

Interview with Letitia "Leti" Gomez
Interview by Sharon P. Doetsch

Interviewed on December 8, 2004, and January 5 and February 21, 2005

At Leti's home and at Leti's partner's home in Washington, DC

b. September 26, 1954
San Antonio, Texas

First Interview
December 8, 2004

LG: {00:00:10} Today I heard on Pacifica -- evidently last night in New York, there was a series of speakers or some sort of a forum held by Democracy Now -- and there was a fellow, and he's a journalist that wrote for the BBC and wrote an article in the *New York Times* -- or column for the *New York Times* for a while -- I guess it was the *New York Times*. And he talked about how in Ohio, there were 92 or 93,000 ballots that were discarded. And 150 some odd thousand provisional ballots that weren't counted, and they were mostly from African American voting districts. So basically it's saying, you know, if you're black, your vote -- you know, your vote gets discarded and, you know, I'm listening to this and I'm thinking, you know, "Why aren't we more pissed off about this?" And I look at, you know, the Ukrainians they're going on three weeks of protesting because they felt that that election was, you know, faulty, and they got it changed. Now they're going to have a new election. Well, what the hell were we doing in 2000? You know, I'm getting all worked up and then last week, you know, was World AIDS day and, you know, we had the Heroes exhibit and Pat Hawkins from the clinic was there and she said, "They're level funding Ryan White"-- you know, the Ryan White Care Act at a time when [there's] a rise in HIV/AIDS cases and, you know, it's just, I'm speechless and I think a lot of us are. Maybe that was the intent of the Right to just, you know, make it so hard for us or just overwhelm us that we're going to take it. And it's like, you know (laughter) -- just really just getting, you know -- like, I was kind of expecting the outcome of the election, and a lot of my friends were really upset. And I was upset, but the more I think about it, I guess I've been stewing on it. It's just like, all these things. Of all places, we should be marching in the streets. But we're not. We're --

SPD: It's the Christmas season. We're shopping.

LG: We're shopping, you know? We're spending, you know -- China owns most of our debt now. The dollar, I mean, we're going into hock big time, not just for the war but for who knows what other stuff, and, you know, China and Japan hold most of our debt. If they were to get pissed off at us for some reason, we'd be in -- you know, we'd be in big crisis and, you know, it remains to be seen because, you know, the Russian Central Banks said, "Oh, we're going to trade in some of our dollars for Euros." So that means their dollar goes down in value. I mean, we're kind of so intertwined with China because of everything we buy from them that if our dollar goes down, they suffer. The same thing with Japan. We're economically so intertwined with them that, you know, if somebody hiccups, the other one's going to suffer, but at the same time, you know, it could be a big crisis if someone does something radical, like, say in Japan or China say, "Oh,

we're going to start trading our dollars for Euros. We're not going to fund your debt anymore." It's -- yeah, we're shopping.

SPD: I just feel like, we deserve it for not being out there in the streets for weeks, you know?

LG: I just, yeah (laughter). You know, and I work for the government, and even where I work, you know? I work for the Navy, and the things that they're cutting, even what we do which is we provide facilities for people to work in or live in or whatever. Even that's getting cut -- it's like, you know, even the quality of life of the people we employ is not, you know -- is less, I guess, a priority. You know, it's just amazing. I'm thinking, where are those hundreds of millions of dollars going to? They're going towards weaponry. They're going to -- And today, on the way over here, Rumsfeld was in Kuwait, and he took questions from the audience of soldiers. And a National Guardsman and said, you know, "We're getting ready to go north into Iraq. We have vehicles that are not armored." And he said, "We're scraping -- we're salvaging pieces of rusted metal," he says, "Of bullet proof glass, of remnants of glass, to armor our vehicles, and, you know, I don't get it. Why aren't you guys, you know, armored?" And so then Rumsfeld says, "Could you repeat that question again? I didn't quite get it." So then he repeats it again, or he repeats the statement again and asks the question and Rumsfeld says, "Well, you know, it's not for lack of money, and it's not for lack of will. It's just, we can't get it out to you fast enough," And then he ends by saying, "We go into a war and -- we just, sometimes -- we go into a war not with the army that we would like to have." It's like, you know, we knew we sent you guys in there not well-prepared.

SPD: Wow.

LG: I mean he didn't say that, but you know, read between the lines. And then at the end of the story it said, "And the national guardsmen who asked the question, nothing will be done to him." Why was that even a question? The man was just, you know, exerting his First Amendment, I mean, his free speech rights.

SPD: You don't have free speech when you're in the military. You don't have free speech when you're not in the military (laughter).

LG: Well you have less, I guess, when you're in the military, but yeah. Yeah, good for him that he brought that up.

SPD: But it's on NPR, right? It's not going to be on any other --

LG: Yeah.

SPD: -- any mainstream news.

LG: Right. Oh and another thing was that this same Democracy Now, this same journalist said, "Oh, and the three major network presidents, ABC, CBS, and NBC, all agreed in a panel," I guess sometime in the last week or so, "Yes, we did not cover -- we were not critical enough." It's like, "Oh, yeah, thanks, guys," you know? It's too late. So, I guess, you know, the more stuff I hear -- and I'm really happy that people are writing about it, talking about it, and but, you know, I don't know what it's going to take to get us motivated as, you know -- 50 some odd million

voted for Kerry. I mean, I still don't see that as anything to be ashamed of. I mean we really turned people out. If we had, you know, 10% of that marching in the streets, that'd be, what, five million? OK, one percent? 500,000, you know...

SPD: Yeah. Yeah, I wonder how bad it has to get.

LG: Yeah. I think, you know -- I was amazed after the election, they interviewed, you know, working class, lower-middle class people about, you know, economics and so on, and they were like, "I can put bread on the table. If I have to work two jobs, I'll put bread on the table, but [pounds on table] by golly, we have to fight terrorism." I'm thinking, you know, 50% of people who voted for Bush still believe, or the majority of people who voted for Bush still believe they had weapons of mass destruction, and that Saddam Hussein was, you know, in bed with Al Qaeda. A Latino Petty Officer refused to go back on a carrier, and, of course he'll probably be court martialed. But he said, "I just couldn't see going back to deliver people" -- because it's an aircraft carrier, it's taking troops. I guess "delivering people that are possibly going to die in that way. So they're not going to die." And he said something very stunning. He said, "President Bush has been hiding behind the honor of the troops, the men and women who are serving there, and it's a shame."

SPD: Good for him.

LG: Yeah, yeah. Of course, I'm sure he'll get death threats left and right, but, yeah. I mean, it's someone who has guts. I think a lot of us don't have guts. (inaudible) Amazing.

SPD: Wow.

LG: Hmm. So anyway... So that's good. That was my afternoon (laughter).

SPD: Yeah. It's a lot. There's a lot going on.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SPD: Wow. And I hadn't even heard -- all I've heard about in terms of counter inaugural work -- I mean I've heard the media were organizing to talk about covering it, and there's some DC youth, like, student stuff, a workshop, I guess, that they're working on. But I haven't even heard much else.

LG: Well, you know, if it's anything like what happened last time, last time the counter inaugural stuff was, like, blocks away.

SPD: Yeah, yeah.

LG: And they cut us off, you know? Because I remember we were -- what was that, K Street? They shut us off at K Street, so you couldn't go past K to, what, Pennsylvania Avenue, wherever the motorcade goes down? They just basically barricaded us in. I'm sure they're going to do the same thing.

SPD: But they had to, because there were more protesters than supporters.

LG: Right.

SPD: So, but actually it was interesting. One person I talked with was saying, you know, she's like, "I didn't want to go down there and get pinned in with all the other protesters." She's like, "I know where all the big wigs are staying. They're staying at the Washington Hilton." And so she, like, put on a sign, you know, had a sign and went in front of the Washington Hilton

LG: Well that's smart. Decentralize the protest, so maybe that would be a good strategy.

SPD: Yeah, I thought that was brilliant.

LG: Just hide your banner, you know, until you get motorcade and then flash it out.

SPD: Yeah exactly. And then the media hoax, did you hear about that? Oh this was on -- it was on NPR yesterday. It was using the BBC -- they hoaxed the BBC releasing an apology from -- it was from Dow Corporation for the Bhopal Disaster in India.

LG: Oh I heard about that. Yeah I did hear about that.

SPD: Yeah, that was brilliant. I loved that. (laughter) I love that kind of creativity.

LG: Mmm-hmm.

SPD: Who knows, hopefully we'll see a lot more of it. I'm sure we will.

LG: Yeah, I hope so. I just hope so, because it's not just the president, but it's just that other stuff that's going on, this HIV/AIDS level funding, decrease in funding. I mean this -- you look at it and say, "Well, it's an increase," yeah, but, you know, when you look at it -- I forget how you really determine that it's level funding, even though it's increased to keep up with inflation or with other factors you have consider. It becomes level. It's really level.

SPD: Yeah. And the other model of funding I heard about this season was thinking about the international humanitarian system, which has also been leveled throughout the Bush Administration, but they divert more and more of it to Afghanistan and Iraq because they're trying to make it look like we're doing good things there.

LG: Yeah.

SPD: So they're cutting funding to the rest of the world--

LG: Oh they're the one that was stunning was abstinence.

SPD: Oh yeah.

LG: All the funding in terms of --I don't know if you call it reproductive health -- reproductive health, HIV prevention, STDs, you know, all that stuff, all that sort of education -- more dollars are being given to faith-based groups that preach abstinence, you know? That's like the say no to drugs campaign, you know, to a large extent.

SPD: And everyone knows it doesn't work. Yeah, I don't know. Um, (laughter) so, well, so how did you get here (laughter)?

LG: How did I get here?

SPD: Well --

LG: Here, DC?

SPD: Well, no, here, being the person you are.

LG: Oh, you want like a life story, or (chuckle)...?

SPD: Yeah, yeah, well, you know, some people just start and go and then I'll ask my questions. Some people, you know, I can ask more questions to fill in some of the details, so it's kind of up to you, how you feel comfortable with me feeling like you can --

LG: {00:14:01} Well, I guess, how did I get here? Well, you know, I'm one of five children. Born in San Antonio, Texas, 150 miles north of the Mexican border. My father is from Mexico, my mother was born here of Mexican descent, but born in the States. I was a kid growing up in - - I was born in '54. I spoke Spanish until I was in first grade, and I guess it was in the first grade where I was -- because, up until that time I really was surrounded by my family. And even in my kindergarten were nuns from Mexico, so we spoke Spanish. It wasn't until first grade that, um, I was in a Catholic school with German and Irish nuns. They were white. I didn't understand them. They didn't, you know -- couldn't talk to me because I didn't speak English, and that was, like, the first time I realized I was different. And, so -- and then it wasn't a very good experience at Catholic school.

My father was struggling with his -- he had a restaurant, a Mexican restaurant. He was struggling financially and so the nun, the Mother Superior -- I think I was about six years old -- Mother Superior had my teacher, my nun teacher, bring me upstairs and asked me why my parents hadn't paid the tuition. How the hell did I know (laughter) why they hadn't paid the tuition? I didn't even know there was tuition. I just knew I went to school. So anyway, -- just a sense of being, you know, singled out, being different. Now, maybe they did that to all the kids, I don't know. And then, you know, I was grown up in the '60s in San Antonio, and I guess, in Texas up until that -- I guess until the '60s, maybe earlier, it was pretty segregated, even between blacks and whites certainly, and also between Mexican and white. And when I went to school, elementary school, less in junior high because by that time my neighborhood was becoming very integrated, but we were, like, one of two Mexican families in a German neighborhood. And one time we went to Mexico, we got back, and one of our neighbors had left a note on the door, "Paint your house or move back to the west side." The west side was the known Mexican part of town. So I remember my mother feeling really -- she was really angry about it, but I remember thinking, OK, there are people out there that that's how they chose to [deal] with it, you know, "Move back to your part of town." So there were little things like that, that kind of just were reminders that I was different. And then, when I was in junior high, this was the mid to late '60s. That was a time of a lot of racial tension in the states, and down in San Antonio, that racial tension was not necessarily black and white, but it was Mexican and white, and, you know, there were people that would paint graffiti on the school that said things like, "Tacos suck." Taco was

like a slur towards Mexican, and all sorts of things like that, and fights. I remember there was a walk out one day, and some of the kids – actually, the student council president who happened to be Mexican American, he organized a walkout of the school because of some incident. And I felt really angry because I didn't get up to leave the classroom, and everybody else was leaving, I mean, my counterparts, and I was thinking -- and I was scared, because I thought, "Well, what's going to happen if I go outside?"

Nothing happened, you know, but it was just another reminder that there was this difference. And then, let's see, high school was OK. By that time, my high school was predominantly Mexican American. And college, you know, I went to UT. I went to San Antonio College and then I transferred to the University of Texas.

SPD: Austin?

LG: Austin. And, you know, and I was living in a co-op and it was the white girls versus the Mexicans. You know, so it's all (laughter) this constant, you know, difference.

SPD: Within the co-op you mean?

LG: Within the co-op, yeah.

SPD: How many people were there?

LG: Oh, it was a large co-op. It was, I don't know, 20 students -- 20 women students. There were various houses, several co-op houses. I was in one house.

SPD: What kind of conflicts were there?

LG: {00:20:03} Oh, well it was a cooperative, so one student was basically, like, the house manager. So, she managed everything that we paid in, you know, went into buying food and we all shared responsibilities, cleaning, all that stuff. And I remember, there was this group, and she was getting married. So she started cutting back on what they were buying. So we were eating, like, a lot of pasta and, you know, just really inexpensive meals because she was trying to save money. It was kind of messy, but we're thinking, why are (laughter) we still eat[ing] tuna and pasta? There's got to be something going on here. Nothing was ever proven, but it was just, like, we're eating a lot less than our sister co-ops are -- anyway. That just created, you know, tension because we wanted to know what was going on and were just told basically to shut up and mind your own business.

And then when I was at UT, that's when I first became aware, I guess, of just like how you can make statements in -- with rallies and marches and things like that, and at the time, there was an attempt to organize the farm workers in Texas patterned after the UFW, the United Farm Workers, of California. So I volunteered to help out with this march that started in the valley and was coming to Washington and that's kind of, like, the -- being there was kind of the beginning of my awareness of ways to become empowered, you know? I remember, we were planning this march and all the things that go on with the march or things like that which is, you know, logistics: where are people going to sleep, eat, things like that. And then actually participating in the marches, like -- there was one in San Antonio. It was a rally. It was a big rally in Austin,

and then the march from Austin to Houston, along the way. And I remember just being so touched and moved by -- (crying) so touched and moved by these really humble people, and they're farmworkers. And how strongly they believed in what they were trying to do, which was what most farm workers march for, you know, clean living conditions, simple things like a toilet in the field, safety precautions like not getting sprayed while you're out in the field.

And I remember there was several elderly women. They had marched from the valley, and by the time they got to Austin, their feet were a mess, and a couple of them had to be put in wheelchairs, but they were bound and determined to come to Washington, and, as it turned out, they came to Washington and they were hoping to see President Carter, and that didn't happen. And as it turns out, they never obtained the sort of organization that existed in California, but -- that was in-- was it '77? Years later, I think it might have been '90 -- in the early '90s I was asked to speak at the Texas Lesbian Conference in Austin, and, it just so happened, that was the weekend of a farm worker march in Austin. And I remember going to the -- I forget where the Texas Lesbian Conference was held, somewhere near the university, and I remember driving to the university, and saying, "Why are these people in the street? What's going on?" Well, the signs they were carrying were, you know, toilets in the fields, you know -- it was the same thing. It made me realize that nothing had really changed in, what, 13 or 14 years?

The different generation, they were younger people. I do remember that. They were younger people, but, you know, they're still looking for the same thing, wanting someone to pay attention to the issue. So, I think when I see things like that, I think, you know, (crying) it takes a lot of guts to really stand up for yourself when you're faced with such overwhelming disregard or a society, well not all society, but parts of society who just, you know don't really stop to think that, you know, the lettuce on the table or whatever was picked by someone who did it under not the best of conditions. And one could say, well, they choose to do that work. Well, yeah (laughter). Yeah, I guess they did choose to do that work, but why should they have to do it under those conditions? Anyway. I heard this morning, I was getting ready to go to work, and I heard Matt Lauer, whatever show that is --

SPD: The Today Show.

LG: -- whining about the price of tomatoes, and I thought -- he says, "When are things going to get back to normal with the price of tomatoes?" you know, because the hurricanes in Florida and --

SPD: It is December.

LG: {00:27:35} Yeah. And I was thinking, you know, the price of your tomato will probably go back to normal because the people picking it, you know, are getting paid crappy wages. OK, so, let's see, after that -- so anyway, so that experience just taught me that it's important to be visible on an issue. And as I got into -- and I was actually still in the closet at that point, I was just coming out. And right after I graduated from UT I moved to Houston, and, you know, Houston, this was the late '70s, and it was a very vibrant gay community, very large gay community. It was just kind of, like working, kind of living my life, going to the bars and all that. And it was, I guess, in 1980 -- yeah, '81, '80 -- that I had been out three years, and it was predominantly a very white, gay scene -- gay [men's] scene at that. I was just kind of feeling,

you know, different, still different, even in the gay community, and I remember somehow I stumbled onto this gay Chicano group that was going to have, like a -- they were going to show video -- some sort of a video. I guess we had videos back then. And someone was going to display their art in somebody's house. So I went, and it just felt so comfortable. Here I was, OK, now I was out, but now I was with other Chicanos, and that was really great. They're mostly men, and several of them had, I guess they just, I never asked them where they got that consciousness to even decide to form a group. They just wanted probably the same thing. You know, wanted to be in a familiar surrounding.

And so we started -- I got involved with them and we organized parties, and we organized *bailas*, dances. Which *baila* in Chicano culture is a big deal, you know, because every Saturday you have a *baila*. Well we didn't have them every Saturday night, but they were fundraisers, and people came out. I mean, just people came out. We rented ballrooms, and it was a very -- it was a very fun time. Then quickly HIV/AIDS showed up. That started to have an impact by the time I was in graduate school in the mid '80s. I could see it was having an impact, I lost friends of mine. And even more so, when I moved here -- this was in mid-'87. But before I moved here I also somehow got involved in San Antonio with -- I went back to San Antonio, by the way to go to graduate school. And I met some women, a couple women who were involved with a new -- actually it was a new organization at the time, It was called the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio.

They're still with the Peace and Justice Center all these years later. And two of them were lesbians, Latinas and Chicanas. And they had this idea of organizing this retreat for Latinas, for women, which was kind of novel because even though we were in organized groups it was still predominantly gay Chicanos, and here was an opportunity to just be with women. And so we organized, like, it was the first retreat of Latina Lesbians, and it was in -- someone knew a fairly wealthy lesbian who owned some property near San Marcos, and so it was like a retreat center, and so we had it there. We had workshops. We had, you know, sexuality workshops and we even had a workshop on poetry. I don't remember anymore, but that was a great thing, because it was even more familiar. It was like, you know, with your sisters. And it was fun, and we spoke in Spanglish and made food, you know, that was Mexican food, and it was just a wonderful time, and I was very proud to be part of that. They did it for many years, many years following that.

SPD: Do you need to get that? (phone ringing)

LG: No. Sorry about that.

SPD: That's OK.

LG: {00:33:54} I guess that was just another opportunity, although it was really about creating visibility of each other to each other. Before I left Texas in '87, we had also -- at that point there were a number of gay and lesbian Latino organizations in Texas. There was a group in El Paso, a group in Dallas, Houston, Austin, you know. And we had a meeting in Austin that was called the Gay and Lesbian Tejano Network. And I was coming to DC and someone said, "Oh, there's going to be a big march in DC in October." This was July. And a guy that I met in Houston years earlier -- we had always been in touch. He moved up here to work at the Smithsonian. It was an internship at the Smithsonian. And he said, "Leti, when you get up here,

we have a lot of work to do, because we have to get ready for this march. We need to organize a meeting for Latinos when they come for the march.” So I got here like September 30. The march was October 11. He had actually done a lot of the legwork, but we spent those ten days just getting -- trying to find places for people to stay, and, you know, the logistics of where we were going to meet. We met at the Reeves Center on 14th Street. And actually it was -- I always felt like I was like an observer but I actually wasn't, but I'm always in awe of others, you know, and at that meeting there were actually Chicanos that came from California that had worked in the farmworker movement in California, and kind of cut their teeth in, organizing doing that sort of work. So it was just good to meet other people like me, but they were from other parts of the country.

So (sigh), um -- and I guess the thing that really became clear then and still is now is that we just have to remain visible. What was going on then is that, yeah we had a number of gay and lesbian organizations, predominantly white, and the common thread was that we were all looking for gay and lesbian liberation and recognition of our civil rights, but the messages weren't necessarily geared towards African Americans or Latinos or anybody who was not white. At least, that's how we saw it, and the African Americans saw it that way because they had the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum.

So, you know, a lot of what I've done, I did during those years -- those early years, '87 to '96, when I was most heavily involved, not just in ENLACE here in DC but also with LLEGO -- was the importance of being visible, having a voice, giving voice to what our issues were. And now that LLEGO is gone, I'm not sure how that's going to happen. I mean I've said, you know, when people have called me after they closed, and a couple people very angry, and I said, "Well, yeah, I mean it's time to be sad, too, because 17 years worth of work has ended, and we need to also be mindful of the fact that even though the organization's gone, the people aren't all gone.” I mean some of the people who are on the table [(SPD note: Leti's table held pictures of deceased loved ones for Day of the Dead)] were part of LLEGO, and they're dead because of HIV and AIDS. But there's a lot of other people who are still around and still struggling, still, working in whatever -- and I've said, "Well, you know, we have a legacy of having grown--" I'd like to say - - "having grown a network of gay GLBT Latinos that, wherever they are, can continue having an impact, whatever organization they're in, whatever community they're in." And so I'd like to think that I played a small role in that happening. Yeah. What's going to happen now? I don't know, as far as the national presence. And so that's kind of where -- that's kind of how I got to be who I am, just experiencing, witnessing, and stuff.

SPD: And so what was your family like growing up?

LG: {00:39:41} Well, my family, um -- my father was a businessman, was kind of distant, and then he left in 1963, and so he left my mother with the kids. And he was, you know -- until he died, he was a part of our life, but very peripheral. My mother played -- was the dominant parent and caregiver. And she -- actually it was because of her that I learned the importance of community service. She got involved back in the '60s, tuberculosis was still major in some communities. It was in San Antonio, a disease to be feared. People were still coming down with it, and we had a TB Hospital, and my mother would go volunteer at the TB Hospital. Which in retrospect, I'm thinking, "Why did she do that?," but she did. She felt that that was important to give time there, and then later she got involved with LULAC, which is the League of United

Latin American Citizens. In LULAC, at that time, it was about creating, like in San Antonio, housing for low-income families and scholarships for -- I remember raising -- they would do events to raise money for scholarships for young men and women aspiring to go to college and things. And so through that -- watching her and seeing how passionate she felt about those issues, and being Mexican American. And she was president of a club and had various leadership roles. So, you know, I think watching her and seeing how important that was and seeing that somebody, because of the good works of her group, that others benefited, I think was a good lesson.

SPD: And she was raising five kids?

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SPD: (laughter) And was she working?

LG: No. Uh --

SPD: OK.

LG: -- fortunately my father, that was the one good thing he did (laughter) is to support us. He just wasn't --

SPD: Wasn't there...

LG: -- emotionally or, you know, physically present. So he did a good thing. He did a good thing and continued to support us and that allowed her to do these other things. And my father was -- I don't know that I can think of what I learned from him other than just hard work. I mean he did work very hard, and education was important. He was a man that I think maybe had a third grade education. My mother had a seventh grade education. But education was important to them, and fortunately, you know, I've got a master's. My brother has a master's. My little brother's a doctor, so, you know, we did good. And then my family, my grandparents were -- my grandfather was very light-complected. My mother is too. And they could have easily passed for white but chose not to because -- and I remember my -- both my grandfather and my mother being asked, "You could get a little bit farther ahead if you passed as white." They said, "No. No, We're Mexican American, proud of it, and not going to change my name, not going to try to pass."

And I remember when I was a kid, I was very dark-complected, played in the sun all the time. My grandmother, uh, was very Indian. She was dark and an Indian, and she would tell my mother, "Don't let that little girl play in the sun. She's going to get dark." And my mother would say, "Oh, leave her alone, she's fine." And I think that I heard it enough that I remember -- my mother remembers me going to her and saying, you know, "I wish I was white like you," and she would say, "No. You're beautiful the way you are. You don't want to be white like that." So, um, (crying) that was important, that she accepted me. Actually I heard the, I'd probably say--you know, there was a show now called, *Desperate Housewives*, and this one actress in it who's -- she's actually from Corpus Christi, Texas. She's Chicana, and she was being interviewed on Ellen Degeneres's show, and she was, like, Miss Corpus Christi or Miss, you know, whatever. She was a beauty queen. Anyway, Ellen says, "Oh, your mother must be very proud of you."

What was it like growing up?" And she says, "Oh, well my mother used to call me *prieta fea*, which means, 'Ugly dark one.'" And I remember thinking, "Wow, you know, that's rough." You know, that's awful that her mother did that to her, and so I feel very fortunate that I didn't have to deal with that kind of, I guess -- it would have been, I guess, like, racism I suppose, internalized racism at home. I mean my grandmother had it. But my mother really tried to protect me from that. So, yeah that was --

SPD: And why do you think she -- like, where do you think she got it from? Was it her father?

LG: Yeah, my grandfather, because, my grandfather -- actually look behind you. There's a photograph.

SPD: Oh, right here?

LG: Pick that one up, yeah. I'll show you what my grandfather looks like. This is my grandfather. He was involved in a fraternal organization. This is the Woodmen of the World, and anyway-- remember that I told you that I went to a Catholic school and I didn't speak English? Well, I was about ready to flunk first grade and I'm not -- I guess my teacher sent me home with a note pinned to my uniform blouse that said, "Speak to this little girl in English." So my mother, when I got home that evening at dinner -- my grandparents happened to be with us at the time, she announced to everybody, "OK, from here on out, we're speaking to her in English." There was a lot more TV exposure after that, too. So within a couple of years, I didn't speak any Spanish. Actually it was right before my grandfather died. We went to visit him and he said to me, "If you don't speak to me in Spanish, don't speak to me." That wasn't going to happen, you know. I really love my grandfather, and I wanted to communicate with him. But it was his way of forcing me to keep my language, my first language. So I mean that was important. You know, now, I mean I still speak Spanish. I'm happy about it, but there's so many like me of my generation that don't because there was such pressure. I mean in Texas at the time, in some schools, you could get punished for speaking Spanish on the schoolyard. I have a friend who was from Corpus. He got expelled for speaking Spanish on the schoolyard, you know. There just was no tolerance for different language. Big push to assimilate, you know. So, that was, yeah, my grandfather.

SPD: Hmm. Did you know your dad's parents at all?

LG: No. They were dead by the time -- my father was much older than my mother. He was like 20 years older than my mother, so I didn't really know most of his side of the family until much later. We went to Mexico a couple of times -- actually he would take us to Mexico. He had that sister lived in Monterey, and we went to Guadalajara, where he was from, that area. Many years later, I went as a summer student to Guadalajara, and I met my uncle, his older brother, and then some cousins. So that was basically the only exposure I had to that side of the family.

SPD: Hmm.

LG: Yeah.

SPD: Did they tell you -- did you ever hear your parents' story of how they got together?

LG: My mother worked for my father --

SPD: In the restaurant?

LG: -- in the restaurant. In the restaurant, yeah. Well in another restaurant -- this was in San Antonio at the time. There was an area that was clearly Mexican. It was near the Mexican market and near the southern Pacific train station. That was the Mexican neighborhood right around the train station, and my mother lived there, and so she got a job working for my father, \$8 a week or something ridiculous like that, but, yeah. That's how they met. And they were going to move to Mexico. My father had planned to move back to Mexico. But, uh, he signed over control of all his holdings in Mexico to my aunt's husband, and he lost it in gambling, everything. So, my father was basically left, you know, with nothing so, I don't think he ever got over -- I don't think he ever recovered from that. I think a lot of it was just having been deceived by family, and everything he worked so hard for, lost. Yeah, not even in his control.

SPD: And brothers and sisters -- three brothers?

LG: I have three surviving brothers. I have an older brother who died in his late 20s.

SPD: Oh OK.

LG: So I have three younger brothers.

SPD: (inaudible)?

LG: Yeah. So, you know, the only daughter, and it's weird because I thought, "Well, maybe one of my brothers would be gay." But no, they're not. I'm it. My mother, actually it took her a couple of years after I came out to her. But she's been great.

SPD: How old were you when you came out to her?

LG: {00:51:40} 23? No, I was going to be 23, so I was 22. I was just getting ready to finish UT. I was getting ready to graduate when I met my first lover and just, you know -- I mean, actually that's fun because up to that point, you know, I had -- I always had a boyfriend, and at one point, I had two boyfriends at a time and my mother thought, oh (inaudible). And so like, overnight, all that changed, and my mother immediately noticed the difference, and she noticed who I was hanging out with, and she's the one that came up to me and said, and asked me, "Are you gay?"

SPD: Wow.

LG: And I said, "Yes," and, uh --

SPD: What word did she use?

LG: She said, "I will curse the day you met that woman." But you know, she got over it. And she realized it wasn't that woman. (laughter) It was me. Yeah, um. Because I had tried to come on to her when I was 17, and she told me, "Oh, it's just a phase you're going through." So, I don't

think she was really surprised, and I was a big tomboy growing up. She had asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I'd say a machine gun, boxing gloves, you know -- so she'd get me the machine gun, and she'd get me a doll. She'd get me the boxing gloves, and she'd get me a doll. So I had all these dolls that I didn't play with really unless I played house, and I would play the - or I'd play the preacher and marry the dolls to my brothers.

SPD: (laughter) At least you had a girl for them.

LG: Yeah.

SPD: (laughter)

LG: But it was a male role. I was the preacher. I was the minister marrying my brothers, so it was funny.

SPD: (laughter) That's great.

LG: Uh-huh.

SPD: So were you close with your brothers?

LG: Yeah, and I'm still pretty -- yeah, very close to my brothers. Actually, the brother that follows me is, like, we're -- I would say we're probably the closest, not just in age but just close in -- but he's also the most homophobic one. You know, it's kind of funny. He's, like, compartmentalized, OK, there's my sister, and I love my sister, but, you know, other gay people I can't do it with. And, uh, it's funny. He came here to visit a few years ago with his kids, my niece and nephew, and I didn't know this until recently. My youngest brother, who was living here at the time, said that my brother went one morning here to have coffee. He was going through the cupboard looking for -- he says, "I need to find a cup that's not gay."

SPD: (laughter) What do they say?

LG: Well, you know, Provincetown, you know. I don't know what they said, just looking for - he was looking for a non-gay coffee cup. It was funny. I had a really big laugh when I heard that one.

SPD: Did he find one, or --

LG: Yeah, oh yeah. There's some non-gay cups in there.

SPD: Are you clearing them out now?

LG: No (laughter).

SPD: Next time --

LG: I can just imagine him going through the trouble looking for a non-gay cup. It was funny. Uh, and then the other two, one is in -- well, that brother and the other -- the doctor's in San Antonio, and the youngest one is here.

SPD: Oh OK. What does he do?

LG: He's an architect. Yeah, yeah.

SPD: Well what's the age difference?

LG: Let's see, I'm 50. Javier going to be -- he just turned 48. Jorge is 46, and Jose is forty -- will be 42 this year. So there's an eight-year difference between me and Jose.

SPD: And what are they all like?

LG: Uh, well I told you about the one that follows me. And Jorge, he was always very serious, very studious. Even now as an adult, that, you know -- doctor, he's got a clinic. He's a pediatrician and a sports medicine specialist and he still writes articles and papers and does research and is kind of driven that way, and a great father, and very loving husband and just a good person -- I mean they're all good persons. And then Jose, who's here, he's the youngest, the baby, a 42 year old baby. And he's, uh -- how can I describe Jose? He's like a big teddy bear. You know, he played football. He's a big guy. Very sweet, very loving. I just watched Monday night football with him last Monday, this past Monday. Just, you know, a very loving brother. I'm lucky, lucky.

SPD: And so did you guys play together growing up?

LG: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

SPD: Other than marrying them to the dolls?.

LG: Yeah, oh yeah. I mean we played in my neighborhood, by the time we were all, I guess, in elementary school, more families had moved in -- urban renewal was occurring in San Antonio, so there was white flight, and so behind them came people, Mexican Americans moving it into the neighborhood. So by the time I was like nine or ten, there were, like maybe four families with kids in our neighborhood, so we'd congregate in my backyard and, you know, play and we played -- we'd play war. You know, us against the next block's kids. Yeah, stuff like that. We'd ride bicycles and climb trees and my father, before he left -- I never asked him what compelled him to do this. He built a platform in our -- we have this huge oak tree in the backyard. He built a platform, like, a tree house and that was, like, the rage in our neighborhood. Everybody wanted to play in the tree house, so it was fun.

SPD: Yeah. Great.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

SPD: So did you, like, herd the brothers together? Like, were you a caretaker or were you a troublemaker, or...?

LG: I was kind of a, not so much a caretaker, I was more of a troublemaker, I think. And then when I got into high school, I would actually take my brothers to picnics and things with my friends. I was never one -- I think there were a lot of times when I -- because there's

photographs, I took them with me. I was, like, the only one of my peers who had their younger brothers with her. And my mother trusted me to take them, so, you know -- so I guess, uh, yeah. I mean yeah I never thought not to I guess. I mean there's parties I didn't take them to, but outings with my friends, I would take them.

SPD: Mmm-hmm.

LG: Yeah.

SPD: And when did you come out to them?

LG: Well let's see, I came out to my mother in '77. I came out to Javier in '78. No, I moved to -- yeah, I was already in Houston, '78, right before he left for the army. He went to Germany, enlisted man. And then I came out to Jorge in '80, because that's -- I came out to him when I was breaking up with my second girlfriend, and he could just tell I was really upset, and he asked me what was going on and he's like, "Yeah, I figured. I was waiting for you to tell me." And then, I don't even remember when I came out to my youngest brother. I think by that time he already knew. I'm sure it had spread -- the word was out. Yeah, I can't remember how I formally came out to him, but he just seemed to know.

SPD: And the first one, how did he respond?

LG: He was upset. You know, it was his big sister. I did take him to parties. I mean, he saw me interact with boys and stuff. So I think it was a big shock to him. But he got over it. I feel very fortunate that I didn't -- none of them ever said, you know, "I'll never speak to you again." like, I've heard others. And I think my mother did raise us to -- she'd always say, you know, "When I'm gone, you only have each other." I think because it was like a matriarchy in the house (laughter), it was my mother and then my grandmother after my grandfather died. She raised my brothers to respect women, or at least to respect women of the family, from what I've observed I mean I think there was, like -- so, um, and she would say, "You only have one sister." So I think that, I mean, the -- I'm sure that was an influence..

SPD: Did she have brothers or sisters?

LG: She had one brother and one sister. They are both now dead. My uncle painted that Aztec scene there in the living room.

SPD: It's beautiful.

LG: He was her older brother, and then a younger sister, my aunt. Actually she's behind you too. Actually, I'll show you (picks up pictures). This is my aunt. And this is my uncle. This is my father's restaurant (away from microphone; inaudible). That's my father. My uncle, his brother. This is my grandmother-- that's her, and this is her grandmother. See how Indian-looking she was?

SPD: Yeah.

LG: And these were aunts and uncles.

SPD: Is this you and your brother?

LG: Yeah. Yeah that's me and that's Javier. Jorge. Actually, I'll bring another photo, more recent one. (Long pause) That's Jose, that's the young one, and my mother and my stepfather. And these are me, this is a very old picture of me. She's very (chuckles)—two kids. Cristina, Javier. These two are this brother. That's Javier. And these two little ones are his. That's Jorge, that's the doctor. (inaudible)

SPD: Mmm-hmm. Wow, thank you for showing me these.

LG: Oh sure. (sounds of sitting back down)

SPD: And so it sounds like you were very social as a kid, too, and a teenager?

LG: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I was pretty social. I hadn't thought about. I have never really thought about that, yeah. I guess I was. I was involved in-- in Junior High -- I got involved with this group called the White Ties, and it was -- I went to Horace Mann Junior High School, and I can't remember what we did exactly. We did, like, little civic things, you know. I can't remember what we did. Anyway, and then in high school, I joined the drill team. But it was like an ROTC kind of drill team. It was military. I think that's -- I had that military thing going for a while. So I was on the drill team, and I was commander of the drill team my senior year. We would go to competitions, drilling competitions. So yes, -- I skipped school the last semester. My friends, you know, we discovered we could skip out. We could buy liquor even though we were underage. And things that in retrospect I'm glad I survived. Experimentation.

SPD: A little bit of partying.

LG: Mm-hmm, Mmm-hmm. And that's kind of -- pretty much when I started to realize even more strongly that I was gay. Because there were two girls that were in our group that, you know, one of them, I figured out she was having a relationship with another girl in the group. We didn't talk about it, but it became kind of clear after a while. Then I got a crush on one of the other girls in the group, but she was clearly straight. We were friends, you know. It was kind of a weird time for me. Later I found out -- this is funny, after I graduated from high school, I found out from this other student, she was like the year behind me. She was, like, "Oh, did you know that we used to just call you Leti the Lesbian?" And I said, "No, I never knew that." So it was like shock. You know, here I thought it wasn't obvious, but it was obvious to other people. So yeah that was funny, Leti the Lesbian.

SPD: And you were dating boys too?

LG: Mmm-hmm.

SPD: And when did you start dating?

LG: Oh, I think -- I mean, I wasn't in a big rush to date. I mean I was doing it because it was, you know -- there was the peer pressure. It was the thing to do. I wanted to go the prom. Back then there weren't the proms like you have now. So I wanted to go the prom and be with my friends, so I had to get a date. Yeah, I'd always get a date to go to the prom, but, you know, I

never liked the after-the-prom, "let's go park" thing. (laughter) It was like, if we must, you know, OK.

SPD: Did you have serious boyfriends?

LG: No. I mean -- shoot -- I mean I had boyfriends all through high school, and the only serious boyfriend, I think, that I would say that I had was my senior year, and I can't remember where I met him. He went to another high school, one of the -- actually, the Edgewood school district, which was, like, the poor school district in San Antonio. There's 11 school districts in San Antonio. He was a basketball player for Edgewood, anyway, or for Memorial High School. And we started dating, and you know, I remember recounting this to a friend of mine. I remember he really wanted to have sex, and I was not interested. But he was a very sweet guy, and I liked him a lot. I just -- I wasn't going to have sex with him. I remember one time we were parked, and he unzipped his pants, and he said, "Feel this." OK. (laughter) So I felt it, and he says, "It's not going to hurt you." I said, "Yeah, I know." "But I'm not going to do it." And finally -- and I got saved because the police came by with a flashlight, you know, and we actually -- then he went to school at Texas A&I in the valley and I stayed in San Antonio. Years later, after we both had graduated, we ended up in Houston, and I had just come out. This was in '77. He tracked me down; he found me. I was living with my girlfriend. And I told him, I mean I had to come out to him. And he asked me, "Was it anything I did?" And I said, "No, no, wasn't anything you did," (Laughter) And then several years later, I ran into him again. By that time he was married, had a little boy, and I think he asked me again, you know? And I said, "No, not anything you did". (Chuckles) But that was the last serious boyfriend.

SPD: And so, how long did you go to Catholic school?

LG: {1:10:30} Well if I count kindergarten, three years. I was in a Carmelite kindergarten, and then I was in St. Anne's for two years, and at the end of the second year, with all this stuff going on, my parents' financial situation, I just was ready to -- I told my mother -- oh, well there were several things. It wasn't just that. It was one month that they didn't pay, I would ride the bus home, the school bus home. While I was getting on the school bus, and the nun pulls me off, she says, "You can't ride the bus because your parents didn't pay the tuition."

Well I had no way of -- I didn't know what my phone number was, I didn't know how to get home. I didn't even know where home was, and I wrote her -- I must have sat there and cried, and I mean I just remember sitting there, it seemed like forever, and the bus driver came back after he finished his route and he said, "I'm taking you home." I told my mother, and she was just outraged. I'm not sure what happened, but I just remember saying, "I don't want to go back there." And there was stuff like, you know, I was questioning authority even then: there was a rule that the girls' lockers were -- the girls' lockers were at the end of the hall. The boys' lockers were right by the door to the classroom, for whatever reason. So I put my stuff in a boy's locker, and a nun came up and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm putting my stuff in a locker." "That's a boy's locker." "Well, yeah, but mine's way down there," and I think she wrapped me on the head, and she made me, you know, take my stuff out, and I got punished or something. I remember getting punished for things like not finishing my meal. So I just said, you know, "I'm done with this." My mother had also started to notice that I was coming home saying, "Oh, are we better than the people who go to the public school across the street because we pay to go to

school?" And my mother didn't like that, because she said, "No, you're not better than the people who let their kids that go to the public school." So, anyway, I did end up in public school for the rest of my education.

SPD: And so was the elementary school mostly a white school or mixed or more Mexican American?

LG: Oh, when I started elementary school in the third grade it was mostly white. All the teachers were white, all female. When I got to Junior High, we had an African American English teacher, which was, like, you know, he really stood out. In high school, I had a Mexican American English teacher, but that's the only diversity I can recall in teaching. I mean, things have changed so much.

SPD: Were there other race or class tensions that you remember from school? You mentioned a couple.

LG: You know, I'm sure there were tensions. I don't recall there were racial tensions between blacks and Mexicans. I don't remember even tension between blacks and whites. Blacks in those schools were a minority because of how the districts -- the lines were drawn. Like, the blacks went to this school. Back then it was like, there were certain schools that you knew those were the Mexican American schools because that's -- it was the neighborhoods they were in. And where I went was transitioning. It was already starting to change. So we had more blacks and more Mexican American students in there. And now, my high school's all Mexican American pretty much, maybe some black students, but predominantly Mexican American.

SPD: Hmm. And you went to San Antonio College?

LG: Mmm-hmm.

SPD: for how long?

LG: {1:14:52} Three years, because I started out, when I was in high school, I said, "I'm not going to college. I just want to get a job." So I said, "Well, what do I want to do?" So I thought, "Well I'll be a secretary." So I enrolled in San Antonio College in the business -- I think it was called the business program or secretary program. And I was lousy at everything. I couldn't take shorthand. I couldn't type worth a shit..So I was, uh, flunking. I thought, "OK, I'm not any good at this and I really don't like it." The idea of being someone's secretary just was not appealing. So I decided I was going to go into the Navy, enlist in the Navy. And somehow I ended up meeting this man who was a retired army counselor. He was a counselor at SAC -- SAC is San Antonio College. He was in the career center. I think that's what happened. He asked me what I wanted to do. I said, "I want to go into the Navy. I don't think college is for me." He says, "Well, why don't you take this aptitude test?" He sent me to go take a test, I came back -- I actually still have a copy of the results of that test. It said I would be really good on an assembly line, some other, like, menial-type -- not to diminish assembly line work but, you know, other tasks, work like that. He said, "Before you enlist in the Navy, why don't you go one more semester, but this time take things like sociology, history, Spanish." So I did, and I liked it. I liked sociology. I liked history. So at the end of the semester I went back to him and I said, "Well, I think I'm going to go ahead and get my associate's." And so, during the course of those next two years, I decided

well, I have already knocked out two years , I'm going to go for the four. So I started applying to schools. And I got accepted into UT, and I remember, right after my acceptance letter, with my acceptance letter came a form they wanted me to fill out how I identify. Did I identify as white, black, Hispanic. And at that time, UT was under a lot of pressure to diversify its student population. So I felt bad because I thought, "Well, is it affirmative action that's getting me into UT?" Not my grades. I mean my grades were -- I think was pulling maybe a low B or B-. So I thought, "OK, well, if affirmative action is what got me into UT, OK, I'll just make the best of it." So I went to UT, did work-study, got book grants. I think my father was able to help me out with some school. This was, you know, a state school. It was fairly cheap, you know, back then. So I ended up with a degree in sociology and social work. I think it was -- yeah I had like a 3.4.

SPD: That's good.

LG: Yeah.

SPD: Very good.

LG: Then I went to work in Houston as a medical social worker. And I was -- let's see, what was it -- middle of '77, and I remember, there were two other Chicanas that were in the program with me, the social work program, and all three of us got hired at M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston. We were hired, because we spoke Spanish, to be the bilingual social workers. They were seeing more and more patients from -- not just from Texas that spoke Spanish but central -- Mexico, central and South America. So it was like my first -- that was really my first job out of college. I did that for six years. And it was really hard, because, you know, it's a cancer hospital, and met a lot of wonderful people who died of cancer and their families. Also I worked in head and neck surgery, which, if you can imagine, is very disfiguring. You had people who had to lose their larynx, had to speak with a -- I forget what they call it.

SPD: (inaudible)

LG: {1:20:15} vocal-- yeah. And people would lose, like, eyes, half their faces, you know, because of the cancer they had. And it was hard, and I think that coupled with coming out and just feeling, you know, the whole coming out thing. I started to drink really heavily. Yeah I think, you know, I could say I probably had a problem drinking. I had blackouts and things like that, but I was just depressed all the time because of, you know, what I was witnessing. That was when I was what-- 22-28. Yeah, as I recall, I think all of us were drinking (laughter) quite a bit back then -- because the other two Chicanos were straight. But it was just -- it was just -- it was just difficult to deal with that. And then after six years of that, I was just ready to leave. And I was also -- it was also depressing because it's still a research hospital, and so it was a lot of, you know, medical protocol on the drugs that were used and drugs that were being tested -- and so a lot of the patients that we saw after, you know, as the cancer progressed or was too aggressive, they'd have to try chemotherapies that weren't proven. There were doctors, I'm sure, under pressure to produce results for the drug companies and for papers, and so, you know, there were people who were ready to go home to die, but the doctors were talking them into staying so they could try one more drug or one more round. And I can't tell you the number of times people ended up dying there, not at home, because they'd allowed themselves to be convinced to stay.

And that really got to me too, because there's a point where one needs to have at least control and dignity over how they die.

So, I was done with it after six years. And then I went to Austin with my girlfriend, the one in that photograph. Kind of, just was kind of lost for -- no, actually I took off a year. We stayed in Houston for a year, and I lived off the savings that I had. And then we moved to Austin and took all sorts of odd jobs. I worked in a bank. I was a temp, and I worked in a bank and did all sorts of other things. I worked as a receptionist and decided that, you know, I needed more. I just couldn't live like that. So we moved back to San Antonio. And this was when Texas was in a recession, and jobs were kind of hard to come by, and I remember taking the job at a Target, on the midnight shift, stocking shelves. And I remember (laughter) -- it was funny, I remember stocking shelves one day, and I was in my little Target smock, and a -- someone I had gone to high school with came in, and they looked at me and they said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well, working." And everybody kind of looked at me -- I felt like they looked at me with pity, and I thought, "OK, you know, (laughter), how much longer am I going to do this?" So I thought I got to work for something else. I mean, I'm not -- I'm capable of more. So, I got a job with the Alamo area council of governments and their job training -- there was a Job Training Partnership Act, which is a federal program to provide training to, I guess, low-income, or people who are in transition, and so it was in Seguin, Texas. It was like 40 miles east of San Antonio. So I would drive to Seguin for my job. I was a counselor, and I remember working the summer program -- they were all minority kids, black and Mexican. I think, actually, there were a couple of white kids in that group. And my job was to talk to them about after they graduated high school, you know, job, work, how you apply for a job, how you fill out an application. And I remember they handed me this curriculum that I was supposed to use during the summer. Well, half -- they'd go to work half the day, and then they'd come in, like, for a couple hours for this training. And I remember thinking, "This is so lame. What are they going to get out of this?"

And so I decided to enhance it with my -- I rented films, and I took them on field trips, you know, and I talked to them. I remember I talked to them about finances. I said -- OK, because they were all -- they were junior high, high school. They were -- not junior high. They were high school. But they were all excited that they were making minimum wage, you know, earning some money. And couldn't wait to get out of high school so they could start working. And having remembered my experience, I remember, a couple of sessions where I -- on the blackboard said, "OK, how much does it cost for you to live? How much does it cost your parents for where you live? How much does it cost for gasoline for the car? How much does it cost -- what does the car cost? How much is insurance? OK, now what do you like to do? Movies? OK, how much does that cost you? Eating out? Yeah," and so we started adding it up, and I said, "OK, now how much are you earning right now on your job?" Well it didn't match. I mean, and I said, "If you work full time, it's not going to match." So, you know, you've got some choices. You can either try to further your education, or if that's not what you feel is going to be your path, maybe some vocation where you can have a skill that will earn you some more money, but, you know, life is hard, I would say.

And I remember, there was this -- the one white kid, he was this big guy, and was really foul-mouthed, and he would intimidate all the other kids and he used the F-word, and he'd say vulgar things to the girls. And I said -- Mike. I said, "Mike, you're going to get three chances, and after

the third one, you're out of here." Well he didn't believe me, so I gave him two chances, and on the third one I said, "This is it. This is your last -- I'm going to have you kicked out of the program." And he was the son of a schoolteacher in Seguin and was getting ready to graduate from high school, and the story was that he had just gotten passed along. And so I went to the head of the program. I said, "How do I get rid of this guy?" "Well, this is what you have to do." "OK." So when he did the third thing, I said, "That's it. You need to go, and if you don't go then I'm going to have to have you removed." So he left, and before he left he says, "You ever had your tire slashed or the windows on your truck broken?" I said, "No." And I was fully expecting my tires to be slashed (laughter), my windshield to be smashed, but nothing happened.

Two years later, I was driving through Seguin. I stopped in Seguin for a burger or something. It was KFC, and I was on the way to Houston, and I come out and there's this kid. Well, he's not a kid anymore. He was a young man, and he says -- he comes over to me and says, "Remember me?" And I said, "Yeah, I remember you." He says, "Well, I just want you to know I got a job. I work in an electric plant, and I just want you to know that I'm doing all right." OK. Fine. Another trip to Seguin, I stopped at the grocery store, and one of the black students who had been in this class came up to me, and he was bagging groceries. He asked me if I remember him, and I said, "Yeah," and he says, "I thought a lot about what you told us, and I'm in college. I'm getting an education. I want to get a degree." "That's great. That's really good." So I felt like, all right, I had a little bit of an impact at least on one or two, you know? And so, you know, that's -- I think some of those experiences just reinforce how we may not ever know it, but things we do, do have an impact. So, when you do them in the collective, it has an even greater impact.

SPD: Mmm-hmm. You know, it's ten minutes to 9:00. Do you need to go set your VCR?

LG: Oh yeah I do need to stop that.

(break in audio)

SPD: It's a great place. I love the blue.

LG: Oh thanks, yeah, yeah. Well I wasn't sure how to pick the blue, but it worked out really well.

SPD: Yeah, it's a good color. Let's see, so you were just talking about teaching outside San Antonio. So that was what you were doing before you did your Master's? Is that right?

LG: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, and I was -- at this organization, we had like a company picnic or staff picnic. And I remember we went to this park. Actually, we went to Landa Park which is in New Braunfels, Texas. And I was on a ride with this black woman who was on the staff. It was kind of poignant because we were in this park that in the '50s did not allow blacks or Mexicans. There was a sign that said, "No blacks, no Mexic-- no Negroes, no Mexicans, no dogs."

SPD: Wow.

LG: So anyway, we were in this park, and somehow we got into a conversation about what I was going to be doing. And she asked me what my plans were. I said, "Well, I want to move up

in the organization." And she said, "Well, you're going to have to get a Master's." And I thought, "Oh man, I thought I was done with school," right? So, she says, "No, you really, if you want to move up anywhere, you're going to have to have a master's," and so I said, "OK." So I thought about it, and I thought, "Well, OK, two years. I can do two years." So I must have taken the GRE, and then I applied to various schools. I really wanted to go to the LBJ School of Public Policy. But my GRE wasn't high enough. So then I got accepted to Trinity University, that's in San Antonio. They had an Urban Studies program. They also had -- the federal government at the time had these -- it was like a scholarship program, or they must have been grants. There was a grant program under the Urban Development Action Grant, which I guess was part of HUD at the time. Anyway, they had educational grants for people who wanted to study urban planning and public administration. So I got into that program. The dean of the program was black, African American, Dr. Lewis, Earl Lewis, and one of my advisors was Cathy Powell, an older white woman, and most of the students in my program were either Chicanos or African American. We have a couple of people who were disabled. So Dr. Lewis, he really wanted to have a diverse group. Well, when you go to Trinity University, it's mostly an undergraduate school, and it's a private school. It's mostly white, and I remember, the first week I was there, I went to the library to check out something. There was a young white student, she turns -- she says, "Oh, you must be from the urban studies program." OK, you know, I didn't know. [As] I started to walk around Trinity, well I realized, oh, she was telling, oh, the reason you minorities [are] here is because you're in the urban studies program. Because there just weren't that many minorities in the undergraduate, because it was a private, high tuition school. So, just another reminder, you know (laughter). Oh God. So anyway. I got through two years there. My senior -- it wasn't really a thesis. I mean, it was basically a thesis, bound and everything. It was a semi-senior thesis, or my master's thesis was -- I chose to write it about annexation. In Texas you can annex, there's a city has the authority to annex outside its boundaries to expand its boundary, expand its city limits --

SPD: OK.

LG: -- and, uh, in San --

SPD: Just the US did it to Texas, so, why not?

LG: Yeah, why not?

SPD: (laughter)

LG: So, um, in San Antonio there was this -- the history of that is that in its early days, it'd try to annex -- remember how I mentioned there were 11 school districts? Well, that's because there are, like, 11 different communities. Actually, not as many communities -- just about as many communities. So when the city annexed, I remember, this community called Olmos Park, which is still a very affluent neighborhood. They tried to annex Terrell Hills, and they tried to annex Alamo Heights, which are all very white, affluent, upper class neighborhoods. Well, there was -- this was in like the 1920s. And they went to court to overturn it, so they wouldn't be part of San Antonio. So now if you look at a map of San Antonio, you'll see Alamo Heights, Terrell Hills, they're all these little municipalities inside of San Antonio. So it was based on that, just the reluctance to be part of this larger -- the not wanting to be any part of this larger city, maintain its

municipality, duplication of services. I mean, there's streets in San Antonio like, this side is San Antonio, this side is Alamo Heights, so Alamo Heights will pave its side of the street. So the other one, you know, they -- if San Antonio doesn't get to it, it could be the crappier side of the street because it's not -- you know, they don't pave both sides.

SPD: Wow.

LG: Yeah. And they have their own school districts, so those school districts for many years were predominantly white. And now -- that's still probably the case in -- less so in Alamo Heights, because Alamo Heights has become fairly integrated. But for many years -- 09, the zip code was -09.

SPD: Do you remember why you picked that topic?

LG: Um, no. I don't -- I think it was -- well I started out looking at -- there's a whole -- at the time, this was in the '80s, this whole notion of growth management. So that's when I started to do my thesis on. But then when I found this history, I thought, well, that's actually more interesting. So that's why I wrote it on. And then as it turns out a professor that I had, who called me stupid once, used some of my information for a book he wrote.

SPD: Wow, did he give you credit?

LG: Did he call me stupid?

SPD: No, did he give you credit? (laughter)

LG: Oh, I don't know. You know, I never checked that out. I should check that out. I don't know if he ever gave me credit. Hmm.

SPD: And why did he call you stupid?

LG: I don't remember. I mean I remember I was really pissed off about it and I went to see him, and he refused to see me. So finally, this was -- I mean, I don't know how I ended up talking to him afterwards, and he decided he was going to use my paper, my thesis, but anyhow.

SPD: Wow. So you mentioned Cathy Powell, you said, and the director. Were there other important people during that time? Colleagues or friends or professors?

LG: {1:39:00} Um, there were -- well, Cathy Powell was -- she's dead now. I remember, she seemed like just very uptight, you know, very uptight white woman, very smart. I mean, extremely -- oh, man she was brilliant. Activist in San Antonio conservation and planning, and she was -- every once in a while you'd see her on TV. She'd be speaking out about something stupid that the city was doing. And I admired her greatly. She gave me a lot of support during the writing of my thesis and stuff. That was good. Dr. Lewis was -- I was afraid of Dr. Lewis. He was, like, just so -- I mean, he assembled quite an effect. They were all pretty brilliant people in their own right. And there was Henry Cisneros, was the mayor at, I guess, now—was he still the mayor at that time? He may have still been the mayor, was like an adjunct. You know, he would come in and teach a class. That was a treat for us. He would teach a class like he was

giving a speech, you know? That's how it became. And he probably was. Politicians do that, you know? You'd just say the story so many times it just sounds, it's rote. So I think, you know, Dr. Powell and Dr. Lewis were -- I think Dr. Lewis because it was obviously really important to him to have minorities in the program and do well. And actually, how I ended up here was the federal government still has it's; called the Presidential Management Internship Program.

Trinity always for years had students that would go into that program, and so actually just put the call out to our class to ask if anybody wanted to apply. I think it was like the three of us or four of us that applied got in. It was me, Terry Dennison, who is African American and Linda -- what is Linda's last name? Older white woman, she was an older white student. She was, like, her kids had already graduated from college, and this was like a second career sort of thing. And I remember he told us it's going to be tough because all the other schools have resources. They prep their applicants for the PMI, for the screening. We didn't have those resources. So we prepped each other, you know? And there was one student who actually had not gotten into the program the previous year, but he helped us out. He kind of, like, told us what to expect. So I went to Dallas. We went to Dallas. We had to go through an application. Dr. Powell helped me with my application. She edited and everything. So I got past that step. And then we were all called to Dallas, because that's where the Office of Personal Management had its regional office and where they did the interviews, and it was a whole -- it was a daylong thing. So the first session was -- we were in there with some other, a whole group of applicants at this big conference table, and the exercise was, we were given a problem, and we had to interact with each other to discuss and come up with some solutions. And there were GS employees in a room. They were, like, grading us, you know serving and grading. You had to do things like, "Well, Ms. Gomez, I think that that's a good point." You know, you had to interact with each other that way, very formally. That's what we were prepped to do. And then there was a one-on-one interview later. You know, why did you want to come to the Federal Government? And I was given a problem. It was a drug testing -- I remember it was about drug testing and how would I go about informing, you know -- getting the police to understand what the importance of blah blah. And then the last thing was a Blue Book essay. So I went through all that. And then that was like in April. At the end of May, as I was graduating, I found out that I got into the program. But then, you can get in, but then you have to then apply to agencies to get hired. So it's not just getting in, it's then you have to actually find a job. But, federal agencies, a lot of them participate in the programs so they're all looking for interns. Because the idea is that the government wants to bring people in with Master's degrees at the beginning of a mid-level management job to go on into senior leadership or senior management.

So I came here and I hooked up with a former Urban Studies student, Chicano, who was living in Arlington. He let me stay in his apartment. So I was here a week. I got here with the flu, a stomach flu virus. I was sick. He was very sweet, bought me popsicles and things. But I had to go on interviews, so I had scheduled a whole week of interviews. And this was in '87, when the federal government on the domestic side -- this was the Reagan years -- had just gone through reductions in force. They reduced staff. Because I wanted to work in the domestics -- I wanted to work for HUD. HUD was my first choice. "Well, no, we don't have any positions right now." I went to HHS, Health and Human Services. "No, we just laid a bunch of people off. We don't have any openings." I went to Commerce, and one guy says, "Yeah, I'd love to hire you, but we just had a reduction. If we hire anybody, it has to be someone we just laid off." So finally it was, like, Thursday. No, it was Wednesday, and I thought, well I'm not making any progress

here. Someone said, "Well why don't you go talk to the Navy? They have jobs," and I thought, "Oh, I don't want to work for the Navy." And I thought, "Gay? Yeah, I'm going to work for the Navy," So anyway, so I went to -- I had, like, three interviews, and I went to this one interview. It was with a Navy captain, and he worked for the program that sold missile and missile parts to our allies. So I'm sitting there waiting for him, and he comes in; he hands me this big -- looked like a Sears catalog. It was like the Sears catalog of missiles. So he said, "Look through that, and I'll be right back." So I'm looking through it, and that's what it was. It was, like, pictures of missiles and engines and motors. And I thought, no, this is not for me. So he comes -- I knew I did not want to work there. He comes in, and he says, "Well," you know, he looks at my resume and says, "Oh, I see your Bachelor's is in SOCiology." And, "You were a SOCIAL worker." He would emphasize the word "social," and I thought, "OK, he obviously thinks I'm a red diaper baby or something." So I tried to end that interview as soon as I could and get out of there, and he was clear he didn't want me there, so it was fine. And I went to another Naval -- that was Sea Systems Command. I went to Naval Air Systems Command, and that wasn't a fit either. So finally I said, "Well, if I'm going to do anything with the Navy it's got to be planning." So, there was the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, and they had a job for a planner -- community planner. Oh, community planner, OK, I could do that. So, I went to the headquarters, and they said, "Oh, we just laid off a bunch of people. Why don't you go talk to our office at the Navy Yard?" This was Thursday. I had one more day. So I call, and they say, "Well, come in on Friday. We'll interview you." So I went in, and they said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we'd love to have you." OK, so I went back home to Texas, and the paperwork started.

So I came up here in September thinking I was only going to stay two years. My plan was to go back home, you know, work, get a job with the city of San Antonio in urban planning and, you know, be happy. I got here, and the March on Washington happened. ENLACE, started working on ENLACE. I just, you know, got involved with so many things. Two years came, and there was no job. San Antonio was in a recession, and my friends that worked for the city were getting laid off. So I said, "Well I'm just going to stay here if I can get a job." Because it was an internship, so the two years came to an end. I didn't know if I was going to be offered a permanent position. So they said, "Oh, we'd love to have you stay." So I transitioned to Career. And at the office, there were like four gay people in that office. We were very lucky because my supervisor -- I mean, my supervisor and the director of the department were straight, but they -- I mean -- we were OK but they also value our contribution and our work. The fact we're gay wasn't an issue for them. I mean it was to other people in the organization, but they were like, you know, that's OK with us. It shouldn't bother anybody else. So we had a pretty good working environment there. That was probably the more integrated department of the -- you know, there were African Americans that were engineers and planners. There were four gay people, women, you know. But that's a credit to our bosses who were doing the hiring. They wanted a diverse staff. They made sure they had a diverse staff. That's not the case in most military organizations. It's just not. So I kind of lucked out there.

And I was there, and, you know, I remember one day I (chuckle) I walked into the office and my supervisor says, "Hey Leti, I saw you on TV last night." I thought, "What did he see me on?" He said -- and it was -- what was it? -- I was interviewed for something. I can't remember. I can't remember what it was. And he said, "Yeah, you looked pretty good." It was a gay issue. Every once in a while, I'd show up on TV and they'd go, "Oh, I saw you on TV last night." And when I applied for a clearance, the director of the department called me in. He says, "What do you want

me to say to them?" I said, "Tell them the truth. Just tell them what you know." I'm not going to hide it, so, tell them what you know. "OK, just wanted to ask you." And when I had to breakup with my girlfriend in the early '90s, I mean, I was, like, devastated. I was just really depressed. He called me and he says, "What's going on?" And I said, "Well, I'm having some personal problems." He said, "Well, if you want to take some time, it's OK with me." So he's very sweet and understanding. Yeah, I mean we had parties at, you know -- one of my gay coworker's, he and his partner would have holiday parties at their house, and we'd, you know. There were certain people who didn't go because they weren't going to go into a gay household, but, you know, everybody else was cool about it. So, it was very lucky. Very lucky. Even now, where I work now, I haven't come out. I haven't told my boss that I'm gay, but I talked to him "Well, my girlfriend and I did this --" But he -- it's this "Don't ask, Don't tell" thing, even with civilians. So he won't ask me. But you know. It was funny because the other day -- we sit in a quad, cubes. There's partitions, but you can hear. There's another Navy commander here, and then my boss is over here, and this commuter, I think, is a homophobe. He was talking about, you know, the gay -- the gay naval academy alumni that want to start a chapter in the future. He started talking about it, and then he got up -- he was on the phone with somebody -- he got up and walks into a private office to finish the conversation. And then the next day, my boss comes in and says, "Hey, yeah, what do you think about that alumni group that wants to --" and all of a sudden I heard that they started to whisper. So I thought, "OK, OK, they don't want me to hear what they're saying." But my commander kind of drops -- he's cool because he kind of drops, "Well, I go to the Foundry Methodist Church. My wife and I go to Foundry, and we have gay people in there, and, you know, it's very--" You know, so. And it's funny because I was telling -- we just hired another planner who's gay and a woman that I know is going to start working on Monday who's gay. And, you know, they're going to be surrounded pretty soon. (Laughter) So we'll see if it comes to a head. I have actually -- I'm pretty comfortable because when I move there, there were a number of people that I was out to at my other organization who moved there also, so, you know, it's comfortable to -- and the three straight women, it's comfortable to just have people who know me, and they're comfortable and that I can talk to. They'll ask me, "Oh, how's Ruth?" and, you know, "Are you still involved with the -- in the community?" Stuff like that because they would all see me on TV, too. And when the Heroes exhibit came out last week, evidently, I guess Channel 4, when they went to cover it, whoever they were interviewing was standing in front of my photo because I had several people go, "Oh, I saw you on TV the other day. What was that all about?" So I have to tell them. But I think, you know, it's -- it'll be interesting to see how that plays out, because the issue of being gay hasn't really come to the surface, and maybe it won't. Maybe they just will say, "Hey, you know, if she does good work, who cares?" That's really the way it should be. You know, who I sleep with shouldn't have any impact on how I'm regarded, so.

SPD: Have you ever thought about getting a job away from the military?

LG: Yeah, I have. I wanted to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but you have to be Native American. And, so, I've thought of, you know -- well over the years I periodically look to see if there are other jobs in other agencies. And, you know, I like what I do. I mean, although I'm thinking I don't know that I'm going to be able to finish out my career. I mean my plan was to have a full career and eventually become a Senior Executive Service. But it's getting to the point where I guess more and more I'm thinking maybe there are other things I could be doing. They won't pay as well, and it's just a decision I'll have to make. But, you know, it's been

satisfying for the most part. I wanted to do planning, public administration. I don't think I could do any other job in the military outside of a planning job, this kind of -- doing something that has an impact on other people in that way. Yeah, bombs and missiles have a big impact on people, but that's not what I want to be a part of that. So that's, you know -- this is probably the only job I think I could really continue to do. Or, if it was a policy job that -- it would depend on what the policy job is, though -- military. Because I've been surprised, you know -- I was surprised right up to the election, like my boss, he said, you know, "There's not a lot of military who will -- you know, they're going to vote for Kerry, but they're not going to tell you they're going to vote for Kerry." Because it's a big conservative culture. But I've heard a number of officers, kind of off to the side say, "We should never have gone to Iraq." You know, we're a Defense department, not an Offensive department. It wasn't about what they say it was. It was about the oil. I just got through reading *All the Shah's Men*. It's about when we overthrew the democracy in Iran in the '50s to install the Shah. It was about oil. And we had no business going in there. Truman had said no. Eisenhower said no. But then Eisenhower said, "OK, well don't tell me. Just do it. Don't tell me." And they had a democracy in Iran. Yeah, we did it in Nicaragua. We did it in Panama. Salvador.

SPD: Well, let's end. It's been about two hours.

LG: Now, are you getting what you -- I guess you are because you're asking the questions.
(laughter)

SPD: Yeah (laughter). {2:00:00}

(break in audio)

Second Interview January 5, 2005

SPD: Thanks. All right. Yeah it's interesting. I've never been to an astrologer, but I know several people that have, and I've been thinking about trying to track down a good one. But I don't really if you've seen that -- do you know Akasha Hull, Gloria Hull -- do you know her work? She, um --

LG: What's her name?

SPD: Akasha Hull. She's also known as Gloria Hull. She was one of the editors of the anthology: *All the Blacks Are Men, All the Women Are White, but Some of Us Are Brave*.

LG: Uh-huh, yes, uh-huh.

SPD: She has this book out on African American women and spirituality, and she interviews Alice Walker and Toni Cade Bambara and all these wonderful people about their spirituality and it's quite explicitly, you know, stuff that people might call new age or occult or something like that, you know, speaking of spirits, It's really brave, I think. One of the things I'm interested in actually is your idea of spirituality. You actually mentioned last time that you're converting to Judaism. So maybe you could talk a little bit about your religious or spiritual beliefs and that journey?

LG: {2:01:36} Um, hmm, well let's see. I was born into a Catholic family. Baptized, went through, like, six years of catechism. I went to a couple years of Catholic school, then catechism, which is like, you know, I was supposed to go somewhere after school. Got confirmed at 12, and that was pretty much it. I mean it's like my, you know -- I started Catholic school before Vatican 2. And then Vatican 2 happened, which kind of eased certain parts of the ritual, and mass wasn't said just in Latin after Vatican 2. But it was always, you know -- I always found that the Catholic Church is just so repressive. Actually it was funny because I was telling -- someone asked me today about my experience with Catholicism, and I said that one of my more vivid memories, other than the whole issue -- I think we talked about it last time with the nuns and paying the tuition and all that stuff was that when I was 12 -- this must have been right before I got confirmed. I went to confession, and I said to the priest, "Forgive me father, for I have sinned. I've had an impure thought." And he asked me what it was, and I said, "Well I don't want to tell you," and so he was very insistent, and I was insistent back, "I'm not going to tell you." So finally I remember he got frustrated and said, "Well just go say three Hail Marys and how many Our Fathers." And I remember thinking, that was very personal to me, and I was going through the process of confession and all that, but whatever it was was my thought, and I didn't think it was important for this other individual, this priest, to know. And after that I was just like totally not -- that kind of just sealed it for me, you know? Why was I even going through that? So after I was confirmed, for years I never went to church -- never followed anything. You know, I was 12, and I think in my 20s I kind of like explored other, um -- 30s, a little bit of Buddhism, very, you know -- just kind of read up on it, talked to some people that were into it. But then Judaism, off and on through the years has kind of just appealed to me. I didn't know a whole lot about it, but what I knew seemed -- I liked the ritual, the sense of community, and it wasn't until, I guess -- well let me back this up. The other thing, though, was at some point I just became aware that I wasn't sure that I believed in God: this, whatever, the man with the white hair sitting up somewhere above us, but I had this sense of -- it was what I read in terms of Native American spirituality -- that there's just this greater, you know, they call it spirit, just this other -- this energy. And off and on during my life, I've just had, like, conversations with spirit.

So when I -- in my last relationship, my partner was exploring Judaism, and asked me to just share that with her, and so I did. And that's when I became aware that in Judaism, well, you're really encouraged to talk directly to God. So that kind of fit what was already doing. And I liked the ritual in terms of, you know, Friday comes along, the Sabbath comes along, we rest, and this is -- OK, you've worked all week, this is a time of rest, and also a time of being grateful and thankful for what you have. And just the various holidays, taking time to reflect and be thankful and also remember. What I like about Judaism is that their history is always present. No matter it's 5,000, 6,000 years ago, it's always present because they remind themselves always about what they've come through and gone through as a people to be here today. Which I find that's always fascinated me, and I think it's important for everyone to not forget where our people came from, what our ancestors had to go through and endure for us to be here today.

So I guess my sense of, in answer to your question is I believe there's a higher power, whatever that is. I don't know that I have a certain vision of what that looks like. And at the same time the human-made creation of ritual, I think, is just important in terms of giving me a sense of community and just helping me be anchored in some way. So that's kind of where I'm at with it now. And so my study to convert is -- I mean I'm still questioning, and every time I meet with

the Rabbi, I just question, is this really a good fit? I'm still not sure because I've never really been strictly religious. And I don't know that I will be even as a Jew. I mean she's reconstructionist, so they're a little bit more liberal in some ways. Because that's just a conversation I'm still having with myself, whether I convert -- really get to the point where I can convert and feel really that I in my heart can do that, and be faithful, so to speak, to the religion is still something I question. But in terms of just having a relationship with a higher power, energy, spirit, whatever you want to call it, I think I have that.

SPD: OK, so I have two questions. I guess the one to ask first would be, well how do you think your ideas about that higher power have changed over your life? Do you have a sense of how you (phone ringing) have understood it or thought about it if that's something that's changed?

LG: Well, with Catholicism, we're born with original sin. And God is kind of -- it's -- for me in terms of that, Catholicism is like you're already guilty before -- you know, you haven't even -- you've just been born and you already have sin. That seems so unfair to me, you know, especially when a child is an innocent. And then earlier I thought, well, if the priests are, you know, not very fair, the nuns, as I experienced it, weren't very kind, and they're serving God, then, what is that? What kind of God are they serving? So for a long time, I really didn't think about God in the way I was brought up to know God in Catholicism. But I always had conversations with -- I guess I would call it God. Yeah, I would call it God. But it was, like, in my view, it was a kinder spirit, and then there [were] many years, and I didn't even think about it much. I was kind of angry about just the whole religious thing and the restrictions to some degree.

SPD: Why do you think that changed?

LG: Um, (sigh) I guess -- Well actually that part I can't say has really changed. And with Judaism, you know, there are orthodox Jews who are very strict. And there's a range of Jews from, you know, ultra-orthodox to humanists, that I think to me represents the, I guess, even within that community looking for, you know, where it's a best fit for them, for the individual. So for me, I guess in the last maybe two or three years, I really started to think about it as I find comfort in talking to a great spirit, and I don't feel as alone. And I can't tell you why that changed. I can't say that there was, like, an event that did that for me. Actually, well maybe it was around the time of my life -- the breakup from my last relationship. I just kind of felt really alone now that I think about it. And so there was, for me it was -- I found comfort just thinking, "OK, I'm not alone." And that also kind of made me realize that I needed to also be in touch with those people -- other people in my life that I had kind of not reached out to, not really sought out and what I found when I did was that they were very welcoming and very, I guess, sympathetic to where I was at that point in my life. So yeah, I guess that was the event probably that, now that I think about it, spurred it.

SPD: And when did you start having conversations about converting?

LG: Well it's funny you should ask that because I remember being -- for me it was just in the last couple of years. But a friend of mine who was my college roommate, we were talking about this a couple years ago about the time that I had decided to do this. She says, "Well, heck, I thought you'd have done that a long time ago. You talked about it when we were in college." I

had no recollection of that. But she did. I mean it was just so vivid for her, and I thought, "Wow," you know? So it's obviously -- it's been on my mind since I was in my early 20s. And I just, you know, shoved it aside for 20 some odd years.

SPD: Do you connect your spirituality or religion with your politics?

LG: I guess my gut reaction is to say no, and I've started to ask myself those questions recently only because of what's occurred, in terms of conservatives and the radical right, evangelical Christianity, and how on the Left, progressives aren't necessarily aligned with any one sect of religion. Although I'm sure that if we asked there's progressives and liberals that have some religious affiliation. But I've started to ask myself that question just because of commentary that I've read since the election about wanting -- you know, the left hasn't really incorporated religion or institutions into the movement more. Other than say, Catholics for Free Choice, or something like that, but. So I'm just starting to ask myself how that fits. I don't know yet, I guess is the answer for that.

SPD: Well actually where I was planning to start today was actually to go back to your arrival in DC and kind of starting from there, talking about your activist work and social life, because we talked more about your work in the Navy. So I was wondering if we could kind of talk about starting to get involved in the march on Washington, that kind of thing?

LG: {2:16:00} Yeah, and it was funny because, when I came here, it was for a two year internship with the government. It ended up being with the Navy because that's where I could get a job. And almost immediately -- I mean I started work, like, on a Monday. That weekend I was marching. Or I guess it was two weekends later I was marching. And I remember my mother called, and she says, "You think you really should be doing all that since you just started this job?" And I said, "Well, you know -- what are they going to do to me?" Yeah, fire me. So I really just threw myself into a lot of -- I mean it was just meetings and getting to meet people here in DC, the gay and lesbian Latinos that were forming this new group ENLACE. And it just so happened that I was here. My friend Dennis Medina from Texas was here. We met a couple of other Tejanos, gay and les-- gay Tejanos that were here. Of course we had come from being in Texas where we had a very active gay/lesbian Tejano Latino community in all the major cities. There was a group in Austin, San Antonio, Houston, Dallas -- I think there was one in El Paso maybe.

So since the early '80s, we had this network and we'd been kind of organizing it in our communities. We came here and there was a group just starting, and they were struggling. So because we had experience with organizing, doing outreach, we just kind of stepped in and worked with them. Which was different for us because we were all Chicanos and here the leader of the group was a Puerto Rican lesbian, and a Columbian lesbian, a Salvadoran gay man, and so we were exposed to all these different Latinos. And that wasn't really an issue, you know? I mean, we all spoke Spanish. Most of us spoke -- were bilingual, so communicating wasn't an issue. And right away we knew that the common thing was we just wanted to get to know each other and grow with other Latinos. And then parallel to that of course was the founding of LLEGO. That was in '87, and February of '88, we were flying ourselves around -- those of us that met here in DC decided we were going to meet again as nationally so we went to LA. So we were just bank rolling our flights, however we could, and so we went to LA. And we met with

other Latinos and Latinos there, and that's when we decided we were going to form a national organization. For the better part of a year, we would try to meet where there were other gay and lesbian organizations, like, in LA it was the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum. They were having a conference, so we thought we'd go there and meet them and piggy back on the use of the meeting space and stuff. I remember we went to the National Lesbian [and] Gay Health Association Conference in Boston. To be there and also to meet other gay and lesbian Latinos. It was just a very exciting time, just getting to just know different Latinos and realize that we all had a common -- pretty much a common goal which was to have visibility in the movement and also start to really give voice to what our issues were. Besides the the white gay and lesbian movement's issues, we had other things because we were Latino. I mean I can't tell you -- I mean I would go to work, and then we'd either be in someone's office Xeroxing, meeting. It was, -- I would go home to sleep, basically. I mean I wasn't really -- and I had a girlfriend at the time and that's probably what contributed to that breakup because I just wasn't home much. I was just really excited and driven by what we were doing. And then here locally with the -- you know, ENLACE started -- we started organizing monthly meetings with topics. We started organizing - in '88, I think we had our first party. Actually it was over at 18th Street at what used to be Cities. I remember we had it in -- we could only get the place in the afternoon for like 4-8:00 or something like that on a Sunday. I can't remember how we -- I think we scraped together some money to put an ad in the Blade, and we sent out fliers. So were there at 4:00. It was hardly anybody there. 5:00, hardly anybody there. Of course, you know, Latinos, they like to come later, so 6:00, the last 2 hours, it was packed. Everybody was excited that we organized the party just for gay and lesbian Latinos with music that everyone, well, most everyone was familiar with, and that's how we started collecting names. We would have sign-in sheets: "Let us know how to contact you for either the next party or next event." And we got to a point where we had collected like 300-400 names. I think it was mostly the parties that we had, and we'd have people come in and like distribute condoms. We'd call the clinic. They would come distribute condoms or other materials in Spanish. I think the word just got around to the rest of the community that here was this Latino organization, so we started getting calls.

Like, I remember that's when Gays and Lesbians [Opposing] Violence started. So they called us to come participate, and GLAA, all these -- at that point, what seemed established gay and lesbian organizations here in town started to reach out because here was a visible group, and some of us were willing to be visible. There were a lot of us in the group that were still closeted, but like Judith would do radio spots on Spanish radio. Dennis and I would go speak at different groups, or whenever there was a rally, we would go speak. So it was a time where it all seemed very new and exciting. And I guess in retrospect now, I run into people -- it's funny. Up until a few years ago, I was still running into people asking me about ENLACE. I said, "That organization's been gone for eight or nine years." But it was just so present in some people's minds that they thought it still existed. Where was I going with that?

Well anyway, I think that's -- you know, it was just -- well, and as far as the work thing is concerned, in '93, I started to work part time. I wanted to work full time on LLEGO. And I told my boss, and my boss had seen me on TV and I campaigned for military service, he saw me give an interview, and my photograph would be in the Blade periodically and a lot of people would pick up the Blade -- you'd be surprised. Back then, a lot of people would -- you know, straight people would pick up The Blade. Folks would say to me at work, "Oh, I saw your picture in the Blade." He said, "Well, why don't you work part time, and do that part time?" I said, "You want

me to do it?" He said, "Sure." Which to me told me that they valued me as an employee and they were willing to keep me on, and they knew that I was doing gay/lesbian work anyway. So I did that for about a year. I would go to work, work half a day and then run off to do this -- to work with LLEGO. So I mean -- I guess in that sense I was lucky that he was open-minded and wasn't freaked out about having an employee that was out there doing this kind of work. And that was certainly helpful to me, to keep food on the table and stuff. But yeah it's -- that was the work. It's been so long now I just can't remember all the details, but I just remember like, coming home at 11 or 12 at night sometimes just after meetings and then after a meeting, you go have dinner, drinks, and, you know -- and that was the life for maybe like '88 to '93. So, a good like five years so that was just, kind of, hard at it in that sense.

SPD: Do you remember what the process was like of coming together and trying to grow community and trying to work out what Latino LGBT issues were?

LG: Well here locally it was -- I guess I -- what always struck me was the need just to connect with other Latinos. Even though the Latino population here has grown -- has kind of exploded since I've been here. Back then it was -- being gay was a white thing. And you would hear Latinos say, "There is no word for gay in Spanish." You know, there was *homosexual*, you know, "homosexual," or *lesbiana*, but like the gay lifestyle just didn't translate. So it was just neat to create our own, you know, life. Or there's some people who call it *el ambiente*, the environment, the atmosphere. And then of course, you know HIV. It was a big -- during that time that ENLACE was getting started, so was Salud, which was by and for Latinos with HIV/AIDS. And we lost a lot of people, a lot of gay men during that period that were active in the community. So I think that it was -- part of it was creating an awareness about HIV, part was about creating an awareness of this community, this almost underground community. Because we'd heard about the bars where the men would go to pick up tricks and stuff. But the women were like totally invisible. And so the -- when we had a party, that was an opportunity to come together outside of a bar. It was festive but it was an opportunity to come together. When we started participating in the gay pride marches, that was a big deal because there hadn't been a presence of Latinos. I haven't been to a march in the last couple years, but for a while there, there was a group that had a float. I mean, there were dancers and music. And that was just about creating that visibility. So, I think here was really just about -- kind of like the beginning stages of any movement. You know, you bring people together, begin to build a network.

{2:30:27} And I guess the other thing that I would hear more after the fact was that ENLACE provided an opportunity to know I could be gay. I could be Latino, lesbian, and it was OK. There wasn't anything -- it wasn't strange. It wasn't abnormal. I think -- probably I guess if we stop to think about it, anything that we do in the gay community, that's what it's about. It's about -- I don't like to use the word "normalcy." It's really about just creating this awareness that it's OK to be who you are with all that you bring. In this case it was being Latino. And often -- also I've run into mostly young men -- who are not young anymore -- but they'd say to me, "You know, if it wasn't for ENLACE, I wouldn't have come out as soon." Or I had one woman say to me, if it wasn't for ENLACE, she wouldn't have known that she could work in the community as an open lesbian and really feel like she was giving something to the community. And those sort of -- I mean, to me it was simple, but not, because it made a difference in their lives and how they lived their life, how they presented themselves to themselves and to others. And if we provided a forum for that, great. Sometimes I think of -- what is it? Maslow's Hierarchy of

Needs. You know, you have your basics and then you keep going up. I think we were helping people self-actualize in a way, giving them more opportunity to figure out how to do that. I don't know what it's like now. I don't know if there are Latinos out there who feel like they're missing something because there is no ENLACE, but now there's like Latino Leather Men (laughter) -- you know, all sorts of -- I run into the folks periodically. I'm just kind of amazed at what people are doing, you know, as out Latinos.

SPD: So, who were some of the people that were especially important to you in ENLACE?

LG: Let's see, there was -- well there was Yolanda Santiago. There was Dennis Medina. There was Judith Arandes. She was the Puerto Rican woman that was one of the founders of ENLACE. There was Jose Gonzales, who was the Salvadoran man. He died very early on; he had HIV. Very sweet man. He had an impact, even though I didn't know him very long because he died so quickly after we got started. But it was just -- he was so sincere about making people aware that -- you know, in his case, he was a Latino Salvadoran gay man with AIDS. And he wanted people to be aware. I mean, he was a very humble person. But it was so important to him that an ENLACE exist so that it could help give visibility to Latinos.

And a very dear friend of his, Dolores Garcia, she ended up working with Salud. She would always remind me of that. She says, you know, "What we do, not just in ENLACE but in Salud is about making people aware of this other community." And that it's not just a gay-wide disease. So those folks had an impact on me. And then just other people along the way. There was this Filipino gay man who was our newsletter editor at ENLACE. And it was weird because his boyfriend was white, but he had just an affinity for what we were doing. He was so passionate about it -- Don Crisostomo. He was just really passionate about what we were doing, and he -- I mean his contribution was editing our newsletter or making sure it got it out on time and stuff -- and then there was Rick Kulik, who is a Jewish gay man, who was our treasurer and our event promoter. He had an affinity for Latinos, but also he was just very dedicated to what we were doing in terms of the organization and doing outreach and stuff. So here you have two cases where they weren't Latino but still they were allies, you know. Anyway there's just the whole slew of people that -- that are still around that were part of that whole movement. Well, ENLACE lasted, what, eight years, '87 to '94. About seven years, yeah.

SPD: Were there ever any issues within the non-Latino allies that came up?

LG: Uh, no. I mean, let me think a second. One thing that -- this was something Yolanda did. She reached out -- when she was the president of ENLACE, she reached out to the African American gay group at the time, which was the DC Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. There was an Arab group here.

SPD: The Gay and Lesbian Arab Society?

LG: Yeah. There was -- there was the Arabs, Blacks, um -- there was another one, no Native American groups here. Anyway, on at least two occasions, we participated in like, a multicultural racial forum on issues, and I think at the time, Roger Dowdy was the president of either Stein or GLAA -- GLAA. So the four groups participated in these forums. And I think the -- I guess the differences were really how we -- I mean, really what was important to a black

person who happened to be gay, what was important to a Latino person who happened to be gay, as opposed to a white gay person, you know? Maybe bilingual education or immigration issues were important to me as a Latina, but not to a black gay person or a white person. And so sometimes it was about educating each other about what our issues are. You know, for Latinos to understand racism and that we can be racist. And you know, the history of racism in the United States. Because again, a lot of Latinos that live here aren't from the United States. They come from other countries. So, racism to them, they will tell you, "Oh, we're not racist." "Well, you probably don't have in your community blacks. So I guess you could say you're not racist but in this country, this is part of our history." Those opportunities were more educational than anything else. I can't think -- I mean, when the young Latino was killed here in '91 -- '90 or '91, herein Adams Morgan, everyone got -- it was an issue of hate crime and violence, so all the groups came together. So I think, in my memory, it was more -- when we did get together it was about coming together on issues. And that's different from what has occurred on the national scene.

SPD: What do you think made the difference?

LG: Good question. (pause) Well, from my vantage point, I think it was that we actually got to know each other as people. And it was actually the people that were willing to be open to someone different, and be open to trying to understand the other's experience. This weekend I just ran into someone that -- a woman, black lesbian that I had met years ago, and we were kind of talking about how we weren't in that part of the life anymore. She goes, "Oh yeah, I remember --" kind of the same thing: "I remember coming home really late at night after meetings and meetings and meetings, and events." So it's kind of weird.

So we kind of reflected about that period -- what, ten years ago -- how ever many years ago it was that we were both going through at the same time, her with the DC Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays and me and ENLACE. So I think that that's probably what made it just that -- here it was -- maybe it was because Washington's small, we got to know each other, but also it was really the people. I mean if it had been another personality that didn't care, wasn't interested, then there wouldn't have been that connection. Not to say that there weren't those people. There were on all sides, but there was a few years there where we were really connected to each other. Which is a shame now because there is no real venue for that. GLAA and Stein are still around, and I think there are probably more blacks in Stein now than there were before. I don't know what Latinos are in Stein -- you know? I don't know Asians, you know? That's the other group that was kind of (inaudible). Like there's the Asian queer lesbians, but I don't know about -- what is that, the white/Asian group, Asians and Friends or something like that. I have no idea if that group is still around, but yeah, we worked with Asians and Friends. You know, we'd have parties together. So, this is just a different time. {2:43:37}

SPD: How did that happen? Was that people consciously reaching out to others?

LG: I think so, yeah. I mean that was my recollection. You know, the black lesbians and gays, they would invite us to their events. We would invite them to our events. For the short time that the Arab group was around -- and actually what helped there is that Dennis and Ramsey were roommates (laughs). So, it was like there -- that was that connection. And what was that Asian man's name that was in Asians and Friends? Oh my God. This is awful. I went to his

birthday party. Well Marshall is gone. Marshall moved to LA. It was really about the individuals I think.

SPD: Could you tell me a little bit more about Yolanda, maybe we'll start with her, just tell what your relationship with her is like?

LG: {2:44:45} Yolanda's from Puerto Rico. How did I -- I met Yolanda through ENLACE. Actually I met a number of good friends through ENLACE. Yolanda was -- she was very outgoing and a great talker. You know, she could talk you into just about anything. She was a catalyst for a lot of just getting out and reaching out to different -- not just Latinos but also that period I talked about with other groups and stuff. That's when she was president of ENLACE. And she would always tell me, she said, "OK, so we don't have 300 or 400 paid members, but we have 300 or 400 names that we can tell someone what -- this organization is connected to 300 or 400 people on a regular basis through our newsletters and through events. She always tried to emphasize to me that when you organize, it's so important to however -- whatever it takes to get the message out, you do it. If it's a party that you use to get the message out, that's the most effective way, that's what you do. Now, kind of like me, she's pretty much retired. She's raising her son with her partner. But whenever we get together and we happen to get on the topic of the community, we just talk about how we wonder now what young gay and lesbian Latinos are doing. How are they connecting to each other, and how important is it in the Washington gay and lesbian community that -- or is there a missing link, now, without the Coalition, without ENLACE, without Asians and Friends, what are we missing? Are we missing anything? Are we missing each other? And we -- it's kind of weird, as I've aged, I now have a set of friends. Now when I look at it, it's like, I want to like get back in, but then I think, "Well why?" I'm 50 now. You know, how do I connect to a 20-year-old girl or a 25-yearold?" Or "Why isn't there a 25-year-old out there organizing Latinos?" Periodically I do ask myself that. And are we missing [something] because it's not happening? I'm reminded of this like with the discussion I heard on NPR a few -- maybe it was today -- about the NAACP. Is it still relevant? I think that's a good question. Is it still relevant to have separate organizations? But at the same time I don't see our mainstream white -- or gay organizations diversified greatly. I mean, they don't appear to be diversified. So, what's missing? Is it still a white gay movement?

SPD: Yeah. Yeah it's interesting. I look at the junior staff of some of those organizations, and they seem fairly diverse.

LG: That's the junior staff.

SPD: Yeah (laughter).

LG: I know some of those junior staffers. Actually, this is an aside, but a couple of weeks ago, Ruth and I were having coffee with one of the leaders of one of the gay organizations, and he was saying, "Well, the gay leaders are getting together." "Well who's that?" And he says, "Well—" he kind of h-- he's from a working class background. He said, "Well, it's the gay leaders of the gay organizations. Those are the gay leaders." And I said, "Yeah, but you all are white. All of you are white." And he says, "Yeah." (laughter) OK, so, you know, there's no Black people there, there's no Latinos there, there's no Asians there, so when you talk about the

movement, how are you going to consider us and represent us? He says, "Well, you got a good point." So, yeah, I just think that's the part that's missing. Those voices aren't there.

SPD: Can you talk a little bit more about LLEGO?

LG: What about it?

SPD: Getting started, what it was about, what you remember --

LG: Um --

SPD: I'm sorry, before we do that, maybe we should talk -- what do you remember about -- we didn't quite finish ENLACE in terms of what happened or -- you talked about how it was doing really well, but--

LG: About how it ended?

SPD: Yeah, how did it end?

LG: {2:50:53} Uh, let's see. I think -- I guess it was in '93 or '94. I was starting -- at that point I wanted to pull away because I wanted to devote myself more to LLEGO. And at that point, Yolanda had just had her son, so she wasn't involved anymore. So what we were -- I was looking for within the organization, you know, individuals to take over. And I guess now it's called Transition Management. We didn't do it very well. Somebody said, "Yeah, I'm willing to do it." But their enthusiasm, as it turned out, wasn't enough. They didn't have the -- I guess the knowledge -- the skill of how to organize, so I think part of it was just not knowing how to keep it going, how to organize, because I mean I totally stepped away from it. I said, "Yeah, great, go for it." So within maybe a year, even less, it just stopped to function. They stopped having meetings, they stopped doing events, it just came to an end.

And around that time, there was a -- and I think it was also generational, because these guys were, like, in their 30s. There was a group of 20-year-olds, Latinos who had just come to DC to work for LLEGO because I had hired them. And when they found out that ENLACE wasn't around, they said, "Well, we'll start this other group." OK. That was Gente Latina del Ambiente, GELAAM. But at that point we had -- this is Leti's opinion--own, we had now professionally or paid Latinos, because they were working for LLEGO. They were doing GELAAM on the side, and it was with a different -- I guess it seemed to me it was with a different -- I don't want to say enthusiasm, but it was just different. You know, ENLACE was totally volunteer, and it was done with by folks who had a real passion for the work. Not that these folks didn't have passion, it was just, if it didn't fit in the schedule, it didn't get done. Through the grants that LLEGO was getting, we were using some of that grant money to give small stipends to different gay and lesbian Latino groups around the country to do HIV/AIDS prevention programs in their community, tailored for their community, and we gave one to GELAAM. But what it meant was that then, now they were paying someone to do it. That just had a different feel. So when the money wasn't there, it didn't get done.

So, I think it was part a function of, just, moving from a volunteer force to a paid -- I mean, people should get paid for that work, but, you know, it was just a different environment in terms

of why people did certain things. And Gente Latina del Ambiente has ceased to exist also for various reasons that I'm not familiar with. I just think it was just a change. Now -- and it's great. There are junior staff at various gay and lesbian organizations [that] get paid to do work, but it's just less incentive I think for some to do it as a volunteer. That's kind of my jaded view of it. But that's just what I've observed over the last few years.

SPD: Do you think it made a difference that when folks came together to create ENLACE, there hadn't been something like that before?

LG: Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think people were hungry for it. They didn't feel connected, and this provided connection and community. Which actually just occurs to me, as we were talking earlier about how I like the ritual of Judaism and stuff, I think that's what makes community sometimes, having a ritual of some sort, you know? In Judaism it's Shabbat or it's, you know the high holidays. For other communities, it's Christmas and it's Easter, you know. But in the gay and lesbian community, what rituals do we have, other than marches and parades? So I think some of what, not just our group but like the DC Coalition and, you know, they had events that kind of brought people together and that was important at the time. Maybe it's not as important to people anymore. I don't know.

But how do you get people motivated on issues? As we talked last time, the election we had here, it's like, why weren't we in the streets? They were marching at Kiev. They had a shady election. They were out in the streets for two weeks. We had two shady elections, and we've been comfortable in -- I mean, me too. I mean, we've all been comfortable in our homes and just watching it on TV, like, outside -- you know, we're all outside observers. So in the gay and lesbian community, what issues are there to really get us out of our seats nowadays? Marriage? The fact that people don't want us to be married? I mean if we were getting fired -- you know, if people were getting fired by the droves, out of their jobs, or being denied access to their partners in the hospital in large numbers. I think there'd be something to spur us, but there's nothing to get us, like, really excited and motivated. We've become very comfortable. There are so many gay and lesbian paid professionals now. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Again, I think people work, they should be compensated. But we have other people doing it for us I guess is my point. So how relevant would it be to have an ENLACE today? That's a good question. How would it be relevant to a gay or lesbian Latino today? I don't know.

SPD: Well, so, LLEGO. So tell me about your involvement in terms of: were you there from the beginning?

LG: {2:59:20} Mmm-hmm. Well what happened was we had a march in Washington in 1987. And ENLACE hosted the event at the Reeves Center. We had about 75 people show up, I think. Gay and Lesbian Latinos not just from the States, but also from South America that had come to Washington for this big march. But the focus was US Latinos. We were in this big room and we were just so happy to be with each other and meet Latinos from all over the place -- you know, all over the country. We decided that -- actually we decided before that, but this was the venue for it -- that we wanted to create some sort of a national organization. And as I mentioned earlier, now after that march we -- several of us flew ourselves or got ourselves around the country to different gay and lesbian conferences to meet and talk about LLEGO, and in '88, we went to LA and that's where we drafted bylaws, and it gets more serious. We decided

that we were to divide ourselves into regions so that the western region had – and there was gender parity, a man and a woman would be co-chairs. They would be -- all the regions would have two men and two women represented. And soon after that -- this was as NMAC, the National Minority AIDS Council, had gotten a grant to do HIV/AIDS prevention. And so they asked LLEGO, which was just getting started, and the National, is it -- is it the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, NCBLG, to be like subcontractors to them. And it wasn't very much money as I recall. But it was enough to, like print newsletters and print information about HIV/AIDS. What that did, though, is we were able to be in the NMAC office space and have a phone and start doing some organizing nationally. And it really centered around HIV. But in order to do that work, you have to organize, so you had to start building networks. So through that process, we found out there were gay and lesbian Latino organizations all over the place, not just in LA and Texas, New York. There was a guy trying to start something in Florida, Chicago, there was a lesbian Latina group and a gay Latino men's group, and they -- and up to that point they had always kind of been in isolation. And what LLEGO did is we just built this network, and help people just get in contact with each other. So that was, like, the '80s --

SPD: What was the spirit of those beginning meetings like?

LG: (laughter) Oh man, as I recall there was a lot of arguing. {3:03:04} There was argument about who spoke for who -- oh, the other thing was, because it started in Texas and California. The view was, "Oh, this is a Chicano organization." "What about the Puerto Ricans? What about the Cubans? What about, you know, all the other Latinos?" And I remember that that's like the first time I realized, OK, yeah, I hadn't thought about it. Yes, we're mostly Chicanos, and we have a different view from a Puerto Rican, because Puerto Ricans, although they're a territory, they have citizenship. Chicanos are Chicanos because they're born in the states, but we're so closely linked to Mexico that for us, immigration is a big issue. Bilingual education was a big issue back then. Some of us came out of the farm worker work or movement, especially the California Latinos that were involved with LLEGO. A couple of them came out of the farm worker movement in California. I mean, so there were other issues that were important to us. So I remember there was a lot of that getting to know each other, different from what had happened here in DC.

SPD: How so?

LG: Well, because here in DC, the Chicanos were a minority. We were a minority. I mean most of the people here were Central American and Puerto Rican. When we had parties we didn't play polkas, Mexican polkas, we played salsa, you know? So it was just, it was kind of like, "When in Rome." But on the national scene, the Chicanos are the predominant group that was represented in LLEGO, and we got flack from the other Latinos, because they said, "Wait a minute, you don't know what it's like to grow up Newyorican." Well no I don't. You're right, I don't. But you also don't know what it's like to grow up Chicano in south Texas. There was tension. I remember, we did outreach meetings when we could. So from here, since we were divided up in regions, we said, "Those of us that are in DC will reach out to, like, Philadelphia and New York." Because I remember going to New York in the -- this was in the late '80s or late '90s, and we organized a LLEGO meeting at the gay and lesbian community center in New York. And--have you ever been there?

SPD: No, I haven't.

LG: OK, well I don't know if they have a new one. It was really crappy.

SPD: Laughs

LG: It was an old school. And the room they gave us was, like -- it looked like it had been a men's room or something. It was like white tile, and the fixtures were all gone. It was just a really crappy room, and I thought, oh no, we're not having a meeting here. This is just, like, really awful. So, we moved it upstairs to this other room. And the New York Latinos showed up, and there were like four or five organizations. There was Salsa Soul Sisters. There was some gay Latino men's group, Puerto Rican group. Anyway, so we're all there. We're there. We're excited. We're talking about LLEGO, okay, national presence. And they weren't going to have any of it. Like, "Who do you think you are to come to New York, talk to us about this national organization, you're all Chicanos," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and so it's like, whoa. And then, as we get -- so we went kind of around the room just like, tell the story. Well, come to find out, that was the first time they had ever been in a room together, any of these groups -- because they didn't talk to each other either. Because you have the Los Buenas Amigas, which I think is still around -- Los Buenas Amigas, which is a Latina lesbian group, didn't talk to the men, didn't talk to Salsa Soul Sisters, although there was some overlap between membership. It was just -- it was an eye opener. I just thought, "OK, there's a lot of work to be done here." First of all, to understand each other, kind of respect our experiences, and then how to bridge the gap. That wasn't easy, and it took several years to even make headway there. That wasn't a successful meeting at -- you know, I remember leaving and thinking, "Oh man, this is going to be hard." We went to dinner with a few folks afterwards, a Cuban gay man, a Puerto Rican gay man, and then the rest of us Chicanos. They kind of like -- they were sounding like, "This is the way it is. You just need to know, this is the way it is. New York's just a hard community. And you guys just need to be more open to being inclusive of other Latinos." So, you know, that was challenging.

And when we went to LA, (laughter), those were Chicanos. That was like, "Well who do you think you are? Why do you think you represent me here in LA." Well, um, -- so we had to get into what was specific about gay and lesbian Latino issues in LA or California that we need to be aware of that had an impact on the national scene. And it was, you know, things like immigration, and -- was this -- no, this was before Proposition 187. So even within our own community, it was the whole -- you know, why do you think you speak for us? So what that taught me was that I could never say I represent the gay and lesbian Latino community. I represented LLEGO. And LLEGO was working on these issues that impacted the gay and lesbian Latino community, but we could never comfortably say, "We spoke for the community." Which I think is probably true in any community. But it kind of dampens your (laughter) enthusiasm a little bit because we thought, OK, we have a lot of work to do just within our community. Of course, you know when the white gay and lesbian organizations would come to us, yeah, they wanted you to speak with one voice. You know, it's like, "Well, no, it's not quite like that."

SPD: "Make it easy for us please!" (Laughs)

LG: Yes, yes, it's not quite like that, right.

SPD: So what were the effects or responses, I guess, or feelings when you kind of realized the magnitude of the work?

LG: {3:10:50} Uhhhhhh, well some of us, we were just like, "Man, this is..." I just remember Joe Perez, may he rest in peace -- he and Dennis and I were the ones that went to New York for that meeting. Actually we also went to LA together. I think we also went to LA together. And I think afterwards we were just like kind of incredulous that it was going to be work within our community, just within our community to kind of give people an opportunity to voice their opinion. I guess the other thing that occurred to me was, this is the first time they'd had anyone that was even interested in what they had to say. You know? And it was the same experience I had when I was involved in the National Lesbian Conference and going to the National Lesbian Conference, organizing meetings --this is all lesbians, right? And having the working class lesbians say, "Why do you think that you could speak for me? And why do you think I can't do it?" It's so -- and it was, like, OK, this is the first opportunity, even though it's amongst lesbians to like have a voice and be heard, and sometimes when that happens, the pain comes out.

SPD: Yeah

LG: Someone's willing to listen to you, and the pain comes out or the anger. So that that's pretty much what happened here. We went there and, you know, "What are your issues?" Oh, yeah, here they are. We'll let you know. Oh and by the way, we're not so crazy about the fact that you guys are going around the country saying you're a national organization who represents gay and lesbian Latinos.

SPD: And at the time did you see that as their opinion or did you feel like you understood what was going on?

LG: No, no, no, not at all. It -- it -- I mean, it took a while for it to kind of sink in. But that's pretty much what prompted me to get involved. I just felt like I wasn't being heard, that I was invisible, and so I had to put myself -- and kind of remind my-- it was a reminder. We would laugh about it too. It was, like, "Oh yeah, we thought we were going to walk right in there, and, you know, everything would be -- oh we'd be embraced." No, forget it. Yeah, it wasn't easy. And then over the years -- and it would have been so easy to just say, "Well, screw you all. We're going to go do it anyway." Well, no, that wasn't the spirit that we wanted to create this. So, we kind of kept going back and getting beat over the head a few times. But finally it was like, "OK, they're not going away, and they keep coming back, so they must mean that they want to include us."

SPD: Or that you want to get beaten up. (laughter)

LG: Or yeah. So in the last years of LLEGO, I mean the -- I'd go to meetings and it was -- man, everybody was there, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, you know, Central Americans, Trans, I mean by that time -- and the other thing is, it was a Latino Lesbian and Gay Organization. There was no Bi and there was no Trans when we started. That all came over time. So yeah, I mean it was a whole process of education, just getting to know each other and then being open to all the difference. There were black Latinos. There were really very white Latinos [that] look like you.

And dealing with racism. I remember we had a meeting in San Jose, and at our meetings, because of HIV we'd also use, like -- we'd create these altars, you know, with pictures of people who had died. And maybe somebody would bring a cross, and they'd put it out there and light candles and stuff. And I remember this, uh -- I think he was Mexican -- Jew, Latino gay man came up to me and says, "You know what? You know, I'm really kind of offended that you have this altar with all this Christian--" and he says, "I'm Jewish." And it's like, "Duh," you know? (laughter) You know, it was -- yeah. Right, you know? We had that diversity. I remember thinking, yeah, I hadn't even thought about it. No one had. So we were -- I mean, I apologized to him, but it also made us realize that we had to be respectful of that difference, that religious difference amongst us. That was just a personal -- it was a very rewarding personal experience for me.

SPD: Well and that response is actually not the way everyone would respond to actually apologize and try to (laughter) -- right, and try to do it better next time. Where do you think that - your ability to respond that way comes from?

LG: Um, hmm. I guess I have always had -- I'm not sure where it comes from. I've always had a sense of wanting to make people comfortable. Yeah, there was something -- there was another incident that came to mind. It kind of slipped my mind right now, but, yeah, I just wanted people to feel welcome and feel like they'd been heard. Oh I remember. It was the last conference -- it was the last conference that I was at as executive director of LLEGO. And there was this Latino gay man from New York, and he just, like -- we had made the custom at the end of the conference, we would have an open forum, looking for feedback. Well this guy just lit into me. And really it was about LLEGO, and how he was so unhappy with blah, blah, blah, and blah, blah, blah, and he just went on and on and on. And it was a crowded room, and I just remember -- I remembered thinking, OK, I have a choice here. I could just be really defensive and lash back at him, or I could just hear him and try to understand where that is all coming from. And so I chose the latter. And where I thought it was appropriate to apologize for something I did, and afterwards -- actually he didn't say it to me. Someone else said to me. She said -- he said, "I really admire the fact that you could stand there and take everything he had to give you. I felt like you really listened to him. And that was important to me that you weren't defensive." So he came back the next year as it turns out, you know, it didn't keep him away from the conference. He came back. I was told he came back the following year, but. It's just always been part of me -- for people feel like they've been heard. Even if it's painful. So...

SPD: And so how did your work with LLEGO evolve?

LG: {3:19:24} Well, I seem to recall that when we went to that conference in LA, it was me, Dolores Garcia, Arcadio Torres, and Dennis. We were the only four that went from Washington. And so we were the four that got -- by default became the representatives for this region. And because we were in Washington, we also had the task of trying to set up a national office. So we accepted the responsibility, and so that's what we did. I mean, it operated out of our house -- my house with -- I was roommates with Dennis for a while. So it operated -- we were operating out of our house initially, but. It was just a sense of duty in some ways, and the other part was it was very exciting. There was a thrill to meeting people, getting to know people, learning about the issues, engaging with other gays and lesbians that weren't Latino, like, black gays and lesbians

and the white gays and lesbians. And it was -- to me, I found it most challenging dealing with white gays and lesbians.

SPD: Why's that?

LG: Because, it was all, you know, I can't tell you how many times I'd hear, "Check your color at the door. We're not going to" -- you know, "We're here to talk about gay and lesbian issues. We don't want to talk about immigration. We don't want to talk about all these other things that are kind of peripheral to the gay and lesbian movement. If it's not a gay and lesbian issue, so we don't want to talk about it." Well, that's fine if you come from privilege where that's not an issue for you. But I'm not [from] privilege. I mean, maybe someone would argue that I am now, because I have a house and all that, but still I mean I've just never felt that way and even today I don't know that our leadership is really aware of the importance of diversity in the movement.

SPD: So how would you respond when you'd get this "Check your color at the door"

LG: Ugh, (laughter). I'm trying to remember that one incident. I think, well actually I wasn't alone because I was sitting next to a black woman, a black lesbian. We were just like, "Sit down!" I think we shouted him down. Because he was, like, it's just -- it's too easy to try to do it in isolation. If you want to make it easy then, yeah, you go off and do it by yourself -- you go off and do it in your little group, but if you're really talking about building a movement and community, there are other voices. You have to be willing to listen to that. If you're not, then I think we all lose. Yeah, we all lose. Because if you're not willing to bring me along, or I'm not willing to bring you along, then it's going to catch up with me at one point. And the fact that the gay and lesbian leadership now is white, well, OK, that's just the way it worked out. And I guess I'm hopeful that over time, that that will change. We're a reflection of the society we live in. Look at who's in congress. I said to this gay leader, "Well, you know, the Republicans are toting out all their people of color, putting them in positions of authority and power. Why aren't we?" There are some of us that are talented who can do that, but it's a question of, well, to some degree, and a willingness to be inclusive. Will there ever be another LLEGO? I kind of doubt it. Will there ever be another DC Coalition -- or a Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays? I don't -- you know, I don't know.

SPD: Why do you doubt there'd be another LLEGO?

LG: (sigh) Um, well it wouldn't look the way it was before. That's probably the easiest conclusion. I just -- you know, I'd like for someone to prove me wrong, but I just don't see in what I hear in -- or read in chat room -- or e-mail groups and stuff -- anyone that's willing to kind of begin to pull it together. Maybe it's too soon. I mean, LLEGO just folded this -- I mean, I think at the end of '04, but at a minimum it would be great to have something that at least on issues would be representative of Latinos. Similar to what I think the -- although I think it's just on the marriage issue, that the black coalition -- what's it called?

SPD: The National Black Justice Coalition?

LG: Yes. It's just right now -- as far as I know it's only focused on marriage. But, you know, there's other issues. HIV/AIDS is a big issue in the black and Latino community. I'm not sure

marriage, but there are other legal issues that I think have not been resolved, and in states like Virginia, even more of our rights were taken away. So I think that there's certainly issues to be addressed. How they're addressed and what voices are brought to bear, I think for us it needs to be diverse and unified, to some degree, voice -- or alliance of voices. But I think -- it would just that -- LLEGO came to rely mostly on government CDC grants. It was never able to diversify its funding base and that's unfortunate, you know? We just weren't able to do it. I think part of that's a reflection of our status economically. It's just not that -- a large base of major donor potential Latinos. I'm sure they're out there, but not to the degree, perhaps that there seem to be -- maybe that's a misconception -- in the white community. So socioeconomically, it's just different. I would say the same thing for women or lesbians. I'm involved with the LSP. Our major donors are less than \$1,000. You know, most major donors, you're talking five, \$10,000. Even as women, as lesbians, we're also at financial -- socioeconomically in a different stratum than our brothers. {3:28:24}

SPD: So, LLEGO started in your house? (laughter)

LG: Pretty much, yeah.

SPD: And then what happened?

LG: It started in our house. We had a P.O. Box. We had a phone.

SPD: You were applying for grant funding or--?

LG: Yeah, we applied for all sorts of foundation grant money, and we got some -- like, we got a Resist Foundation Grant, and let me think. I think we even got some from Astraea to do something with lesbians. Yeah so we were, you know, just writing grants or proposals, and mostly it was just kind of like we were funding out of our pockets pretty much. And then that was in -- let's see, that was '88. '89 we moved into the NMAC office. In '90, I think we had to move out of the NMAC office because that grant stopped. Then we were in my house for about two years. No, we were in Arcadio's house. Then we were in my house, and then we got the CDC grant in '93, and that's when we were able to get an office. And so from '93 until this past year, LLEGO had the CDC grant and was able to hire staff and have an office. And the one thing that I liked that we did with that grant money was -- and the CDC, the government liked it, too, was we used some of that money as I mentioned to -- and we gave it to other gay and lesbian Latino groups around the country. We'd have a conference. We'd bring gays and lesbians together and we'd -- we would do -- because it was a CDC grant, we had to do HIV/AIDS workshops in terms of prevention or strategies, but we also used the opportunity to talk about other issues. I remember a couple of times we brought these women from Puerto Rico that were doing, through plays or vignettes, education on domestic violence amongst lesbians. We got some substance abuse money to do some education around alcoholism, which is a major problem. It's in all our communities, but in the Latino community it seems to be, in some places, a bigger problem. And then also we would hold these -- what we call *congresos*, like a congress and it was like all the gay and lesbian organization representatives would come together and just kind of -- we'd throw issues on the table, whatever the issue was at the time. Campaign for military service really never got a lot of big support. That was a big issue in the larger gay and lesbian community, but Latinos could really never get behind that one. (loud buzzing noise)

SPD: Why do you think that is so?

LG: It just, you know, compared to other issues like (pause) immigration, I'm trying to think - that's the one that comes to mind because that's the one that was pointed out to me, "Hey, we've got more issues with immigration than we do with people going off to the military" -- and wanting to serve in the military. Yeah, we just never got -- it just didn't seem that important.

SPD: Mmm-hmm. Do you remember some of what the conversations about the issues were like?

LG: Uh, hmm. (Long Pause) I have to really shake my memory here. It was immigration, there was -- employment discrimination was a big deal.

SPD: In what sense?

LG: Well, in the sense that some Latinos, not all, worked in occupations where they were just so fearful that if they were found out that they'd get fired. I mean, it's kind of -- I thought -- I was kind of surprised. Like, people who worked in, like, food service, you know -- because I always thought that's kind of -- to me I always thought that was kind of an open, not society but, you know, the waiter that -- the gay waiter, you know. Actually and that happened in California. We had a meeting in California, and immigration and discrimination -- because we had a couple people that showed up that were -- one was a waiter, and there was some other kind of food service and they just said that they were holding down two jobs and it was an issue for them. If they got found out, they might lose their jobs, or because of their status, get sent back to Mexico.

You know, I'm having a hard time remembering some of the issues because, I mean, domestic violence and most lesbians -- that was kind of a surprise to me. I guess -- I've never been around it, and so to learn that it was kind of, not common, but, you know, more common than we'd like to think was a big shock. I think for me it was just also just becoming more aware of -- some times I felt like I grew up in a real isolated environment, that I wasn't aware of how much drug abuse there was, how much substance abuse, how much violence, you know, men beating up on men, families turning out their children, just because I came from a family that didn't turn me out. So I was -- there were times when I was overwhelmed by the stories. And that's nothing that -- those aren't things that fit neatly into a movement. They're an issue. It's just really about just humans trying to live a decent life. I think for me, part of what we were doing was also, again, just saying, "Yeah, you can be gay, you can be Latino, you can be a lesbian, and you're fine."

I remember, I got pulled into the military service -- I mean we'd get called and say, "Look, would you come debate these two retired army generals or on -- there was a show here in Spanish that was broadcast. It was Univision. I took -- actually it was a guy that I knew from ENLACE who was Puerto Rican. He had served in the military. And so we went to the show to debate them. And I remember thinking, "Well, you know..." -- it was kind of weird because I went to the show knowing that the Latinos weren't really that hot on the issue, but it was an issue in the Latino media that they wanted to highlight. So I went on, and we debated the marriage issue when that came up. That didn't -- also didn't -- when it first came up, remember, that Hawaii case which was back when? The mid-'90s? And I was asked to go down in Miami to the Cristina Show to talk, and they were going to marry two couples on the show. So we went, and I

was ready to talk about marriage, and it was kind of weird because I thought, well, you know, they're marri-- I mean it was a show. They were married, these two gay cou-- a lesbian couple and a gay male couple. But the issue of marriage wasn't that -- just wasn't getting that much play in our community. I mean, really I don't even know if it's getting played now, you know, if people are really interested in it.

SPD: They're blaming Hispanic voters for voting for Bush and a much larger percentage than the Democrats had expected because of the "values" piece. So (laughter) --

LG: Well, actually I have a friend that works at Pew, and she said there's a poll that they did and it depends on how you ask the question. It really depends on how you ask the question. Well anyway, I got off track, but I mean the -- so much time has passed I just can't remember specific issues. I just remember that when people spoke, it was with a lot of passion and just wanted to be heard, and also if you -- I think this probably is true for most of us as humans. You know, you look for someone, perhaps, like you who might understand, because it feels safer. So to me I think that's -- I mean for me that's what I remember. That was a lot of the purpose that we served: being visible, being there, and for other gay and lesbian Latinos to know, OK, there's a group of people out there that are visible, that are out, they're trying to represent us as best they can. Maybe I don't like what they do all the time but, you know, they're ours. I'd have to go back and read conference proceedings or something to remember the issues, but I just remember there were a lot of passionate discussions.

SPD: Yeah. So what do you think was working well with LLEGO?

LG: What was working well? I think it was -- to me, it always was the networking, the reaching out. That's, to me, really what worked well, you know, staying in touch with what people were doing, whether it was Seattle or Miami or Kansas City. Wherever it was happening, just to be in touch. And, vice versa, you know, I remember getting calls to say, "Hey, guess what, I'm doing this here in Kansas City" -- just that sense of pride, you know -- "I want you to know we're doing this and if you ever get out this way, we'd love to show you what we're doing." And even the very last LLEGO conference that I went to which was, I guess, last spring, was the health summit. The focus was lesbians and trans. It was just -- for me, it was moving to see these trans -- these women, MTFs, get up and just talk about how important it was for them to have a LLEGO and to have an opportunity to meet other trans from other parts of the country. It was, like, the same thing, you know, 17 years later, but here it was with a different community within the community. And if that's all it is, that was a good thing we did.

I remember when I got up to talk -- and I was there to really just talk from a kind of historical perspective. And I kind of did the Oprah thing, I went out in the audience, and I said, "What were you doing 17 years ago before LLEGO was even around?" "Oh, well I was a drunk," you know? "Now I'm sober. I've been sober for ten years—" not that they attributed that to LLEGO, but they're saying, in the course of 17 years, I've done this with my life and part of that has been also being involved with LLEGO." Other people said, "Well, I've just come to this country, and I mean, I was gay but I didn't -- LLEGO helped me not just get connected but also know that there was somebody out there that represented me." I'm sorry that that's not there anymore for people. It gave me a lot of good memories and hope it gave a lot of other people some good memories and good connections. I tell people that, since LLEGO closed, have said to me they're

really angry about it, and I said, "Well, yeah, I mean, you can be angry about it and sad, but you also have to think about what you've got now that you didn't have before," and for some that were involved with it, they have other connections. And hopefully that will continue. Those that came out and are professional gay and lesbians, well, good. Hopefully you'll continue to do good work wherever you are. Whatever organi-- and that you bring the Latino perspective to whatever it is that you're doing.

SPD: And a lot of the staff have in fact gone into--

LG: Yes.

SPD: Right? More mainstream gay organizations, right?

LG: Right, right. And hopefully they'll either work their way up or learn things that they can apply somewhere else. Yeah.

SPD: So what were some of the major conflicts that you remember?

LG: In LLEGO?

SPD: Mmm-hmm.

LG: Or in -- OK.

SPD: Or -- I mean it's -- certainly with LLEGO.

LG: Conflicts... well, other than the, uh -- kind of the nationalism, it was the sexism.

SPD: Nationalism, I was just going to ask you --

LG: Between Puerto Rican, Chicano --

SPD: OK.

LG: -- that sort of thing. National identity.

SPD: Because then I was going to ask if you mean in the sense of, like a patriarchal kind of nationalism. Was that connected with the sexism, or was it sort of a separate issue?

LG: {3:45:37} Separate issue. But the sexism was -- it was intense. You know, macho men. I was one of the founding co-chairs and, so I quickly had to -- I was raised to be a good girl, and I had four brothers and even though I was the oldest, it was still -- I had four brothers and, you know, kind of took care of them in a sense. And I found myself doing the same thing with my gay Latino brothers. And quickly I found out, well wait a minute, I'm going to get totally run over here if I continue to do this and play nice. So -- not that I learned not to play nice, but I learned to hold my own, and be assertive, and that was hard. It was hard. That was part of me just coming face to face with the sexism within our community, and so the conflicts were just basically, here I was the co-chair, happened to be in Washington. My other co-chair was in LA -- Nicole -- and he was running things from LA. I said, "Whoa, wait a minute. There is a co-

chair." So I started to just kind of assert myself a little bit more, and he didn't like it. It was challenging. He wasn't used to having – well, I should say, it seemed that he was not used to having women challenge him. So that was different for me to be in that position. Then with some of my other, I guess, peers, yeah, it was almost -- in some ways it was somewhat familial. You know, some of my peers were actually a little bit younger than I was, and so there was a tendency to want to take care of them. And there was a time when they just -- a couple of them just really, I felt, grew to respect me as a person, not necessarily because I was a woman, but just as a peer, you know, which was a little bit different for me.

SPD: How so?

LG: Well, because in the workplace you get that. You know -- at least my male peers learn to, I felt, respect me in my professional work life. But in an organization sometimes it's different because you're not dealing with levels of hierarchy necessarily. And, in LLEGO, we really tried to make it not too hierarchical. It ended up being hierarchical but, with the organization, the way we tried to have regions and parity and, you know, we're trying to keep it balanced that inevitably, the stronger one, kind of gets to take over, and for a while that was me. So I also felt very responsible, too, for what was going on.

SPD: So what does that mean?

LG: The buck stopped with me kind of. Not kind of, it did, as far as I was concerned. And my being fired from LLEGO in '95 was 'cause I just took a lot of responsibility onto myself that in retrospect wasn't all my responsibility. But I took it on, and a couple of people used it. "OK, she's willing to take this on, we're going to lay it all on her."

SPD: So what happened?

LG: {35:00:00} Um, well, basically it was a financial issue. We had the grant. We were switching bookkeeping systems, and I found , a \$50,000 shortfall. And just felt really bad about it, and so I went to the board and I said, "Look, this is what I found." Well they all freaked out. In retrospect, \$50,000 is nothing, really. Well not that it's nothing, but in the scheme of things, it could have been dealt with fairly easily. But it provided an opportunity to -- and this was sexism at work. It provided an opportunity for a male peer to get rid of me. And that was extremely painful. I was depressed for months after that, because I felt like, OK, I had given my heart and soul to the organization, and when it came time for -- what I expected was some support, I didn't get it. I was just really hurt by the whole thing. And when that happened, it was like I had lost my family. And I was just -- I was just devastated. And at that point, the folks that I had started the organization with were gone, either dead or moved away. So, to some degree I was isolated and so I didn't have any one really, I guess, close from that period that I felt like I could talk to. So that was tough.

So for me, I mean, in many ways LLEGO died in '96. So when it ended this year, I just didn't have any feeling about it going, because I had lost it eight years ago. It was just -- I can't tell you how devastated I was. It took a long time for me to get over that. And it left me with an unwillingness to get back into the fight. So I thought, OK, granted, I did it because I enjoyed it. I got a lot out of it. I got a lot of satisfaction out of doing the work, and it was an adrenaline rush

most of the time. But when that happened, it was, like, OK, the community I've worked so hard for has turned its back on me. That's the way it felt. And so I just had no -- and for years, I've just stayed away from getting involved in organizations.

It was really just a couple years ago when I joined the Lesbian Services Advisory Board, and that was reluctantly because over the years I've been asked to be in a number of other organizations. I just said, "No. I'll write you a check, but I don't want to still want to have to have that kind of engagement anymore." Because when you feel something -- actually I used to tell people LLEGO was the other woman in my life. That's how intense it was. It was just like a love affair with the movement and with the people and what we were doing, so. Yeah. That's what it felt like. So, it was like I was spurned by my lover in a sense and rejected. So that was really, really hard. And, so sometimes when people ask me about getting involved, I think, "Well, you know." I always encourage people to get involved and hope that it doesn't happen to them. But I think that when you go into anything with that much intensity and passion, it could happen. (laughter) You could get burned, you know? I didn't expect to get burned by my own, and that was the hard part. I got burned by my own. So, I don't know. But I have a lot of fond memories of -- you know, with that. Now that so much time has passed, you know, I have very fond memories of the work and the people -- most of the people. I'll always have that.

SPD: So who did you turn to for support when all that was happening?

LG: Oh, my partner at the time, Sabrina. Yeah she was really great. But it was really hard. Actually that happened -- my friend Ampata Jimenez, who had been on the Board years before, happened to be visiting that winter. She was just -- they were both great. They just, kind of -- you know, I cried for days. But I just felt it so deeply (crying) that I just -- I went to a place where it was just really hard to reach me for a while. And to some extent I credit that -- I mean I credit that down slope with just kind of withdrawing. And it was hard on the relationship as you can probably imagine. Just not being able to bounce back. I guess, because she -- I mean, LLEGO was in our house for two years. (sniff) She lived with that, and she lived with, you know, the -- me dealing with that rejection and it was just -- it was really hard. And we just never recovered -- I didn't recover -- in time to really save that relationship. So, yeah, and I'm sorry for that.

SPD: How long were you together?

LG: Uh—(chuckles) count on my hands -- almost ten years because this happened, like, in the middle of the relationship and then, so the last half of the relationship was just -- I was just, like, really depressed, not wanting to do much of anything. I mean, it was just enough for me to go to work. Yeah, I just didn't want to be connected to too many people. (background noise: Leti's partner, Ruth, whispers and searches room for something)

(Long Pause)

SPD: It's actually been almost 2 hours.

LG: OK.

SPD: You have been involved a little bit since LLEGO fell apart. So I mean --

LG: You want me to just kind of wrap it up there?

SPD: Can you just talk a little bit about that?

LG: Sure.

Ruth: OK. It's not here. (laughter)

LG: Well let's see, last summer -- no, no, no -- yeah, last summer, '04, I found out that the executive director was leaving through a friend of mine who was working there. And they were going to do a search -- they were doing a search for a new ED. So I recommended someone that I know from here to apply. I told them, "I think you would be good," you know. Well, during that process is when the board discovered that there was a six figure shortfall of funds. When I found out I started calling around to people who had been involved with LLEGO to figure out -- the board, I called all the board that I could get a hold of -- to find out what was going on. Was there a way to save it? They all assured me they had looked at everything. And I said, "Well, think again. Is there a way that you can save this organization?" I was pretty much -- I [was], you know, powerless to do anything. So I, you know -- there was a lot of phone calling back and forth. We thought well maybe we can save at least -- if we can't save the organization, could we save the funding for the government to continue doing the HIV/AIDS work within our community. No. So then we went into the fall. They closed the offices. Everybody got laid off, and Robert De Leon, who was the office manager -- I don't know how we hooked up, because I didn't really know him that well. I said, "Well, what's going to happen to all this stuff, you know?" And he says, "Well, you know, we did send some things to the archives in Texas -- these archives in Texas a few years ago -- the early part of the history of LLEGO." So I said, "How about sending the rest of it?" And he says, "Well, there's nobody here to do that." So I said, "Well, OK, I'll volunteer to do that." So over the course of several days, I went over there, and I just started, with his help, figuring out what could go to an archives. And I remember there's lots of photographs and materials and videos and things, and so I contacted the University of Texas and found out where the other stuff had gone. I talked to them and I asked them, since it was closing, would they be interested in more materials, and they were very happy. They said, "Sure." And I asked them would they pay for the shipping, and they said, "Yes." They would reimburse whoever sent it. So I said, "OK."

So I got a couple of folks to go help me. We packed it all up one night. It took us one night to pack it all, 39 boxes. Which includes some posters and things like that, and as I was going through the material I thought, there's a lot of work here. I mean, yes it was funded by the government for the most part. But when you look at the material in English and Spanish, educational materials about not just HIV, because LLEGO also had a grant to deal with domestic violence amongst lesbians -- there was all this, just, material -- this wealth of knowledge that [is] people's ideas transmitted to paper. So I was very happy to be able to pull that together and send it down there.

So that was like -- and I had actually (laughter) -- right before Christmas, I had been hounding the lawyer that was the trustee's lawyer to let me in because I hadn't been able to get in there to ship it. They had locked the offices. So finally -- I guess it was the 23rd of December -- early in the week I called the lawyer, and I said, "When is my last opportunity to get in there?" He says,

"Well, you better come Thursday because that's when the auctioneer is coming to start cataloguing." So I said, "OK." So I called UPS. We met them down there, and that's how I got the boxes shipped. And afterwards I wrote a message to the -- e-mail to all the board members, and I said told them I shipped it and told them that as the last board, even though I know that all that they had to do was difficult, that I hope that at some point they can appreciate all the good work that we did do and the legacy that LLEGO leaves really and the people that it touched.

Yeah, so that was, yeah, my last work for that. It was kind of weird because people ask me, "Well, what did it feel like to go back there?" Well, like I said, in many ways, the organization died for me in '96, but going back to that, you know -- to the empty office, walking through empty cubicles, it was like you go back to some old relative that's finally died, and you're cleaning out their house, and saying your last goodbye. That's what it felt like. But so it was kind of odd that, being one of the founders, I was also one of the last people to be in that office. So actually I hadn't really thought about it that way until I was talking about it. Hmm. I might write something about that at some point.

SPD: That'd be great.

LG: Yeah, yeah, so that -- so that was it.

SPD: OK. Seems like a good place to stop.

LG: OK.

Third Interview February 21, 2005

SPD: Let's see, I think we talked about a lot of stuff last time.

LG: We did.

SPD: So I have some notes of a few things that we didn't get to.

LG: Okay. Fire away.

SPD: I was wondering if you could talk a little more about the first National Lesbian Conference. You made some references to it but I don't think you talked very much about what that was like.

LG: Let's see, what year was that, 2000?

SPD: 1991

LG: Was it that far back?

SPD: (Laughing)

LG: {00:01:00} Oh my god. The years kind of run together after a while. I think I covered this

the last time but just to help my memory, I am going to go over some probably previously covered ground. There had been talk of a National Lesbian Conference for several years. At that point, I had been in DC just a few years. And I can't tell you how, but I met Kay Ostiford(?), and I just remember one of the first conversations that she had I had, probably some fund-raiser -- she worked on NGLTF -- was, oh, she really wanted to do a national lesbian conference. So the idea kicked around for a while and then it got legs. She was involved with organizing meetings. And I remember that -- the planning meetings that I remember going to, one was in Durham, North Carolina, and the other one was in Portland, Oregon. Then, I went to the National Lesbian Conference. I was there not for the whole weekend; I was just there for like a day. I just remember that whole experience being exciting. It was the first and only, as it turned out, National Lesbian Conference, but it was also very difficult. Even though we were all lesbians, everything that was different about us came out: class, race, disabilities, everything just came out. I was witness to a couple of things that were very ugly and hurtful.

I remember in Durham, I had a friend who was -- at the time, she was there in Chicago -- Ampata Jimenez -- and she has always been someone who just spoke her mind. So when I arrived, I remember, I ran into her and she said, "They are already trying to exclude me." I said "What are you talking about?" She said, well, when I got here, I introduced myself to someone, and the woman responded by saying, "Oh, you're the --" What was it? Like "You're the troublemaker, you're this Latina who is just trouble." Whoever said it labeled her as the Latina troublemaker. That just made things worse. Then, it was not just about whoever she was,, it was "You are the *Latina* troublemaker." She cried, and she was really upset. She says, "I just want to be part of this. I don't know why --" this particular woman was taking that position. So that kind of set the tone for me for that weekend. Everybody was just watching their back. I remember being in a session that was just women of color and there was a white lesbian reporter from one of the gay papers there. She was asked to leave, and she didn't want to leave. That was the nature of the weekend, at least from my experience. If you talk to other people, they might have a total different take, I'm sure. But as a lesbian of color, that was difficult. Then, there was this huge session -- I can't even remember where we were meeting in Durham, but it was just this large room. I remember: I didn't know who Robin Tyler was at the time, but it was Robin Tyler in one corner with a group of white lesbians and there [were] the black women somewhere else, so people had picked their sites. You looked at the room and it was segregated, white women are here, black women over here, other women of color over here. Just viewing the scene told the story. Everyone was there because they wanted to have a national lesbian conference, but there was a lot that we weren't talking about in terms of how we relate to each other as women, as lesbians across all the lines: race, disability, color. I wasn't aware -- I am guessing that there were probably some bi issues, too, but I don't recall that.

There was a question about who was going to be on the committees that I don't remember. It really broke down when it came to deciding who was going to be on the committees. And I remember -- this was hearsay -- but there was a group of white women who said, well, the women of color aren't up to the task. And whether that was indeed said or not, it kind of ran through the room and just set the stage for just a lot of angry words back and forth. I can't tell you how we got past that. The committees ended up having a diversity of women, so that was good. But it was because the women of color said, "Who are you to say that I am not capable?" So we just kind of muscled our way into -- I wasn't on a committee, but as a group, we muscled

our way into being on committees. So, that was Durham.

Then, we went -- there was a follow-up meeting in Portland, Oregon, and I think I told you the last time that I remember that was the first time that I witnessed a group of what appeared to be white, but it turned out they were Jewish lesbians, working class lesbians from Portland. And there was a session during one of the workshops where they just expressed their anger about how they were treated as working class Jewish lesbians in the world and in this forum by other non-working class Jewish lesbians. And it was very powerful for me because I thought, well, it opened my eyes to even someone of my own -- I don't want to say prejudice because I wasn't aware. Because I had my own stereotype, let's say, about Jewish lesbians, like, well, no, there are no working-class Jewish lesbians. But here was a group of working-class Jewish lesbians, and so that was an education for me.

The other part that was an education was the older lesbians, and that group is still around. Older Lesbians—it's OLOC. I can't remember what OLOC stands for. I remember this woman, she went to all the meetings. She must have been in her 70s at the time. She's probably not around, but if she is, she's in her 90s now. And she said, I am here representing the old lesbians, and you guys aren't making a place for us. So again, at that point, -- let's see, that was 14 years ago, so I was 36, 35. I wasn't thinking old either.

Going through all those experiences, although they were hard, they were educational. And it really reminded me that none of us can speak entirely for another, when we say we speak for our community because there is so much diversity in our community. We need to be mindful and sensitive to the fact that there is a lot of difference and what that difference represents when you're trying to organize. I think what really struck me was if you are really committed to organizing, you have to take the time to be inclusive and so many times, in some of the work I've done, it's been oh, we kind of rushed, do the easy thing, but if you do the easy thing, then you're only inviting like people you know, the people that you have easy access to, it's much harder to reach out and really look for folks that are going to bring the different perspectives to the table, if that's what you want. You have to really work to find them. When they come to the table, you have to be willing to give them room and space to have their voice heard and also take it in and learn from it. Let's stop this, and let me go get the tea (sound of whistling kettle has been going in the background).

So, that was Portland. I remember I drove to the National Lesbian Conference. It was in Atlanta, and I was there for a day; it was a two or three-day conference, but I went for a day. I remember walking into the hotel lobby where they had it, and I fell upon this group of women who were identified as women with disabilities who were angry because there were certain parts of the hotel that were not accessible to them. Whoever the organizers at the time were dealing with that. They felt that their needs hadn't been seriously considered because there were some sessions that were in places where they couldn't get to easily.

There was a Latina workshop or something, I can't remember. And there was a Latina who was actually on the main organizing committee. What was her name? Arlene? She lived in Ashville, North Carolina,. She worked really hard to organize this, and at the Latina workshop, she -- I guess used the opportunity to kind of vent with her Latina sisters. Well that got everybody riled

up because of some of the stuff that had been going on. And then in the Latina workshop, there was – I remember there was this discussion about racism in the Latina community because there was an Afro-Cuban woman there and a white Cuban woman there, and I don't even remember what the discussion was about. Anyway, the Afro-Cuban woman got really angry, and she was like just expressing her feelings, and the white Cuban woman said to her in Spanish, -- there is a saying in Spanish that basically is “don't let your hair get kinky,” which is an insult. So the Black Cuban woman said to her, “That's racist. I don't you ever say that to me again.” And the white Cuban woman didn't want to acknowledge that she had something that was offensive. So it was just – I guess I have to say – oh, there was one more thing. There was this main session of women of color, it was a panel. I remember it was Sabrina Sojourner, it was Carmen Vasquez from New York, it was -- I can't remember who the Asian woman was. There was a Native American woman, this big panel. It was one of the main sessions. And these younger white lesbians stormed the stage to make a protest about something that -- I can't even tell you what it was -- so then, the women of color said, “Wait a minute, why did you pick this particular session to take the stage and voice your opinion? Why didn't you wait for a white lesbian panel?” So, it was just that constant -- and I was only there a day.

I don't know if anyone has written about that conference. I would love to know what other people -- women who were there for the whole weekend, what they took away from that and the whole experience because for me, I guess it was disturbing because we think we are going to get along with our sisters, it's always the boys, men's sexism, in the movement that keeps us -- kind of ostracize us, but we do it to ourselves. We do it, in this case, it was within the lesbian community. There were no men there. But just because some degree of sexism wasn't there, everything else was there, ableism, ageism, racism, you name it. For me, it was just a big lesson, though, for me about what I talked about earlier, which is if you are really about creating a movement, you have to be willing to give room for this.

To some degree, it was healthy that women felt that they finally had a space where they could express their feelings, whatever it was, anger about being treated badly because they were disabled, anger about -- and I think in Portland with the Jewish lesbians, the pain that came out -- I thought, this is hard but where else are you going to say this as Lesbians, as Jewish women? Where else are they going to get a venue to share what it's been like? I think perhaps we as a group weren't skilled enough to deal with it well, or better, but I think that, for me anyway, it was a valuable experience.

SPD: Do you remember processing it with people?

LG: No. That's why I was saying -- that would have been a good thing to do (laughs). Just personally, I've spent a lot of time in my personal life just trying to figure things out. You learn a certain way of doing things, a certain way of being in the world and then something happens and that gets challenged. So in my personal life, I have tried to process things, but in terms of my activism, no. I rarely have taken -- except for maybe commiserating with friends or other activists in a very brief, like during those events, but nothing where we would say, “Well, what was that about. Let's talk about what that was about. What's going on here?” That's why I'm saying we didn't have, perhaps the skills or the knowledge or the awareness to do that. It could have been helpful. Women, I think, wouldn't have walked away necessarily with whatever pain

they experienced. I would like to think the fact that some of the lesbians that were there got a chance to express themselves was cathartic. But I don't know.

SPD: It sounds similar, when you brought it up before, to some of the stuff that happened in LLEGO (sound of dishes clinking). Have there been other places where you dealt with some of those dynamics?

LG: You mean like that experience dealing with all the issues?

SPD: Yeah, I mean, or in other organizing, when there've been lots of conflicts -- I guess especially the kind of painful conflicts. It seems like to me like there's a particular dynamic, people wanting to come together and maybe expecting to find -- thinking that we are sharing something, expecting to find kind of sameness and encountering all these differences that are really hard to deal with.

LG: I remember during my years with LLEGO, that was like a constant. It was like whenever we would get together, whether it was a conference or whether it was an organizing meeting, everything just reared its ugly head. It was just part of doing the work. Individuals who didn't want to deal with it didn't come back and those of us that felt, we've got to hang in there and we've got to just try to work our way through this stuff hung in there. With LLEGO, you have to add sexism. Also in the early days, HIV and AIDS was killing people--mostly gay men -- left and right. A number of men that were key to gay Latino organizing were dying or died. In some cases, that also opened up opportunities for lesbians to move into certain leadership spots. Then there were some men who just understood that it was important to include women. There was a little of both. Latinos I've never found to be separatists. I am sure that there are, but my experience with separatism was really amongst white lesbians in Texas. You don't really find many Latinos that -- well, maybe they live their lives as separatists, but. Actually I hadn't thought about it that way. But for the most part, there is not that strong -- yes, I'm not going to talk or live, do anything with men. I don't recall seeing that. {23:23}

SPD: Did you develop strategies for dealing with all of the conflicts?

LG: My personal strategy was -- like with LLEGO, we were organizing across the country, so when I was co-chair, I had a co-chair who lived in L.A., a gay Chicano, and other times, I had a co-chair that was in Boston. He was Puerto Rican. The other co-chair, she was Puerto Rican. The strategy --(inaudible) -- and I would also hear things. "Oh, you really got to watch him, he's slick" or "She won't come through," all sorts of things. So my personal strategy was, which I use with most people is yes, I know what I have been told, I am going to take you for who you are right now in front of me and how we are going to work together. Whatever occurred in the past, we're just going to consider it in the past until you do something that shows me that OK, that was true. So in terms of working together, that was my attitude. In terms of the sexism, I don't recall that I had a strategy like with Arturo(?) that I'd say, "What you just said was sexist" or "That's sexist behavior." I don't think that at that time I had the skill to really identify it clearly and be clear in my thinking. I think that was my level of immaturity at the time. Now, of course, 15 years later, I have a lot more knowledge under my belt and experience, but at the time, no. So it was kind of like with whatever skills I had at the time, I kind of just tried to deal with it.

There was sexism and some -- toward the end of my involvement, classism started to be an issue because we had -- when we started, LLEGO was mostly working class or poor Latinos, mostly Chicanos. I'm trying to think of anybody there that came from any kind of money. No, I can't think of anybody. Towards the end, we had a couple of co-chairs, one was a chiropractor, but she had a very good practice. One was a banker? I think was a banker. Anyway, so these are now people who are middle-class, so it was changing and in the larger Latino community around the country, I started to get -- this was when I was Executive Director, I started to get e-mail or phone calls about my gay Latino Republican co-chair. What's with that? I said, "Well, he supports LLEGO. Yeah, okay, he's a Republican, but we are not a partisan organization."

At that point, we did call Jody (?) on the carpet about something some of his classist stuff because he would actually say things that were -- and most of the rest of the Board was from another background, so they were, "Wait, listen to yourself," you know. So it was kind of homogeneous in a way, the group that started LLEGO. Over the years, as it evolved and other people came in, the demographic of the Board changed. I guess that's normal for most organizations. The first boards are usually the activists and then the evolution of most organizations, probably like at NGLTF or maybe even at HRC, I don't know -- I'm not familiar with HRC, so (inaudible). I think if you look at some of the nonprofits that are still around they probably all started with activist-type boards. The Whitman-Walker Clinic here.

SPD: Can you talk about your involvement with them?

LG: My involvement has been just the last two years, really. When I went on their website, I was giving an orientation to the new members of the Lesbian Services Advisory Board, because I wanted to give them a sense of, yes, the clinic's been around since '73, and -- it wasn't called lesbian Services back then, but there were lesbians involved with the clinic in the early days. But it's always been so marginalized. It started out as the Men's VD clinic and then when AIDS showed up in the late '70s, the focus really went to HIV and remains there today, HIV/AIDS, so that there is a tension within the clinic and on the board about the mission. The mission is that it's a clinic that serves the GLBT community with special emphasis -- I forget how it's worded-- focus on HIV/AIDS in the community, but most of the funding, most of the infrastructure is for the HIV/AIDS service population. There's very little resources for the GLBT stuff. I would say probably a majority of the board members are GLBT community members, and we have some straight board members. They are there because of HIV/AIDS for the most part. There is a class tension about who brings in -- what brings in the most money, is it the HIV-AIDS stuff or the GLBT? Well, it's the HIV/AIDS focus. Those programs bring in more money.

We have LSP, that's constantly -- not constantly threatened, but there's always a question of can't we just fold it into everything else we do? Well, no, because one of the things about LSP is that women need to feel that the environment for them is safe and that's why it's important to have a separate Lesbian Services Program. I know there are people that argue all the time, "Well, a gay man comes in and he doesn't have HIV/AIDS, he needs a program, too." No question. There are gay men that don't have HIV/AIDS that need a program, but let's face it, most of the clinic serves a male population. So, it's kind of geared that way. Lesbians, for the most part, aren't getting HIV/AIDS, so they are not accessing those services. And they need to have that.

So, my experience so far has been -- we really have to watch budgetary issues that might affect LSP. We have to watch just program, organizational changes that could adversely affect LSP. That's why it's important to have -- I'm thankful I'm not the only lesbian on the board. There are several of us, but it's important to be at the table. Because if you are not at the table, something will get -- just like Congress. That's the thing that's so infuriating about Congress. It's mostly still white men, very few people of color, very few women, relatively speaking, and yet the laws that they pass have [an] impact on all of us. But is my voice well represented there? No. So at a micro level, in an organization like Whitman-Walker, it's still the same thing, you have to -- those of us that are lesbians or people of color, we have a responsibility to really participate, because you just have to be right there to take your voice to issues or to defend, in some cases.

Yeah, sometimes it's a burden, but it's a burden that I welcome. I guess at this stage, I am 50 now. I keep thinking, well, where is that other generation, the next generation? I hear about some of the people you are interviewing, that's exciting, because -- like a Lisbeth. Lisbeth's like so wonderful and heart changing and good head on her shoulders, and really clear about who she is and stuff. There are some folks that are there working now, and it's really great. I guess that at this stage, I am just concerned that are we doing enough to pass on to the next generation, not just the history, history is important, but also just an awareness of the struggle. I think -- even with Black civil rights, that history, it's only been what 40 years ago? 50 years ago? And I remember when I lived in Northeast -- I live in Northeast now, but when I lived in this neighborhood near Rhode Island Avenue, predominantly Black, I would say probably working-class neighborhood. And I remember these kids were outside and it was January, it was MLK weekend, and one of the kids said, "Who's Martin Luther King?" And he was like eight, seven or eight, and I thought, that child should really know who Martin Luther King is.

And then a few years ago -- oh, it's been more than a few years ago, there was this gay Puerto Rican man, he had just come out and he came to see me. We were walking down the street and I said something about Stonewall, and he says, what's that? I said, "You don't know what the Stonewall riots are?" So I told him and he said, "Oh, I had no idea." I thought, OK, it's not part of American history that I am aware of. We're not teaching kids in US history, or maybe we are. I kind of doubt it. But we are not teaching US history to include the importance, I think, of probably the feminist movement and gay and lesbian civil rights movement. So that history gets lost. So in the vacuum, then, what are you left with? We are not doing ourselves any favors by not passing on the history because then, just like -- that's kind of like what Bill Cosby was trying to get back to, and I know that there is a big debate within the African American community about that, but the point is it took us so long, the struggle was so long and hard, and people died to get to this point, how can we throw it away? People going to jail and in the gay/lesbian civil rights movement, people have died either by a disease, by a hate crime, alcoholism, drug addiction, you name it. People have killed themselves or have been killed because of who they are as gays and lesbians. And now, I would throw in trans. To not have that awareness of -- at least have the awareness, now whether you decide it's valuable or not, at least be given the information so you can make a decision. Is this something that I need to be aware of and keep in mind that I'm taking something for granted.

In a way, I think that what's been going on the last few years with gay marriage, and I just don't

feel like there is enough passion around. I am not sure -- I don't think that I'm convinced that marriage is the thing that we need. We need some civil recognition of our relationships, but I don't know if I could call it marriage. But regardless, I think that this is an opportunity where we can do with a lot of education. I know groups like where Lisbeth works [are] doing that and NGLTF I think is doing this. It's just -- it's about the marriage, but it's also about what does this represent in terms of us having this civil right? It's not a special right, it's a civil right as a US citizen, and I don't know that it's really sunk in even within our community. But I have a limited view now since I am not out in the streets anymore. {39:40}

SPD: What is your vision for the future? What would you like to see?

LG: Actually I have been thinking about this, kind of off and on. I would definitely like to see -- one, back to the history piece, I definitely want to see either more written -- there are a lot of stories to be told out there. I think your project is one way of getting some of these stories, but there are a lot of stories to be told out there, and they're are stories that haven't been told, perhaps amongst people of color. Oh, and let me go back to the history piece -- Did I tell you about the time I was asked to speak at the 25th anniversary of the Advocate? OK, there was this event here in DC, and I was asked to speak - it was the premier of this exhibit of the Advocate over 20 years. I remember, Sabrina and I got there, we were walking around looking at all the photographs. She and I were looking at them, and we said, "What's wrong with this picture? There are no people of color in here." I don't even think I counted a handful, and this room was huge. It had panels all around it, covering each -- however many years it was. So by the time I got the end, I was furious and Sabrina asked me, "What are you going to say?" I said, "I don't know." So, I got up there and I just said, "I was happy to be asked to be here but this history isn't complete. There really needs to be a better representation of all the people of color who have been part of the movement. The Stonewall photographs, there were Latino and black drag queens at Stonewall, that who started the riots. There were white gay people there, too, but--" you know. And actually, one of the Latina drag queens from the Stonewall was there. She was like in her '60s and kind of unsteady, I am not sure what the health issue was. And she said -- "I am so glad you said something." -- she was very nice about what she said, she was just happy to be there. But I just remember thinking, how could-- her photograph, I think, was there but not for Stonewall, it was there for something else. If that is what we are going to rely on to tell history, well, then, it's not going to be a complete history. So I would like to see -- and I know that involves publishers who want to think it has merit -- I would like to think there are more dissertations out there that have covered some of this stuff, this history. But I'd like to see some kind of compilation of just a more complete history. {43:55}

Let's face it, when we think about just US history, what we know now -- what I know now that I didn't know growing up is that like where I come from, in Texas, I grew up thinking the Alamo was John Wayne and there were white people at the Alamo that defended the Alamo. In actuality, there were Mexicans there, too, but those people didn't get talked about. They weren't represented necessarily in the movie. So, that becomes your history, so again it's not a complete picture. I would like to see just better documentation. And then, relaying the history, not just to young GLBTS but also just everyone. Straight students ought to hear this stuff, too. That's part of US history. I think that teaches them that this wasn't just something that showed up on the scene a few years ago. People were being thrown in jail and losing their jobs before Stonewall, and

actually after Stonewall, too. So the history, relaying the history, supporting our institutions, the institutions we have left like NGLTF, like HRC, and then the gay and lesbian clinics. Actually, the clinics have been around for a long time. Like Whitman-Walker. I think the clinic in Chicago has been around for a good while. So there are still things that we can do in the gay and lesbian community.

Last year, I led a support group, a coming out group for LSP. And all the women in the group -- actually, no -- the group that stayed through the whole eight weeks were white. It was really middle class to upper class educated women but the issues are always the same. I don't know how to tell my parents, I am afraid if I tell them, they will kick me out of the family. So even though here we are in 2004, individually, there are still people who battle the demons of just the fear of coming out, feeling free to live who they are.

A friend of mine on the board was telling me he went to a party of black gay men who were well-to-do black, gay men and his host said, "Don't bring up anything about what you do for HIV/AIDS because these guys are just paranoid about being connected with anything gay, but they are gay." But it's the fear of "Well I will lose my job". I don't want to sign a check for the Whitman-Walker [Clinic], because somebody might think I'm gay. (inaudible) We still have a lot of that to deal with in the community. And that's a group of educated people. But if you are afraid, it doesn't matter how educated you are, you're afraid, and that can paralyze you. I know, I have been there.

The other thing is just the being out, as many of us that can be out as possible. I think it just makes it harder for people to, one, ignore you, in a sense, ignore that gay people even exist. And also, oh yeah, I know a gay person and yeah, they're fine. They're just like us, in a way. I know some things we do we kind of take it to the extreme, try to mainstream us too much but the fact of the matter is, in some cases, we are just like everybody else, except that we are gay.

SPD: Why do you think history is so important, and what histories? --Actually you mentioned some before, so just the first part actually. What do you think knowing history does?

LG: Knowing the history does?

SPD: Yeah, like some of the different histories that we talked about.

LG: {00:49:30} For me, when people ask me why I thought it was important to have a national Latino lesbian and gay organization, I say, "It's about being visible." And that always has been, for me, the most important thing. I always feel like it would be so easier for people to ignore me or to ignore my community, my Latino community. So, for me, the history is about making visible the struggle, making visible what the issues were that led to the struggle, the stories, why they are important.

When you think about it, I don't know about you, but for me, I am just fascinated when I get a chance to hear like the old-- I think on NPR they ran readings of old slaves' letters. It takes you to a time when people were trying to live a normal life under the conditions that they had to live in. It's like those voices were lost for years until these letters were recovered, and we get to see

them now or hear them. So to me, the stories of gay and lesbian people are important because it would be so easy for the non-gay community to say, oh who knows, fags and sissies, you know. But if they are given the opportunity and it was visible to them, or if they had access to it, they could see or hear the voices of people who, whatever their struggle was or whatever their part in that movement was, is visible. That's really for me what it is all about. Because 100 years from now, how would you know what happened if someone didn't write it down? Or in the case of the young man with Stonewall, 30 years later, how would you know? If somehow that information didn't get conveyed to you. And maybe in the gay and lesbian community, we don't have enough ritual about those things. I mean, every year in New York, there is a parade. It's around the town of Stonewall, and that's why gay pride started. But do we really know why now? Does an 18-year-old gay person know why gay pride is in June? So those sorts of things, just reminders. That's the thing I like about the Jewish community. Every holiday is -- Passover commemorates some end or culmination to a struggle. Chanukah, although it's a minor holiday, is the same thing. Well, you have Yom Kippur, that's just -- there are holidays that commemorate certain events in Jewish history and they are repeated every year. Every year, you read what that history was, so yes you may have heard it 50 times in your lifetime, but you are reminded every year that you are here because of your ancestors' struggle. To some extent, I think, that you and I sitting here talking about this is from our predecessors' struggle. But you going to write about this stuff for a dissertation at university, is about someone's previous work and struggle to even say, can I write a paper about gay and lesbian whatever? So, the fact that I can get a security clearance as a openly gay person for the Navy is because a Frank Kameny and the group that he worked with here in DC got that passed after so many years of struggle. And I think he got fired from the government. I don't take it for granted, and I guess I don't want other people to take it for granted, either.

SPD: Could you say something about your work with District politics and District government? You mentioned the Civilian Complaint Review Board and Latino Civil Rights Taskforce.

LG: The Latino Civil Rights Taskforce was a nonprofit here in Adams Morgan that started after the Mount Pleasant riots. Here again, there was a group of Latino community activists that basically seized on the opportunity to say, OK, obviously, the tensions that have been brewing for years between the Latino community and the DC police just exploded that day. The man that stabbed a police officer, I can't remember (inaudible). There were buses being turned over and burned, it was a big deal, tear gas. Ruth says she remembers -- she lived here at the time -- you could smell the tear gas here. So, it was a major event. All of a sudden Latinos were visible. The way I took it is, oh, that quiet group of people is not so quiet; they were actually pissed off about something. I think Sharon Pratt Kelly was the mayor at the time. She had an office of Latino-- there had been an Office of Latino Affairs here for years, but it seemed to become a little more energized after that.

The task force was a group of diverse Latinos, people from central and South America, a couple of US Latinos like me, here, that came together -- I wasn't part of the first board; I was part of the second board -- to develop -- it was a couple of things -- kind of an advocacy group for Latinos with the DC government and the other part was education of Latinos, immigration issues, to some extent, health care issues, just like how do you deal with the system, that kind of (inaudible—background noise).

Did I ever tell you this story? I ran for the board. It was a community election, and there were slates that were drawn up. So Bebe Otero, she's the secretary-treasurer, it's Calvary Bilingual School. She asked me if I wanted to be on the slate and I said, "Sure." I am not sure how it came around, but I said, "Is it an issue that I am a lesbian?" "Not for me." So then I got a call from the other slate, and I said, "Well, no, I am already committed to this slate." So then the other slate -- the days up to the election, there was in the stuff in the Latino papers, and they did this article about our slate. I can't remember which paper it was, but it had a little paragraph about each of us, and in mine, they said, something "homosexual" -- just call it out, you know, she's gay. The day of the election -- I think it was at Marie Reed, and I didn't see this, but either Bebe or somebody came up to me and said, you know, they are telling everybody that we have a gay candidate on our slate to see if they could persuade people to vote for the other slate. It was kind of funny, so I thought, well, OK, whatever. When the tally came down, even though I was on the slate, the highest vote-getters regardless of slate, is who got elected. When the tally came in, I was like the fifth highest vote getter out of a slate of ten or 12. I didn't realize that I was -- that my name was that well known in the community. So it was kind of a fun thing. It was kind of gratifying for me.

SPD: How do you think your name was known?

LG: Well, previously, I had applied for the job of the executive director of the Office for Latino Affairs. And the Office of Latino Affairs had this committee -- Latino Development Committee or something like that. That committee was in charge of the nomination process and the vetting of the candidates. So I went for an interview; I made the final cut. And then there was this huge community forum down at the district building. There were like six or seven of us candidates. I remember the room was packed. The community got a chance to come hear these candidates. I can't remember because I remember being there and doing my thing, my spiel, and I remember this woman, Elena -- I can't remember Elena's last name -- came up to me and she said, I really like you -- she was an actress, and she said, "I really like you and I want to support you for the director." There were articles in the Latino newspapers with my picture in it about I was one of the finalists for this job. It was a big deal in the Latino community. I think I still have some of those clippings. I think it was that I had my photograph in the Latino papers and my name. So I think that's when people saw it. I think that's really what helped it, that I had already been visible, in another way, in the Latino press.

Then the Civilian Complaint Review Board, well that was my consolation prize for not getting the ED job at Office of Latino Affairs. The mayor appointed me to that board. It was a Civilian Complaint Review Board We had community members like myself, and there was an officer who was from the police department, I think he was from the Fraternal Order of Police. I remember -- I was on that board for almost like three years and I remember early on, somehow, it came up that I was a lesbian -- an African American cop had been on the force for years and said, OK, didn't say anything about it. And there was a case -- oh, I remember -- a gay man had been beaten up by some marines, and he called the police. He was wearing women's clothes, and he was black. When the police got there, there were two African American police officers and when they saw who he was, they started laughing, and they wouldn't help him and wouldn't do a report on the marines that had beaten him up. Evidently, this occurred on a street corner and so a

crowd started to gather and one of the tactics -- I think, I call it a tactic -- that the police would use to arrest people was say that it was disorderly conduct because you were drawing a crowd. So, they arrested this man --

SPD: the one who had gotten beaten up?

LG: Um hm. For disorderly conduct. So his complaint was that that was wrong and had been excessive. I remember sitting there with the -- after we heard the -- the process was that you heard the testimony and then, you'd deliberate as a board. This officer said -- he understood what was wrong with the situation. Of course, his dilemma was that they were officers, and he was FOP. He said, "I am going to have to vote this way, but I can see your point, how wrong it was." That's kind of the only gay case I can remember getting the whole three years I was there. I like to think that I made somewhat of a difference to him, even though he didn't vote with us. That he was at least aware of --

SPD: Did other people support the (inaudible)?

LG: Oh yeah. The process was that if we found against the officer, there were administrative things, unless it was something like excessive force or something more serious, the penalty was more serious. {1:06:00}

Actually, I found myself being incensed at some of the things police officers would do with women, forget -- apparently straight women, same thing. They would just arrest women. I remember this one case, god. They arrested this woman. She ran a stop sign. The police officer was at the corner. She realized what she had done; she went back. She didn't keep going. She went back, got out of the car to talk to the officer. He starts yelling at her to get back in the car. And she is trying to explain, so he arrests her for disorderly conduct. She has got two kids in the back seat. Someone has to come and the officer has to drive everybody to the police station, and now, the kids have to wait in the police station while their mother was being booked. It was stuff like that. So as a woman, I was like -- that to me is like blatant misogynist behavior. There was no reason to do that stuff. That was my stint. Years later I ran into this officer, the FOP. He was already retired, and he says, "How's your girlfriend?" And he was with all his kids, and I was kind of taken aback because I thought, he was fine with acknowledging me in front of his family and I thought that was pretty cool. To me, it's like, OK. Maybe one person out there, I made a difference with him.

SPD: Did you feel like you contributed things on the Taskforce and the Board?

LG: I think I did. I guess it was -- for me, on the Board, it was very concrete because we each rendered an opinion that led to a decision. So, yeah, I definitely feel that -- that to me is pretty clear. On the Taskforce, that one I am not really sure how much I really contributed only because there I was -- because what I had going on in my life at the time, I was not like a leader of that board. There were other much more prominent Latino activists and that was fine. There were people that lived in this community, I didn't live here. I lived in Northeast. But you know, people who lived in the community knew what the real issues were, so I felt in that instance I was a little more peripheral. We really didn't have any gay issues that would come up that I can remember

right now. I helped hire the only gay executive director they had. And I thought that was a really good choice. Actually, okay. The difference I made there -- at that point, I was the vice chair, actually, at that point on the Taskforce. So I had to talk to a couple board members about making this decision, about hiring somebody who was openly gay. As it turns out, after I left, one of those people worked to oust him. So I often wonder if I had been there if that would have occurred or someone else, another ally, which is a sad commentary about the straight allies that I had because they didn't fight to keep him. Then again, maybe I would have made a difference. Someone who was strong enough to bring this up with their fellow board members, that we stood up for him. That's why I say it's important to be in the room, have somebody in the room

SPD: Do you feel connected with the Latino community in DC?.

LG: Not as much anymore. Actually I am sad about that. Many of the friends that I've made here were from my activism, and I am still connected to them, but not to the larger Latino [community]. Actually, that's been a big benefit of my activism is that I've made some really wonderful friends. Sometimes, we get together and talk about old -- I guess they're kind of war stories. It's kind of fun.

SPD: My next question was going to be how activism has affected your personal life and relationships?

LG: Oh, man. Well since I'm not active any more, my relationships now are really great. Lets see. It took its toll on two relationships, and then I just had some personal issues. I was really depressed after my ouster from LLEGO, and that was really hard. I can't tell you how hard that was. That took its toll on me and my relationship. Even before that, though, just the long hours. Because I was working a job and doing my activism. Like I took two full-time jobs, really. For a time, my home was the offices of LLEGO. So me and my girlfriend had to live with people in and out, there all day, there late. She should get a medal for what she put up with.

SPD: This was Sabrina?

LG: Sabrina. It's hard. I think it's common amongst activists. Their partners have to be either activists also, so they know what the demands are, or just someone who can really kind of be there for the other one, or just run two separate totally parallel lives that somehow work. It's tough. I was sitting here thinking, some of the activists I have known -- Latinos -- I guess a more common -- the two most common pairings are they are both activists or the other one is just content to be in the shadows and just be there, the supportive spouse, so to speak. Yeah.

SPD: How do you think living in DC has affected your activism?

LG: Living in DC (sigh). Well, I think it was a major factor in me being involved in all that I was involved in. If I wasn't here, I don't know that I ever would have been involved with LLEGO. We had gay and lesbian organizations in Texas that were already established, so I didn't need to create one like we created here. For me, it was like -- part of it was wanting to -- part of my personal motivation was that I just wanted to connect with other Latinos, other gay and lesbian Latinos. At the time, what I didn't realize is that there were so many that were still in the closet

here. So my wanting to meet people brought people out, not just me, but everybody else that was in ENLACE, all that group of us that wanted to -- we wanted to have a community, and we were all motivated by bringing people out and having social things and some educational things. So that was like the driver. I think that if I hadn't been here, if I had stayed in Texas, I was part of the majority of people there, so that wasn't going to be an issue. We had a couple organizations, Latino lesbian organizations, and a peace and justice center that was very gay-friendly -- there were already things there that I could have just gone to, and I'd been participating in trying to start something, whereas here, I had to help start something if I wanted to satisfy my need for contact or, as I got more politicized, visibility. Yeah, it made a big difference in my life, being here. And meeting all the people that I met. And getting exposed to just such a diversity of people. That was a good thing.

SPD: When did you first identify as feminist? Or how did you come to identify as feminist, do you remember?

LG: Man, that is a good question. I don't remember. I don't remember one defining moment where I said, "Oh." I ran across -- I am a big saver. I save a lot of stuff. I surprise myself when I go through my old papers because I think, "Boy! I subscribed to that? I was reading that?" I can't remember. It had to have been in Houston. I was in probably my mid- to late 20s. Somehow, I ended up going to a Take Back the Night march or rally. I got involved with this woman, she was a medical student at the time. She started taking me to these different lectures and workshops about incest survivor—it was kind of heavy stuff. And it's like for the first time, I kind of put a name to what sexism was about and the place of women in the world. I don't think I'd ever really thought about it that way. I realized that women had -- at that point, this was like, what the late '70s -- had still a lot of struggle in terms of just equality in the workplace. That's when I heard "the glass ceiling." Had no clue what that was. I just became aware of how important it was as a woman to again be visible, make your voice heard, give yourself your rightful place. Because I was raised to be a good girl. A lot of us were: be nice, don't make waves. I realized, well, I am probably still a lot like that, but I'll also call it out if it's not -- I mean, at work, some of the stuff that comes out of these guys' mouths sometimes, it's like, man! I have to come back at them, sometimes, like, "What are you say-- listen to yourself." Yeah, it would have to have been the '70s. I never really thought about that.

My friends are raising daughters, and I am so amazed because they are really working so hard to make sure that their daughters grow up knowing their voice, being assertive with their voice, not being afraid to explore and do things that are not characteristic of what a girl does. My brother is raising my two nieces the same way. It's great. Hopefully, that generation is much more free and that the men also understand and free themselves about who they are as men in relationship to women and vice versa. That would be so great.

SPD: How do you define feminism? Or what's your understanding of, what's really central for you in terms of feminist politics?

LG: I think central for me is as a woman being unafraid to confront the injustice, however it comes, that's foisted upon us everyday. Because it happens every day in some manner or another. It's kind of like constant. I notice it because of where I work. There are some very

enlightened men that have feminist wives that taught them better, and then there are some jerks that just don't get it and they probably won't ever get it. They tend to be like the older-school men, older school meaning my age or older. Actually, some people my age are better together about their sexism than some of the older men. So I think for me it's just that, being willing to confront and say, "That's not acceptable," Or you don't have to be so radical about it, I guess, but just confront it. Don't let it slide. I think that's really important.

SPD: What do you think sexuality has to do with politics? What are the connections?

LG: I was watching Hillary Clinton yesterday. She was with John McCain in Iraq, and they were being interviewed about a number of issues and I was looking at her, and I was thinking -- well, first, I was very proud of her, not very proud of her but just how smart she is, and I realized that, as much as some of us would love to see her become president, and if she runs, it would be a real challenge, it's the sexism is going to be a major wedge issue, if she were to run.

I was walking through an office one day and I heard this guy say, "Oh, did you hear Hillary Clinton had a heart attack." But they were mocking her, and I thought, who is he? I wasn't from that office, but I thought, that sucks. What is it about her that just drives so many men, white men especially, nuts. She stuck by her man when he was a jerk, but what is her about her? And I think that she's smart, she's willing to stand up for herself and her issues. She is a strong woman and I think that's just still threatening to a lot of men. And I think in politics -- here locally, I was on the state committee with a woman who was a very strong black woman, and man, that was an issue for, not just for the black, but just men in general. She ruled with an iron hand, rightly so, that's my take on it -- she had to, and they just couldn't take it. They ousted her. I think that sexism is so strong, that feeling. And I almost perceive it to be like a visceral loathing of sorts. And the politics of -- of course it's a little bit different in other cultures, but still, the sexism keeps going down around the world. Anyway, it just pisses me off when I hear it. Women and children are still the poorest in the world. The majority of women are still poor. And in some countries, I forgot what the statistic for rape was as a tool for beating your opponent. That's all based on sexism. It's a very key part of how politics gets waged.

SPD: Why have you chosen the issues that you have chosen to work on?

LG: Just because they were near and dear to my heart. Yeah, being Latina, being a lesbian, being other in this country. Even in a US forum, I see the struggle of Latinos here and the struggle of undocumented Latinos. Just the justice issue, how unjust people are with Latinos, will exploit Latinos. Things that I have seen with workers being exploited by bosses that just, unscrupulous because they're not documented or they think they won't complain and raise their voice, you know, the docile Latino stereotype. Unfortunately, sometimes, it's real because, yeah, people will call the INS to come get you. Just things that I've felt most strongly about.

What was I reading the other day? I think I told you the story about the farm workers. I was reading something the other day about, there is another march this year in Austin, they will be marching again for farm worker rights in 2005, and I was there in '75, so 30 years later, it is still going on. Those are just things that I pay attention to because I was involved it for a while and now maybe I'll write a check to the United Farm Workers. That's the extent of my involvement.

I think that's what kind of really pushed me to the things that I did.

SPD: What have been some of the most memorable moments of your activism?

LG: {1:32:18} Oh, man. That's a lot of them. Uhhhhh(sighs) Well, the 1987 March on Washington meeting with the Latinos where we started LLEGO. That was very memorable. A number of the gay men that were there are now dead. And there was a Latina lesbian conference in Tucson. That was memorable because it was just the whole -- it was mostly Chicanas. There were some other Latinos, but it was a lot of Chicanos because of where it was, so that was fun. There's a lot. There's a lot.

Another memorable moment was meeting the Salvadoran woman who had heard, not me, but another woman who was in ENLACE on the radio talking about being gay in DC. Judith gave the ENLACE phone number, which was my house number at the time, and I remember this woman called, and she said, "I heard the program on the radio, and I want to know when is there an event?" And (crying) -- she is still a good friend. In fact, Ruth and I had lunch with her yesterday, (inaudible). And I think I am getting emotional about it because if she hadn't heard that show on the radio, she wouldn't have had anywhere to call. She was a single mother, knew she was a lesbian, but didn't know where to go, who to talk with, and so we made a big difference for her. That's memorable to me. There have been other people that have come up to me over the years and have said, you know, "If it hadn't been for ENLACE and what you guys did, I don't know if I would have wouldn't have come out when I did or come out at all or do what I do now." Stuff like that. So I think the really memorable moments are those, like, one individual that I feel very lucky to know that we made a difference because they've said as much to me. So that the work that we did was, if nothing, it had value because of the individuals that we touched. So that's pretty memorable.

SPD: The last thing I wanted to ask you about (inaudible) was if you wanted to talk a little bit about Ruth and how you met her, what your relationship is like.

LG: Oh sure. Actually, I met Ruth years ago. She and Sabrina were on the NGLTF Board of Directors. And I think I came for party here when she was with her previous partner, years ago. Then after Sabrina and I broke up, I was out with a friend who wanted to go country western dancing, so we went to Sheridan's, which is a gay country western bar here. It does not exist anymore. And I remember I walked in, and I was there. I don't hang out in country western bars, so I didn't really know anyone, and Ruth comes up and says, "Hi. How are you doing?" I said, "Fine." We knew each other by sight. And she said, "How is Sabrina?" And I said, "We are not together anymore." "Oh, I am sorry to hear that." So we chatted. And then I think two months later, a month and half later, I get this email out of the blue, and I freaked out because I thought, how did she get my email address? I didn't give it to her. She had seen my address on a string, so she sent me an e-mail and asked me if I wanted to go dancing. I said, "I'm not ready," and my parents were coming for two weeks. And she wrote back, "Two weeks? You actually like to be with your parents for two weeks?" "Yeah, I do." So November of that year, 2000, we went out. It was supposed to be a group thing. Well it ended up being three of us, and my friend said, "Well, it looks like you guys are getting along pretty well. I am going to leave." So that was kind of the start. She is still actually also active on the Lambda Legal Defense board. So we have that in

common. She used to be in – she was in a lesbian activist group with Urvashi and a bunch of people in the ‘70s. I can’t remember the name of it, but, yeah, she was a little activist there, too. So that’s been good. Sometimes, it’s kind of fun to just sit around and talk about those times and also talk about what’s going on now. How it doesn’t end. There is always something. I remember years ago saying, “There is also is always going to be a struggle. You can get in, you can get out, but there is always something.”

SPD: Well, it’s about (inaudible). Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?

LG: No, I can’t think of anything. Do you have any other questions?

SPD: Well, we could go on and on, but I think we have plenty. Thank you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT