

Interview

with

HELEN RIVAS

August 18, 2006

by Sarah Thuesen

Transcribed by Karen Meier

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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TRANSCRIPT - HELEN RIVAS

Interviewee: Helen Rivas
Interviewer: Sarah Thuesen
Interview Date: August 18, 2006
Location: Offices of The Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama,
Birmingham, Alabama
Length: Approximately 1 hour, 23 minutes

START OF CD

ST: Today is August 18, 2006. My name is Sarah Thuesen. I am interviewing for the Southern Oral History Program, our Long Civil Right Movement Project. Today I am in Birmingham at the offices of HICA [Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama] with Helen Rivas. Thanks very much for sitting down with me today.

HR: You're welcome.

ST: Generally we like to get just a little bit of general background information. I just thought I would start with that. Could you tell me just a little bit about growing up in California? What did your parents do out there?

HR: My father was from Oklahoma and he migrated in around 1939, I think, to California where my grandfather had a hotel. A lot of his aunts and uncles and siblings of my grandfather had migrated there. They were not dustbowl refugees. They were city folk. Anyway, they wound up in the San Francisco Bay area in California, many of them. My mother came to Los Angeles at age two. She was born in Vancouver and grew up in Oakland and met my father. I was born in Oakland and at age one moved to Berkeley

where I grew up, went to school, Kindergarten through college, left shortly after college graduation.

I was a Spanish major and was offered a job with the government. They promised to send me to Latin America because I spoke Spanish. That happened. I wound up in the embassy in Guatemala, a year in Washington, then three years in the embassy in Guatemala. Then I married a Guatemalan, became an English teacher. We spent some time in Montreal and Cleveland, three years away while he did a specialty in anesthesia, returned to Guatemala for five years.

When we left there I was principal of a bilingual secretarial school and came to Alabama. I interviewed about becoming a--getting a teaching credential, realized that on a teacher's salary I couldn't pay the mortgage and get the kids educated. I got a degree in computer science which I then, after graduation in '84, '85, I guess, maybe '83, I worked at the University of Alabama at Birmingham for about five years.

In '89 went into business for eleven months with a bipolar person. It was a terrible experience, supplemental staffing of registered nurses. Then I went back to school to finish my masters in anthropology, working in the Mayan community in Guatemala, which relates to what happens here. Finishing that up, I actually worked for a short time in clinical research. Then, realizing I didn't really like sticking people with needles and would really rather mess with minds, I went back for a teaching credential, my nest now being empty and got a degree, MA, in teaching English to speakers of other languages, called MA TESOL.

I did not start to work there. That's when, about that time I got a call from a woman who said, a public health nurse, a girl sixteen had a baby, been abandoned by the

father and needed some help. So when I hung up the phone I realized I don't know how to go about doing this. I called Shelley Douglass who runs Mary's House. She's with Pax Christi which is a Dorothy Day Catholic Workers project. She and her husband, Jim are well known area peace activists. Jim has also written a book about his experiences in Bosnia. Anyway, so I called Shelley and said, "Shelley, this has happened and I need to find help for this girl. I realized I don't know where to start. I'm not a social worker." She said, "You are now." This was about '98. I had known, since about '94, that there were a lot of Mayan Indians from Guatemala moving into northeast Alabama. I hadn't figured out a way to connect with them, was involved with the Alabama/Guatemalan partners of the Americas and some things, and had also, starting in '97, done some serious anti-racism work with the National Coalition Building Institute. Then became a co-mediator of the Southern Anti-Racism Network list, which is out of Durham and Kentucky, John Lindsay, who is in Louisville, in Lexington with a project called AWARE [Alliance Working to Achieve Racial Equality] and some other things and Teresa El-Amin; Tim Wise, who writes a lot on white supremacy and racism issues, a group of people--actually nationally--Ben Ho, an activist in New York, a performance artist; Lucy Murphy from Washington, DC; variety of folks, a couple of people here from Alabama too were involved. I had taken, the year before that, the Tides Center course that Sharon Martinez does on combating white supremacy. It tied in with my work with the Mayan Indians in Guatemala where I really began to understand racism. Being with the Maya and seeing the dynamics and sort of beginning to apply some of them here. All that came together, I guess. In '94 I'd received a call from Los Angeles to try to help them find two children. The mother had been killed in an automobile accident and the

grandparents got mother's remains and some paperwork and a check and no knowledge of the children. It was said that some woman said, "Well, I've taken care of them. They are mine now." That time I called the Department of Human Services and FBI and couldn't get anywhere. Now, I would know what to do immediately. That was a start.

With this young woman who had the baby I was put in touch with a militant Right to Life group called Showers of Blessings. They had done clinic picketing here but then the FACE Act was passed. The woman I met who brought me a bunch of stuff, her husband's an assistant district attorney, and he said, "You have four children. You're risking going to jail. Is that what you want to do?" About that time, evidently, some young woman was turned away from a clinic because she was offered clothing. They provide clothing and things. I, who get called to Planned Parenthood sometimes to interpret, was hugged on Friday by a militant Right to Life who brought over a stroller, a crib, a bath and little bathing thing, one large storage tub, fairly big, full of clothes. There were some booties on top with a note that said, "Each stitch done with a prayer," and \$200 that kids had collected for a Lenten offering. This young woman did very well.

Suddenly, I began to get phone calls, so began to have some contact with the Mayan community here. Also, there's a woman here, Nancy Neal, who has an ongoing project with a group in Nahuala, Guatemala. She's had Mayan priests up. I remember going to a Mayan religious ceremony in Chandler Mountain of which is just north of here about forty-five minutes and walking through the woods in the autumn with--they were a couple--a man and a woman until they found the right spot which turned out to be a place in a dry creek bed where there was a hole where a turtle came out. Anyway, we set up shop there and he held a Mayan ceremony. Another day, I was at a home out in an

affluent suburb. We were sitting on the front lawn drumming with a bunch of United Church of Christ people. It was very interesting. I also studied Mayan religion. It interested me and Mayan women and how religion and education tied in with identity. Then the things around health care and then somebody had a problem with--it was still INS, and making phone calls, doing things.

Shortly after that, about '99 or 2000, I took an interpreter's course with the State Department of Public Health and Troy University and got certified as a medical interpreter. HICA was founded around that time. I was on the founding board of the Hispanic Interest Coalition. About a year or two into that, the Latinos Unidos de Alabama was formed which was more into advocacy and working with youth. HICA was more at coordinating resources and other things at the time. HICA has now transformed into doing more things. I was on the HICA board for a couple of years, as well as working with the Centro Cultural. We had a couple of Cinco De Mayo fiestas and various other things. We almost got a driver's license bill passed in 2004 but didn't quite make it. There are multiple political and other reasons, in part the session ended. Then I realized the following year, the animosity was rising with the anti-immigrant sentiment was so high that it wasn't going to happen. Mainly it's been a defensive action which I'm not at all happy with blocking bills rather than something more positive.

Currently, I'm very much involved in just working for comprehensive immigration reform. The state level initiatives are mean spirited. They're ugly. They're inefficient. They're unconstitutional. They're just a pain in the backside. They are often racially motivated as well as there are just folks that are very much by the book and are looking at the what at the immigrant here and not into the why. Why are people here?

My time span in the Mayan community in Guatemala, well in '91 and '92 and several other, '94 and '97, '98, I became closely tied to the community of Tecpan, Guatemala. I have a piece of land at Iximche which is the old Cakchiquel Maya capital. It was the first Spanish capital. It's a botanical garden on Mayan principles. I have two associates who are Maya. She is a Maya, a Mam Maya from San Pedro San Juan Sacatepequez San Marcos in the pacific down slope of Guatemala. He is Cakchiquel Maya from Tecpan. They now have a small publishing house. She's also working with the president's wife's group. She's done with women's issues. She's also previously been involved in domestic violence work. They've produced five sons, all boys.

My ex-husband is Guatemalan. I was married to a Guatemalan from 1967 until 1990. My children were born there and identify as both Guatemalan and US citizens, though I say the Gringo side is stronger. I was just coming back from Tuscaloosa this morning. My granddaughter learned to say cepillo when she saw my electric toothbrush. They realize some of their heritage. I am WASP. I have no Latino background. I learned Spanish because a friend of mine, when I was in elementary school, a Mexican family, moved to our area and went to my church. Spending time at their house it was very frustrating not to know what they were saying.

ST: I was wondering how you got interested in that.

HR: That's how I started Spanish. Then just found that I like languages.

ST: I wanted to ask you a couple of follow up questions on some stuff you've mentioned. It's good overview.

HR: I'm sorry if I was talking too fast.

ST: No. It's good to get kind of a broad outline of the things you've been involved in. How do you think growing up in California, maybe early on, shaped your thinking about race and ethnicity?

HR: That's interesting because that's something I was just thinking about this morning, related to something totally different. We were just used to diversity, though I have to say my background is quite WASP. There were a lot of things I didn't understand about racial and ethnic interactions. Generally it was a positive kind of situation. At one point, I was in high school when our neighbors (he was a professor at the university) sold their house. A red-haired woman, who my father looked out the window one day and said, "Oh, Mrs. Wilson has a house boy." It turns out that was Mr. Wilson. I didn't learn until many years later, Berkeley, California, where you would think not, real estate folks there steered black people to certain neighborhoods. Actually, this one was not quite where they were steering people. They moved in next door. We saw them. It wasn't a lot of contact. One neighbor sold their house. Otherwise there was not much. Actually, the funny part was that they moved when he was appointed a federal judge. They moved to a better neighborhood. I thought that was funny. Ours was solid middle class. Well, we had Mrs. Cutter of Cutter Laboratories down the street in a really fancy place. It was a mix of things. When my parents bought our house it was in very bad shape. It was quite reasonable. My dad was an electrician at the university. He worked at the radiation lab. My mom was a housewife. We were among the few working, blue collar income families, though I think my dad's salary was probably better than a school teacher's at the time.

ST: You had mentioned he was unionized.

HR: Union. Oh yes, yes.

ST: That probably raised his salary compared to high school teachers.

HR: Compared to other things, yeah.

ST: I'm curious. You were growing up in Berkeley in the '60s.

HR: Well, actually I grew up in Berkeley in the '50s and was in college when the '60s hit. I graduated--. Well the last major political upheaval thing that happened when I was there was the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It was in its last days. They came to San Francisco. I remember there was a list of sixty-four people arrested. I realized I knew half of them, including Evelyn Einstein, granddaughter of Albert, she went to Berkeley High School; Mariam Abamowich who was a singer, she may still be a singer, her father was a concert pianist; and Doug Walkter whose parents were communist party organizers in the docks. Doug, he was a high school classmate, never heard political talk from Doug in high school. It was sort of amazing. I'm going oh how interesting. I wasn't particularly political that way. I was on the newspaper. I was one of the crass capitalist on the advertising staff which paid my way to Mexico for two summers, to Guadalajara to summer school. I dated a Mexican architectural student who didn't speak any English, wonderful way to learn another language to want to communicate with folks who can't speak yours. After that second trip is when I went to Washington. When I mentioned Lionel Wilson, the Wilson's living next door, then when they moved they kept the house but they rented it. We had a first group of British with one Czech grad students. Before that we had some Filipinos. They had parties. It was fun. I remember going out to dinner once with one of the Filipinos. He was a nice guy. It was just dinner nothing else. I thought it would annoy my dad but it didn't. There was

interracial dating going on. It was no big thing in California. Of course, we considered ourselves so superior to the South.

ST: I was going to ask you, you were probably watching Birmingham on the TV news during this time.

HR: Yes, it was horrible.

ST: What impressions were you drawing about the South?

HR: That those people were hateful, ugly, nasty, stupid, dumb people, I mean southern stereotypes, even though my dad was from Oklahoma. Yeah, I was into that. If someone had told me back then that I would wind up in Birmingham I think I would have gone and jumped off the bridge. It's just inconceivable. I remember when my husband said, "How would you like to go live in Birmingham?" I go, "Alabama!" I actually came up--. The anesthesia department was recruiting. I took my kids to Disney World. This was 1980 in July. They paid my way up. I was amazed. It was a quite pleasant place. Birmingham was not exactly what we thought of it in California.

ST: So you moved to Birmingham in 1980, is that right?

HR: Yeah. August 27. We are coming up on next week it will be exactly twenty-six years.

ST: Your first impressions of the city defied some of the stereotypes?

HR: Trees. Some, yes. We came in and we actually got here the 28th. We left Guatemala the 27th but the plane had problems. It was after midnight when we got here. A cousin of my husband's, Mercedes Marbach, who has lived here since '77, her husband took a job. He repaired all sorts of computer and fax and other equipment for the *Wall Street Journal* and so sort of traveled around the southeast doing that. Eventually he got

laid off about five or six years ago. He's now a TSA inspector. He's there checking your luggage at the airport. Mercedes has worked at a camera shop forever. Anyway, we stayed with them for a couple of days.

The first thing we did, practically, once we went out when we were out--we started going out looking for some places. We'd actually arranged to stay in a town home owned by a Guatemalan in Inverness, which is in Shelby County about thirty five minutes south of here down Highway 280. We stopped at Rich's in Brookwood Village which is another shopping center there, to get my son a teddy bear because he had not brought any of his stuffed animals. He needed one. I remember we were in this children's department and there were two little girls there. They looked like they were maybe seven, eight years old, make-up, little fur wraps, and of course it was August. I was just appalled. The whole beauty pageant thing, that was something. It happened in Guatemala but that was Guatemala but to see that. Then soccer, I was delighted. Yeah, one of the stereotypes, football. We didn't know. The woman in Guatemala whose condominium we rented, Betty Whitbeck, and actually her husband, Harris, was Vice President of Guatemala, '82, '83 under Rios Mont, the dictator. They were involved with Partners of Americas. My children were at the American school with one of her children. At a birthday party I said, "I'm going to Alabama. I'm going to Birmingham. I know you're from Alabama." She said, "Well, I'm from Birmingham." Actually she was from Bessemer and had met her husband at Auburn. I came out of her house which looked like Arlington House, our antebellum house here only in a reinforced steel and concrete version. We left with a bunch of *Southern Living* magazines. "Oh, you'll get there just in time for football." I thought that was a very odd thing to say until I got here. Then

discovered that football was it. To find out that they actually had soccer was a big thing here. I was really delighted. Once one of my sons said, "Mom, I'd like to go out for football this year." I said, "Football and motorcycles are not negotiable." They both played soccer all through school. My younger son actually became a cyclist. He continued soccer but less somewhat. My older son played all through school. He went to the University of Chicago, played there, came back to graduate school at UAB and got a PhD in cell biology. He played with a team called the Dinosaurs until he left to go to Pennsylvania where he went to law school after he finished down there. Then he toured some things and is no longer playing soccer. There were southern stereotypes.

One thing I liked was southerners have manners. I think we are very nice and polite. Gradually I figured out often there's subtleties there that go right by outsiders. I actually have a good time watching southerners run rings around Yankees or Californians or people from outside who come in with certain attitudes. They are just appalled. In fact, there's somebody right now in a meeting I sit at once a week whose outrage is tremendous around health care and other social issues. We're listening to him and yes, yes, we understand that. But he doesn't understand how complicated and difficult it is to fix things. There's that tension. I think that it's still new for--as I've been reading, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, those are places that are used to immigration. Now, it's happening in places where folks are not used to it. You have this influx of people. Here in the South, first of all it was the influx--. I know they said it was air conditioning that's what has made the difference here. It's brings in a lot more folks. One, you have a lot of Yankees which I remember about twenty years ago reading a piece by Greg Pence whose a philosophy professor at UAB, saying that for instance the Evolution/Creationism

debate hinges more on the fact that Yankees came in here and it's seen as an outside thing. Yeah, there's a religious thing but it's really also about expressing southern identity. I think that several of these issues this is a part of it. Yes, church and religion but I think the political religious demagogues have really pushed the issue a lot.

ST: I'm curious, one more question about when you came here in 1980. Did you find that non-Hispanic whites were accepting and including of your husband?

HR: Yeah. As far as any outsider. He was an anesthesiologist, so he was a doctor. That puts him somewhere. He was earning a good salary. Our kids were in private school, Altamont here which I'm glad because they just sort of walked in and were pretty much accepted. My son, Daniel, when he was writing his college essay wrote something. Oh yes, I read it because my kids didn't learn to type right away. They had to put up with me typing the stuff until I made their life so miserable they learned to type. I was commenting on it. You said here you were discriminated against because you were Guatemalan. I said, "I don't believe that." He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, what?" He said, "So and so" and named one of his classmates. I said, "No, he just didn't like you." Now, looking back on it, I realize that I probably shouldn't have dismissed that so much. My sons look like me. Their dad looks Mediterranean maybe. He had brown hair, green eyes, slightly yellow skin, tans well but you couldn't tell there were Mayan Indians in his background. He looks pretty European. His English was excellent, both he and his sister went to the American School and they speak incredibly idiomatic colloquial, standard English. Also, he came here as a professional. He already had his sense of who he was, basically put him into the elite. He came from the rising middle class but I would say the fact that he went to the American School, then he became a doctor. He then specialized

first at McGill University and at University Hospitals of Cleveland which is Case Western Reserve which both have prestigious anesthesia programs or they did at the time. I don't know now. And board certified, etcetera, gave him certain level, plus he's darn good at what he does and respected. That was at UAB.

Now when were in Montreal I remember them talking about the camel corps, the head of the department and his wife. I said to my husband one day, "What do they call you? You and the other Latinos? The wetbacks?" There was probably some but not major. There was also--and also my husband was never very sociable. Even when we were living in Guatemala, after we were married. I was teaching at the binational center. I went to the parties. He stayed home and was studying. He was still in medical school at first. It was not your traditional thing. He usually drives a pick-up, parks it among the Mercedes, Beemers, and the Porsches in the doctor's parking lot. We lived in Homewood which is a nice solid middle class community. It was full of World War II veterans. It's become a little more upscale. In fact, it's a place I wouldn't want to live in now. We lived under our means. We did not live in a house, and in fact one of my son's classmate's mother said, "You know, Jim has sort of decided against medicine after seeing that not all doctors live that way." There were at least fifty Guatemalans here, probably more. Most faculty here at the university, there was a couple of dentists in business. There was an architect name Oscar Waldheim who'd been here forever. For instance, Harris and Betty Whitbeck back the Alabama Guatemala partners had been around since the Alliance for Progress in Kennedy in '61, '62 and Alabama and Guatemala were tied together. There was a lot going on. The university just had a lot of foreign physicians. Probably there was some I suspect. If we wanted to join the

Mountain Brook Country Club or Birmingham Country Club we wouldn't have been allowed in. But that not being--. If I had had a daughter I doubt she would have been a debutante. Those were not--.

ST: Priorities?

HR: Yeah, not priorities. Not something that we never cared about. Also, we went to the Catholic church. I'm not Catholic but we went to Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows. We weren't Baptist. Then I'm from California. So that makes us outsiders in a way. One of the best pieces of advice I received was from a native of Memphis who was a friend in Washington. We worked in the same office in Washington, DC. Then one day she showed up in Guatemala. My husband came home and said he'd taken out the tonsils of this kid and he named him. I'm going oh yeah. We were friends while they were on their tour in Guatemala. She said, "Let me tell you about living in the South." She said, "Don't go into an old established neighborhood. Go where there are other new folks coming in." She was right.

Initially, where we were in Homewood was an old established community, mostly World War II veterans and their families. Then the young families started coming in. There were some--. My children swam on the Homewood Swim team every summer, but did not go to the schools. I didn't feel, even though Homewood schools were considered among the best here, they are not good enough. I wanted my kids to be able to function anywhere in the world. My older son as you can probably infer is pretty bright. My younger son is also bright but he has to work harder. He is a doctor. He is working family medicine and mostly emergency room in Tuscaloosa now. If he had gone to the

public school I think that he would not have gotten small classes and the individual attention and done as well. He might have had a whole different outlook on life.

ST: Getting a little bit more specifically to your work on immigrant rights and just more generally your work in the Latino community here, I'm curious whether you feel like there is a particular moment or maybe an event that stands out in your mind as a moment when you realized there really was sort of a new insurgent movement here--?

HR: Insurgent?

ST: Growing perhaps is a better word.

HR: Surging is.

ST: A movement here centered on immigrant issues.

HR: The actual movement centered on immigrant issues is very young and new. Actually this past April 9th I would say is when I said, "Yes, finally" because '98, '99 things were going on. I began to see things. There were few lawyers and had some contacts and was doing some things. I was doing an awful lot of direct services stuff. HICA finally got into more of that. I'm trying to remember when the multicultural-- The Multicultural Resource Center started in 2003, I think or end of 2002. In '98, '99 there were some efforts. It was more a public health, service providers and then also a few folks.

One guy set up an organization that was going to be an umbrella for all these groups. It really was he goes around taking credit, finding these groups, pulling them under his umbrella and taking credit for what they did. It's been a mix. I became aware of --. Let's see. There's some activity in the wiregrass which is southeast Alabama, Dauphin, a little bit down there. Mobile, not a lot of contact with what's going on. Then

north Alabama, northeast Alabama, the Collinsville, Gadsden, Fort Payne area has a lot of Guatemalans. There are also Mexicans but Guatemalans coming because of the sock factory and the chickens plants, coming both from Indiantown in Florida and from Los Angeles. Those ethnic groups are Kanjobal, Quiche, and some Mam Maya mostly. I've also met Aguacateco, Chuj speakers, Sacapulteco, and Guatemalans who are what you called Ladinos not Mayan. The immigrant community itself has not organized until really now. We are seeing stirrings of it. Documented immigrants are not that many. There was a coalition in Tuscaloosa which lasted for a while but then the people doing it moved on. There was not enough there. Huntsville, now, has had--because I think of Redstone Arsenal and NASA--has had a large Latino community, predominantly Puerto Rican for decades. I have a friend here, Arlene (), who was born in--I don't know if she was born in a hospital--. She finished up. Her dad may have retired. Her parents, her father was military. Her mother still lives in Huntsville. Her father died about ten years ago. There is a well organized Latino social group but it is US Citizens or legal residents. It is professional or relatively privileged set. It is not the minimum wage workers. There has not been much of a movement there. Besides Huntsville, Oneonta, Javier Morales and Project Aprende, they've been around now close to ten years. Javier was here with East Coast Migrant Head Start, so Project Aprende sort of separate thing. I don't know if I mentioned Juan Vargas in Gadsden who still is on the board of East Coast Migrant Head Start. I would say the Project Aprende folks, the folks in Oneonta were the first actual grassroots immigrant-driven group. Now Javier is ()--he's from Texas. His wife () is from Mexico. She's teaching in the school right now, teaching Spanish. They had some sense of organizing and grassroots work rather than say the

social group in Huntsville which has parties and dances, which nothing wrong with that. I'm all for that. There's also some of that here. I don't know that they are officially organized but the doctors at UAB and other folks, the Latino professional have always had also a group before we got here. We were plugged into that some. As I said, my husband didn't socialize a lot. It wasn't heavy. When we divorced, which was sixteen years ago, I still maintain contact with some. In fact, my dentist is Guatemalan. He was going to return to Guatemala but his brother-in-law was murdered and while he and his wife were there he decided not to. They've stayed and finished raising their four children. The youngest of which is about to graduate from college. The others are in their twenties finishing up grad school and other things.

In Albertville, which is about an hour north here close to Gadsden, and in Gadsden there is some organizing. Juan Vargas is involved in with the Gadsden organizing. Some of it goes with the Catholic Church. I don't know if the Baptist or some of these evangelical groups have done that much. Organized groups, quietly organized, for instance the Church of Christ Maya, in Athens. I spent New Years 2004/05 at their New Year's Party. It was one of the most wholesome New Year's Parties I've ever been too. We had horchata which is a rice cinnamon drink and tamales and other foods, played games like Pin the Tail on the Donkey. It was multi-generational. I left about one or two in the morning and they were still going. This is a Maya group from Quiche mostly from the towns of (). One of the things is that people are from the same community. I met those folks.

Now three years ago there was some organizing going on about this time because of the treatment of Marta Alonso, A-L-O-N-S-O, who she is a Quiche Maya from the

town of Joyabac, sent here when she was fourteen, fifteen, got involved with a guy who turned out to be married, but not before she got pregnant. He abandoned her or the wife showed up and said give us the baby. She said, "No, I want my child." She was seventeen and went to work one day, came home and found her baby gone. The baby had scabies and the Department of Human Resources or DHR had picked up the baby, taken him to the hospital. In the emergency room they said this is scabies, do this, do this that's all. There was a doctor's wife and another woman there and there was a lot of whining, crying and insistence and pushing, so the baby was in over night. In the morning the baby went home with one of these women. Marta was sent home with Dr. Ernie Hendrix who was the physician who delivered the baby and who had actually been looking after her. They did have a problem with scabies which is one of the casualties of chicken plant work. Javier had been re-infected and he did need--. Marta was not real clear about how to do the medicine. She had not refrigerated. Not refrigerating the medicine is not enough reason to take a child away. This quickly became--. I don't think--. A Columbian woman who knew them called DHR. Later she lived to regret that. DHR came and took the child, as I say.

ST: About what year did this happen?

HR: 2003. I did have huge numbers of files which I may still have some of. Yeah, 2004. I backed up a lot of stuff and separated out. I have a lot of the history of that if you want it. I can send it to you.

Dr. Henries called me and I finally figured out how he got my name. He called the Guatemalan Console in Miami and I had been at a mobile consulate in Boaz, the first time the Guatemalan Consulate came. They had thousands of people. It was incredible.

I walked into the Snead College community campus just to see the sea of Guatemalans. I was just amazed. I said it really hit me just how many people were here. They come from all over the place. Anyway, also her sister was living in Montgomery where my daughter-in-law was. Their children were at preschool together. Those things sort of reinforced. Called me in Birmingham. I sort of had a reputation of connecting folks and doing things. So I got involved. Quickly learned the Department of Human Resources is a monolith and this was not going to be easy to undo. We had Catholic Family Services involved. We had a wonderful lawyer up in Decatur, Clint Brown who took it on as Atticus Finch sort of thing. He looks more like Hal Holbrook, things distinguish southern gentleman. He fought for her. We tried to have it--. Marta tried to name him her lawyer and she couldn't. They kept saying she was lying about her age. She was really fourteen not seventeen. Anyway, out of that a Free Marta Committee grew and publicity happened. Ernie Hendrix, the doctor wrote a letter to the *Athens News Courier* and so the lid was off then. We had been trying to fix things quietly. It was a real eye opener for me. It took until November 18 to get her (or 17th, 18th) to have her reunited with her child. It took up six to eight hours of my day for months. It goes on. It's a soap opera. There's more. The upshot of it now is that Marta had a green card which DHR got for her. She and Javier were reunited and she's now married to a nice man whom I met at a mobile consulate in June and has another baby. She's now doing the paperwork for her husband to get him stuff. The foster mother who thought she was going to adopt the baby and whom she and the baby eventually wound up living with, her husband introduced himself to me at this mobile consulate. I have never--. I had conversation with her on email. There was a Free Marta list. We had several hundred people on the list plus

thousands more looking on and millions more informed. That did stop it. It was just bad. I've heard stories which I've been able to substantiate, some in Jefferson County that I really would like to find out about, about adoptions. A woman with a lot of power, under a previous director, there's a new director and she is making some changes. What I say refers to the institution of a couple of years ago. I'd say it's much more positive now. Termination of parental rights and taking kids, Latino babies away and putting them into American families is something that's happened.

ST: Was Marta's baby returned to her?

HR: Yes. First of all they violated so many rules. You are supposed to keep mother and child together. The plan from the beginning was to deport her and have Javier, the baby, adopted by this nice white, Baptist family. That woman is a nut case. What disturbed me though is she is employed by DHR in Limestone County. I spoke to people in the state office about my concerns. I said this woman's email, she wrote under several pseudonyms but we had a couple of geeks and nerds and hacker, tweeker type folks on the list and they quickly traced emails back to her. A missionary in Guatemala was part of our group actually has a file. We have information on her. To me, it's unconscionable that a person is willing to take another woman's child that way. There was a right wing talk show host from WVNN which is a radio station that Sean Hannity got his start at, right wing commentator. She was going and I remember getting a call from her early on and saying, "Why do you think this happened?" I said, "The only thing that I can say is it must be 1850 and we're living on the plantation." It was sheer we can do it. We can get away with it. Who cares about these Indians anyway? That was one--. At the Vice President of the Libertarian Party was one our folks, we had Native

Americans. We had African Americans. It was one of the best coalitions I've ever been a part of. We had some Guatemalans. We had some immigrant folks involved too. We stuck to our topic, didn't get distracted very much. We had people who had a lot of experience dealing with human resources. We basically by just keeping the light on things, had this--. We had this demonstration November 8th. November 7th DHR published some "facts"--I'm doing quote marks there--that were appalling, including--. Well, they suspected abuse. The reason for that was Javier was born with a Mongolian spot which most babies, African American, Latino, Asian babies, a lot of folks have that. I remember checking with my son who early in medical school he knew about that. He didn't know about it from his Guatemalan experience because he was too young when we came from Guatemala here. He knew about it too. And some other things, it just made them look more stupid. There was the issue on language.

By the end of September I got a call from the director of Human Resources who said, "Would you be on our state quality assurance committee for DHR? We need to work better with--. We need to do a Latino study." I agreed. We did this Latino study. It took a while. Now we're just barely into implementing it. Lots of recommendations about cultural and other issues for the Department of Human Resources and how they worked with families and things. I have witnessed changes. I've seen efforts to keep families together. I've seen people call to ask questions, seen a real sincere desire on the part of folks to do the right thing. There also is racism classes and other stuff and failure to understand things. One of the things too is educating the community as to how to live in the United States. If you read what If the Spirit Moves and We All Fall Down about the Hmong, similar kinds of stuff. People who were working shifts and one of them was

late, kids that were left at home, the UPS man or the FedEx man comes to the door, kids are alone, kids are removed. I remember sitting in on one where I could tell that the more mature supervisor was saying--thinking about his young case worker--you shouldn't have done this. You should've just taken care of it. So to warn people you can't leave your children alone. Kids can't wonder around here in an urban setting the way they did in the country back home, both Mexicans and Guatemalans. The school, what you need to know. That you do have rights. As much as some folks say no, that you do have rights. You can't vote and other things. But any human being in this country is protected by the constitution. We just, unfortunately, have to keep telling people that. I'm way off track now. I can't remember what your question was.

ST: I had originally asked you about whether there was a moment when you felt like there was a recognizable movement here?

HR: I say that was one movement. Free Marta was one where more of us were together. This brought in some folks and we expanded. With human resources, I became a resource. Actually some of us connected. I began to learn--and I'd already been in touch with people in other cities. This helped. For instance, personally it gave me some bona fides as far as being an ally of the community. That goes on. That was 2003. Before that there was stuff but it was mostly, again, the service providers and the upper middle class or the privileged folks doing stuff. We have people who've lived here for a long time and there's one woman who's lived here twelve, thirteen years, everybody goes to her. It's just like in the African American community, yeah, the dominant society here still calls on certain people here and they don't see other folks.

ST: Is this one woman Hispanic?

HR: Yes. This is the thing the majority, 80% or higher depending on where you are, are Mexican. Then Guatemalans are the next largest percentage. Then there are El Salvadorans, Columbians, Venezuelans. We do have growing numbers of Columbians, Peruvians, Venezuelans, some Argentineans. The head of English Languages for Birmingham schools mentioned that the Argentinean immigrants here all come from a working class suburb of Buenos Aires. It's a place where there was some toxic waste dumping and stuff. You got a lot of kids with some hyperactive learning disabilities. It would be a really interesting study for somebody to do. The majority are Mexican. I feel that we sort of need to first look there. The middle men with the community, Puerto Ricans. There was an Ecuadorian who set himself up as Mr. Latino. I mention another woman who--and they're both going the corporate route. You have professionals, lots of attorneys. The head of multicultural division at Alabama Power, Teresa Owen is a child of Mexican parents and identifies as a Mexican American. She's great. She's on the board of HICA. There are other folks. I remember there was a Puerto Rican woman here, oh wow, in fact I think read about her in the newspaper back--it had to be before I moved to south side in Birmingham in '95--so in '93, '94 reading about her and other folks. If people who spoke English and Spanish and were naturally already at a certain class level, it was, they just came in and they sort of were the folks that were called.

ST: They became the gatekeepers in a sense?

HR: Yeah. By '97, '98 I began to get calls from this. I remember a call from the *Birmingham Post Herald*. When the basketball coach, Wimp Sanderson, made a derogatory comment. He made a joke about Mexicans. He got into trouble for it and

somebody called me, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "I can't speak for the Mexican community," and referred him on. For several years I got a lot of calls from newspaper and press and other folks. Then, the past couple of years it's occasionally. Now, it's when--I did a television interview last week. It was about--I'm blanking on, oh yes--car insurance. Judges noticing people have driver's licenses but they're international, they're not--because Alabama won't allow this. I said, "Have you tried?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Okay, so I'm your last resort." He said, "Yes." I said, "Okay." When they can't and I feel comfortable I'll give an interview. If it's one where they are expecting me to speak for the community I won't do it. Almost always I can now find people, folks in my cell phone, folks on my lists, lots of people that they can talk to that can really better speak as far as a feeling from the immigrant community.

I would say, as I say, I really--It was just wonderful. I probably told you this when we talked on the phone. I was sitting in a room at the Old Grace Episcopal Church where HICA used to have its office. We were planning the march for April 9th in the park. I looked around the room and it hit me. I'm the only person in this room right now, beside Rich Stoltz from the Center for Community Change who was there sort of attending and he's working the We Are Democracy Project, we're the only ones in the room without any Hispanic heritage. I'm going whoa. We had Lorena Ramirez from Albertville, whom I mentioned, a young woman who's doing organizing. She organized the march that got 5000 people. She's twenty four. Fernando from here who's in his twenties. Hector Gonzalez, our Spanish language rapper. I've got his CD here in my purse. I haven't heard it yet, of the April 9th march. He's got music from it. His group's name is Baby Aztec. Lorena's husband is also a rap musician and has a music studio up

in Albertville. We've got a lot of businesses. You look in the paper and it looks like automobiles and stuff. Folks too, now it is getting so ugly and mean and that's why April 9th people turned out. They said, "Well, if we're going to be arrested or imprisoned or treated this way what have we got to lose." There's still a lot of folks that are scared.

ST: I was going to ask you whether the level of participation exceeded or fell short of your expectations?

HR: We would have liked to have had more people. You may have heard one of the radio stations, the personnel behaved--they sabotaged it. We had four to five thousand people here which is the largest agglomeration of people since the Civil Rights Movement. We had African Americans and we had Americans and large numbers of people, everybody waving American flags, Jose Pena of Estilo Latino, who is a Honduran who came here when he was in high school, donated two hundred hot air balloons with flags on them. We just had all sorts of stuff. We have four radio stations in the area, four or five, two newspapers, one's weekly and the other's biweekly. Then there's the employment one. There's a television program. You find signs in Spanish around. People now call and I've got three complaints against a law school student who's passing himself off as an attorney. You couldn't get anybody on record complaining before. We keep trying to let people know there is a separation still as much as they are trying to breach it, between immigration officials and the other parts of daily life here. I'm finding it very distressing these city ordinances. I fear, with the city ordinances like what they are proposing in Gadsden and they're doing a memorandum of understanding to have Gadsden City Police trained, I think it's unconstitutional but I don't know what's happening there. It is going to break down the relations built between the police and the

communities. It's short sighted and it's frustration. The folks in Washington, DC have to do it. The only representative pushing for comprehensive reform is Artur Davis, even Bud Cramer the other Democrat isn't doing much. Spencer Backus, I'm actually in his district, Sixth District, one of his aides told me two Thursdays back--we were at a downtown Birmingham breakfast briefing and I said something about comprehensive reform--"Oh, congressman's for comprehensive reform." I said, "Since when?" She said, "Read our web site." Well, I read and by comprehensive he means secure that border and once you've done that we'll look at everything else. That is not, I'm sorry my definition varies there. Backus and--you have Senator Sessions is probably one of the major thorns in our side, most hateful about this. He's taken up a position. He is Tancredo's analogue in the Senate. He's got good rapport with the law and order folks and he's got money to hand out. I think he's buying some of this. Don't say that for the next six months but after that you can quote me. I'm also distressed that the Alabama Democratic Party two days ago, did you see what they published?

ST: No.

HR: A covenant. The back page of the *Birmingham News* day before, no yesterday's *Birmingham News* has this thing. It includes something related to--yeah, not raising property taxes more than every four years and also something about education and some social issues. Then it talks about definition of marriage, abortion, immigrants, and life begins at conception, just pandering Republican like stuff, I would call it that is not really helpful. It doesn't show real wanting to address Alabama's problems. If we had tax reform or constitution reform, which would make tax reform easier, we would have a lot of our problems go away. We need public transportation so immigrants here are

really shafted. They have to get around. I don't think many folks realize how bad it is. We've had Katrina victims too, Americans going-- It's when we bought a house in Fultondale, just north of Birmingham and went out to catch the bus and no bus or once every six hours.

ST: I was curious how you see--you are already giving some hints as to how you see this but looking at this whole struggle who you've seen as your biggest allies and opponents? In particular how supportive has the civil rights community in Birmingham been, some of the older civil rights organizations?

HR: The SCLC sent a representative to our April 9th march. The NAACP I think would but it is a dysfunctional organization. The SCLC sent Darryl Wilson, who is a young--he's thirty-four--to speak. The Million More folks in the Nation of Islam sent a representative. They now have elected one of our new representatives and I facilitated connection between a group of Latinos and them. Right after the April 9th march we met. Several of the African American representatives are our allies. I wouldn't give out--I can give you their names but I would want that kept private for the moment.

ST: Sure.

[Tape turned off]

HR: As I say I don't want to name any--I'd appreciate it if you'd erase any ally names that appeared on the tape--don't want to cause them problems right now. It's a very tricky situation. There is a lot of reaching out. Part of the community says, "We remember what it was like and they're being treated the way we were." Others are saying they're taking our jobs. You've got the demagoguing-- I still remember talk radio hostess who sounded just like one of the hate radio people, there's a hate radio

show here I call, Russ and Dee Fine. This black talk show host sounded just like her. She was repeating a lot of the mythology that the anti-immigrant extremists repeat. The jobs one is the one that most resonates. Also, there's issues where, you know, you hear the if you are brown stick around, if you are black get back, that we're not getting-- they're doing all this stuff for immigrants. Now most of that is a lie. This is the new kid on the block and there are white folks that don't have a problem dealing with Latinos, just don't want to deal with blacks. You hear this racism and stereotyping in comments, "Well, these people work hard." "You can't get Americans to work hard." Occasionally you'll get someone who will slip and say the African Americans which is what they are saying. It's a delicate issue and one of my goals is more cross community collaboration and getting folks to talk to each other. Otherwise what happens is exactly what happened during Civil Rights. If you read Diane McWhorter's book *Carry Me Home*, there was dynamite Bob Chambliss growing up in a dysfunctional family, drunk dad, tubercular mother who died, being treated bad, hating black folks when it was really Henry DeBardeleben who was sitting on all this stuff. What fries my gourd is when I read in the paper about Margaret Tutwiler who is now I think she is ambassador to the Vatican. She's from Birmingham. She's a DeBardeleben. That was her grandpa. These folks on the backs of slaves and other folks are doing very well thank you. Now their analogue, sometimes it's the same folks but others are perfectly content to have that friction happening between black and brown or black, brown, white. Yeah, keep the folks at the bottom fighting. If we can work on coalitions, it would move us along. Greater Birmingham Ministries director, Scott Douglas, has been very good at supporting this. In fact, he called me. I didn't get the voicemail until this morning because I was in

Tuscaloosa. At sometimes my voicemail doesn't work right on my cell phone. To say that CSPAN had a program boarder patrol guy who was contradicting the Minuteman and other folks stuff. Actually I've heard David Aguilar, the border patrol, when asked back in July of last year, "What would you do--how would comprehensive immigration reform affect your work?" He said, "It would mitigate it 90%. I could then focus on terrorist drug dealers and others." I get very tired of the commingling of terrorism, immigrants, and others and so try to talk about people who just come wanting jobs. I think most folks do. What distresses me about the Alabama Democratic Party making this comment about protecting our borders is that they don't have to do that.

Oh yes, I talked to the pollster just over here nearby who does polling for the Democratic Party and for issues in nonprofits and other things. I asked him on Tuesday when he was talking about the polling results around Democratic candidates and stuff, I said, "Well tell me about the immigration issue." He said, "It's a wash. People are conflicted. Folks here are acting as if the majority hate immigrants." They are just pandering. It's George Wallace out-niggering Patterson once again. Pardon the language but that's what's going on in some places. I hope it comes back to bite them really hard. As an outsider, I often stay behind the scenes on certain issues because I don't want my favoring something or my praise for someone to cause a problem for them or their institution. I know I mentioned the Department of Human Resources, they have done some things related to immigrants that they didn't have to do but they did the right thing. They were fulfilling their mission of child welfare. I could see where one of these spin meister politicians could take some of the things they've done and use it against them.

ST: What about the labor community, labor organizations how have they been connected--.

HR: Shitty. Excuse me. That's all I have to say. I'm very disgusted with most of--. Well, let me make some exceptions, A. D. Thomas and the Pemco workers and some others. Otherwise labor has not been around. The Carpenter's Union is sort of interested in pulling folks in. They at least get it. They understand that they need to be pulling people in. It's the wage issue. I'm part of the Living Wage Coalition. If we are paying a living wage some of these jobs will be taken by Americans or immigrants are coming and getting the same wages and if we have reform they will not put up with it either. Some of these hard workers may turn out to be a little more uppity and difficult than they are right now. I don't think that the labor--. Labor in Alabama is beleaguered too. I feel sorry for labor. They have become--the unions that were earning high wages have become very moderate, conservative. They forget what it was like. I never forget that I got orthodonture. I got to the University. I didn't have to work my way through college. I did work because I wanted extra stuff, on union wages. I think about John L. Lewis and the folks in the thirties that got their heads bashed in and worse and what they did. These folks have been throwing it away some of them. Well, especially, maybe some of the leadership. Anytime I talk about corrupt union leadership I cringe. At the same time I also want to say why aren't we talking about corrupt corporate leadership? I would like to be working more with labor. What I've found is the unions that are involved with Living Wage--some of these things, sometimes Living Wage and other things don't really seem to get it. I would like to be able to--I know some of the unions are recruiting. Oh yeah, let me exempt the Food and Commercial Workers Union in this.

The building trades folks and I say, the higher wage stuff, I think that Mercedes plant. I don't think, well, they are not organized right. They didn't hold a vote for that. If they are well off, they seem to be—just as you hear some immigrants who are very opinionated about on undocumented folks—they got in and now they want to close the door as somebody said. I don't take back my--.

ST: Your argument. Do you think the Change to Win Coalition is going to push things in a different direction?

HR: Which Coalition?

ST: The Change to Win Coalition, the unions that broke away from the AFL-CIO.

HR: Oh, oh. Service workers. Probably. Now, I'm not in touch with those folks here. I don't even know. I think they are. I have met one person. I used to be active with Jobs With Justice but it's been a couple of years. We don't have a Jobs With Justice chapter here right now. I would like to see, because I think all workers need protection and I would like to see labor more unified and whatever the reasons are. I know the AFL-CIO from my anti-racism work, when they got rid of Bill Fletcher. I don't know if you're familiar with that.

ST: A little, yeah.

HR: And looking at Sweeney and stuff. He's not in touch. Somebody once said that the--. [Interruption].

ST: Okay.

HR: Let's see we were talking labor realizing that unity amongst all workers is important and it's not just getting yours. I remember thinking back as a child of union

person, looking at the automakers, General Motors. I mean I've always said why is General Motors telling us what kind of car we want. The auto workers there are doing very well. It's been going away. Some would say they've priced themselves out of it. I'd also say we have not supported American made stuff. I am concerned about the loss of manufacturing capability in this country. We're not making things and that where it is going people are being exploited there. I've been active also in the CAFTA/NAFTA Free trade stuff. In fact I have a letter to the editor that I needed to send in around the Peru thing, thanking Artur Davis for voting no on the Oman trade agreement and sort of encourage him to vote the same with the Peru agreement. Some of the other labor folks wouldn't do. Davis is seen as being APAC money and lots of banking money. However, his predecessor voted the right way most of the time but was corrupt. Davis is actually doing black belt initiatives and other things. He has spoken very strongly and consistently on immigration things. Well, we do have to say he voted for the real ID act which I'm not happy about and he knows that. You can call up his office and get some support. The other elected representatives, I know Bud Cramer up in Huntsville has helped people get Green Cards; he's helped people with paperwork. Mike Rogers seems to be somewhat Libertarian; he might be able to listen to something. It seems to be there's no punishment for bashing immigrants. I don't know how much of a benefit it is. People are worried about other things. This behavior is concerning me and that the immigrant and allied communities are still not strongly countering this stuff or working to change the dialogue to something else. Such as how do we fix the problem and to get folks to realize we can't build big enough jails or arrest and deport twelve million people. I don't know how much of this is being driven by the contractors who will be getting the

money. I know from talking just border fence and other things, that again it's the big companies. Senator Sessions is an unreconstructed racist no matter what he may protest and a good old boy. He's still mad at being called on that. I don't see any hope for changing him unless we can get somebody else elected. Susan Parker, who ran against him last time, got 44% of the vote but she got no support from the Democratic Party. What I would also like to see from the Democratic Party is more of the McCain/Kennedy approach rather than these folks here trying to sound like Tancredo and others. There's no need to be so extreme here. People are all over the place.

Going way back to a thread of about half an hour, forty-five minutes ago, talking about Alabama and people from north and from the west coming here, outsiders, with the immigrant it's another version of that. In numbers, I guess they've hit critical mass in some places. They are seeing, when you have one or two it's no big deal and you have day labor pools, folks standing there. You may have people living in ways that folks don't approve of and or doing things either because they don't know better or just don't care. You have some folks in the immigrant community that I would like to deport and send them home. Most are hard working and they're our neighbors and I try to speak that way. I always say undocumented and I say neighbors, hardworking people, folks looking for an opportunity. A lot of folks in Alabama understand my ancestors were immigrants. They came looking. This empathizing or understanding where people are coming from.

ST: Just by way of wrapping up. I wanted to ask you a couple of broad questions. How do you think Birmingham's history as sort of the epicenter of the black Civil Rights Movement has affected the immigrants' rights movement up to this point and maybe will shape it in the future?

HR: I'm hoping that the grown ups in Birmingham of all races and the African American community, there are a lot of folks both old Birmingham and younger folks who do understand and who do see the need to get together. I'm going to hope that those of us who want to work across the community and include everybody that we will prevail. It's the only thing that's going to work. I see a lot of the activity now. It's fear, sometimes corrupt police. Our Catch 22 laws, we won't give you busses but we expect you to have a driver's license. We don't want you to work here but, gee, we got this stuff that needs to be done. I got a thing this morning from some organization and it was talking about their agenda. It said no second class citizenship. It's for comprehensive reform and if you're good enough to come here and work you are good enough to be my neighbor. I would love to work with labor. We have not heard from union folks here at all, hardly. I find constantly when something happens or there's something, there's one or two folks like Al McCullough who understands is very well and A. D. Thomas and a few others, the director of Food and Commercial Workers, Elise Fox, but they're few and far between. There's a woman in Decatur too who is labor, who is also on that.

ST: Where do you see the movement standing maybe thirty years from now?

HR: Thirty years from now?

ST: Yeah, a generation from now in other words.

HR: Golly. Looking back on it the way we look back on the '60s, I think, I'm wondering if April 9th and 10th will be one of the watershed events or what it's going to take. I think that the community needs to be organized. One of the things I've been doing, I do some freelance translating. I had to take some documents back to a lawyer's office. There were various people there doing various immigration things. I just sat

down and chatted with them and told them that the community itself needs to be talking to itself, organizing because you can share information. If something happens to one person you can get the word out. You can try to get it publicize. You know what allies to call. I see right now we're beginning about coalition of allies and community. I really look forward by the end of this year, I've been pulling back a little bit to pull back more and become more of a grandma and do other things and think that there are some folks that have stepped forward. For instance, two young women down in Pelham who are sisters. They're from Texas, never in their life done everything. They organized a vigil for Montevallo, a church in Montevallo, on the first of May when the national effort was happening. At the last minute it looked like the place wasn't going to be there. They managed to contact city hall to do all sorts of things to have a back up plan. We didn't need it. They're folks that are working on this. We now have enough legal residents and citizens that it makes a difference too. Folks are willing to speak up. I think that the House did us a favor in one way or another on the Simpson Bill by raising the heat of the pot too fast. That got a lot of folks jumping out of that pot instead of boiling. I don't know. They say that Mexico's economy is going to be much better in ten years. People will start going back. We will be a majority minority country. There will be no majority. It's already happened in California and other places which I think scares white folks a lot. There's an attitude that I remember. I went to South Africa a few years ago. White South Africans, "Oh what are they going to do to us if they get power." I heard this from what was called a Ladino or Eurocentric Guatemalan taxi driver I talked to often who drove me around. One summer I got some sort of Hepatitis from food, a bacterial disease and couldn't drive. I was really sick, so I hired him to drive around. We had lots of

conversations. He said, "Some day I envision Guatemala with a Ladino president and a Maya vice president." I said, "Or vice versa." He said, "Oh no." I said, "Why not?" He said, "After what we've done for them they are going to want revenge." I mean the dominant group doesn't understand that the subordinate group just wants it to stop. You may somebody lashing back, backlash. We are actually having backlash, black/white community right now around some elections. Because it's in the Democratic Party, the Republican Party is fueling this quite nicely and sitting back and smiling like the Cheshire Cat. It just disturbs me to no end. What I'm hoping to see are really diverse coalitions of folks, coalesce around issues. I'd like to see the political parties become less relevant and it be more coalitions around issues anyway. It's harder to govern. Democracy's sloppy and messy anyways but that's two parties. We even subsidize their primary elections and things I don't think is right. Then when we get a Democratic Party like this current one which is all about getting elected then they-- You know one person said, "Well, you know, the perfect is enemy of the good." I'm wanting to say, "Around what you guys said on immigration and other things, where's the even good to this?"

ST: As a final question, what would you most like your kids or grandkids to remember about your own activism on this issue?

HR: That I made a difference. [Pause] I'm sorry that was an emotional.

ST: That's okay.

HR: I received and I have to give back.

ST: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to add?

HR: Well, that we have more folks speaking more than one language walking around, that people are comfortable with that which would help the United States become involved in the rest of the world in a more constructive way. If not, it's going to bite us too quite hard. That we have a more just society. I think what I hope I don't see is that racial and ethnic differences have become, have morphed into class or something else. I think it's a mammalian trait. We classify. You have to. You have to put people into categories or you can't function. When they become too strong and blind you to differences and possibilities and you operate only on stereotypes then you've got problems. I don't know down the road people who live, geographic divisions or religious or something like that.

I find one of the awful things is when someone in the Latino community here assimilate here they are taking on the worst elements of our society, whether it's religious intolerance. I saw in Guatemala the missionaries going in after the earthquake. Evangelicals came. Catholics were always pretty laid back; well there were some extremes but mostly pretty tolerant, live and let live folks. After the earthquake these folks began to push and so there was some pushing back. I didn't like that. I would like not to see that. As a religious liberal the folks who share some of my perspectives, we also must be tolerant--at least tolerant if not accepting, well respectful and tolerant of differences of folks. I just don't understand why these people think you can create the world in four days. I'd like to see a lot more dialogue. I don't like debates. I just hope that we have folks learning to get along with each other and that people that think that war and violence and force is the answer get drowned out by folks that have figured out that it's not the best thing. I hope that thirty years from now I could be around. I don't

know. My grandkids by then will be parents with families approaching middle age, that they are sharing their understanding. And that government is responsive and that just generally things are better.

ST: That's a--. I'm sorry did you want to add something?

HR: No, that's plenty.

ST: That's a good note to end on. Thanks again so much for sitting down with me.

HR: You're welcome.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by Karen Meier, October, 2006