mean

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you see the hook up I have with counsel people. Come on, common sense will tell you that. It's a city facility. I'm tight with the counsel people. Gabriel Vasquez is long gone you know. His crooked ass got voted out the next year. He was a one term councilman that's how terrible and crooked he was. I've been asked if I wanted to go back, if I wanted to pursue that by several people, people in power and just people in the community or otherwise. I'm like, "No been there done that." The only reason I would ever go back to TBH is if it was fallen. If it was falling down and somebody was about to close it. Because I was in this group, ever heard of American Leadership Forum, ALF?

NG: No.

RR: It's a great organization in the city when they get community leaders from all kinds of backgrounds, presidents of corporations, politicians, university presidents, minority arts leaders like myself... they bond them for a year. We go stay in hike in mountains in Colorado, spend the week in... we talk about sensitivity and one thing I learned from them, I learned a lot but the one thing I learned... because I used to be proud of the fact that if I left TBH it would crumble. Well 10 years before I left TBH luckily I got these workshops. What I learned there was the mark of a good leader is somebody who can walk away from what they built and it still stands. So I'm real proud of that. When I left TBH they had \$100,000 grants from the city. They had a building that they pay \$1 a year for. They had United Way grants. They had a lot of corporate grants. I left them stable. Because who would have been there? I mean that guy that bookkeeper guy that was paid \$50,000 he wouldn't have stayed if he wasn't getting paid that. After I left he only lasted like 8 months after that. They have gone through... in the first four or five years after I left, it's only been like 6, they have gone through like 6 or 7

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directors and interim directors. This last guy they have I hear is a pretty good guy I don't know him but I think he's been there like a year now. So of course it's not good to work 25 years of your life and put in all that sweat equity and look at their web site and your name's not even on there anywhere as any part of it, that's sad to me. But I did get a lot out of it and I wouldn't change it for anything. I made a lot of contacts. I met a lot of kids. They don't work with kids anymore at all. They don't do classes. They don't go to detention centers. They have something in the summer called [] where basically if you have money you can be in this 8 week summer program but they don't work with kids. They don't even produce. I think they just got a theater person and they just started producing but for the past five or six years they haven't even produced a play. It's more like a rent a center. We had our own *baile folklórico* we had our own *mariachis* we had a youth theater, an adult theater. Now people rent it and it's more like a rent a center more than a cultural center to me. I don't know how it is because I haven't looked into it but a couple of years ago the main tenant organizations in there was Interactive Theater, which is an Anglo theater. They are doing Pinocchio, Snow White, bla, bla, bla...kids can go see that at stages on Main Street. We need something in our community. Isn't that a Latino cultural center? The other one was Organ, Sandra Organ Sands Company which is basically an African American dance company. The other one was a Civic Symphony which is mainly a lot of Asians and Anglos maybe 10% Latino. What I'm saying that this is a Latino cultural center and it is sad to see that our people are not using it that much except to rent it. The poor playwrights and artists, comedians that try and rent TBH now it's out of their price range now just about to just rent it. My policy was anybody that wanted to do a play the first time they came they used it for free. The second time

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they paid a third. They next time we halved the money (and believe me that was a good deal for them because both things don't make any money). So, and they can't charge that much a local play then charged \$5 now they charge \$10 you know. So I think we are providing a real service for the artistic community and much less the kids.

NG: So do you think now that there is any kind of artistic outlet for kids?

RR: Oh yeah there is a place called Meca, the Meca Community Center, Cultural Center, they are a wonderful place. Alex Valdez and I started at the same time. We only had each other. We had many, many, many midnight dinners. I had dinner with her yesterday at 9:00 at night just because we always compared notes. We didn't have anybody else to compare. But luckily for the kids now it's all over everywhere. They can take *baile folklórico, mariachi* in their school, their church their YMCA. It doesn't have to be a cultural center. So there is a lot of people serving that need. I never saw myself serving that need. I saw myself helping at risk kids through the arts. But for the normal kids there are a lot of cultural outlets out there. Even our schools are not as bad as say L.A. where they have no art education. We still have a lot of art education in our schools in my opinion.

NG: Can you talk about that a little bit about the importance of the arts? I think you've alluded to it with, you know, talking about some of the people who have been involved with Pancho Claus what they have gone on to do even if it is not with the arts.

RR: Well the way we reel them in is to low rider bicycles, let's do low rider bikes, let's do the hip hop you know. Edward Avila started off as a hip hop dancer. Then we got him into HSPVA. We've got kids from the second ward to HSPVA to take ballet. His father didn't like that at all and I had to talk to his father. He had like 8 brothers and

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sisters. I had to talk to his father and tell him HSPVA is a very good thing because almost everyone that goes to HSPVA gets a college scholarship at a good college and that is what happened to him. He went on to college and became a pharmacist, a community leader. At the Triangle Café here North Main right now. He owns a pharmacy in Pasadena on Shaver and he is on the HCC board. Other kids, we get them in there drawing. Drawing low rider scenes and things like that. Then they graduate, you know... [] now has a [] agency that is mainly a graphic agency that does things for the City of Houston and other corporations in graphic you know. He went on to college and learned how to do computer graphics and that kind of business in general... media. So yeah Carol Alvarado came in as a teenage actress in Pancho Claus and did a lot of other plays. I think it built up her confidence. She was always confident but I think it always helps when she got into politics. Politics is about telling a story. So now she is not... not all people are in the arts that is what I am saying she is a state representative and so on. So if nothing else it keeps them busy. There are some kids that want sports to keep busy. Some kids like tutoring. Some kids like games unfortunately after school. Some kids like the arts. Some kids like going to go practice hip hop or practice band or practice dance. That is where... we are not for everybody but we are trying to serve that need and hey this is how we get this kid's attention.

NG: You said something earlier that people expected Pancho Claus to come and set off bands and things like that. When did you decide that you wanted Pancho Claus in a Zoot Suit as opposed to the stereo typical...?

RR: Edward James Olmos and Louis Valdez did a movie in 1980 called Zoot Suit. It didn't fall on me. There were no Latino movies out there. La Bamba hadn't even come

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out yet I don't think. The whole Chicano community was talking about it. There were Zoot Suit fashion shows all over town at the car shows. Low riders were really in. The car shows were at all the big arenas but not now there's one or two. The movie Zoot Suit came out. The first Zoot Suit I wore imitated Edward Olmos' Zoot suit which was all black with a red shirt. My mom made it... I couldn't find nobody to make Zoot Suits in Houston so now you can buy them at the mall. At that time you couldn't. My mom made it out of a raincoat pattern. I remember the first time I performed like I said those glasses or power people would know who I was and we performed at Moody Park on the stage and the whole set was one stool and we did it for \$83 our whole cost, actors, prop sets, etc. Somebody dropped me off because it was right at the curb of Fulton and it was like 400 people looking at something else. Then whatever was happening stopped so they started setting up our stage, the stool actually and the mic. So I decided at the beginning... Pancho Claus for a long time came in from the back which is the way it was written. But I couldn't come in from the back so I had somebody drop me off in the car right there in the edge of the audience because it was almost to the street. I was scared because this was my first big acting role. All I can remember, I still wear Stacy's. I was wearing Stacy's and these... the glasses are the power because you don't have to look at anybody and they can't see... you can look at them and you don't know you are looking at them. I was looking at my feet and my feet just looked like they were big fins in front of me it was like surreal. These people were like parting like Moses. They were like, "Oh watch out! Watch out for that *vato*, man." People just started parting like the red sea or something. Because I didn't even know how I was going to get to the stage. They were giving away toys. Whenever they give away toys... You know they give away toys

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they are going to show up. They had a big giant piñata on the crane and like I said the Red Sea was parting. I just made it on stage like that. So what was the question?

NG: The question was why you made Pancho Claus in a...?

RR: Oh so the first Zoot Suit was black with red shirt. Then the next year I was looking in low rider magazine and I found a shop called Coleman's Menswear at Little York. So I went to see the manager and he is an African American and he was making all the Zoot Suits for the fashion shows and the conference. So I explained to him what I was doing. He said, "You know what I'll give you the Zoot Suit. I'll give you the chains. (It's got a lot of chains). I'll give you the Stacy's and the shirt and the hat. I'll give you the whole thing on one condition..." I go, "What?" He said, "You have to let me design it." He was an African American gentleman. I said, "Oh okay sure what is it going to be?" "I'm thinking red. All red with black trim." I was thinking, "Oh my God I'm going to look like a pimp!" He said, "No, no it's like Santa Claus." He was right. There is a Santa Claus look being all red. So he was right. But the idea came from Edward Olmos' movie. Because they told me we need to write something that will attract teenagers. Teenagers really like low riders. They really liked that movie when it came out. I figured we'll just hop on that band wagon. That is how it happened. Now they were thinking... when they first told me. I said, "What do you see it being?" That is where I got that from because they are the ones that said, "Well we are thinking it's like a guy with a sombrero and a serape and somebody plays like a burro and he comes in pulling them on a rope." I went home thinking that.

NG: When did TBH move from Ripley house and get a new space?

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RR: TBH started in 1977 and moved to Ripley House in 1980 and I joined in '81. The directors left in '83. They left it in shambles. All the grants, we had grants for Missions of the Arts, Cultural Counsel of Houston, National Endowment for the Arts... they were like, "See ya!" I was like... literally my hand would shake when I would put the key in the door every morning because we owed so much money and I was getting all the calls. I was real naive. I didn't know what to do exactly except that I wanted to keep it going. What I should have done is let it close and make my own. But I had no idea how to do that. I was desperate to keep TBH. It turns out that the Cultural Arts Council would call and say, "I gave you \$2,000 for chairs. Where is the receipt?" "I don't know?" "Where's the chairs?" I'd go to Mr. Fraga, "Mr. Fraga they said they gave me \$2,000 for chairs." National Endowment, "We gave you \$10,000 we need the final report. We need the receipts. We need the description." I'd call Louie Juria the people in charge. They were in San Antonio. "What do I do what is this?" Because I didn't even know about grant reports. They were like "We left. That that is our past. You want to stay there you stay there but that is our past. We quit. You are not paying us. We don't have to answer to you." I figured they were right. So it took me 2, 3, 4, 5 years to get the credibility back to get our grants back. I had to get on a lot of boards a lot of panels. That is what I said I had to get involved in politics. Not politics per se but politics for our community. That hey... Cultural Arts Counsel at that time, it is a wonder they gave me money. They were like... I'd go to panel meetings and they were dumb enough to put me on a panel as a token and then I started looking like, "wait a minute." I said, "It was 1983... it was like '83" Latino's get like 2% of the money you are giving. Because Meca was getting money and [] was getting money. Latinos get 2% of the money you are giving.

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That doesn't seem right. I made a big deal. So the next year they were like, "What are you crying about now? You got 100% jump!" "Oh we are getting 4% really good!" Really that is the way they thought. They thought, "You are getting 100% more then you got last year. And I'm not just talking about me, everybody. Oh my God. So then I know the next year there was a group they called No Encontramos [?] a little catch name they didn't find any theater in Houston. I was kind of pissed about that because I had theater but there was a darling little socialite and they didn't last long a year or two. But the first year we were getting like \$750, \$2,500 from the Cultural Arts Counsel. They got \$10,000 the first year. But that was the year I was making trouble. So they were like, "We'll show you." What happens when you are a good boy and when you are not, you know? So what was the question?

NG: Moving the space how did you?

RR: Oh okay. So Ruby Jorge left and I inherited in 1983. It was very hard for me because I wasn't getting paid and there was a lady who was the president, I let her go. I'll be nice and let her go unnamed. She was president of the organization and she was the pastor of the church. I was working my ass off. I started a youth program. I was really... things were happening. I was getting money in finally for neighborhood centers and then a couple of the board members that liked me and saw what I was doing took me in their confidence and said, "Well this lady said that you will never be director of TBH." I go, "Why not?" "Because Ruby when she left said to make sure you are not director." Honestly they got a little jealous about Pancho Claus. Because of the story that I told you The Chronicle did, a lady came in and was with us for a week following us and it was a story about Ruby and her husband and TBH. In the middle of it she turns to him and

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says, "I hope you don't mind but we are going to take this more towards Pancho Claus because it is a more colorful story." After that they didn't want to do Pancho Claus again. I was like, "Are you kidding me we just got \$5,000 from the city to do it." "Well we're not going to do it every year that doesn't make sense to do it every year." I said, "They do the Nutcracker every year. They do Scrooge every year. It's the same kind of theme don't you get it?" But they were the directors. They were like, "You want to do it you do it." They wouldn't give me the money but I kept it going some kind of way. That is where the friction started. But they were still the bosses. When they left I was only made interim director out of default because there was no money and nobody wanted it. It was like a 3 member board including her friend. So I built the board up to like 6 and then these two people said, "She said you are never going to be director because Ruby highly recommended that you not be the director." I said, "Well that don't make no sense because I'm working so hard here. You know, I've brought in the money. I've worked for free for three years. I'm not even asking for a salary I'm just asking for the title." So they did make me the director and she left. So then we made the youth theater. A lot of people...see the previous directors and that lady were all Chicano power. All of their plays were about Chicano power literally. I was like there's a lot more Latinos... I'm Chicano but there's a lot more Latinos then just Chicanos. I was doing some things with people from Spain and Colombia and whoever wanted I didn't seek them but if they wanted to. I was doing things with youth. So their little camp was like, "He's doing things with youth. He's really brought down to theater." My defense was they did three productions a year with adults. I'm doing four, I did four on purpose.

End Tape 1 Side B

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RR: What was I talking about?

NG: You were talking about becoming director.

RR: So I became the director and we started the youth theater. We toured the kids across the United States. Right away, the first year I rented a bigger space from Ripley House right away like the size of maybe four of these rooms, big space. Then things started moving. Felix Fraga really liked what we were doing. They liked the kid part. What they didn't like about TBH before that was that they were doing these three productions, they would take charge of the theater every night for weeks, you know just like a play you rehearse every night so nobody could use the theater like the other people in the community center. Then they had these plays and they would have 20 people there, you know for a two week period play. So they liked that I was working with kids, That's what Felix Fraga's about, hundreds of kids everywhere. So then the problem started I guess being too successful. The director of neighborhood centers I think, I guess he just didn't like that I was rubbing shoulders with him as a community leader I'd be putting in some of the same mayor's committees and like that. He'd see me there and he saw me as his employee under Felix Fraga, under Albert Castillo. What are you doing here? But I was director of Talento Bilingue at the same time. I always had that separate little thing and I was on their pay roll working with kids. So they made a little deal. They did all kinds of things to make my life miserable. I remember one time on my evaluation you get a bonus. I was getting paid minimum wage all the whole time I was there like I'm a guy from McDonalds. That was my main salary. I was limited I think to like 20 or 30 hours but you get this good bonus if you get a good evaluation. My evaluation missed it by a point because the lady in charge wrote as one of my criticisms,

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“overextended in his job duties.” I was like, “What does that mean?” She said, “Well Richard I can’t just write everything good then they will think we are friends or something.” I said, “Well what does it mean?” She said, “It just means you are always here. You are here day and night and you are always doing things and doing projects. We pay you 20 hours and you are here 60 hours. So you are overextended in your job duties.” I said, “Well that just don’t make any sense to me.” So then they send me to Fraga. “Okay Richard they want to know if you will be director of...” I don’t know what they called it they used to call it City Gas another community center they owned. They owned like seven community centers. I was like, “No I don’t want to be director of City Gas because you have to deal with senior citizens and WIC and health issues and I’m the arts and youth you know.” So they went back, they came back with another center. What they wanted me to do was to quit TBH. I worked there full time so they were offering me this job. “Well we want you to do is be director of all the centers drama departments. You go from center to center. Pasadena, you go to Klein, you go to South Park.” I said, “See I don’t like that because I’m working with communities that is not my culture and I got in this to work with my culture you know.” So they went back and says, “Well they say you aren’t qualified to work for us. You are fired.” I’m going, “What?” Abel Davila, that whole group. They were losing...everybody went to colleges in my group. Everybody went to college one way or the other. We raised the money some kind. We didn’t have scholarships because they weren’t documented. We are raising money in other ways. It wasn’t so hard to raise the money to go for it. Abel Davila made a big scene to United Way and all kinds of people. I mean they got on the press. They did little protests, these kids on their own really. Abel Davila was the leader and that’s

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why he is the president of Houston Community College you know. United Way caved the community was in the paper that Ripley House really didn't have any youth programs that we were the main one and why were they... it must be political and it was in a crazy way. So United Way gave us a \$20,000 grant, out of their own money and told Emmerson, "You've got to let him stay here for a year. Let them figure it out." So they gave me a reprieve but I knew I had to leave. So I started looking around trying to figure out what to do. I saw nobody wanted to be in the *mercado* it was... tried to make it a Mexican Market place like in San Antonio and it went bust and it was abandoned. So I asked the city with some help of some community people on my board Elada Navarro in particular. Could we get Oscar's grocery store? It is an old grocery store that was all gutted out. They agreed to give it to me for \$1 a year for 30 years. Sergio Gallegos got me a trailer, a mobile trailer. We used that as our office and rehearsal rooms for about two years. We had programming in the park. We played home kids. We had kids in something called Little Mexico in a real run down area. When practicing in the park was raining we would practice in the trailer. When it was raining. I did tours like crazy. I didn't know how... I mean I got the building but I didn't know where I was going to get the money from to build it and stuff. I remember I would wear different hats. You've been at TBH haven't you? There it is up on top decked out for a wedding the top picture. I remember I'd wear different hats. I'd give some people tours that had money and I knew that they had to know that we were successful to give us money. So I would tell them how successful we were and we got this million dollar building. We just got a million dollar grant, we did from Quincy Development to fix it. But then other people I would tell them how broke we were and if they didn't help us we were... But I remember

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going to the building, going to the building with all these tours trying to talk people.

“How are you going to do it?” I said, “I have this feeling that if you build it they will come.” Do you remember Field of Dreams? I’ll show my newspaper clipping on a wall.

It says, “Center of Dreams” and the whole thing is about if you build it they will come and they did. After we built it, the Museum of Fine Arts gave us a grant and all these places wanted to work with us. I remember particularly one day, I had been doing lots and lots of tours of people. The most impressive thing was walking through the building.

It wasn’t complete but the skeleton was there. The stage had formed. You could stand on the stage you could see the levels, the roof was there. I remember... I was like, “Yeah I know what I’m doing and we are going to do this and I’ve already raised a million dollars and I’ve got to raise a million dollars for programming and I know what I’m doing.” I remember they left, one time everybody left and I was standing on the stage by myself in the building and I thought to myself, “Who the hell do you think you are? You are a cab driver! You’ve never owned a building. You’ve never owned a house or a car! You’ve never operated a theater budget! Who do you think you are? If these people knew that I’m just a cab driver!” But anyway we got through it.

NG: When did you change the name?

RR: Well the kids... I work with kids and the kids always had a hard problem saying Teatro Bilingue de Houston it just didn’t flow easily from their lips. So make an acronym and make it sound fresher I started calling it TBH. Then when we got the cultural center I didn’t want to be just a theater because of my sister I wanted to do art. The kids were really into hip hop dance. There were so many other artistic ways to go. So I wanted it to be a cultural center not just a theater. So I wanted to keep TBH because

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they were getting used to saying TBH some of them though to so I thought Talento— Bilingual Talent of Houston. The bilingual doesn't make sense. It didn't make sense the first day they thought of it. You know how they got that name? Arnold McDonald told me. It was called Teatro Español de Houston and somebody came from the National Endowment of the Arts and said, I know the guy didn't know much about the Latino culture. He said, Teatro Español... I don't know if we want to give money to an organization that is going to be speaking Spanish. Arnold right there said, "Well you know what we are thinking of changing the name to Teatro Bilingue— Bilingual Theater because we are going to do stuff in English and Spanish." And he just made up something there. He was like... "See all productions are going to be in English one week and in Spanish the same time next week" which wasn't true. But that is the name he gave it. So instead of TBH, I just had to convince myself, "Yeah bilingual is because we have to deal with kids in Spanish and English" but I inherited the bilingual part and I changed the talent part to Talento to keep the TBH and I think it works okay.

NG: I don't remember if you said what year you got the space.

RR: I started in '81. The space was 1996 so we were at Ripley House a long time for fifteen years. That was what hurt. For 15 years at one spot and then they used like, "No we don't want you." For no good reason, no good reason at all other than they want you to close your program and then you are 25 years in another spot with no salary almost and they are like, "We don't want to play anymore." You are like, "My God!" That is why the organization I have now is called Pancho Claus Art and Education Project so I figured if you name it after yourself it is harder to get the boot!

NG: So that is what you are involved in now?

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RR: Pancho Claus Art and Education Project. It is very minimal. It is very small. I'm resisting getting a 501C(3) but we are getting such good donations, we go under Meca right now that I have to get a 501C(3). I don't like dealing with boards but I will have to get a board but it is going to be very small. Everybody wants a big board, 20 people but that's just 20 people that the odds are you are going to have two or three trouble makers, you know? So I have no grandeur...however that saying goes.

NG: Allusions of grandeur?

RR: Allusions of grandeur. You know they are opening up a culture center, a community center right here on the north side Lionel Castillo. People are ready to retire... I don't want none of that. Ripley's has asked me to be the culture... I don't want none of that anymore. You know in my old age I like playing my music. I still like working with the youth. I start working with Richard Treviño's program and stuff. But I am getting more like I perform myself. I think the band this year is going to be all year round. We are going to make a little... I got a little grant to make a little deal and go to senior citizens homes and sing like Spanish songs or songs they know. We got a lot of requests, for years we got requests to keep the band going all year around, like at blues clubs and stuff like that and I might just be selfish enough to do that now, you know? There is only so much you can do. I mean I had a heart attack last year and it was in the papers all the TV stations. The hospital didn't know what was going on. There were two stations all in the hall. The way I like to say it, I went to L.A. for a year and a half. When I came back, the day I was going to leave I got put in the hospital. They thought it was a heart attack but it wasn't but I was there three weeks. I was in the heart ward for about a week. Then the next year three trees fell on my house. I lost everything because

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the roof caved in, the fireman's wouldn't let me in and all my clothes were got. I had an office just like this, you know, tuners, practicing, computers and there were... they actually said all that stuff from clothes to that were luxury items. I got I think \$800 from FEMA. Then last year I had a heart attack and then this year for some reason a big old heavy pipe like that, I have an office at Taxi Fiesta, the pipe fell through the roof and all the fluorescents... I've been telling everybody so I'm done. I think I've had all my bad luck. I think if you want to hang around somebody it would be me because I already had the heart attack and been to the hospital, the roof falling in the house, you know. The roof falling in that office. So I'm kind of like, I just don't have the stamina. I get offered good money because there's not a lot of people that want to work with gangsters, you know. And I get offered good money to continue doing it but I just pick and choose. I'm choosey of who I work with. For instance the youth detention center, I know a little lady there over the year. She is like, "Come and work with us." They don't pay but I go. It's like 8 African Americans, 2 Anglo kids and 1 Latino kid. I'm like, "I can't do this."

"What are you racist or what?" "It's not that I'm racist it's that my expertise is working with Latino kids and telling them about their culture and all the people that sacrificed for them. And the contacts and networking that I have they can help them like Said, Aviso, Meca, Ripley... that is where... I'm worth that to these kids. I have these contacts and these connections and this knowing and I don't do these other kids. The other kids don't care who Pancho Claus is they've never heard of him. They are from Cleveland or whatever, Spring and I said, "It's a waste of everybody's time. There's 10 kids I could help that you're not bringing to me because you can't do it." So I'm just a little bit more picky know. It just doesn't make sense. I used to do stuff like that all the time. I was

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working with girls at Bailin for about a year and a half knowing that I shouldn't have been doing that. It was just a big... but I was just going with the flow. But in your older years you get a little bit more choosey. You still help people but you are a little bit more selfish. I wrote a play working with 10 actors. How many people are we going to impact in our community about colorectal cancer that is curable? You just take a screening test and find it fast and it's a cheap test \$50 and most insurance pays for it. But our community doesn't know about it. It's the second killer among men and women, cancer killer you know. It's just not a glamorous cancer, you know. So I know I can help people. Going and singing for senior citizens. That is selfish because I'm going to perform. But I know seniors they sit there every day going to the center playing Bingo. It's nice to have somebody come in. They have seen me perform at the George Brown with a big show. It's funny one year ago they were there with senior citizens. There were like two or three thousand seniors there. They are all sitting there looking at this show. They got to be there five hours and they have the silliest people on stage, an Elvis impersonator that is a heavy weight woman. But when it's our turn to perform they know, they are used to us. As the band plays the first song they crowd the stage. It's like I don't know like 300 in front of the stage. They appreciate us. We play oldies and swing music. So I know they will like us coming to their centers. They already know us. I still work with some kids in jail and stuff like that. I still get letters and I write people but I'm slowing down a little bit. I'm going to be 60.

NG: You don't look like you are going to be 60.

RR: Well I am going to be 60 and you can just only run so far. I've been beat up. I've had my tires slashed. I've been... I was in a play at Stages and this gang got a hold of me

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and I was so swollen up. They held the play and they told the audience that I had just been in a car accident because they didn't want to tell them what I did. So it's enduring you know. You have to have some endurance to do this work. That's why it is hard to find people to do it.

NG: Well I think that's it is there anything else that you think that is important to mention?

RR: No you asked real good questions.

NG: Okay well thank you.

RR: Thank you.

End of interview

