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ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 3, NOVEMBER 2013

BARBARA CARRASCO

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS

ON AUGUST 30, SEPTEMBER 11 AND 21,

AND OCTOBER 10, 2007

Artist and muralist Barbara Carrasco lives and works in Los Angeles. She received her BFA from UCLA and her MFA from California Institute of the Arts. Her work has been exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Carrasco has taught at UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara, and Loyola Marymount University and is the recipient of a number of fellowships and grants. Her papers are held in the Department of Special Collections at Stanford University and the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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THE CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

The CSRC Oral Histories Series publishes the life narratives of prominent Chicano and Latino figures. The life narratives have been recorded and transcribed, and the interviewer and interviewee have reviewed and corrected the transcriptions prior to publication. These oral histories are often undertaken as part of a larger research project and in tandem with archival collections and library holdings.

CSRC ORAL HISTORY SERIES PROJECTS

L.A. Xicano documents the history of Chicana/o art in Los Angeles with a focus on artists, collectives, and art organizations. The project resulted in new museum and library exhibitions, public programs, archival collections, and scholarly publications. These efforts were part of the Getty Foundation initiative Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980. The project received support from Getty Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and California Community Foundation. Related support includes funding from Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, AltaMed Health Services Corporation, Entravision Communications Corporation, Walt Disney Company, and individual donors.

A Ver: Revisioning Art History stems from the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a meaningful and diverse art history. This book series explores the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other U.S. Latino artists. The A Ver project is made possible through the generous support of Getty Foundation, Ford Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Joan Mitchell Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

The LGBT and Mujeres Initiative seeks to increase archival and oral history holdings that document the Chicano/Latino presence in LGBT and women's histories, the role of women and LGBT people in Chicano/Latino histories, and the importance of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in "mainstream" scholarly research and archival institutions. The project receives generous support from the Ford Foundation and individual donors.

ARTISTS INTERVIEWED FOR THE L.A. XICANO PROJECT

Judy Baca
Charles "Chaz" Bojórquez
David Botello
Barbara Carrasco
Leonard Castellanos
Roberto "Tito" Delgado
Richard Duardo
Margaret Garcia
Johnny Gonzalez
Judithe Hernández
Leo Limón
Gilbert "Magu" Luján
Monica Palacios
John Valadez
Linda Vallejo

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AUGUST 30, 2007

Karen Mary Davalos: This is Karen Mary Davalos; I am interviewing Barbara Carrasco today, on August 30, 2007. And Barbara, I wanted to start with some really open questions about your early childhood. Some of these are really basic: when were you born, where you born, where were your parents from, things like that. The size of your family.

Barbara Carrasco: Okay. Well, I was born in 1955 in El Paso, Texas, and that's where—both my parents were born there, and we moved to Los Angeles when I was a year old, and my mother had . . . There were two of us born in El Paso, my older brother and myself, and then the other three siblings were born in Los Angeles. So they're a total of five of us. But our grandparents were born in Mexico on both sides. And anyway, but we've been living in—we grew up in Culver City in government housing projects for veterans, Mar Vista Gardens.

KMD: Who was the vet?

BC: My father. He was in the Korean War, in the Navy. And—but there was a lot of family members in the service. I had an uncle who was considered a war hero in the Korean War also. He was very young when he died, he was nineteen years old, and Hal Wallis, the famous movie producer, spotted him in the Army and pulled him out, along with seven other guys from his company, and did a movie called *Cease Fire!* It's a full-feature film called *Cease Fire!* Paramount Pictures made it, and then Chon [Noriega] actually found it at UCLA. Paramount had donated the film to UCLA Film Archives, and I asked Chon if we could see it, so he screened it for our family. That was real exciting. We've seen our uncle—he starred as himself, Ricardo Carrasco.

KMD: Wow.

BC: And the ironic thing is, he died several days before the actual cease-fire in Korea. He was—they offered him a film contract, which he turned down to go fight “the Commies.” And so he died—it was pretty sad. Anyway, but I just thought I'd say that, because I thought that was pretty interesting. We just found that out about ten years ago, so it was something new to us.

KMD: In other words, growing up, you didn't know him as a war hero.

BC: Never. My mom or dad never spoke of him. But then again, my father died when I was twelve years old; he died of a heart attack. He really is the person who introduced me to Mexican art. There was a book on Diego Rivera, and he showed it to me when I was very young, about ten or eleven, and I was inspired. I mean, it was the real famous painting of the man with the white horse, and that image has stuck with me ever since; it was amazing. Because my dad drew pretty well. He would draw women. My mother didn't like it. [*laughter*] And then my mother, her—she was very gifted herself, and when we were growing up in the projects, she was very creative. We were very poor, but she was very resourceful as a mother, she was always making things. There were always art projects, there were always athletic projects. She was a very creative person, and she was very good at drawing and painting.

KMD: So would she plan these things for the kids, or . . .

- BC:** Yeah. Not just our family, but also the kids in the projects. Well, the projects was set up like Army barracks, so our building—we lived in building 55, and there were like eight families in that building, something like that, eight or nine families, and so we were really close. And some of the other buildings in back of us and in front, they were . . . That’s what I really liked about growing up there, we became a big, huge extended family. And we were really keenly aware of the way people perceived us outside the projects. We were “poor, uneducated Mexicans,” and there were blacks, a lot of people of color that lived there. But I didn’t realize we were so poor until I got into junior high school. Well, actually a little earlier than that, when I—
- KMD:** When were you aware of these perceptions of how people thought of you?
- BC:** Well, I went to St. Gerard’s, a Catholic school—my mother put us all in Catholic school, thinking that, you know, even though we’re poor, we’re going to be provided with a good education. But at the same time, it was actually smart on her part to put us in Catholic school, because she didn’t have to buy clothes. You had to wear uniforms; we had like two sets of uniforms so she would wash one while the other one was . . . And so anyway, the four of us were going to Catholic school at the same time, and I think it was at that time, it was a lot of money for her, it was like twenty dollars—it was like twenty dollars each a month to go to school. And—but I remember, there was one day in the school year that was called “free dress day,” and that was the worst day for all of us, because we wore the worst clothes to school that day. And so I think that’s when I realized—I was pretty young when I realized we were extremely poor, because all the other kids were wearing really nice dresses and nice socks and nice shoes, and my sister and I would come with our Salvation Army dresses and our tattered little shoes, and it just—they were clean and pressed, that was one thing they instilled in us. My dad said, “You can be poor, but you can still have your dignity and walk out with your hair clean and combed.” You know, the presentation, the way you present yourself to the public. And that’s something that really stuck with me too, that you can always have that. But other kids would really make fun of our clothes and stuff, and I remember that was very painful for us, growing up.
- KMD:** What Salvation Army dresses? Did they give away clothes to—?
- BC:** Yeah, the Salvation Army had . . . My mom would go and buy clothes at the Salvation Army. You know, dresses that were used. And at the time, I didn’t think it was bad until we went and wore them. *[laughter]*
- [break in audio]*
- KMD:** We’re back. We had to pause for a second, turn off the computer. I was asking Barbara about the clothes she wore. I didn’t know if her family experienced what my family experienced, which was that the free clothes from the church were corduroys for boys. So corduroys were identified as poor people’s clothes.
- BC:** Oh, really?
- KMD:** Nobody wore corduroys unless you were poor.
- BC:** Oh, we wore corduroys a lot. *[laughter]*
- KMD:** So that wasn’t what people were seeing? They could tell they were hand-me-down dresses, second-hand dresses, Salvation Army.
- BC:** Yeah. I didn’t have a problem with it. It’s amazing, though, what other kids say can—how they impact you, the way you feel about yourself. And I was fortunate enough to have a really great fourth-grade teacher. She was a really wonderful nun, Sister Mary Ann, and she recognized the fact that we were all very poor, and that we couldn’t afford even milk. Five cents—milk was five cents at the time. She gave all four of us free milk every day, and she told us not to tell anybody, and that she was doing this out of pocket, out of her—she was the first person I felt that was extremely kind to us. I have some of her letters that she wrote to me, at Stanford. So those—to me, they’re very precious letters. She encouraged me in those letters to continue drawing, and to not . . . She even quoted Ghirlandaio, who was Michelangelo’s teacher, “Continue without fail to draw every day.” And that’s always, always been with me. I mean, it’s amazing that one person can make such an impact on your life. I remember thinking, “One day when I get older, I want

to help someone out who's disadvantaged in some way," and she's the person I attribute that too. You know, along with César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, but she was the first person.

KMD: When you—you're growing up, you're the oldest, or the . . .

BC: I'm the second oldest.

KMD: You're the second.

BC: My older brother, he's one year older than me, Ricardo. Then I have a younger—a brother one year younger than me, a year and a half younger; his name is Robert. Robert, we call him. Actually, we call him Bert most of the time. And then after him is my sister Frances, she's three years younger than me. And then we have a younger sister who is eight years younger than me, Leandra.

KMD: So even while you're going through the elementary school, your—this Sister Mary Ann, was it?—was helping out the family.

BC: She helped all of us. I attended a summer school free of charge, which was due to her. I was a really terrible student. I was always, always drawing. That's all I did. They couldn't stop me. I mean, the nuns were so upset because I would draw on the tables, I would draw on the erasers, I would draw on everything.

KMD: With a pencil? Or were you using —

BC: Pencil, of course, pencil. And I remember, she's the only one who encouraged it. So we did a John F. Kennedy album together; we did other projects together, her and I, after school, I would stay after school.

KMD: What was the John F. Kennedy album?

BC: I still have it. It was a really—I used to think it was really wonderful, but it looks funny now, because it's hand-sewn, it's hand-bound, and it's just photographs of John F. Kennedy during his early years as a young man, and later on as president.

KMD: So magazine, newspaper clippings, and things.

BC: Yeah. We just did a collage, a little book. But that was—and we were always doing cards and rock art, you know, painting on rocks. She was always really great about that. So—and I didn't realize that she was doing the same with my brothers and sisters, I thought she was just—I always thought I was special, but she was actually very kind to a lot of people, so she was—I think she's still alive, someone told me she was still alive. She's got to be in her eighties now or something. There were other nuns that I didn't get along with. Sister Barbara-Anne, who was a survivor on the Titanic; she actually told us that story. You know, when you're a kid, you're not interested in that. I wish I had talked to her more, because it seems interesting now to me. But she was very strict and very old school, and I remember getting in trouble with the principal because of her. She accused me of flirting with the guys. I was on the basketball team—I was a really good athlete—and I was wearing a half-slip. You're supposed to wear a full slip in Catholic school, because you're wearing white tops. And in seventh grade the straps are taken off, and you just wear the skirt. And she thought I was being flirtatious with guys by wearing just a bra and a half-slip. And I told her I was just—because in volleyball, you need the flexibility, and the full slip would always gather here once I pulled up. So I was telling her, I was explaining to her everything why I switched, and she didn't listen, she wasn't listening to us. So she brought it to the Mother Superior's attention, then I got in trouble. And I went to the Mother Superior, and I told her, I said, "The bad thoughts are in her head, not mine." [laughter] It was funny. So Mother Superior, I remember her—Sister Mary Francis. I remember her really well, because she actually listened to me, and she called my mother there, and my mother backed me up, one of the few times she backed me up. And it was really great, because then she apologized; she made the sister apologize to me.

KMD: Wow. That sounds unusual.

BC: That was very unusual.

KMD: And you knew it at the time that it was unusual.

BC: I was very strong. I was a real strong-willed girl. Seventh grade.

KMD: Did your family have that kind of atmosphere, they listened to you, or was that something that—

BC: No. When you're one of five, no one listens. My parents—my mom, I don't remember having a lot of one-on-one attention with my mom, because she had five kids to deal with. But we did a lot of projects together, I tell you, when she became a Girl Scout leader. I was very young when she became a Girl Scout leader, and I was sort of the guinea pig. I would have to do the project. And, "Barbara's going to do it; she's going to demonstrate how to do this." And if I screwed up, I got in a lot of trouble with her. So it was fun, but it was also frustrating. My brothers were in Little League. It was a pretty normal family. Even though we were poor, we were real active in a lot of different things. And I remember going to Little League games and hating it, the smell of the snack bar and all that.

KMD: Oh, really? The smell of the snack bar?

BC: I didn't like it. I just didn't like it. But we always went there to buy candy, because that was the only time we got to eat candy.

KMD: Did your mother work outside the home, or was she—

BC: She never worked, because my father worked as a Santa Monica bus driver for Santa Monica Bus Lines, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. She didn't know how to drive at the time. And then when he passed away when I was twelve. He died three days before my twelfth birthday of a massive heart attack. But he had arteries of a sixty-five-year-old man. He smoked—he was a chain-smoker. And then my mother learned to drive, and she got a job, and so—

KMD: That must have changed the whole household dynamic.

BC: Oh, yeah, it was really different, very different. He was my supporter, so I lost my supporter. I was real upset, and I remember writing in my diary that—you know, it's terrible to say this, but I was angry with God that he took my favorite parent. I mean, of the two, he was definitely my favorite, because he was very supportive, and my mom was more critical. She still is today. [*laughter*] It's one of those things.

KMD: Different parenting styles, yeah.

BC: Yeah. But I was just really—it was real sad for all of us. My brothers got in trouble right away, without my dad in the picture. But it was really interesting, because all the women—my mother and the three of us girls—we got stronger. I think that was really interesting, that all the men in our lives became weaker, and . . . We saw them as weaker, because my stepfather, he married my mom, I think, three years after my dad passed away, I was fifteen or something when they got married. And I remember, he was an alcoholic at the time. Four of us—were really adamant about doing well. I was never a good student, but I really applied myself after that. Because right before my dad passed away, he told me he wanted me to go to college, and I thought, "Is he talking to the right person?" I was surprised that he was telling me this, because he knew that I was a bad student. So I'm looking at him like . . . But I did, I was the first person in my family to graduate from college.

KMD: Where do you think he got that from? Were there other cousins who were talking about college, or—

BC: No one. No one in our family, no one in our extended family has graduated from college. It's really amazing. But I guess he had a premonition that he was going to pass away. He said, "I'm going to go on a long trip, and someone else is going to come into your mom's life, maybe another man." But I didn't know, I was really naïve about those kinds of things. So I remember thinking, "I don't know why he's talking like this," and then when he said he wanted me to go to college, I thought he was—something's wrong, because I was not a good student. And so—but in ninth grade, when I went to Marina Junior High School, I got a scholarship to Otis Art Institute, a summer scholarship, and my mother made me turn it down, because she said—it was near MacArthur Park, and MacArthur Park was considered not a very safe part of LA, and she . . . But I didn't realize at the time that my mother's mother had made my mom turn down an art scholarship. So it was just weird, it was really odd. And I didn't realize it until I got older that that had happened, and I really, really felt bad about telling my art teacher I couldn't accept that.

KMD: Now, how did you get identified for this scholarship?

BC: Well, my ninth-grade art teacher told me that she wanted to nominate Tony, this other guy, I forgot his last name—he's probably a really great artist by now, because he was very talented—and myself, that the two

of us were the students that she picked to be part of this Otis Summer School program. And I felt really happy about it, I was extremely happy about it. And then my mother told me I couldn't go, because I was too young, and it was too dangerous of an area. I was really disappointed. And then I found out later that my stepfather worked right around the corner from Otis, so that just made matters worse for me, accepting that. But I think I would have greatly benefited from attending Otis, especially at that time, because I was very—I was really starting to develop a painting technique, and then I felt like I really needed direction from good art teachers, and I think that was kind of sad that I was unable to take advantage of the scholarship.

KMD: I'm probably going to come back to that, because I had some more questions about the family, and some of the things that you did with your family, before your dad died and then after as well. When your father was alive, did you take vacations as a family? Did you go places, or were the weekends consumed with cleaning house, or going to aunts and uncles?

BC: Oh, we never went on a vacation, ever. We never went. Vacations were something rich people did. Our idea of a vacation, or our leisure time as a family, was going to the beach, going alongside PCH, stopping, having a little picnic. The pits, they call them the pits. And my mom, it was always fun, because my mom would make—put all these vegetables in a little aluminum bag, and we would barbecue those on the fireplace. Oh we had so much fun as a family, I have to admit. It was—I think it was just when I became older, when I was in junior high school, that's when it all hit me that we were extremely poor and disadvantaged, that word "disadvantaged" came in. Because there was a summer youth athletic program that I became part of. They bussed kids from the Mar Vista Gardens, from the black area, Crenshaw area, and from East Los Angeles, to UCLA. And once we got there, we broke into groups. We were given lunches, we had lunch in the dorms at UCLA. And it was the first time I ever had real milk. I had always had like Carnation powdered milk.

KMD: Powdered milk, right.

BC: Yeah. That's why I did a painting. I don't know if you ever saw that one painting I did. But it was all these different food items that I grew up with, like Spam and Tang, we never had real orange juice, it was always imitation. And so when we got to UCLA, I said, "Oh, my God, this is—I can't believe that we're allowed to have real milk here." So some of our counselors were really famous athletes. We had [Olga], I was twelve years old.

KMD: You're kidding.

BC: Olga Connolly was an Olympic gold medalist, with her husband, Harold Connolly, who was also an Olympic gold medalist. Henry [Bibby] was one of our counselors; Henry Bibby's a very famous basketball player. We didn't know how famous they were at all until years later. But she was really wonderful to us. They taught us how to take care of ourselves physically, and how important it is to exercise, although she'd be ashamed of me now, because I'm out of shape.

KMD: Were you—you were saying you were athletic, were you—

BC: I was a really good runner.

KMD: Really?

BC: I was very fast. And she told me that she thought I was Olympic material. She goes, "Barbara, you're very, very fast." I beat all the guys. I—especially on that wonderful track field at UCLA, I felt like I was floating, I was running so fast. And I beat all the guys, they just . . . In the projects, we had relay races around the buildings, and I always beat all the guys; I was the first one.

KMD: But this was something that came naturally to you. It's not like you practiced—

BC: No, no. Well, we did it every day; we were pretty—

KMD: You were running every day?

BC: Yeah, we ran every day. We had relay races every day, we had . . . It was a really nice set of activities that we did as an extended family.

KMD: So it wasn't organized by some center there at the projects.

BC: No. There was a rec center in the middle of the projects; it was called the rec center, and we did go there occasionally to play. But it wasn't organized very well, I don't think. Some activities did . . . Like the rec center, I know, initiated that program that went to UCLA, that bussed kids to UCLA, that was part of that. But a lot of times, we'd just go to the rec center and play volleyball, or play tetherball, or—

KMD: Were you more like a tomboy growing up, or was that—

BC: Extremely.

KMD: Oh, you were?

BC: I was real good at football too. It was terrible. I could catch a football, and throw a football. It was—but you had to be tough there because unfortunately, there were a lot of physical altercations there. Someone pulled a knife on me when I was thirteen. This was a mother of a girl, not the girl herself, it was the mother.

KMD: And she pulled a knife on you because—

BC: Yeah, and I remember being extremely—I mean, as soon as I saw that knife, I got very scared. And then the police came, and they were going to arrest me, and I had to convince the police that it was not me that initiated the fight, it was someone else. And that's a big no-no, too, to do that in the projects, to finger somebody. But my mother tried to defend me, and then they attacked my mother, the girl's family members. It was really bad, it was—that was a really rare case, but because people liked my mom a lot, the blacks. [An] older black woman—she's actually the older sister of a friend of ours—she defended my mother, and so it became a racial thing at that point, because now the blacks got involved. But that was very seldom, that didn't happen a lot. But it happened a lot with our friends. So I lost maybe about fifteen, twenty people that I knew very well to—

KMD: Growing up—

BC: Died, were killed. And my sister came home one day and told me that a friend of mine—he was a really nice guy, Chuck—she said, “Barbara, they killed him today,” because he had tried to stop a guy from beating up his girlfriend. And when my friend went to help her, one of his friends went in back and slit his throat, killed him. So it was really sad to—you know, that was the really bad part about growing up there, is that every once in a while, we would lose somebody to some kind of gang activity, and that were pretty bad.

KMD: Oh, so you identified it as gang activity, not just—

BC: There were gangs there. And my brother, one of my brothers was [angry]. His best friend was shot underneath a car, trying to hide underneath a car, and he was on crutches—they didn't care. Had a big cast, and they shot him about five times. And then we had to do everything in our power to hold him down, physically hold my brother down, not to go seek revenge. It was just—that part I really did not like. And then there was a few of us that were really—there was a guy in the projects, his name was Gary Galvan, and he became a high school principal, and there was about six of us who got commendations for being outstanding students in the government housing projects given by Tom Bradley. So there was a ceremony, and I have that plaque. They gave us all plaques that day, and I remember thinking, there's a lot more of us there that wanted to make a difference and get out of there and better the way people look at poor people, but they just identified the six of us.

KMD: So on the one hand, you're being identified as an academically successful student, but you also said that you felt like you weren't, when your dad made this comment to go to college.

BC: Yeah, but—it was amazing, because my grades started improving in the eleventh grade, because tenth grade, I didn't do very well, and then tenth grade—eleventh grade is when I realized I have to do a lot better, academically, in order to go to college.

KMD: But in your elementary school years, when you're little, it's because you're drawing, and you're not—

BC: Yeah, I was not focused. I was not a focused person. And I think my brother was a straight-A honor student, my older brother. He skipped the fifth grade, he was a very smart guy, and he went on to Saint Monica's high school, because he was . . . My mother could afford only to send one of us to Catholic high school, and he was the one, because he did so well academically.

KMD: Because he had the most promise, yeah.

BC: And then he became a track star there, and—they haven't broken his records since—but it's amazing that he didn't [graduate]. He dropped out of college, right before he—I don't know why. It was weird, he was the one that everybody thought would graduate with honors in college.

KMD: Was—your parents have a large extended family, or were they not part of your childhood? You know, aunts and uncles . . .

BC: We weren't—they were all in El Paso, Texas, and some of them had moved to Wisconsin—Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Some of them moved to Fairfield, Connecticut. Some of them—they all moved all over the place. They went from El Paso all over the place.

KMD: Was it train—

BC: Well, it's just some people wanted to get [away].

KMD: Were they working on the railroad?

BC: No. Just that people wanted to move away from El Paso. *[laughter]* That's what my aunt said, one of my aunts that moved to Milwaukee said she didn't like El Paso, it was too small.

KMD: They much have been in the first set of families moving to Milwaukee.

BC: Yeah, I think so. She just passed away, too. Three aunts died just recently, so—

KMD: I'm sorry to hear that.

BC: This summer was the last of the family of all the aunts and uncles. She was eighty-seven, and that's the one I told—I don't know if I told you—

KMD: Yeah.

BC: I went to her funeral.

KMD: Your mother's side of the family?

BC: Yeah. My mom's. It was my mother's aunt, so she was my great-aunt, and she was a champion bowler of Mexico. She's the one who raised my mother. And that's why my mother became a bowler. So when we grew up, my mom and dad were on a bowling team, and it was really unusual, because people would say, "What do your parents do?" and I go, "Well, my mom's on a bowling team." They thought that was really odd. But my father was—he did that more like for recreation, but my mother took it seriously.

KMD: Competitive.

BC: She wanted to be on the team. So she competed on teams with other women on her team, and then would go out of state and out of—up north, or San Diego, or wherever, to compete.

KMD: Wow. When you were young, or before they had—

BC: When we were young, when we were in high school. She started doing it when we were in high school. Well, she did it before that, but she was real serious about it more in high school.

KMD: Did your family—I mean, they're going to church, or you're raised Catholic—

BC: Yeah, we were going to church every Sunday.

KMD: You're going to church every Sunday.

BC: I hated it.

KMD: And—yeah, what—was there a spiritual sense in the home as well, or—

BC: Well, we're all going to Catholic school, so we actually attended church—there was a Mass every morning before school started. So we would go to Mass every morning, and then we would go to Mass on Sundays with our Sunday clothes that didn't look too good, but they were our best clothes, so we'd go. And my mom had in her room, she had like a little altar with several saints, especially Saint Martin de Porres, the black saint. That was her favorite saint. And then when—in seventh grade, when I had to make my confirmation as a Catholic, I selected Saint Joan of Arc as my confirmation name.

KMD: You did? That must have caused—

BC: Surprised all the nuns.

KMD: Yes. *[laughter]*

BC: They said, “Why her?” And I say, “Well, why not her? She’s the only that led all these men into victory.” You know, I mean—I thought she was the most inspiring person. I read about Saint Bernadette and Saint Teresa, and all of these other saints, and I was not impressed with—I mean, even though they were—in Saint Bernadette—I remember seeing the movie *Song of Bernadette*, and I remember the Virgin Mary, when she appeared to her, said, “I cannot promise you happiness in this world, only in the next,” and I felt so bad for her. But I picked Saint Joan of Arc because I read several books on her, and I thought she was a really heroic person, someone I would want to be like. Because he said you have to pick someone who will inspire [you], and so I picked—I thought she was the only one that—

KMD: So at a young age, were you getting a sense of women being strong and women being leaders was different, or —

BC: Well, yeah, I think so, because I had—my mother was such a strong person. She was really the first real role model I had. And then I—when I went to Catholic school, I noticed—I think it comes from a sense of feeling or experiencing of injustice. I think it comes from that. It’s very Catholic-based, right and wrong.

KMD: Yes.

BC: I used to hear the nuns say to the black students that they had to press their hair, and I immediately—I was in seventh grade, and I approached this nun. I heard her tell my friend, Marvelle Ford, I’d never forget her. And I said, “Excuse me, but I heard you telling Marvelle that she had to press her hair, and I don’t understand that. I don’t understand why you don’t tell the white girls how to comb their hair.” And the nun looked so surprised. I mean, what was I, thirteen? And she looked down at me, and she said, “Are you being insolent? You’re being insolent,” or something. And I said, “No, I’m not. I really want to know why you don’t tell the white girls how to comb their hair, and you’re telling the black girls how to brush their hair.” And I remember being so—I thought it was wrong, and so I remember that. And then I went home and I told my mom, and my mom thought—she said, “Well, you’re right, but there’s a certain way you talk to nuns, you can’t be disrespectful,” and all that kind of thing. But I remember, that was one incident where I felt there was something wrong about that.

And then also, you know, just reading about how Saint Joan of Arc herself was treated poorly by the men who . . . Here she was, helping one king become a king, and then they all turned against her. And I thought, “Wow, that’s not fair.” Based on all the things I read about her, and just seeing the way women are treated. And then, you know, I remember watching *The Honeymooners* and seeing just the relationships. In *I Love Lucy*, in all these programs. And I remember thinking the woman is always really doing all the work, and all the guys are just too—they’re getting all the glory. And it just seemed like that has always been—I’ve been conscious of that for a long time.

KMD: Yeah. Since a young woman.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Is your family also reinforcing this? Is there either conversation or not about girls do this, girls don’t do that? Or they’re just encouraging . . . Obviously you were very athletic, were you getting encouraged—you said your father was very supportive, you were getting encouragement from him to do these things, to be—

BC: Well, my dad, he said God gave me a gift, and that I should definitely realize that it’s a gift that shouldn’t be ignored, and that I have to do something with it, I can’t just let it—what is that word?—he said, not take advantage of it. And my mom, on the other hand, I think in . . . It was kind of interesting, because my mom had dressed my sister [in blue] and I was always dressed in pink, and my sister was dressed in blue, and the boys were dressed in blue. And I remember thinking, “That’s weird.” I mean, when I had my daughter, I never dressed her in pink. I tried not to do . . . Although she liked pink, it’s one of those things where you’re [thinking], “Uh-oh, my feminist friends are going to see me dress my daughter in pink, and I’m never going to hear the end of it.”

KMD: [laughter] Hear the end of it.

BC: No, but I think my mom had a hard time. Like on one level, she was very strong, and she actually went door to door and got the rec center going by starting . . .

KMD: A petition?

BC: A petition. And so she started an exercise program there for women, and then she went door to door when they were threatening to close down the housing projects. There was, at one point, some people outside wanted to just demolish the whole place, because it was considered like an eyesore. And my mother went door to door and got—I remember being kind of—I was really proud of her for doing those kinds of things. And then at the same time, I think when she convinced me not to go to Otis, I think that was something that was based on her own experience that she went through, and she was repeating that same painful experience to me, and I thought that was unfortunate, that was sad.

KMD: So you think there was kind of like, as a girl, you shouldn't go to those. If your brother maybe had gotten something, he would be allowed to go?

BC: Yeah. Definitely. If I was a guy, he would have gone. He would have been there. But I don't know, I think—I don't know, it's just a really interesting. I wonder—because her rationale, I think she said it was a dangerous neighborhood, but then when I find out my stepfather worked right around the corner, I could have—

KMD: Just gone with him.

BC: Yeah. Just terrible.

KMD: So your family's going to church. Are they praying at home, or . . .? You describe what 'sounds like an altar, but is there any, like, when you pass it, you're crossing yourself, or you know not to touch it as a child. Is there a sense of spirituality in the home?

BC: Yeah, I think there was. We prayed before we ate our dinner, and then my mom had this thing about the Virgin Mary. She had this Virgin Mary pin, a medal that she pinned on me when I was young, and I—one time I asked her, I said, "Why are you pinning that on me?" And she said it was to protect me against all the evil of men, sort of the bad things that might happen that might be committed by men. It's just a protection thing. And I remember thinking, wow, she was really religious to do that. And she did that all the way up until I was in my thirties, because I went to Russia, and she put it in my suitcase before I left. I didn't know until I got there. I saw it, the Virgin Mary, with—you know, with the water of Lourdes, it was in a little vial. So I guess she worried about me being so far away.

KMD: So spiritually, protection and sense of the sacred world protecting you on a daily basis.

BC: Yeah. I think she had all of us—we all made our Holy Communion, all of us made our Confirmation, and then we always had rosaries and medals and statuettes.

KMD: When people died, did you do a novena?

BC: Our family, no, we weren't that [traditional]. We had some friends that did that, but our family didn't do that. We would go to Mass where they did the novena but not—

KMD: Not in home or anything.

BC: Not in the home. I had a friend of mine who actually—they did the whole nine yards, with the whole ceremony. And on Christmas they had a little baby Jesus that they kissed the feet of. That kind of thing, all that little ritualistic kind of thing. I kind of liked [it]. I really liked that about going to Mass, and that ritualistic part in me was hoping we'd do something like that at home, but we never—we weren't religious.

KMD: Oh, so you were aware of it, but it wasn't happening in your home.

BC: No.

KMD: Obviously, you wouldn't have had a quinceañera, because that would be much too expensive.

BC: No.

KMD: Were your friends, or were you aware of that also?

BC: Yeah, I went to a lot of them.

KMD: You did.

BC: Yeah, I went to a lot of quinceañeras when I was growing up, and they always—there was always some kind of horrible thing happened there at the end of it.

KMD: Oh, during the party, somebody would fight, or somebody would . . .

BC: I saw a policeman hit a grandmother with a baton. It was bad. It was—I think there was a lot of racism there when I was young. I felt and experienced a lot of racism. And not just directly to me, because I'm aware of—I was really aware that people are less likely to say something racist to me because I'm light-complected, but I saw the way they treated my sister, both my sisters; I saw the way people treated my friends. And at one point in the projects, we noticed the police hurting someone, and five or six policemen surrounded our family. They were threatening us to leave, because we were complaining that the young man that they had thrown against the car, that was unnecessary, that he lived in the third building, we knew who he was, and they didn't listen to anything we said. They just threatened us to leave, that we didn't have any [right to be there], it's none of our business. In other words, they wanted to beat him up without us—

KMD: Observing it.

BC: Observing it, yeah.

KMD: Yeah, witnessing it.

BC: It was disgusting.

KMD: So your family's a range of colors, like most of us?

BC: Yeah. All of—I have—my older brother and I are light-complected with green eyes, hazel eyes, and then my other two sisters and my other brother are dark-complected with brown eyes.

KMD: And so you noticed as a young child growing up, this color meant something, if you had light skin.

BC: Well, yeah. At one point, my sister came home, and her and I came and asked my mother, asked our mother why we looked the way we looked. We said, "Mom," because at school, they were calling my sister the n-word, and they were calling me white girl, so we were very confused at one point. My mom would braid our hair like real old-fashioned Mexican traditional braiding, real tight—

KMD: Tight, tight. I remember seeing that.

BC: And then I'm going—oh, it hurt so bad. Every night it would just be painful pulling it down. Oh, God, I remember that. But I remember my sister came home and said that a black lady had approached her and told her that she had really beautiful hair, and she was thinking my sister was black, because her hair was real shiny, and she had real thick black hair. So we were both confused about, as to why the difference in skin color. But my mother explained it really well. She said we have, on her side of the family, there was some German relatives, and that's why we have the green eyes and light complexion, and my sister is inheriting my dad's side of the family, who's more dark-complected. Actually, my mom—there's some family members on my mother's side too that are dark-complected. But really funny is that my sister has the freckles—

KMD: Oh, really?

BC: And I don't have them.

KMD: That's interesting, the dark skin and the freckles.

BC: That's the weird part. She has freckles here and I don't have any. So that was weird.

KMD: Were some of these . . . You talked about how the nun was pressuring a young black girl to straighten her hair. Did you also see the other kinds of injustice in your Catholic schooling, around issues of race?

BC: Well, I remember they didn't want anybody to speak Spanish in school. They told [us], "You have to speak in English," they would correct the students.

KMD: Was your family speaking Spanish at home, or—

BC: No, unfortunately, my mom and dad spoke Spanish to each other, but not to us, thinking they were doing us a favor, because they were both from El Paso, and they both were prohibited in the school system from speaking Spanish. It was against school policy. I mean, you know, it was just terrible, and I think it would have definitely been an asset to be bilingual. But although I understand most everything—we understood

everything they were saying, that's for sure—but my sister and my brother actually don't speak any Spanish whatsoever. There's a couple of us that speak it, understand, and we could . . . I was in Mexico several times, and I could converse with people, but not very well, actually.

KMD: But you were getting a sense that other kids, that there was something at school, that Spanish is being seen as bad.

BC: Yeah, that it wasn't good. And then also the types of food we brought to school, like burritos, real—like sort of—I was a little embarrassed to bring my food to school, because, well, that would definitely illustrate how poor we were. But at the same time, the food was good; my mom made—I mean, we liked the food, it's just that in comparison to other students, it was embarrassing, because they had fruit, and they had this and that, and orange juice, they had so many things in there, and we just had one or two items and that was it. I remember being a little embarrassed about that.

KMD: Did your family have big meals for holidays?

BC: Yeah, we had pretty good holidays. Especially Christmas and Thanksgiving were good.

KMD: So your family wasn't doing, like, oh, we've got to make the American cuisine, I'm going to teach my kids, I don't know, macaroni and cheese, spaghetti and meatballs, and potatoes or something, I don't know.

BC: Oh, we ate everything, a little bit of everything.

KMD: You did?

BC: Yeah. My mom used to make pot roast and chicken potpies and TV dinners, a lot—we had a lot of TV dinners. And then she would make—

KMD: Was that while she was working, or—

BC: Yeah, when she was bowling, when she would be bowling, we'd have—the nights that she would have a babysitter, and she would have us all eat those horrible chicken potpies and TV dinners, I just hated them. But I have to admit that I liked when she cooked. She made the best rice. It was really great rice. And enchiladas, very good.

KMD: Was she teaching the girls how to cook?

BC: She tried. We were not very good. We would do whatever [we were told]. You know, chop the onions, chop this, whatever, but we weren't very [good].

KMD: So you were helping out in the kitchen?

BC: Yeah, we would help out. She would—yeah, definitely. She made us all work. We all did our chores, and then our father was pretty good about making it fun, he always wanted to make it fun. He had a little jar, and we had little pieces of paper in there, and then we'd all have to pick up a piece of paper, and it would say bathroom, or ironing, or laundry, whatever. He was really great about that.

KMD: And the boys were doing this too?

BC: Yeah. That was nice. You know, I also heard stories from friends that the girls only—only the girls had to do the laundry and the dishes, and not in our family. That was great. It was pretty equal.

KMD: At the time, were you aware that it was unusual, or—

BC: Yeah, because my friends would tell me that their parents made them do the dishes, not the boys. But—

KMD: Did your brothers ever react to that, or it was just—

BC: No, they were . . . We had a mother that was—she believed in using the physical force if you didn't do what you're told. She was a very strong lady. She carried a sixteen-pound bowling ball, so you don't mess with someone who can carry a sixteen-pound ball. That's the heaviest bowling ball you can carry, so she's a very strong lady. She tells you to do something, you did it.

KMD: So no one got out of line.

BC: No. I never, ever talked back to my mother. Eighteen years, I was a good girl. And then as soon as I turned eighteen, I said, "See you later." I mean, I actually left the home and started working with the farm workers, because I felt like I was really—I was a good daughter, I was very good, I never gave my mother any kind of grief. Probably when I was in my moods, maybe, but I never talked back, ever.

KMD: Wow.

- BC: Not even once. She can't even recall a single moment where I talked back to her.
- KMD: I didn't realize that you were—you're still in Culver City. I didn't realize you were—you're a home girl and you've been home—
- BC: Culver City. I lived in Silver Lake briefly, but yeah, Culver [City]. I wanted to come back here so bad, because I just liked the air quality here, and just being close to the water. I just didn't like living so far away from my family, my brothers and sisters and my . . . And then, you know, when I had my daughter, I definitely wanted her to grow up with her cousins.
- KMD: Was there a—I mean, Culver City is such an unusual little strip of land made into a town. So you're living with other people of color in the housing development. Is there a sense that there is also kind of a Mexican community developing in this area, or not?
- BC: Well, you know, that's a really good question. I was part of the Upward Bound program, so they would bus kids from East LA, actually Roosevelt and Garfield and then Locke High School from the black area to UCLA, and so they would tell me, they didn't think there were any Mexicans on this side of town. And I go, "I hate to tell you this, but there's a lot of us on this side of town." But you know, there's that perception that the West Side is white people only, and that's just not reality. And so anyway, that was something that we felt like we had to really prove that, I don't know. It was always this sense of trying to prove ourselves.
- KMD: Did you—I mean, people identify with a kind of Mexican community would be the shops and the stores and maybe the way they did Mass at the church or something like that. Was—or are you just referring to—I mean, were there restaurants and—
- BC: Yeah, we always went to the Mexican restaurant right across the street from the Catholic school, El Albajeno.
- KMD: Yeah.
- BC: I don't know if you've ever gone there.
- KMD: Yeah.
- BC: But before that, there was . . . One part of the restaurant used to be a liquor store, and we always went into that liquor store too. But the priest, Father [Doherty], our parish priest, he used to come out every morning with a bottle of liquor under there, and we all knew it was liquor, and it was just an ongoing joke about how he's going to get drunk again. But he was really not a very nice priest. He would yell at us, and at one point he caught a bunch of us ditching Mass in the morning, and he said, "God damn you," and I remember saying to him, "You're breaking the first commandment." I was little, I was a little tiny thing, and my mom—I couldn't believe it, my mother goes, "Oh, my God, you actually said that to him?" because he got really pissed off when I said that. And I said, "Well, it's true, isn't it? You're not supposed to use the Lord's name in vain," and he actually kicked my brother, kicked my brother in the leg, for . . . I thought that was child abuse that was wrong. But my mother complained to him already, but he kicked my mother out of the church, in the confessional, for confessing to using birth control pills when I was about fifteen.
- KMD: Wow.
- BC: He said she was no longer welcome in his church. I had already graduated from Catholic school at that point, and I remember thinking, because she had one more kid, that was the youngest one, and she was really hurt, because here's this devout Catholic, and she's being told—she was told not to come into that church ever again. And then I remember her crying when she came out, and I thought it was so wrong for him to do that, because he's not—
- KMD: Oh, you were there in the church while she was—
- BC: I was in the car waiting for her, and she came out crying. I remember that day really well. But I was—that's when I became really angry with the church. I just thought it was disgusting, after five children—that part, I disagreed with, that after five kids, you should be allowed to use some kind of—I mean, we couldn't afford it, to have another child, to pay for another mouth to feed. Anyway, but there was a lot of really devout Catholics having—we had a family right around the corner that had sixteen kids. Sixteen of them. And there was another family of eight. They were all extremely poor families.

- KMD:** The kids in your schools, and—I'm sorry if I confused this—did you go to the Catholic school of your parish, or was this—
- BC:** Yeah. It was part of the parish.
- KMD:** Okay. And so those were different kinds of kids. They have obviously a little bit more money than you do, but they're also not necessarily Mexican or black or—
- BC:** Yeah. But it was amazing, there were not a lot of blacks and Mexicans there. There were quite a few Mexicans that were there. In fact, yeah, because I hung around with most of them, so—we were very close. Yeah, that's amazing. I think because they were so religious and devout Catholics, they would do what we did, pay the extra money to have their kids educated in a Catholic school. That was important, so my mom thought it was important, so.
- KMD:** I was trying to get a sense . . . You said there was a restaurant in Culver City. The church, though, isn't doing—it's not all Mexicans, so they're not doing mariachi music, I imagine, or—
- BC:** No. They weren't like that, no.
- KMD:** Yeah. Are you singing the contemporary stuff, or is this—
- BC:** We were doing Latin. I was in the choir singing in Latin.
- KMD:** You were in the choir.
- BC:** Singing Latin. The kyrie, Ave Maria, oh, my God. All that.
- KMD:** Barbara, I didn't know this about you. *[laughter]*
- BC:** And I loved it, though. I really, really liked that part. I told you, I liked the whole ritualistic part. I like when they had the incense burning in the church, just all of it. And I used to always stare at the Christ on the cross and kind of wonder what kind of person he was and all the suffering he must have gone through. That kind of . . . You know, I think I was very much a really true Catholic. And then later, I think when I got older and I saw sort of the inequities of the church, like not being allowed to—oh, I remember one time I came into church without my lace *[veil]*.
- KMD:** Your veil?
- BC:** My lace veil.
- KMD:** Yeah.
- BC:** Father Doherty stopped the Mass—*[laughter]*—and he came right up to my pew—I was on the side pew—and he came up right at the end, and he wanted me to look at him, and I refused to look at him. And he said, "Someone is not wearing their veil!"
- KMD:** Had you just forgotten it that day?
- BC:** Yeah, I just forgot it, and he was trying to embarrass me, but I wouldn't allow him to do it. I was very stubborn.
- KMD:** So, in singing in the choir, was that something that came out of the school—
- BC:** Yeah, it was part of school.
- KMD:** Okay. Did you enjoy the performing part of it, or—
- BC:** Yeah, I liked it.
- KMD:** Oh, you did.
- BC:** And then the procession, too. There were all these different processions going on, and the May procession. But one thing I didn't like, I liked it but I didn't like it, was the pagan babies thing. That part I did not like.
- KMD:** Saving the pagan babies.
- BC:** And I think the—I just thought it was weird. Here were going to name somebody, and the person—the class that raised the most amount of money could name a child over there. And I just didn't think it was right, I don't know. I didn't like that part. You did that, right?
- KMD:** No, my children did. For some reason it skipped a generation. I don't know.
- BC:** But I remember—
- KMD:** But I went to a church that sang more contemporary hip '60s songs.

BC: Oh, really?

KMD: Yeah. But still, you would think that most of Southern California was moving to that at the time that you were growing up.

BC: Oh, everything was in Latin. And then they had all the old songs. Like the Ave Maria was sung at every single—I think every single event; that was one of the most popular songs. And then when we were singing in Latin, I didn't know what we were saying, but it was all in Latin, so.

KMD: I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more about how the family kind of fit in or not to what's going on in the community, the place you're growing up. I mean, you mentioned you becoming aware of color difference, and racial prejudice. Did the family ever give a sense that, you know, we're Mexican, but be proud—I know you've said that there was an awareness of poverty, but we're going to have dignity, we're clean. Was there also—

BC: Oh, yeah. I think my dad and my mother were very proud to be Mexican. My dad more—he would talk about it more to us, I guess because he had more time on his hands than my mom. But he—I remember him saying that you have to be proud and hold your head up high, and never let anyone make you feel insignificant or beneath them, and I don't know, that's—he always said that, and he was—I don't know, he seemed like he was really kind of—he felt guilty that we were living there, I know that. He said, "I wish we could be—I wish I could have provided better for you." He would always apologize for us living there. I think he felt bad that we weren't living in a house or in a better neighborhood or going to a better school or whatever, you know. I was really—I didn't really understand why he felt so bad about it. I didn't really understand it at the time. But now I do, but just at that time, I didn't really think about it that much, and I thought we were fine, until people started making—until the comments.

KMD: So I guess being poor was more of a stigma than being Mexican, is what I'm trying to get at.

BC: Oh, I think the poverty thing was actually more, I think more than—being Mexican. I remember him joking around saying—he used to tell us, "Whatever you do, don't marry a Mexican when you get older."

KMD: And what was that?

BC: He was joking around about it, he wasn't serious, because of course, he married a Mexican himself. But he said, because most Mexicans are poor. He had that whole mentality that most—that most of us are poor, and most Mexicans aren't going to go far in life because of just the racism and all that kind of thing.

KMD: Oh, so you think he was also making it aware of how racism limited opportunities?

BC: Yeah, I think so. But it's interesting, because most people from El Paso really don't talk about racism; they sort of are in denial about the whole racist thing. But he said it in other ways, there was—he never used the word—he would say "prejudiced," or "prejudices," but he thought people were more prejudiced about how you dress, and how you are financially.

But my mom, she really didn't care what people thought. She was more in denial too about racism, I think, because I asked her if she had experienced racism strolling with my brother and I, two light-complected kids, in a stroller in El Paso, if people looked at them really oddly, that here's these two dark-complected parents with these two white . . . "Never, never. I never experienced any racism." I just don't believe that. But that's what she says, and she—and now she's more, she's starting to change a little bit, she's very conservative but she's starting to talk about a little bit of the prejudice that she experienced. But she—I looked at photographs of my father in the Navy, and all his buddies were all white guys, so that was interesting. And he's got his arm around all these—he looks like he's having a great time, and they're all white. There's not a Mexican in there. So I don't know if it's because he was one of the few, or because he just gravitated towards whites.

KMD: Well, some platoons were segregated, but he obviously wasn't in a segregated platoon.

BC: No. And he had a really—he was really outgoing; he had a really—both of my parents have really good personalities, they get along with anybody. My mom gets along with everybody.

KMD: You were saying they're both creative. Did they also play music, or—

BC: No, I don't think either one. My dad, he wanted—he got my older brother to play guitar, he thought it was important to learn to play. So he got—my brother actually took guitar lessons in the projects, and I think he had to pay for that, but I thought that was really great that he spent money on my brother, so my brother played guitar.

KMD: You said your mother eventually remarried. Were you home for most of that time?

BC: Yeah, I was in eighth grade when my mom started—when she married the guy, because I remember he came to one of my volleyball games in Catholic school. And he was a real tall guy, looked like a very—he was the opposite of my dad. He was wearing business suits, my dad never wore business suits. And I thought we were—we didn't know that he was alcoholic at the beginning, and so he was not very—it was not a good experience when he first arrived, let me put it that way. But he has since become a totally different person, and we get along really good now.

KMD: Oh, they're still together.

BC: Yeah.

[break in audio]

BC: So, especially when I got to UCLA, a lot of other students were in denial about that kind of thing. Although the majority, I have to say, were very—they're the ones who really reinforced the pride in being Mexican, with me. The MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] students, I thought they were great.

KMD: Is this when you were doing your bachelor's, or when you're going for your summer programs?

BC: Oh, before, at the summer program.

KMD: Oh, really?

BC: Upward Bound program. Because when I got to UCLA with the Upward Bound program, there was a girl from—I think she was from Roosevelt High School who had told me about the Chicano movement. I knew nothing about it. Nothing. And some people claim they were a part of it—I was not part of it at all; I didn't know anything—

KMD: About what time is this? 19—

BC: This is in the early '70s. And I just didn't know anything about the Chicano Movement. I'd never heard of the Virgen de Guadalupe, ever. Never saw her image. In Catholic school, they never showed us her image.

KMD: Right, it would just be—

BC: The Madonna.

KMD: Mary.

BC: Yeah, Mary. Then this student showed me pictures of the farm workers marching with the banners with her image on it, and so I became like really intrigued. I thought, "Wow, this is a movement that's going on, and how come I don't know anything about it?" And so her and I, we became really good friends, and I started actually going to East LA, visiting her over there, meeting with her. And we would meet at Olvera Street, and I started really getting into Olvera Street, buying all the little trinkets and that kind of thing. But we went to Olvera Street as a family, but several times, actually, my mom would take us to Grand Central Market as young kids on the bus—they had the red cars back then. And I thought it was really exciting, I loved it, and it was a big outing for us to go from the West Side all the way to downtown.

And so then as I got older, I wanted to do the same thing, find out more what's going on. And so these students, they were telling me—they would say things that I never heard before, like that education is—that this is—what was the word that they used?—it's not your college, it's their college. You know, the white establishment school. And they had these . . . The way they looked at things was very different from the way we talked about things on the Westside. So I was just saying, "Wow! I guess I have a whole education to go through." But it was really kind of a nice transition in Upward Bound to know what other people are doing on the other side of town. And then when I found out about César Chávez and the farm workers, and that was really exciting for me.

KMD: So how did you find out from this woman—MEChA, and then—

- BC: No, it wasn't MEChA, it was Upward Bound. And then she was a member of MEChA at her school. I was not a member of MEChA at my school.
- KMD: Oh, they had it at your school?
- BC: Yeah, but it was called UMAS, United Mexican-American Students. And a lot of my friends were members, but the understanding we had, a lot of us, that we had, was it was Spanish-speakers, so I felt a little uncomfortable joining a solely Spanish-speaking, because UMAS—our UMAS at Venice High School—was not like the MEChA at Roosevelt. They were more politically oriented; this was more like a social gathering, and they were all into talking about—I mean, speaking in Spanish at those meetings. So I didn't want to feel like I was an outsider, so I didn't join. When I was high school, I was more involved in art production, I was involved in drill team. I was—
- KMD: Wait a minute. You were doing athletics, and you were doing—
- BC: Drill team.
- KMD: Drill team.
- BC: Yeah.
- KMD: Is that with the flags, or is that—
- BC: That's pom-poms. My sister and I both were on the drill team together. She was—I designed the drill team uniforms.
- KMD: You designed the uniforms. Had you been doing fashion design [*inaudible*]?
- BC: I was always—I wanted to be a fashion designer since I was real young. That was my main thing. And then my first job that I ever got at West LA College, before I went to UCLA—I transferred—I was working with a woman from Catalina Swimwear, and so she was my fashion designing teacher. I was taking a class there, and she told me I was very good. But—she wanted to take my sketches home with her, and I knew no, no way, because I had heard about Edith Head, that's how Edith Head got her start: she took her students' portfolios, went to MGM, and got hired. She passed her own students' work off as her own. I don't know if you know that story, but that's a true story.
- KMD: No, I didn't know that story.
- BC: That's a true story.
- KMD: And you were aware of this story as a young girl.
- BC: Yeah. I knew the teachers did that, and that famous people have done that. Because they did something on Edith Head, and I remember thinking, "Oh, my God, I'm never going to give my sketches to anybody."
- KMD: What kinds of things were you sketching?
- BC: Really crazy swimsuits. Really nice ones. She said there's no material that will make those kinds of designs. [*laughter*] They were really out there kind of designs, but she said I was good enough to go to Paris. She said, "You should go to Paris," and I just didn't have the confidence to believe that she was telling—saying, you know, the real truth about it. But I knew I wanted to be an artist, so I was pretty serious about studying at a university to get there.
- KMD: When did you determine that you wanted to be an artist? What age was that?
- BC: I was really young. I think I was in first grade. I knew I was going to be an artist in first grade. I did drawings that my dad—I would show my dad, and he would say, "Oh, these are great!" And they were. I look at them now, they're pretty funny looking drawings, but he—
- KMD: You saved them.
- BC: I saved them. And he used to tell me—
- KMD: Are they part of the archive at Stanford, or are they—
- BC: No. Stanford doesn't own a single piece of artwork except for one, they only own one, the first drawing I did of César Chávez. It was on a flyer to promote him talking at UCLA, and I did an illustration of him, and it's like really small, like three by three inches, and it was on the flyer, and that's the only one they have. It's autographed by him. So when he came to the campus, that was when I met him, and I was so thrilled, so I asked him to autograph it. And so that's the only one Stanford owns.

KMD: So you knew you were going to be an artist as a young, young child.

BC: Oh, I always felt I was going to be one.

KMD: And when did you actually start pursuing this? I mean, you know you're drawing all the time, but when are you going, "Okay, this is what you do." Was that in high school?

BC: No, I was doing it all through elementary school. I won—in Catholic school, I won the annual poster contest every year for eight years. I won it every year, so everybody goes, "Oh, I'm not even going to try, Barbara's going to win it." But I did that, and then there was . . . In high school I won all kinds of other honorary awards and all that honorary—the Rotary Club came and I won one of those.

KMD: Are you doing mostly drawing pencil at that time still, is that your medium?

BC: Yeah, I was doing [pencil], and then I took an art production class with a teacher who has since passed away, Mr. Shigaki. He's the one who introduced ballpoint pen to me. He told me, based on what he saw with my pencil drawings, he said, "Barbara, you should try this." He showed me some of his ballpoint pen drawings that were beautiful drawings. And so he gave me some pens, and he said, "I think you would really like this." The way this ballpoint pen works on paper, it's very fine. You can get really detailed with the ballpoint pen. So I started doing a lot of that. He was the first person . . . I started drawing in the eleventh grade with ballpoint pen. And two of my drawings were at the Music Center, and they were never returned, somehow disappeared. They were in a big statewide student art exhibit, and someone has those.

KMD: Getting late on time?

BC: No, I'm just—I'm looking so I don't go over.

KMD: How much time do we have?

BC: Well, 'til two [o' clock]?

KMD: Let's take a pause.

[*break in audio*]

KMD: We took a quick break so we could check the time. Barbara, you're winning contest after contest. I mean, it's like the other students must have been crazy. So you're getting a lot of positive reinforcement in your schooling years, even in elementary school, from Sister Mary Ann, was it? Did you ever encounter any technique that was difficult, or was there one contest you didn't win, or you couldn't master this particular media, or—

BC: Well, I was frustrated with—I think was watercolor, because I was working with watercolor, and I was making it thicker and thicker, and then my art teacher told me that I would really love oils, but we couldn't afford oil paint, it was too expensive. But she told me, she said, "There's another water-based paint; it's called gouache, and so I started working with gouache a little bit, but I didn't like how fast, how quickly it dried. It dried way too quick for me. So I just stuck with watercolor. But the ballpoint pen, I really loved it, and I started doing really tiny drawings, miniature drawings, and I would draw all over my Pee Chee folders—

KMD: Yeah, Pee Chee. [*laughter*]

BC: I mean, really detailed drawings. I don't know, so that was something that I really liked doing, doodling. But I think the whole ritualistic part of Catholic school, with the . . . You know, we actually had a penmanship class, and so my penmanship was like perfect penmanship. So they would actually teach us all the loops, and oh, my God, every day, that was something we had to do every single day, and it's amazing that I still do that on a continual basis almost every day, in some form or another. I'll get a piece of paper, and I'll practice the loops. I don't know why. It's just conditioning I guess, I don't know. But I think it helps to always practice, no matter what.

KMD: So you're experimenting with different media early on as a young girl, and you're obviously taking art classes in high school. What did your family say?

BC: Well, my mom was a little upset that I was so into my art and not into academics as much. So she was—she would actually have us read for an hour every day, all of us had to read for an hour every day. So I am really kind of grateful to her in the fact that she made us do that, because she also told us that when you read a lot, you acquire verbal—a lot of words. You learn more about words and how to use them, or how they're used in books, and then she—and she was telling me that writing is just as important as anything else. You have to write well. And so when I was in junior high school, right after Catholic school, I went to Marina del Rey Junior High School. I was in—I used to write poems and used to write stuff. I don't think I was very good at writing poems, but I used to just like writing. And then I just wrote—I had a diary all the time, so I wrote always in my diary, a lot of stuff.

KMD: What kinds of things would you read when your mother is telling you to do reading for an hour a day?

BC: She would have us read Jane Eyre. All the classics.

KMD: Really?

BC: Yeah. She was . . . Moby Dick, all these weird . . . My mom has read everything. I have a mom that—she didn't go to college, but she could pass a college entry exam anytime. She helped my brother pass his. She's just one of those people that just reads. She's read—she has the biggest library of books. It was ridiculous.

KMD: In the home, she had books?

BC: It was huge. We had tons of books, all the time. And she had an encyclopedia—anatomy books too, so I loved—I wish to God we kept those. But when we moved out of the projects, she left a lot of that stuff there. She couldn't take everything. But there were these anatomy books that were really beautifully illustrated, and those like really were like—they really stuck with me. And—oh, I forget—the illustrator's famous, a famous illustrator, too. But my brother—I think that's why my brother's such a good reader also today. He reads everything today too because of my mom. She made us all read.

KMD: When did you leave the projects?

BC: Well, I left early, earlier than my siblings did. I left when I was—right after high school. I mean—actually two years after—college, my two-year—I moved into the dorms, and so I guess that was 1976.

KMD: So your family then leaves after that?

BC: Yeah, they left. My mom and my younger sister. My sister and I, we moved into the UCLA dormitory together; she came straight from high school, she was only seventeen, and I came from the junior college. So we lived together in the dorms at UCLA.

KMD: Wow. That's pretty amazing.

BC: So this kind of love of reading coming from home, sounds like mostly novels? Or is it other things as well?

BC: Everything. *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, by Irving Stone, I read that book. My mom had all these books that were really great books. I didn't realize—this was really ironic—because that book, Irving Stone's book, was translated from Italian to English by [Charles] Speroni, who was the dean of the art department at UCLA. And he's the one I approached when I was denied entry to the art department, I met with him. It was so weird, because I was with my older brother, and I was very upset that I had been rejected from the art department, and I had this big argument with him about—I thought the art department was racist, that they only . . . Of the five departments within the art department, they only had like a certain amount of minority students. And then he said, "Well, how did you get that information?" And I said, "At the planning office. I went over there and got it." And then he said, "Well, I don't think it's racism," and he said that he experienced racism when he came over from Italy, too, by housing in Westwood, and I had told him that buying a house was not even—I can't even imagine what that's like. But it was interesting. I didn't know who I was speaking to, I didn't know that he was the one who had translated that book, and how important a person he was. I got in one week later after talking to him. I was accepted. But it's—I think it's based on—

KMD: [inaudible]

- BC:** I know, but I think when you feel—sometimes when you feel like you’re powerless, it does interesting things to you, because if you have nothing to lose . . . I felt like I had nothing to lose by having this argument with him and fighting for my case. And so it paid off really well. I got in the next week.
- KMD:** Before we move on to that, because I know we’re going to run out of time, do you want to say anything more about the family growing up, and any particular memories that you think might—
- BC:** Well, there was—well, I think what was really great about growing up at the projects too—you know, it’s really weird, because it’s so—it’s like a double-edged sword. On one hand, it was a dangerous place to live in. But on the other hand, it gave me a real sense of community, that I think has stayed with me long after. And I felt like I was—whenever I did anything outside the projects, I felt like I was representing the people there. That’s how I felt; I actually felt that way. But there was—inside the projects, I thought there was a really great program there, it was called Toy Loan. They would loan us toys for like a week or two weeks, and if you brought that toy back in good condition, you got like a star next to your name on an index card, and then after so many stars, you get—that’s how I got my first Barbie doll, my first Barbie doll I got from Toy Loan. But I know it seems insignificant, but that was such a great program. And those programs like that that I really think help really poor kids get by, because I remember being really grateful to that program. Because, you know, every week we went there, and we’d stand in long lines, and all of us would say, “Oh, I wonder what --” you know, some kids would want to get a GI Joe or Barbie or some toy, some game, and that’s the only—that was our only source of getting toys. That was it.
- KMD:** Right. Christmas.
- BC:** Christmas was—you know, we had our gifts from our parents; I remember getting—now that I think about it, it was a really nice stove made out of metal, they don’t make those anymore. Stove and a refrigerator, all that kind of thing.
- KMD:** Big, they’re not—they’re almost like life-size for the kids?
- BC:** Yeah, they were big enough for us, when we were little tiny things. And I remember thinking that—we loved our toys, we loved them, even though we knew they were small and they were few, but we—I don’t know, I didn’t have—but in comparison to the kids at school, their toys, that’s when we realized we were really --
- KMD:** Because the kids at school are talking about these things --
- BC:** Yeah. They got a bike; they got real expensive things, and we never got expensive things. But you know, we were happy.
- KMD:** Not even a shared bike, a shared, used bike?
- BC:** Nope.
- KMD:** No, wow. Did you wear the shoes that had holes in them?
- BC:** Yeah, we did, on free dress day. But the shoes that we wore for Catholic school were good Oxford shoes; they were made of—you know, the black and white shoes, and those are nice, sturdy shoes; they would last forever, those shoes. I hated them; I tried to scuff them on purpose, intentionally, because they just were so durable, and that’s what I hated about them. But you know, and then we had like a plaid uniform with the—we had to wear this blue sweater that was the ugliest blue, I hated that blue. It was like this color blue, just a real—
- KMD:** Royal?
- BC:** Ugh, I just didn’t like it. And to this day, I don’t like blue at all.
- KMD:** And were you sensitive to color then as you are now?
- BC:** Yeah. I was. And then the whole time . . . My mom, the whole ritual thing about my mom putting our hair up, and doing that, every day, it was kind of interesting, because the boys, they just put the Vitalis stuff on their hair, and that was it. I remember that Vitalis, it was real greasy stuff that they would put on their hair. And my sisters and I would just say, “Oh, God, it hurts so bad,” and my mother—
- KMD:** Are you doing it with the wet hair, or is it dry hair?
- BC:** She did it. Sometimes it would be dry, but she would get—

KMD: Wet the—

BC: Wet the brush, and then apply it.

KMD: Pull it back.

BC: Oh, God, it was so painful. I don't know if your mom did that to you.

KMD: So there weren't tender moments where they're fixing your hair. *[laughter]*

BC: I don't remember any kind of tender moments. My mother . . . I don't have a memory like of my mom sitting down with me and watching a movie or reading a book with me, nothing like that. I don't, I just don't, because she didn't have the time to do that. She was . . .

KMD: Right. You mentioned before that your father had the time. Is that because when he wasn't working, he had leisure time?

BC: Yeah, he had a heart attack that left him with workman's comp time off, and he—

KMD: Wow.

BC: This is like he was laid off, I think about a year and a half, so he was home all the time with us. So he would spend a lot of time; he was really good at spending time with us, and making even chores fun, he would always make everything a lot of fun. But he was very strict though; you could never cuss in front of him, or talk back ever to him, that's it. Because you know, they believed in hitting us. *[laughter]*

KMD: Spanking, the belt.

BC: The belt. The thin one hurt more than the thick one.

KMD: Was it like my family? "Go get the belt," which is half the punishment.

BC: Yeah, that's what they would say, "Go get the belt," like, "Oh, yeah, we're going to go get it." Sure. But my dad was . . . I think it was good, he knew how to balance being strict and having fun, he was real good about that. But I don't know, I have to admit, I think we had a really fun childhood, which was just really sad when he died; the whole family dynamic changed drastically. Even my relationship with my mom changed big-time.

KMD: Did you ever have a job as a young person before going off to school where you got to keep some of the money?

BC: Yeah, I worked in a t-shirt factory off of Jefferson Boulevard, and that's the first time I ever realized I didn't know anything about immigration raids or anything, but they would do several immigration raids. And I used to hear, "The *migra* is coming." I didn't know what that meant. I had no idea. At that point, I was only fifteen years old, so I didn't know what that meant at all. I mean—but I just knew that everybody ran, and that I had to be in a certain place, and it's weird.

KMD: So you're not running, because you don't know what it is, but after you start seeing this happen, you know that they're not going to pick you up?

BC: Yeah, they're just going to pick up the Mexican—undocumented Mexican, or other nationalities that aren't documented.

KMD: Are you having an awareness that this is something wrong, or—?

BC: Yeah, I thought it was wrong. I just thought it was sad, because I saw one coworker look really nervous all the time. That was my first job. And then my second job, I worked at McDonald's, like so many other people, on Lincoln—Lincoln and Venice. And so my brother worked there . . . Actually, everyone in our family worked there, my sister too. I think both my sisters worked there, I'm not sure. But I worked there, and I didn't really like it.

KMD: So are you taking this money home and saving it for yourself, or is it all—

BC: No, it went for clothes, to buy clothes for us, because there was a certain point where we were all buying our own clothes. We went to Culver City right here, the only mall around at that time was the Culver City—it was Culver Center, it was called the Culver Center Mall. I mean, that was like an open mall—it was the only mall. There was no Fox Hills, there was no West Side Pavilion or Santa Monica Place mall, nothing. That was it. And so we went to the Surprise Store, that's where I bought all our clothes. Do you remember the Surprise Store? You don't remember that?

KMD: That was one I don't remember.

BC: Yeah, that's—you were very young probably at that time. You were probably a baby. Lee Marvin was in there one time, so that was funny.

KMD: Are you also buying your art supplies?

BC: Yeah. I was buying real—like very inexpensive art journals, little books. And then even when I went—when our art teachers would say to buy [Grumbacher], or these name brands that were good, I never did. I went to the standard brands store and bought the cheapest generic oil paint and watercolor paint. I never bought what they told us to buy. I couldn't afford it. It was just too expensive. And even later, when I became a student at UCLA, I never, ever, went to the art store they told us to go to, which was called Flax, it was in Westwood. It was a great art store, but I couldn't go. I couldn't buy anything in there.

KMD: Did you notice . . . I don't know if you got to use somebody else's, but could you tell that they were different quality, or—?

BC: I couldn't tell, but . . . And my teachers didn't seem like they could tell. They just told me I was a very good artist. So I had really good art instructors, I was very fortunate to have—I had some that would tell me, they were pretty honest with me, and tell me that I was really—[that] my ego was going to get in my way, because I was very self-confident. One teacher actually told me, he goes, "Barbara, that will actually prohibit you from learning, if you just. . ." He said that in front of everybody, too. That was embarrassing—that my confidence is one thing, but that I was just a little too cocky about knowing that I was a good artist, and that I was just not trying harder, I wasn't experimenting more. He was a good teacher, because he was really honest with me. I liked that.

KMD: Was that when you were already at UCLA, or—?

BC: Yeah. Jan Stussy, very good teacher. God, very hard. He was really hard on us. Everybody said don't take him, because he's so hard, and that's why I took him.

KMD: Hold on, let's pause.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2007

- KMD:** This is Karen Mary Davalos and Barbara Carrasco. Today is September 11, 2007, and we're continuing the interview about Barbara's youth and growing up. I had a question about your family's artistic tendencies. I don't think we talked about that before. Were you the only artist in the family, or were there other kinds of expressions?
- BC:** No, both my parents were very artistically inclined. My mom did—when she was in high school, she received an art scholarship, which her parents quickly made her turn down. And my dad was actually drawing all the time. He would always draw mostly images of women's bodies and stuff. *[laughter]* And so, but he was a natural, he was very talented. Then I had a younger brother—he's a year younger than me—he became extremely skilled in spray-painting cars. So he was good, he was extremely talented. And then my sister Frances and my sister Leandra both are naturally talented artists, but they never pursued it. It's more like a hobby for both of them.
- KMD:** Right. Was the house well decorated, or did your mother pay attention to those kind of details?
- BC:** There was a lot of art, but it's amazing that most of the art was from Japan.
- KMD:** Really?
- BC:** There wasn't anything about Mexico, except for a few velvet paintings in my mom's bedroom, traditional velvet painting that—ugh, I didn't like it.
- KMD:** What was the image?
- BC:** It was just, you know, a river and some palm trees. It was just done in a real traditional Mexican style. But all the other decorations were all Japanese. Japanese scrolls, all the seasons, winter, spring, summer, fall. And my mother would—she'd get them, and she'd really . . . One thing that I really admired about my mom is that she—we were really poor but she was very resourceful, she would get those scrolls and then put them on a piece of plywood and shellac it and it looked absolutely beautiful. It looked very expensive, but it wasn't at all. She was always doing stuff like that, she was always decorating stuff all the time. And then we would do a lot of arts and crafts things that . . . When she became a Girl Scout leader, we did a lot of arts and crafts.
- KMD:** Yeah, you talked about that. You make faces like it was burdensome at the time?
- BC:** Because I was a guinea pig, so she would be real critical if I did something wrong, because I was supposed to be showing them, this is how you do it. Anyway, but she did the . . . A lot of it was craft oriented, and it wasn't really a fine-art project, it was more craft.
- KMD:** And your father was drawing on—he had like a pad that he kept?
- BC:** Any piece of white paper, he would draw. And then the chalkboard, we had a big chalkboard that all of us drew on all the time. That was a really good investment, I think, because it was huge. It was like two by three feet—that was big for us. So all of us, they would buy colored chalk, and we were always drawing on there. So he would just draw this woman's back, it was just beautiful. "Ooh, look at her back!" He had a real good sense of humor, my dad, but he was really *[good]*—it was really beautiful. And then he showed us pictures of Diego Rivera's art. He was very proud of the Mexican artists, so he wanted us to know about them.
- KMD:** Do you recall—did he own these books, or did he . . .
- BC:** Yeah. We had a lot of *[books]*. I told you, we had a really good art library. I mean, a library, it was ridiculous. It was pretty good. My brother, when my brother . . . The oldest brother, he is not artistically inclined at all. I mean, really bad, he can't even—I don't understand anything he writes, either. Really bad. But we went—all of us, when we went to Catholic school, penmanship was extremely important, so . . . I don't know if you did that, but we had to do that every day.
- KMD:** No, I've just heard stories. Making the circles, making the loops, thin ones and fat ones.
- BC:** Yeah. I had like perfect penmanship. Not to brag, but it was perfect. No, the nuns would actually hold it up and say, "This is what it should look like," and mine was the example. But that was the only thing. I was

bad in everything else, all the academics. Math, English. But art was the—it was something we all did as a family, and then of course individually as well.

KMD: Did it strike you at the time . . . You talk about your family now, you're aware that your father was really proud of these Mexican artists. Was he verbalizing that, like you should know these, you should appreciate these?

BC: Yeah. He told me early on, when I was really young, like five or six years old. I remember because, first grade, I was six, seven, or eight, he told me that I had a gift, and that I should appreciate that it's a God-given gift, and that I should definitely pursue what God has given me, that type of thing. And then when he showed me the Mexican artists, he said, "This is what good art is." That's how he presented it. He didn't necessarily say, "These are great Mexican artists." He said they were great artists. So I never like, at that young age, I never like thought, "Well, I should study Mexican art." I wasn't—it was just, these are good artists, period. And so that stuck with me.

KMD: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your time in high school. I had read that you were quite popular, the homecoming queen. *[laughter]* Ah-hah, she cringes. And you worked on the school newspaper, you were the editor of the paper.

BC: Editor of the *Oarsman*. Well, you know, the first year, in tenth grade, I did very poorly, academically, and I was not a dedicated student, if you want to call it that. I was really distracted by what my friends were doing, by what some friends, who were considered a bad element in school, too, ditching, not attending school, just going to parties instead. It was my older brother Ricardo who had a long talk with me, and he convinced me. It was in just one talk with him, because my father wasn't around and my mother was just so busy raising all of us. But that one talk with him—because he was the only one that excelled academically, and went on to Saint Monica's High School—he said, "Do you want to wind up living in the projects when you get older?" And I said, "No," and he said, "Well, that's where you're headed, because you're not doing good in school." And it just scared me. Everything he said just snapped me out of that kind of just not taking school seriously, that kind of just lax attitude towards education, and he really—it was a really good talk. I really appreciated it, because it changed my whole direction. I actually remember getting really upset—I think I was even crying. Then in eleventh and twelfth grade, I got really involved in the Upward Bound program, which bused us to UCLA every Saturday throughout the summer, and I did pretty good from then on, from eleventh and twelfth grade. I was really involved in the *Oarsman*, just becoming the editor was a big responsibility. I had worked on the paper the previous year as—I think it was city editor, something. So I had done different things, and then I wanted to pursue being manager. But it really made me more responsible, to be the editor.

KMD: As the editor, did you do any writing, or was it just organizing and editing the layout?

BC: We did writing also. But I was actually organizing, telling other people what to write about, sending people out to interview people. We went to a lot of plays, so I met a lot of really famous people. Went to go to *[Juno and the Paycock]* with Jack Lemmon. I got to meet Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. We went backstage and met them. It was amazing. It was just really great. And then we saw at the Huntington Hartford Theatre, we saw a play, all black cast, it was . . . Her name was Kelly, something Kelly, and she was really—she's on TV right now. She's really beautiful, tall actress-singer, and we got to meet the cast. So I was like . . . And then David Carradine—we went on the set of one of his—what was it, *Kung Fu*? And so I interviewed him. I have photographs of myself with him, and I'm like seventeen years old. It was just a lot of fun. It was—the interviewing part I really liked, and then I realized that I have—that it was really exciting to find out about other people, what other people are doing outside my community. Up until then, I really didn't know. And so here was this girl from the projects going and interviewing movie stars and activists.

KMD: How did this school create those relationships with—?

BC: Well, it was really good. Our teacher in journalism class, he was a really interesting guy—Mr. Rottman, I remember. He was somebody who was always arguing about—he would take . . . He loved to encourage argument and discussion. I remember one time we were arguing about religion, because he was talking

about Barabbas. And Barabbas was the—and it was funny, because he was Jewish, and here I was, this Catholic defending . . . Because he said Barabbas meant “son of the father,” and then I looked it up, and I saw it means “son of a father.” He appreciated that. It was—I really liked him, I thought he was a really good teacher. He was always telling us about interesting topics all the time, more than the average teacher.

KMD: So would he arrange these interviews? I mean, getting the press passes, and—

BC: Yeah, he would say, “I want you to go do this, interview these people.” And a lot of times, the interviews came about through the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound had a newsletter, and I wrote for the newsletter as well. So through Upward Bound, I think we went to go see that play at the Huntington Hartford Theatre, and then just a bunch of . . . We would see a lot of plays and performances and musicians, and it was really great.

KMD: Did you pursue that writing interest, or—?

BC: Yeah, I did, actually. I had an English teacher who was actually at Marina Junior High School, she was really great, she was very . . . I was also writing for that newspaper on that campus too. But she’s the one who really told me I was a good storyteller. So she told me, “You should put these down on paper.” So when I went to high school—I remember in high school, they asked us to write a story about our childhood, and I wrote about the gang situation in the housing projects. And it was really interesting, because my English teacher really liked the story. She said, “You know, Barbara, this is really good stuff. It’s amazing you’re okay,” because a lot of my friends died. I mean, it was just scary. I didn’t realize how scary it was until I got older. But we—I told you, there was another aspect of it, which was like a big—we were like a big extended family, and so it was interesting, because people saw it as dangerous, but we didn’t realize it until later how dangerous it was.

KMD: So you continued doing this kind of writing even in college?

BC: Yeah. I became the first female editor of *La Gente* newspaper.

KMD: At UCLA.

BC: Yeah. There had never been a female editor until I came along. And that was an interesting experience, because we were interviewed by the communications board, and Merced Martin, who is now an attorney, him and I both were interviewed separately. And then when they selected me, it was sort of like a domino effect where all the Chicanos dropped out altogether, all of them, all the males. And then I had to convince them one by one that I was—that I need them to work on the paper and that I don’t understand why they quit, because—why, because I’m the first female editor? And so—

KMD: Are you hungry?”

BC: There goes my stomach. [*laughter*] So anyway, one by one they came back. It was great, that was really great. I had to convince everybody that I was going to treat everybody equally, that I was not going to be a control freak. That was pretty interesting, because it was sort of . . . I’m so glad that I broke the ice, because after me, there were several other women editors. It was just—you know, I think the first editor was—one of the first editors was Sam Paz, the attorney. Moctesuma Esparza, I think was—there was a lot of really great editors. Joe Gonzalez. There was a lot of really good editors before me. My ex-boyfriend Robert Rodriguez, he was the editor the year before I was editor. And it was interesting, because he kept saying, “There should be a female editor,” but when I said I’d like to apply for it, he said, “Oh, you shouldn’t do that. It’s your last year, you need to concentrate on your studies.”

KMD: So there was a sense of cultivating female leadership in terms of like a—like you were aware it would be controversial.

BC: Yeah. I knew. I was surprised that there had never been a female editor, and when I brought it up, [the response was,] “So, well, that’s just the way it is. Nobody’s really applied,” which I had a hard time believing. But it was interesting that we’d have to go before the communications board and not our fellow staff members.

KMD: It wasn’t a normal process.

- BC:** No. I didn't realize that every editor had to go before the board. I was surprised about that for some reason. And we had—our office was in 289 Kinsey Hall, which was one of the oldest buildings on the campus. Right, I think it was the first one. And it looked like a maze to get in there. You'd have to go in, right, left, it was just really—I don't know. I think it was a darkroom at one point or something. It was just weird the way it was made.
- KMD:** Or they had maybe rehabbed the building so many times that it was just a mess.
- BC:** Yeah, it was just really odd.
- KMD:** So let's go back. You go off, you finish high school. Well, I wanted you to tell me just one more thing about high school. You have to tell me about homecoming queen.
- BC:** Oh, God.
- KMD:** You have to. *[laughter]*
- BC:** Well, it's funny, because Dolores Huerta had let that out of the bag at this awards ceremony several years ago. She told everybody. All these political people were in the audience—I was so embarrassed. But now that it's out, it was actually, it started off as a joke. All of my Chicano friends said, "Barbara, you should apply for it, because you could pass," and I said, "Pass for what?" "Pass for a while girl, you look like a white girl." Every year it was a cheerleader who won. So when I said, "Okay, I'll do it," it was like—it was performance art. I actually dressed really conservative—I never dressed like that before—and then I put my hair up in two little hairclips on the side, looking—trying to look real cute. And I was like this ninety-five pound, little tiny thing, and so I didn't realize I was one of fifty girls applying for this position, or whatever they call it. An honor or something. But anyway, I forget, *[there were]* like maybe ten members of the Venice High School Alumni Association as judges, and one of them was a Chicano guy, and he was a very nice person to me—Mr. Valdivia. Anyway—and he lives like a few blocks away from me now, it's so weird. Anyway, but they asked us a series of questions, and it was interesting because some—one of the questions was, "What do you think caused the racial riots on campus?" Because that year, in 1974, there were several race riots. It was really bad. I mean, between Chicanos and blacks, and then it turned—then the Chicanos and blacks got together and went against whites, joined forces against any white student. It was really terrible. Anyway, and because I grew up in the projects, I knew all the blacks, I knew all the Chicanos, but I didn't know a lot of white students. I just knew that I was defending one of my friends who was in an art production with me, and I felt really bad for her, because she was one of those flower child blonde girls, and she was a real peaceful girl, so . . . But I always go off on tangents, I'm sorry.
- KMD:** No, you're fine. You're answering the question they had asked you on the panel.
- BC:** Yeah. And so I said that I don't think that some of the needs of the students are being taken seriously, that they're given shop classes, *[that]* the counselors are assuming they're not going to go to college. I was surprised that I was saying this, because—I guess because I heard other students talk about it. We'd go to our counselor, *[and]* a lot of the girls that were in drill team were being told, you know, "You need to take these college preparatory classes," and they never said that to the Chicano students. That just did not happen. And so I was real aware of that. So I was surprised when they said, "Number 6, you're. . ." Six is my lucky number. It's weird, I was born at six-thirteen in the morning, so six has always been my lucky number. But when they said I was homecoming queen, I just couldn't stop laughing. I thought it was funny.
- KMD:** So this starts out as kind of a joke. Your friends and you were aware of this idea of passing, and you had mentioned before that you were the lighter-skinned one in the family. And now you're telling me there's even an awareness in your youth about this kind of racism in the classroom, right, that nobody's encouraging Latinos and blacks to go on to college.
- BC:** It's not only with Latinos. I had an Asian friend who—she was a very good friend of mine, a Japanese girl, and she told me that our math teacher that we had together, that he told her that she was a disgrace to the yellow race because her—she wasn't as good as her sister, who was there a couple of years before her, because she wasn't getting A's like her sister. And I thought that was disgusting. I got really angry when I heard that, because I really liked her, and she was very hurt by it. So I was aware of . . . And then some

of my black friends also were telling me what teachers had said to them, and it was just—I was definitely aware of racism all throughout high school. Even in Catholic school.

KMD: Did you have any of those things happen to you?

BC: No, this is weird. This is the ironic thing about being light-complected, is that—and I hear a lot of people who are light-complected talk about this—is that you’re neither accepted in your own culture or by the white culture. It’s a really *Catch-22* thing, because I remember when I was at UCLA, I remember being extremely involved with the farm workers already, and demonstrations against the Bakke decision, and a lot of things. And I remember a black girl coming up to me and saying, “You’re really involved, because you have to prove yourself. You’re out to prove yourself. That’s why you’re doing it, right?” And I looked at her, and I said, “What do you mean by that?” And she said, “Well, you could pass for white, so I guess you’re doing this because you want to—” And I got really upset, and I looked at her, and I said, “No. I’m not doing it to prove anything to you or to anybody else.” It was just kind of hurtful, but I was—by that time, I was used to it. So—and it got worse, actually. The comments—I think the most hurtful comments came from my own people, it’s real sad to say. I mean, I remember even working with the Public Art Center and all the Chicano artists said some pretty bad things. I guess we’ll talk about that later.

KMD: And when you say Public Art Center, that was known as Centro de Arte Público. I was reading your Smithsonian interview with Jeffrey Rangel, and how you talked about learning about that kind of racism through your family or through your sister. I wonder if you could reflect on that.

BC: Well, my sister, she’s dark complected, long black hair. She was a really good student, she went straight from Venice High School at age seventeen, and she was on the UCLA campus. She was pretty young. And we lived in the dorms together, and sometimes the white girls would invite me to lunch, but not my sister, not knowing that I was Mexican. They assumed I was white. And then when I said, “Why isn’t my sister invited?” they said, “Oh, my God, that’s your sister? You don’t look anything like her,” that kind of thing, always. Or they would say the opposite out of guilt, they’d say, “Oh, you look just like her,” when nobody said that. Just to compensate for their—whatever. But it was pretty interesting. She—I didn’t realize that—she was a pretty strong person, though. She was an extremely dedicated student, she got good grades, and I did not. I mean, I did okay, but she was a good student. She was more focused.

KMD: Did your sister and you talk about these things, about the color —?

BC: We actually didn’t talk about it until years later. It came up in, actually in an argument. It came up, and she said that my mom—that she was hurt that my mother had put me in Girl Scouts and not her, and I was—I had just assumed she didn’t want to be part of that. But I didn’t know that she wanted to. It never crossed my mind. But we never discussed it. They would make jokes, my sister and her [friends] would make jokes that I was found on the—I was left on the doorstep, or I was the milkman’s daughter, all those kind of things, which my mother didn’t appreciate either. But I didn’t really—they weren’t really hurtful to me, because I thought they were all—it was just all in joking.

KMD: All in fun.

BC: All in fun. It wasn’t serious, until years later.

KMD: And what about the high school homecoming queen thing? Your friends—I mean, it seems like you could joke with them about that particular group of people? Joke with them and play with this idea, but do it as a . . . They’re talking about your light skin, but they weren’t being hurtful?

BC: No, it was just—because they were really good friends, and they said, “Barbara, just do it. You’ll probably—you could pass.” They weren’t saying, you know . . . It’s really amazing, I remember later some people said I had it easier because I’m light-complected, which is actually true. I mean, I know that’s true to some extent. But then, I was talking about this same subject to another light-skinned girl, who told me that she was taking advantage of being light-complected, and I go, “What do you mean?” And she said she would go out with white guys because they would treat her better than Mexican guys, and I told her I didn’t think so, I don’t agree with that at all, that I’ve met nice people from all different nationalities, and some idiots

from all nationalities. So it was weird talking with her about that, because I didn't agree with the way she thought about being light-complected.

KMD: You certainly had this awareness early on in life.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: And you go off to first West LA—

BC: For two years.

KMD: For two years. What was that experience like?

BC: Horrible. It wasn't very good, because it was not a popular campus like SMC [Santa Monica College]. It was all barracks. It was out in the boonies up there in the oil fields in Culver City. I had to take a bus there from the housing projects to West LA College. I had to work. I was a box girl at the time at Alpha Beta, I was one of the first box girls there. I just found my union card. Anyway, and I remember I had to pay for all my books. I did get a couple of grants, state grants for low-income students, which helped me pay for the books and all that. But that was really difficult, though, financially.

KMD: Why'd you end up at West LA College and not Santa Monica, which was nearer to your home?

BC: Actually, West LA is closer.

KMD: It is?

BC: Mm-hmm. But SMC—the reason why I didn't go to SMC is because I knew that if I had gone to SMC, I wouldn't have taken school that seriously. All my friends were going there. I knew that I wanted to do—my goal was to transfer to UCLA, and in order to do that, I had to get good grades. And I just knew that if I went to SMCC, it was known as a party campus, and I decided not to go there. It was pretty good.

KMD: That was a smart choice.

BC: Yes. I wouldn't have done as well, I don't think.

KMD: So you get out in two years, which—

BC: Yeah, transferred. I got my AA degree in English, writing, and then I transferred to UCLA with the help of the Academic Advancement Program, AAP program. *[phone ringing]*

[break in audio]

KMD: So, we're sorry for the interruption. We're back and talking about Barbara's experience at West LA community college, and she was saying she worked really hard.

BC: Well, it was real difficult, because I was taking a full load of classes, because I found out late again that some of the classes I was taking were not transferable to UCLA, and that, really, the counselor had misled me, so I had to go and take a really huge amount of classes. I think it was nine classes I was taking.

KMD: What? *[laughter]*

BC: Or eight classes. It was ridiculous.

KMD: Even if you were taking more than five, that's crazy.

BC: Yeah. And so I was really—and then I had to work, and it was really difficult. So I—but I did it.

KMD: Did you sleep?

BC: No, not really.

KMD: No, you didn't.

BC: I was exhausted. But I had to help out financially, because we had some problems at home at the time, so I had to—I was the one working, mom wasn't working. My stepfather left her for a short period, so.

KMD: And so that year, those two years must have been like a blur. You were working as a box girl, you said, at Alpha Beta. Were those good wages?

BC: At the time, they were. *[laughter]*

KMD: Yeah, at the time, I would imagine, a box girl.

BC: It was really difficult, because I was really small, and then I would have to carry these heavy things like dog food and big huge sacks—oh, it was ridiculous.

KMD: Preparation for the work you did later with the UFW [United Farm Workers]? *[laughter]* Heavy labor? So you are able to complete it in two years, which, you know, I don't know if you're aware, but most people don't do the AA in two years. That's pretty miraculous, I think.

BC: Well, I was taking a lot of classes.

KMD: And you were working full-time, so that's pretty amazing that you did it in two years.

BC: And I didn't get any financial assistance from my family. It was—that was pretty hard.

KMD: Right. So you were focused those two years, and then you get to UCLA.

BC: Yeah, then I get to UCLA, and it was easier, it seemed a lot easier, because I wasn't taking such a full load of classes. I lived in the dorms on campus with my sister as my roommate—

KMD: What made you decide to go to the dorms, instead of staying at home?

BC: Well, we were encouraged to do so by the AAP program, because they said it would be easier for us, we didn't have to . . . I don't know, I think I was used to being on the campus also through the Upward Bound program, because during the summer we lived in the dorms, so that was really great. I was a member for two years, and then I became, on the third year, I was a counselor, so it was a really good program. It really prepared me for UCLA. We lived on an all-girls floor, of course, in Dykstra Hall, so that was amazing. There was one telephone for the entire [floor]. And of course my mother called every day.

KMD: She did.

BC: That was embarrassing. But anyway, you know, because we were the only ones that had a phone call from our mother every day. Anyway, she was a really old-fashioned Mexican mom. But anyway, but my sister and I, her side of the room is immaculate, and my side was full of art supplies and oil stains here and there from my oil paints.

KMD: So you went from this English emphasis at West LA, and then into arts right away?

BC: Yeah, well, even at West LA College, I was taking a lot of art classes too, so I took a lot of art classes, actually. So English and art always appealed to me, so—

KMD: Oh, okay.

BC: So then when I was in, I got accepted—when I applied to UCLA, I was actually rejected from the art department, I was outright rejected. And then I went to the planning office, and I was really upset, and I found—I got the ethnic breakdown on the entire art department, and I found that it was like seven hundred and something students—I forget the exact number—and there were eleven Latinos in the entire art department, which covers five areas: dance, theatre, music, fine art—painting, sculpture, graphic arts—which I was enrolled in. And then I had a meeting with Dean Speroni—I told you last time—and then I was accepted after talking with him about all that. And then he . . . It was amazing, because I was accepted a week later. Being in the art department was interesting, because I became immediately drawn towards the other Latinos and people of color, like Richard Wyatt. I went to school with him, he was a great artist. And I didn't know [May Sun] really well, although she was there.

[break in audio]

KMD: We're on tape 2 with Barbara Carrasco. This is Karen Mary Davalos. We're talking about her work, her early work at UCLA in studio arts with Richard Wyatt and other artists, and today is September 11, [2007]. Go ahead.

BC: Some of the other students . . . When I was going to school, there was Ben Venegas, Sybil Venegas's [former] husband, and we were taking a class by a guy named Jim Valerio, who's a really great art teacher, great artist and art teacher. But one day he said something to us like, "You guys are good because—we're all good because we're Latino," or something, because of our Spanish background, I forget how he said it. And then we immediately said, "Well, we're not Spanish, we're Chicano." So it was like—it was funny.

KMD: Oh-h. So he wasn't—he was Hispanic-Hispanic.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: As in Spanish.

BC: Spanish from Spain, Española.

KMD: Wow.

BC: So anyway, but he was a really, really good artist, and I remember he was just a great painter. We saw some of his work, so I knew that the person who was teaching me this art was himself a really good artist, as opposed to some professors who didn't show us their work. Jan Stussy was another one. He was a great, great teacher.

KMD: Now, when you talk about a great teacher, give me a sense of what that means. Because they were good artists, because they could draw out the best in you?

BC: No, because they were extremely challenging art teachers. Jan Stussy was—I was told not to take Jan Stussy's class, that he was really difficult, and he was extremely difficult. I mean, he made us study anatomy like—it was ridiculous. He had a skeleton, and we would draw the entire skeleton. And then he would remove it and have a model, a live model sit in the exact same position the skeleton was positioned, and we would have to draw the body on top of the drawing on the skeleton. And then he'd say, "Okay, now I want you to attach the muscles to the bones." It's a little hard, you know? And we had Mrs. Ferguson, an eighty-seven-something-year-old model, posing for us nude, completely nude. It was really, I was extremely . . . The very first day of school in the art department, I was taking a class—I forget from which teacher, I think it was Jan Stussy—but it was the first time I ever saw a male nude, and I walked out right away. I came back the next day—

KMD: You mentioned that last time. *[laughter]*

BC: Oh, yeah, he was laughing. He said, "You didn't stay," and I go, "That wasn't me." I didn't want to admit that that was me, I just left. But he was—those were good teachers, I think, the ones that really made us work hard.

KMD: Technique.

BC: Yeah. You know, because I think now, I realize that all of that early training has really helped me become a better artist. But I think a lot of students who graduate from art schools now don't get that type of training, and I think they're ill equipped. I know that *[inaudible]*, different schools don't really teach the basics like drawing, anatomy, perspective, all those kind of—I think that every artist should have that kind of background.

KMD: So you're encouraged not to take it, but you do it anyways, and are you kicking yourself the whole time, or is it with hindsight that you appreciate it, or—?

BC: Well, actually during—yeah, I was a little upset, because he would definitely—the critiques were pretty severe. He would say, he would just come out and say, "You're lazy," or "You're not trying hard enough," or "This is too easy," stuff like that, in front of the entire class. He'd say, "Oh, Barbara—Barbara thinks her work is real precious, and it's not." He'd tell me, "Don't ever think your work is precious, because at that point, you stop really being open to learning." He was a good teacher. I remember he would do a one-on-one critique, and he would tell us—he told me, he said, "I was really hard on you because you're good," and I said, "Oh, because I thought you didn't like me." I was getting a little paranoid at that point. But I think it was really good what he was doing. He was encouraging me to sort of get looser. I was a little too tight back then.

KMD: Did you ever have a moment—I don't know if what you're describing, these moments when the teachers are critiquing you—thinking you're going down the wrong path. "Should I do art? Should I go back to English?"

BC: Oh, no, I knew.

KMD: Never?

BC: I never doubted once that I was good, that art was going to be my life. There's no way. I never—I always knew it, ever since I was a little girl, I knew it. I don't know. It was amazing, because at UCLA there were so many gifted artists around me, [and] that actually inspired me, too. And I would see Richard's work, Richard Wyatt's work, [and] say, "Wow." And then Richard would say, "You know, we're the best ones in this

class, Barbara.” It was stuff like that, the camaraderie of working with my fellow artists was a really good way of learning, because there was times where we felt that the professors were very prejudiced, and not . . . I told you about one professor who said he couldn’t find six of my drawings, five or six of my sketches, he misplaced them. And then so I did a little sit-in in my office until he found them. I didn’t believe him, in other words, because a lot of times, they would take the drawings—a lot of art teachers do that, they’ll take the drawings of their best students, and they just hold onto them, because they know that artists one day will do really well, and so they have this early work.

KMD: Sort of an investment?

BC: Yeah, and it’s really unfortunate, but it happened to a lot of artists, art students, and I remember getting really upset with this one professor who’s pretty well known. And then there was another professor who said—I think I talked about that—that said I should make a giant burrito sculpture. That was really hard to take that. I was—that was very hard. I told you I went to the ombudsman, what do they call it, on campus?

KMD: Yes.

BC: What’s his name, I forgot his name right now. But anyway, he was really great, because he actually had a hearing set, and then the professor had to change my grade.

KMD: So Barbara, you’re describing an incredibly self-confident, assertive young woman.

BC: Yeah, I don’t know what happened to her. *[laughter]*

KMD: No, I know her. *[laughter]* You’re a little quieter now. But I’m curious, where do you think some of that came from? I mean, you could have been one of the leaders over in East LA with the blowouts. You just happened to live on the Westside.

BC: And actually, I came after that started.

KMD: Right. You’re a little bit later.

BC: I’m the second—Jesus Trevino refers to it as the second wave, I was part of the second wave of the Chicano movement. Which is true, because a lot of people came before me. But I think that brave front that I had, I really believe it was a survival mechanism in some way, because if you look really weak to some people, people go in and they really take advantage of that. I don’t think I was especially brave at all. I remember—you know that saying, ignorance is bliss? Well, a lot of that is true, because I went in—I was always feisty, that I always had with me. But the fact that I would see this breakdown of the entire art department and only eleven people of color? That was not right. I knew that was wrong.

KMD: Do you think you got some of that awareness about race inequality? Because I mean, that’s a lot of foresight as a young person. How old were you? What, seventeen, eighteen years old, because your sister’s seventeen or so?

BC: Oh, no, I was older. What are you talking about, college?

KMD: When you went and you challenged the art department and talked to the dean, to know to look at racial inequity.

BC: Oh, yeah. I was about nineteen or twenty.

KMD: So it —

BC: Because I transferred over, so it was my last two years at UCLA.

KMD: Right, your last two years.

BC: Well, actually my first year I remember when I went in his office, my brother was with me, my older brother, and he thought I was blowing it. He thought you don’t attack the dean of the art department and expect to get in. But I knew I was going to get in. I was confident, extremely confident, because I had nothing to lose. I was already rejected. So I told him, what could happen? They can’t do anything more to me that would hurt me. I’m not in the art department. And the unfortunate thing was—I mean, the fortunate thing was that I got a chance to see my competition. When I went over to the art department, I saw what other students had submitted, and I knew that I was just as good, if not better, than a lot of the ones who were applying. So I went back with that and told Mr. Speroni, you know, “I feel I’m a good artist, and I’m unjustly being left out of this department, and I don’t—and I need an explanation.” I said, “At least that.

I think you owe me that.” Then he said, “Well, I think you’re right.” And so he went back and he talked to them, and I don’t know what happened, but I never got that explanation. I just got accepted a week later, which I really appreciated.

KMD: Were you aware of the civil rights movement? The last time we talked, you said you weren’t that much aware of what was going on across town.

BC: Well, I told you, in eleventh grade is when I became aware of the Chicano movement and the civil rights movement through students from Roosevelt and Garfield High School, and students from Locke High School, black students. The teachers weren’t teaching that in school.

KMD: Right, it wouldn’t be taught. But you’re meeting other kids—

BC: And they were telling me about it, and I thought, “Wow.” And then I remember, there was a—I told you about that one Chicana at Venice High School. She was really on my case for not being part of MEChA, for not knowing more about my own history, and I was . . . I remember admiring her. She looked driven, there was a look on her face like she was proud of herself and proud of her culture, and I wanted to be part of that. There was something about that was appealing. And it’s interesting that now, she’s—I heard from her sister that she has thrown all of that away. She was a source of embarrassment to her family because she was so political, and so her sister told me, “Oh, she gave away—got rid of all that junk, those stupid ideas, and married a doctor, and now lives in San Diego.” It’s really weird.

A lot of people who were really political did that, went away from the movement, or went the opposite direction. Which it was really interesting. I told her sister, I said, “Well, when you talk to your sister, could you tell her that she inspired me to work with César Chávez, and do a lot of things that she was—” And then goes—she looks at me all confused, like, “What? What are you talking?” I don’t know, I think she’s the one who really opened my eyes to all of the . . .

KMD: Well, let’s talk about that, how you first met or heard César Chávez give a talk, and what it did for you.

BC: Well, I was about nineteen. I wasn’t quite on the campus yet. I was part of the welcoming committee along with other people, and I had the newspaper welcoming César and his bodyguards and all kinds of other people to the campus. And so we were going up the elevator to the big Ackerman Union. And there was a flyer that we had designed, and it said, “Cesar Chavez Speaks at UCLA, Ackerman Union,” and there’s a small graphic, and I did a portrait of him in ink. So I was in the elevator with him, and I asked him if he would autograph it, so he autographed it. That’s the only drawing or piece of artwork that’s at Stanford. He told me, “Oh, we need artists, a lot,” because I said, “I would love to work with you someday.” This is after he spoke. He spoke first, and then when I was listening to him speak, I thought, “Wow, this is a real Catholic.” I mean, I was still very much in Catholic mode at that time, and I heard him talk about dedicating himself to representing the most exploited workers in America, farm workers, and that they . . . And he was talking about how they don’t have even decent working conditions, they were just horrible working conditions. Women were violated in the fields, were not given sanitary access.

KMD: Bathrooms.

BC: Human needs, restrooms and all that. Water, all that kind of thing. And I don’t know, I was really inspired. So after his speech, I said I would like to help out. And he said, “Well, we need artists. We need our artists to spread the message out to other people” And that began my long association with him.

KMD: So you weren’t yet at UCLA as a student.

BC: I was still at—

KMD: You were still at West LA.

BC: West LA College.

KMD: And what is the first project you end up doing for the UFW?

BC: They were flyers for . . . I was working at the time with someone who’s now on the board of UFW, Irv Hershenbaum, and a guy named Larry Frank, who was the [research director] of the Labor Center at UCLA. But they were both organizers on the campus, and they had me doing flyers, designing flyers, passing flyers out, picketing in front of supermarkets, all that kind of thing, while I was a full-time student.

KMD: So that was here in the LA area, or were you going—?

BC: It was here in LA, in Westwood. And during Prop 14, Proposition 14, the campaign, one of the farm workers, he was passing out literature right there on Westwood Boulevard, and someone—one of the merchants made a citizen’s arrest on him, and I took my camera out to take pictures of them arresting him. Chris Snyder, who’s also on the board—he was real young at the time, and we were, we were all very young—but I brought my camera out, and I thought that people were going to get real upset that this young guy is being arrested for no reason other than handing out literature.

KMD: Right. That’s not illegal in this country.

BC: I couldn’t believe it. But they said he was interfering with the merchant’s business, and so they’re taking him away. I bring out my camera, I’m taking pictures, and the whole crowd of people that gathered there, they all point to me, “She’s taking pictures!” I couldn’t believe it. So the attention turned to me. So I hid my camera, and I ran away from the scene.

KMD: So were you frightened when they turned, when they pointed at you?

BC: Yeah. I was really surprised that they would get upset with me, rather than the police. I thought they would get upset with the police for arresting this young guy, but it was so weird, they all turned to me, and that’s when I realized, oh, my God, people are really against the farm workers and what the farm workers stand for. And I remember some of the things that we were shouting to people were, “These are people who put food on your tables,” and I remember this lady said, “Well, they’re all illegal. They should be deported.” And I said—and I remember thinking, “Well, you wouldn’t stand in the fields leaning over doing stoop labor, a sixteen-hour day. No one else would do that.” I remember that kind of—just seeing the hypocrisy of people wanting fresh fruit on their tables, but not respecting the people who picked it, that kind of thing. It was very amazing to me that people were so . . . I saw it as racist.

KMD: Did you . . . Prop 14 . . . I’m not [remembering] which one that was.

BC: There were so many different propositions. [*laughter*]

KMD: I know. This was a bill to assist labor conditions?

BC: Mm-hmm.

KMD: Over the years, you were doing all of this for free, right?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: This is volunteer labor.

BC: Yeah. All of it was free. And what money’s we ever get, I remember . . . I just looked through my archives the other day, because I’m going to have to show, and I found a check stub made out to me. I used to always xerox everything, so . . . It was for supplies, art supplies. So every once in awhile, César would give me a check to go buy the cloth banners, or to go buy art supplies for a particular project. But that was very seldom.

KMD: And you did this work, like—I mean, my understanding is the home—the organization is based in Northern California, right?

BC: Yeah, but they had an office on Union Street in downtown LA, and then they also had . . . The UFW was on every single campus at the time. They had student organizations. They had actually their labor organizers on campus working closely with students, whether they’re MEChA or whatever.

KMD: And so you were working downtown, or . . .

BC: No, I was working here in Westwood. And then when we went to Safeway, all the different stores. They were all local, they were all around West LA. Occasionally I would go to East LA with them. I would carpool and go to East LA. I remember we picketed all kinds of places. Tianguís . . . all the different places that were refusing to honor the UFW boycott.

KMD: And when you were doing the large banners, where did you physically do those? I’m curious how, because they’re huge.

BC: Well, some of the banners—well, the huge ones I did in La Paz, at the Farm Worker headquarters, which is considered the North Unit—it’s called the North Unit, it used to be a tuberculosis hospital. Helen Chávez

was a child there, and that's why she didn't want to move there, she was really against moving there. But anyway, I would work in that North Unit, back then. But all of the banners I did here, I did a lot of banners here. Boycott—I think we were boycotting Chiquita at the time. I have photographs of all those. I didn't document everything, but I documented a lot of them. And I remember right on Lincoln Boulevard, they were boycotting some store over there, the banner was small, it was like ten feet wide and maybe four feet tall, four and a half. And it said, "UFW Boycotts" and then they had like a Chiquita logo with a thing slashed, going across it. And there was something else, it was . . . Anyway, there were so many banners, and sometimes—but I have to admit that a lot of people helped me paint the banners. Dolores Huerta's son, Fidel Huerta—he's a doctor now—he helped me paint some of the banners. Tomás [Benitez] and Beatriz Echeveste helped me do the banners. There was a lot of people that would just volunteer to help, because we had crazy deadlines all the time.

KMD: So you were doing the design?

BC: I would design it, project it and design it, and then have a couple people helped me throughout the night, so . . . And it was hard, because I had assignments due, too, and I don't know how that happened. That's probably why I didn't have a good GPA.

KMD: Well, one of the things I was curious about is, you're doing this throughout your—the undergraduate work at UCLA, and it continues—I mean, you continue working for the UFW into the '80s, right?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: I guess it stops right before you go to CalArts [California Institute of the Arts]. So you're doing banners that could be described in a certain style. Well, I don't know if you would describe them in a certain style.

BC: [*inaudible*]

KMD: And then you're doing other things in art classes and for your own art production.

BC: Yeah. They were really different styles, actually. Yeah, the stuff I did for the UFW, a lot of the banners were—because I had to—I required assistance from non-artists. The graphic technique was really good, it was a good way to go because I would just outline everything real clean and then have people fill it in, and [I] couldn't go wrong with that, as opposed to my personal work that I was doing on campus, which was blending, and I did oil. And I remember once when I did the *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn* while I was a student at UCLA in 1978—and that was a lithograph—and I remember people who—a lot of my political friends just couldn't relate to that image. They thought it was just so personal, because it was a nude female, and it was a very strong statement about forced sterilization, and women being confined to motherhood, the role of motherhood. And I remember a lot of the guys just couldn't deal with that image, but a lot of the women responded really good to it. Older women.

KMD: I was just curious about that, you know, doing these larger banners, also not only is it a different technique, but it requires this coordination of people, as you said. Do you think some of the leadership skills you develop being an editor and working on gathering people to do things for you in newspaper context came in handy, or—?

BC: Oh, yeah, it really did. Well, I had several friends who—they became my friends, the people who work with the United Farm Workers who are organizers, and they were just so good I learned a lot from them how to interact with people. And one of the things that I really admired about them is they were always very appreciative, and always gave credit to the people who helped them, which I think was really great, because we weren't getting paid to do this. So that was really wonderful, and that was something that has really stuck—has stayed with me. I remember when I did a lot of the banners, the big huge ones, even during the convention, César would call me up onstage. [*laughter*] I didn't want to go in front of all those people, because there were huge amounts of people. I remember the first time I went up there, I almost—I thought I was going to faint, because I had never seen that many people clapping for me in my entire life.

KMD: Did you sign them?

BC: I signed a few of them, real small, you couldn't see where I did it, real miniature little signatures here and there. But the last banner that I did for the United Farm Workers was César's funeral banner. I didn't sign that one.

KMD: You didn't.

BC: No.

KMD: Why not?

BC: Tomás and Bea helped me on that banner, too. They both worked really hard with me on that.

KMD: Why not?

BC: I was just so extremely sad. I felt like it was—I wanted to honor him. It had nothing to do with me. So I really wanted to just respect his memory and, I don't know. I just was extremely sad when I got the news.

KMD: By then you were already—you've got your MFA, you understand the art market.

BC: I know, I can't explain it. I felt such a loss, this great man who I was privileged to know personally. I had never felt that sad. And I think that part of the sadness was that a large amount of my life was spent working with this guy who was just a tireless worker for human rights. And I remember thinking, "Who's going to fill his shoes? No one." I just felt like this loss, politically and socially and culturally, on so many levels. In a way, he was sort of like a father figure to me too, because my father had died when I was twelve, and he was the only man that I really admired a great deal. So here's this—I don't know, it was just very—I was real sad.

KMD: Did he share *consejos* with you, advice with you, about growing up?

BC: Yeah, he was—

KMD: In a fatherly way?

BC: Yeah, he was really great about that. I remember one time being in his office, and he said, "You know, Barbara, I'm an artist like you too." And I said, "Really? How's that, César?" "Well, don't you—you have to admit that getting so many people to work for so little takes a certain amount of creativity." I said, "Yeah, that's true. That's true." And he told me that if he hadn't gone into the field he went into, which was organizing, that he would have liked to pursue a career as a photographer. He always wanted to be a photographer. So he really felt an affinity towards artists, a connection with artists. He had a really beautiful drawing in his office. I don't know who did it, but it was of Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi. And then he had—I don't know, he was just—he just really admired . . .

There was a photographer for the UFW that he really liked a lot, there were several that he liked a lot. Victor Aleman, George Rodriguez. And he just had them all the time with him, they were always there. I remember photographers were at every single event that César spoke at, and not only documenting everything, but documenting the people that came. And so I don't know, it was . . . But that was the only piece I never signed, really. I didn't sign that one, and I know that that was shown a lot. It was shown at the funeral on the outside of the tent, and I was real upset, because it was supposed to be on the stage. But somebody—I told you that story, right?

KMD: I don't think so.

BC: Luis Valdez decided not to put it on the stage, because he said that the family put him in charge of the funeral thing, and he thought it would be more effective on the outside. But the family called me up to do it like they always did, for specifically to be on the stage. That's why I was very upset with him. Anyway.

KMD: Did you—I mean, you're balancing school and—during those early years and working for the UFW. You're not making any money. You're obviously having to work on the side, right? You have a job. Did you ever consider that this would be—that you could find a way to make a living doing that? That kind of activist artwork? Or did you just see that as, this is the volunteer, the Good Samaritan, the kind of thing you were raised as a Catholic, or . . . I don't know, it sounds like it somewhere resonated with Catholic upbringing, that you never thought, "How can I make money out of this?"

BC: Well, I saw the other artists like Carlos Almaraz and John Valadez, all those older artists, they weren't making money. They were also doing commercial work to pay the bills. They were taking on signage,

illustration, that kind of work. Their work was—there weren't any galleries really selling their work at that time, and so I knew that it wasn't like something where I could make money. And that's why I started working for *Caminos Magazine*. I worked as an editor and writer for them. I had all these small odd jobs everywhere. I had a million. I had a really crazy—I worked for all kinds of people. I worked as a secretary, I worked as a student. I volunteered actually to help go—I went back to my Catholic and helped listen to people do prayer for confirmation and all that. I don't know how I did that, but I did. I was doing all these things on the side for the Boys' Club. I don't know.

But money, I didn't—I never thought there was a future in making political art. In fact, there's several artists who came to the conclusion that that's the kiss of death, to do political art. You just won't get paid well enough to do it. And it's actually true. I did one painting that in comparison to now seems very mild. And I remember when I did it—it was called "Motivating Factors," and Armando Durón now owns that piece—people thought it was too political, and it wasn't. I didn't think so at all. But it was. I remember a lawyer . . . It was a fundraiser for Gloria Molina, for her campaign when she was running for city council-woman. I did a fundraiser with about eight Chicana artists, and we donated half the money from the art show to her campaign. And that piece was in it, and a lawyer came up to me and told me, he's a Chicano lawyer, he said, "You're not going to sell that one." He just told me right out.

KMD: Describe this one to me.

BC: Because it's sort of like a self-portrait, but it's a *calavera* face, and it's a profile and I'm holding all these things. There's a UFW flag in there, and there's all these images of the movement all around me, and he just thought it was—Well, also and then the girl, the woman, it's a self-portrait, but nobody knew it was a self-portrait, and it was a low-cut kind of like a bra that I was wearing, with the Virgin Mary pinned onto my bra again, and there was all these images of movement, things around me. And he said that people want more decorative things in their home, not stuff that reflected any kind of political or religious movement. That's what he told me.

KMD: So you've been literally confronted and told and instructed over the years. I know that you had told the story about other artists telling you not to do stuff with UFW because you're not making any money and they're taking advantage of you.

BC: Yes.

KMD: How did you answer those?

BC: Well, I remember that one particular artist who said that, he said . . . It's really interesting about him, because he later . . . César met him and said, "Oh, he really sounded like wanted to help us," and I said, "That's the guy who criticized me for working with you, because you don't pay me." And I told him, and César said, "Well, what did you tell him?" And I said, I told him that everyone—from the person who's organizing the organizers, all the way down to the person who's making food for the volunteers who are going out and picketing—no one gets paid, so why should the artists get paid? If you feel like you're an integral part of a movement, why would you set yourself apart from everyone else to get special treatment? That's the way I looked at it. I looked at it like I was just a part of a big—the bigger structure, which was made up of all these really incredible people. I really loved that part of it, too, that we all felt we were all in it together. There was a real—I don't know, it was a really nice. I remember those days were really a lot of fun, it was like a really big get-together of people who believed in the same things, and I don't know, it was really nice.

KMD: That lasted for you all the way through, from the late '70s I guess until—

BC: Until Cesar passed away.

KMD: Wow.

BC: And then there was—that feeling was gone.

KMD: That's a long time to have that sense of belonging.

BC: Yeah. Well, right before I went to CalArts, I told César I was going to go to CalArts, and that he wasn't going to see much of me. I was going to be incommunicado, actually, for two years, because I'm paying

like eleven thousand dollars to go to that school, and I'm going to be . . . So I told him of the commitment I made, not only financially but just to become—to take advantage of the education and get my MFA degree there. And he said, "Well, good for you, Barbara, I'm really happy for you." He encouraged me to do it, and "I'm glad you're doing it," so I'm glad that I had his blessing, sort of, that this guy understood that I wasn't going to—I'm not turning my back on this movement, but I'm putting a hold on it. And I told him, I said, "Well, I think everyone who seeks higher education can be that much more effective in contributing." And so he agreed with me, he said, "Oh, that's a good way to think about it." And you know, then a few years before that, he had gone to my press conference in New York, so that was a really great experience.

KMD: Do you want to—before we move on, do you want to talk—anything else you want to say about the UFW experience, and the artistic work you did?

BC: Well, it was—it was really difficult, because I had seen a lot of Carlos Almaraz's banners get completely destroyed because they would—despite my telling them to roll the banners, they would fold them and ruin so many beautiful banners. But now they finally realized how important they are. But I remember Carlos's banners, some of his banners were completely destroyed because he had them on canvas and then the UFW had them in a storage unit on the floor, so the moisture would get in there, and it would go into the canvas. And so that was really unfortunate. But I think I learned a lot about not only organizing, but just realizing that there are people that are committed to helping people who are less fortunate. I don't want to say—I don't know, I just learned a lot about real commitment. I thought everybody who worked with the UFW were extremely dedicated. There's so many people who are not well known, who did so much work and never, ever received any recognition for it. And that's—and they don't seek it, either. They don't expect it. And so one day, I want to do a mural that includes all of these people who were just wonderful. I mean, there's so many people I can't even count how many that I saw, personally saw work their ass off for the UFW.

KMD: What about the technique you learned?

BC: With the UFW?

KMD: Yeah, the art technique that you had to—you know, this is a different—like you're saying, you laid down the—

BC: Book, the flat-color.

KMD: The flat coloration and the rapid production. I'm assuming you're working in acrylic, because it dries quickly.

BC: Yeah. Well, sometimes we used, because I didn't want to use canvas, we used vinyl, and so we had to use this ink—

KMD: Vinyl?

BC: Yeah. I was the first person to use vinyl, because when I saw Carlos work completely destroyed, I decided we can't do canvas anymore.

KMD: About what year is that?

BC: This is 19. . . Oh, God, I'm really bad with dates.

KMD: Well, give me a ballpark.

BC: I think like '84, '85, something like that.

KMD: So after you've been doing it for a while.

BC: Yeah. I did two huge banners on vinyl, and César really liked it, because this . . . You know, I remember I had to really experiment, because you couldn't paint with acrylic on vinyl, so you had to use an ink, a special ink that goes onto vinyl, and the ink itself is extremely toxic. So we did a thirty by thirty foot banner.

KMD: My goodness.

BC: We had about eight days working with this ink.

KMD: How are you laying down this ink? Brush, or. . .

BC: We're doing it with brushes, and we had to put—I made—A&R [Tarpaulins] made it for us. They were a really cool tarp place that Carlos Almaraz told me about. Anyway, we made three strips of ten feet by thirty feet, and so we'd put one strip down, paint it . . . First, I had to make a free-standing wall with a roller on top so that we could project the image.

KMD: Right. *[laughter]*

BC: And then—it was crazy. I mean—well, I think as a poor person too, just coming from a real impoverished background, you learn to be—

KMD: Resourceful.

BC: You use what you have, yeah. Resourceful. So I had one of the carpenters there at the UFW make this free-standing wall for me with the roller on top, and so we—after we projected everything, then we put the banners on the floor, and I had teams of five or six people helping me paint these huge sections. And it was César's—his projections for the future. He wanted to expand globally, so I have this globe in the middle.

KMD: Right, that's the one you described to me.

BC: Did you ever see that one?

KMD: And that's at the [César Chávez] Foundation, right?

BC: Yeah, they have all that stuff. But there was—oh, actually, I did more than two banners. I made several banners out of vinyl. But what they liked about it is you could actually twist it and really manhandle the banners, and it wouldn't flake off, the ink was in that, it's absorbed into the vinyl. It was really great.

KMD: Wow.

BC: It was really great. But it was very toxic. I was sick as a dog after ten days, I was extremely ill. I got really sick.

KMD: So you weren't working in a ventilated area?

BC: No, because we didn't want the dust to get into—because we were working in the North Unit, which is right . . . There were no paved—well, I think they paved some of it now, I went there not that long ago, a lot of the roads were paved now. But back then, they weren't paved. We did that to avoid the dust going onto the paint. Anyway.

KMD: What were the physical side effects then? Headache?

BC: I got headaches, I got—

KMD: Were you sick to your stomach?

BC: I lost about ten pounds in eight days.

KMD: Wow.

BC: And then I knew that it was not good for me. I was not going to do that again. And I actually asked César to come over so he could see us working real hard. He goes, "Why?" I go, "I need you to come over to the north unit." And he came over, and it was funny, he goes—he saw all these people on their knees, and their knees are red, and he said, "Oh, now I know why you had me come over." He would—a lot of times he would plan these conventions and events, and they would give me such short notice to do them, and I would always do them. It was hard to say no to him.

KMD: Right. Did you ever say no?

BC: I never said no to him. And Helen Chávez used to say, "You're stupid for saying yes all the time." César's wife, she was real funny.

KMD: So did you use eventually a different ink, or—

BC: I just did everything smaller, and we went back to canvas, [. . .] but coated both sides so that it would be protected against the elements. But just a lot of the banners were indoors, so you didn't have to worry too much about exposure.

KMD: It was just the handling afterwards.

BC: Yeah. Because I remember always saying, "Roll them, roll them." But they would fold them right in front of me. Anyway.

KMD: Let's go back to your time at UCLA. The training you've talked about is mostly the technique, and I was wondering if you were exploring style and—

BC: Oh, yeah.

KMD: You know, the schools of art.

BC: Well, I didn't get that from the art department in particular, because I . . . It was interesting, because I learned more about the Mexican muralists and artists from the Chicano Studies resource library than I did from the art department. They never once mentioned any of the masters. Not Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco, nobody in the art department. So I had to—I was always in the library, and that's when I picked up a book on Frida Kahlo's work, on Diego Rivera's work, and all that. And I remember when I did the *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*, I wanted to do a really strong image, and I was always really good at drawing, and I made this really strong woman's body. I don't even know where it came from, but it just emerged on the zinc plate that I did it on. And I remember thinking that it was really kind of—it was inspired by Siqueiros more than anybody, and a little bit of Rivera. The woman is kind of big, she's big, she's a heavy woman, she's not a slender person. But I did that intentionally. She's pregnant, and I wanted her to look very strong, so it couldn't be this real thin person.

KMD: Right.

BC: So anyway, but I really liked the way it came out, and I remember everyone in the art department had a hard . . . They didn't really like it that much, it was everybody outside the art department that liked it. The Chicano—all the other Chicanos and Chicanas who saw it, they liked the image, they thought it was very . . . They knew, they saw things in it. Like I didn't really intentionally want to talk about, with that particular piece, forced sterilization, even though we were writing about it, we were printing it at the newspaper. The Puerto Rican women were being sterilized, all that kind of thing. But a lot of people read that in the work.

I basically did it because my brother wouldn't let his wife go to college, and I remember she was knitting a baby bootie, and I asked her if I could borrow the bootie, if I could borrow the crochet needle, and then I did the drawing that night. I was angry. And so I think what emerged was this powerful drawing, and I think the style is sort of—I don't know, it's pretty—it's like a derivative I guess of everything. I studied all the classical artists, like Michelangelo, Leonardo, all those people. But also, I think the other thing, I think it looks very Mexican to me, too. I mean, Siqueiros has a real—kind of the broad stroke. The woman's body is very stylistically done; it's not an anatomically correct portrait of a woman's body.

KMD: Are there—so you're saying this came on your own training. Are you doing this with other students as well, or is this just your own ventures into the Chicano Studies Research Center Library?

BC: Oh, I think Richard Wyatt was doing the same thing. He was influenced by Charles White, all these other black artists who came before him. And we—you know, I think we did that, we were very conscious of being the few people of color in that department. We were very, very conscious of it, and I think he wanted to excel, be recognized as a good artist, not a good black artist but just a good artist, and I think we were both concerned about that, because comments were made in the art department about . . . I remember one of the lab techs said, "Barbara's going to be printing on . . ." What did he say? "Green, white, and red paper." Stuff like . . . We just had to hear that all the time, which was unfortunate.

KMD: Do you think, when you were involved in this activism during your college years, that it—I mean, it certainly spilled over to the work you did in the UFW. I'm wondering if you could talk about were there any things that spilled over?

BC: Oh, from the UFW to the art?

KMD: Or other activist work that you were doing.

BC: Well, yeah, definitely the women's movement. I think that when I—initially, I didn't really know Dolores Huerta that well until a few years later after I got involved. Then I saw her as a really strong voice for Chicana women, and women everywhere actually. And then she's the one who started talking to me about women's groups and what women were doing. And Gloria Steinem, I didn't really know anything about Gloria Steinem. And then I became a member of the Southern California Women's Caucus for Art. And then there was other art collectives that—but that was the only women's collective that I belonged to at the time.

KMD: Did you attend things at the Woman's Building, or—?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: You did.

BC: I brought—for Frida’s show, I brought a copy of a 16 millimeter film that Bert Corona had taken of Frida Kahlo, so I brought it to the Woman’s Building, and people were just amazed, because it’s Frida and Trotsky and Diego Rivera all like—and Siqueiros was in there—and they’re all laughing.

KMD: How’d you get that from Bert Corona?

BC: A student at UCLA was doing a film called “From Siqueiros to Carrasco,” and so when I told Bert about it, Bert said, “Oh, you know that I have some film on Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.” And so Bert lent the 16-millimeter film to the film student. Juan—no, what was his name?—John, John Garcia. And so he . . . That film was made into a DVD—I mean, a VHS—and was shown at the Woman’s Building. And then there was a couple other—I was in about four or five exhibits at the Woman’s Building. And then there was other ones at the Southern California Women’s Caucus for Art had at different venues, like the Art Store in Pasadena, that was one. They were all over the place.

KMD: Did those events and those exhibitions inspire any other conversations? Were you talking with these artists that may have influenced your work, or was it just a general—

BC: Well, through them, I think, there was a few Chicano artists that joined, and it was just a very few. Like Anita Miranda was a member, and—what’s her name—Gallegos, my friend . . .

KMD: Kathy?

BC: No—Margaret Gallegos, the artist whose parents own that big Gallegos Brothers restaurant. Anyway, but those two, they were really extremely involved [in the Women’s Caucus for Art], and so I think it’s through Anita that I became involved in that. And so, but then when they saw that some of the women within that particular group were not addressing issues about women of color, then we started a subgroup called Women of Color, and it was mostly—it was Margaret, and Rachel, and—what’s her name?—Faith [Ringgold].

KMD: Oh.

BC: Faith Ringgold, do you know her work?

KMD: Yeah.

BC: They started it, so I became a member of that. So it was really interesting to see these . . . They were older than me, they were like nine years older than me or something, so I felt like I had—I was being introduced to something by these very strong women who had strong opinions about being considered the other. And they didn’t really appreciate some of the things that were [taking place]. I think Anita was the first Latina treasurer. There was like all these firsts going on there. So I think this group made an impact.

KMD: Were you reading similar works, or it was just discussion about women of color as artists should be validated, or—?

BC: I wasn’t really reading that much, unfortunately. I was attending a lot of artist talks.

KMD: Talks.

BC: Yes. Helena [María] Viramontes, the writer, and she would do talks in there about her stories. Actually, I became [involved]. I was a member of the Latino Writers Workshop. So she—just talking with her about some of the issues that she was writing about was pretty educational for me.

KMD: So what role did you play mostly in this, in the Women’s Caucus subgroup? Just a member?

BC: Oh, I was a member, and then we were talking about having art exhibits where women of color are the focus of the exhibits. And then just talking about issues of being included, being excluded from shows, and how we can try to get into these other shows that historically have left us out. So that was pretty—that was really great, to be part of that, especially. I think Faith [Ringgold] and Margaret were the main organizers of that.

KMD: Let’s take a break. It’s almost lunch.

[*break in audio*]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos with Barbara Carrasco. We took a quick lunch break. It’s September 11, [2007], and we were talking before the break about the kind of political activism that Barbara was doing, that you

were doing during your two years at UCLA. I was wondering if you could mention any of the other groups. You had talked about Latino Writers Workshop. Were there other—were you a member of other writing groups or editor groups during that time?

BC: Well, I belonged to the Chicano News Media Association, which included professional news anchormen, radio and television reporters, as well as student editors and writers. And so we had people from UCSB, UC San Diego members, we had the local television personalities like Frank Cruz, Henry Alfaro, Ray Gonzalez. And these were people that we had regular meetings with. It was a very small group at the time, maybe fifteen to twenty-five people at the most, something like that. And now it's—thousands of people are members now, so.

KMD: Were you one of the founding members?

BC: No, I wasn't a founding member. I came a couple of years later. But it was a very small, intimate group of people. I think it was really great to actually get a chance to talk to people, and talk about the sort of the limitations that they had as Latino journalists in the field. Then years later, I remember talking to Henry Alfaro, and he was telling me how difficult it was for him as a reporter to interview racist people like the KKK and to put aside his personal feelings and just be a professional at the time. He told me a real funny story about that. But anyway, that was a really good experience to actually meet with these people.

KMD: Was the goal of the group to help explore ways to get over some of these boundaries?

BC: Well, just a coping kind of—coping with the problems type of strategies that we talked about. And then but also encouraging—they used to encourage us to enter the field of journalism, which I kind of entertained that idea for awhile, but I always knew I'd rather stick with art than do that.

KMD: Well, right, you were saying you were part of the Latino Writers Workshop. What did you do in that capacity?

BC: I was actually the art editor. So I would read the articles that were written by fellow artists and writers about art, and then decide which artworks would be published. We had a special women's issue for *Chismearte* magazine, which the Latino Writers Workshop actually was involved in producing. There was a special women's issue, and I was working very hard on that issue. I did the illustration on the cover as well as selecting the work by several pretty well-known Chicana artists on the inside of the magazine, like Yreina [Cervantez] and Elsa Flores, and I forget the photographers, different photographers and writers. And so I remember it caused some controversy too, the cover, because a lot of the older Chicano artists thought it didn't look "Chicana" enough.

KMD: Didn't look Chicana enough?

BC: Yeah. It was a young Chicana putting on her makeup, and it was a real clean type of graphic that I do, and I got criticized for that, it didn't have—I guess all the Chicano symbolism. There's a lot of hard . . . I don't know, they just criticized me. It was someone really well known who's older, I won't mention the name. But anyway—

KMD: How did you answer to criticism?

BC: I said, "Well, I'm a Chicana, I did it, so it's Chicana art. So I don't care if you can't relate to it, but a lot of Chicanas can." And they did, a lot of women really liked the drawing a lot. It was very, very popular. That issue sold out right away. That was one of the most popular issues. And then another issue where we focused primarily on women was—the cover was illustrated by John Valadez, two women holding hands—and that's the one where Sybil Venegas did an extensive article on Chicano artists. It was a really good article. I don't know if you ever read that article. That was very good.

KMD: That was later. That one's like '81, right?

BC: Oh, yeah, that's true. Couple of years later.

KMD: I'm trying to get a sense of how you were able to kind of work with these groups, and whether it impacted or conflicted with your development as an artist.

BC: Well, I guess it was confusing for me, because I hadn't, at that point, developed like a personal style that I was comfortable showing publicly. I continued doing my own drawings in my space, but I did not show

a lot of personal work, because at that time there was severe criticism if you didn't do political art. There was a lot of pressure on all of us to do that kind of work, and there were those names, you know, "sellout," and "compromise," all those kind of things. They were just always popping up. There were statewide conferences where people were calling each other those names. The Concilio de Arte Popular, I remember at one of the meetings, somebody was screaming at each other about that. Artists from the Bay Area would come down, [from the] San Diego area. We would all get together in one big, huge place, auditorium of some kind. And there was—those kind of issues were discussed, and the direction of Chicano art. And I remember that's one thing that I felt really stressed about—doing work that wasn't about the movement. It had to be movement-oriented, or message-conscious type of work.

KMD: And you were doing that with the UFW, but your own—

BC: Personal images?

KMD: Yeah.

BC: Well, I was doing a lot of images of women that—like the *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn* image—that kind of spiraled into other images of women who were being physically abused and then mentally abused. So I started [drawing] a bunch of angry, pissed off women. And guys were . . . I guess I was angry too because I wasn't taken very seriously at that time. I used to wear my hair in a braid, and I didn't wear any makeup, and there were a lot of men hitting on me at that time, and I remember being really conscious of not letting it get to my head, so to speak, so that they would take me seriously as an artist. That's one of my . . . I remember later, after college, that's when I got criticized for that, too.

KMD: For not—

BC: For not trying to take advantage of my appearance. I guess one of the artists who's also well known, too, right now, he said that I walked and dressed as though I was ashamed of my body, and that I should be really proud of it because I had a good body, and that I should show it off. And I said, "Well, I'm not here to show it off to you or anybody else." And then a week later, he came back and told me that the other guys were talking, the other artists were talking, and they came to the conclusion that I must be a lesbian or someone who's a frustrated Catholic, or a hung-up Catholic, that's what they said. He said that I must have some issues about Catholicism that are affecting the way I dress and act.

KMD: So this attack on you personally, because you're not sexually available to them.

BC: Well, it was a male-dominant organization, for one thing, and—

KMD: Oh, this was in Concilio?

BC: Yeah. Well, actually even before that, before I even—when I was still at UCLA. I remember I was going out with somebody at the time who's—he was no longer on the campus. I was the first female editor, so he had already graduated. But we were still together, and I remember that people would make comments about, "God, why do you dress like that? How come you don't—how come you're not part of the party scene?" I just didn't want to be taken—I didn't want to be one of those women that everybody talks about, because they always talked about friends of mine, actually, that would go out with them. Anyway.

KMD: So you were maintaining some of this sensibility about your sensuality through your dress and your comportment and how you presented yourself. That seemed to resonate with the topics you were addressing in some of the early work. I mean, this is obviously the image that's in *Essays on La Mujer*, the anthology published out of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center publications, it's one of their earliest publications. The cover you did in '77—

[break in audio]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos with Barbara Carrasco. We're on tape 2, and it's September 11, 2007, and Barbara was telling me about some of the challenges she had and the pressure to do a kind of political art defined in a very specific way. Now, we have been more—well, at least my impression as a Chicana scholar—is that we're a little bit more open about how that political is defined, because the image on *Essays on La Mujer*, a woman with hair and a kind of *trenzas*, a braid, going around her neck, and there's figures throughout her

hair. She's got a tear in her eye. I mean, that's a feminist piece, and if it's not political, I don't know what—it's about the issues women face, the power, the inequality that women have to endure. But at the time, not—

BC: Well, it was. I guess because these were essays written by women, and this was actually including all those essays, images are—those are reflecting all the different essays that are in the book, health care and all that. Olga Talamante was in there, that's a portrait of her. And all these different images . . . At the time, a lot of men, of course, felt that they were being left out of the discussion when women got together and talked about these things. I mean, there was a few people who did believe it was relevant to their own experiences as well. But it was really unusual to meet someone like that. *[laughter]*

KMD: So most of the time, there was a lot of attack when women would talk about the particularities of being a woman, whether it's sterilization, or—I'm trying to remember some of the issues—labor force inequities, the role of Chicanas within the student movement—that was a wonderful essay, lots of circulation. Women in pre-Hispanic society, women in health services.

BC: Because there was one article that generated a lot of controversy that's in the book is [about] La Malinche. That was—I think [Adelaida Del Castillo] did that article. But anyway, that whole thing about . . . So I guess that's where it stems from. It's amazing that something that happens so many years ago could permeate all these minds of these political activists. But it was something that—I think it's pretty interesting that some of the guys would feel like they were left out. But all the time, we've been feeling left out. Women have been feeling left out of a lot of times, even with . . .

There was a play that was done—I forgot the name of the play, but I have the card from it—it was a play, it was written by—I think she was Bolivian or something, this woman playwright who did it at the Inner City Cultural Center—and it was about the movement, and how the movement actually discriminates against women. And it was a really, really great play, because it shows a political movement happening, and everybody's getting ready, but the women are the ones who are preparing food and cleaning up afterwards. It was just funny, because that was something we all could relate to.

KMD: I was wondering if you recall any of those moments of conflict, when either a man or another woman would challenge you or challenge your work, in terms of the content and how you responded, or were these things that were kind of quiet behind people's backs?

BC: Well, the *Chismearte* issue where I did a portrait of my sister putting on her makeup, that—it was a very simple, clean drawing, and it generated so much anger from the Chicano artist community, because one prominent older artist, he said that there were no symbols at all in the drawing that reflected the Chicano art experience, there was nothing. And I told him, I said, "Well, you're wrong, because the Chicana is—" She's putting on makeup, and one of the eyes, there's makeup on her eye, and the other eye is without it. But it was also like this whole necessity on her part to make herself more attractive, but also to cover up, too, at the same time. It's interesting that it's a double-edged sword, in a way, trying to make yourself more attractive, but also covering up a more vulnerable part of yourself, the one that's open—that can be open to criticism.

But in this particular drawing, I have the Virgin Mary pin on the girl's bra, and I thought it was really [strong]. It was a feminist statement, because here's this woman defining herself, and she's doing it with really a sort of religious kind of inspiration of sorts, but she's doing it with—you know, it's another woman that she's drawing inspiration from, the Virgin Mary. And so when I heard all about this controversy . . . It was mostly up north, actually, more than it was here.

KMD: Oh, okay.

BC: So I thought it was interesting that here are these really old-school guys, guys twice my age, criticizing something that's done by a younger generation, a young woman, not a Chicano older artist. And so that was interesting to me to see.

KMD: When you were just about finishing up at UCLA, you introduce yourself to Carlos Almaraz and John Valadez, right?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: How did that happen?

BC: Well, they were both working on the zoot suit mural. And I had met them before at a Chicano art exhibit. But I drove by, and I stopped, and Carlos was towards the—at the base of the scaffolding. And I asked him, I said, “Do you guys have a Chicana working with you on the mural?” And they said no, that one artist had agreed to work on it, but cancelled at the last minute, and that they didn’t have anybody. And I said, “Well, I’d like to work on it, if you’ll let me work on it.” And they said, “Well, do you do portraits really well?” And I said, “Yeah.” So I showed them my work, they hired me, and it was—that was the beginning of many other projects we worked on.

KMD: Now, they were being commissioned to do this for—

BC: Yeah, the Mark Taper. Gordon Davidson from the Music Center actually commissioned them to do the mural.

KMD: And so you became the assistant.

BC: Yeah. I was the assistant to them.

KMD: What did that consist of at that time?

BC: Well, it was interesting, because at the start—

KMD: [*overlapping dialog*] Or actually painting?

BC: It was interesting. At the beginning, I was working on details, like at the base of the mural, like the shoe, there was a big giant shoe of the *pachuco*. And then when I convinced Carlos that I’m really good at faces, let me do the face—the face was huge, it was like five feet—and he goes, “Well, okay,” kind of reluctant. So when I did it, it came out very nice, if I do say so myself. But I went up there, and I was kind scared. It was on electric scaffolding. At first it was the pile-on scaffold, which is very dangerous. And so they changed it to electric scaffolding, and when they saw that I was good at what I was doing, they were happy, they seemed very pleased. But I remember a couple people came by to visit to add—one of them was Magu, actually—and he was like right away trying to tell me how to paint. He told me that I should be doing this and this way, and I wasn’t doing it the right way. I told him that I didn’t need his comments, that I was doing a good job without his help. And it was just interesting, right away, that was my first introduction to Magu. But he seemed like he respected that I stood my ground. So on the list of credits, it has all our names on there, including mine, which is great. But Gordon [Davidson] came by and said, he wanted to know who painted the portrait of Eddie, and everybody said, reluctantly, “Barbara did it.” And he loved it. He said it was really well done. I said, “Why, thank you.”

But again, it’s a situation where I think that if anybody said at that time that I was aggressive or . . . I like to use the word “assertive,” because I think I turned it around, and there was an opportunity there. I just introduced myself, I said I’d love to work with you guys, and I was really happy they said yes, because I think they’re both really good painters. And I learned a lot about painting just by watching them paint.

KMD: Can you give me some hints at that?

BC: Well, I saw the way Carlos approached . . . He had a really great way of—what’s the word—painting on top of other paint, creating texture, and letting some of it come through. And he just had this—I just watched him as he was painting, it was so different from John. John had like a real traditional approach to painting. But it was just really amazing to see these two guys who have different styles work together so well. And I think that’s one thing I really appreciated about working with them, is the chance to see how they work together.

KMD: Did you do that work in some kind of studio space, or—?

BC: Right on the wall.

KMD: You did it right on the wall. I thought that’s what you were describing.

BC: It was right on the wall. We had to go across the street to see if everything looked good, it was so huge. But that was really wonderful.

KMD: There was no projecting then?

BC: Well, they did it on the grid system. So it was a grid system, so everything was—I got there right when it was already—the grid system had already been placed on the wall, and the sketches . . . You know, there’s

a square inch equals a square foot type, that's a very old-fashioned way of doing it. But back then there weren't—we didn't use slide projectors or opaque projectors.

KMD: And Carlos and some other folks go on to develop a couple of different groups, and I wanted to know what your relationship to some of those groups were.

BC: Well, Carlos and John and several other artists started a group called Public Art Center, or Centro de Arte Público. There was a few female members of that organization, and then later on they dropped out. It's right about the time they dropped out, I came into the picture, and I was basically an assistant to their—on their projects. They would hire me to do detail work. John would get commissions to do these movie theater banners that would go on the outside, the exterior of movie theaters announcing a particular movie, so he would hire me to do all the detail work on it. And—because I was good at doing that.

KMD: And you were doing paint? Is that what you were working on?

BC: Yeah, paint.

KMD: And so this is the kind of stuff you were saying—you know, the graphic design that they used to make their living, to pay the bread and butter.

BC: Yeah, work for hire stuff, yeah.

KMD: Yeah. How long did you do that, for how many projects?

BC: It seemed like. I don't know, maybe a year, a year and a half or something. And then I started distancing myself a little bit because I felt like I really needed to express my own personal work. I was doing a little bit of that work at the studio, but I still felt like I needed my own space, because I think I wasn't . . . Although the guys were really good about having me work with them on projects, I wasn't really getting paid really well for the work I was doing. And I felt like I needed to really break away and to do my own work.

KMD: So you mentioned two things I'm curious about. You had a studio around this time, late '70s, early '80s?

BC: No. I didn't get a studio myself until the mural project, in 1981.

KMD: Okay. So let me go back then a little bit. So this is the late '70s when you become a member of the Public Art Center.

BC: They had a studio, so I would—

KMD: Okay. And what role . . . I mean, I'm trying to get an idea, like how does this group form, and what are its goals, what do you guys do when you get together.

BC: Well, most of the time they have meetings about particular commissions. And a lot of the commissions came from the merchants in their community as well as other communities in East LA and surrounding areas. And it would involve like a small mural or a small sign or a big sign, and either—sometimes it would be directly on the wall, or it would be on a panel, or on canvas. And so we would do—whatever the project was, I was usually called in to do the detail work. I did a lot of lettering. I was real good at that kind of thing, just steady-hand type of detail.

KMD: So these would be commissioned signs. I mean, this is functioning as a business then.

BC: Yeah. The goal of the group . . . I was listening to these guys, Carlos especially, he came from a very politically conscious background where he was from. He had gone to different places with other group where they did—I think they went to Cuba, all kinds of organizations that he was part of—and they all felt that they had to give back to the community, that kind of thing. So I enjoyed working with him, because he had that kind of commitment to serving the bigger community.

KMD: Did you play other roles in the group, in that particular Public Art Center?

BC: No, not really. I was one of the few women that were there. There were a couple, though they had left. They had jumped ship, actually. I think they had just felt that it was just too difficult to work with the guys. I think that they really liked—they recognized that I have talent. Because I remember one day they were talking about me not knowing I was around the corner, and I was listening to them, and they were, "Oh, Barbara's really good at what she does," and then as soon as I said, "Oh, sorry, I overheard that," they got real upset. *[laughter]*

KMD: Oh, it wasn't supposed to be known? *[laughter]*

- BC: Yeah, they didn't want to disclose that to me personally.
- KMD: The space that they're working in, this studio, where was that located?
- BC: It was Avenue 52, in Highland Park, it's up Main Street.
- KMD: Well, Fig goes through it.
- BC: Yeah. Figueroa and Fifty-Second. It's now a Bank of America building.
- KMD: Yeah.
- BC: It was on the second floor, and then I think later on, after the Public Art Center kind of folded . . . Although some business cards from that era I should show you one day, they're really fun.
- KMD: That they made?
- BC: Yeah. They're really fun cards. Anyway, I think Richard Duardo took over and started—it was his studio from that point on. Hecho en Aztlán, Multiples, or something that he had like every Friday or Saturday. He would have some pretty well-known musicians play there. They became famous later.
- KMD: So the group was mostly doing like kind of a business, by the way you're describing it. There was a sense that they were kind of working in the community with the community because that's who their clients were. Was the work also, the content of it, speaking to that community? I mean, now, if you're a sign painter in East LA, you better know how to do the Virgin Mary. Right, you know what I mean? Was it that kind of content?
- BC: Yeah, definitely. They had done a couple small murals in the community, too, and it was—they would always include, you know, images that people could relate to. I think the Virgin Mary was in a lot of them, actually. So that was one of those must-haves.
- KMD: The group dissolves because of financial or personal differences?
- BC: I think both. I think everybody—it was hard to maintain a studio space that large, and I think—I don't know exactly. For me, it wasn't really logical for me to live in Culver City and then drive all the way out there on the Pasadena Freeway. It was too long a drive, and I decided to try to seek some kind of work closer to home.
- KMD: What did that end up being?
- BC: Well, actually, it was so silly, because I started working . . . Where did I—I actually worked kind of far, I worked at Children's Hospital. It's funny, you know, I go back and then I . . . Anyway, but I did a lot of work in East LA, too, it's so strange. I worked on a Spanish-language recycler called *El Clasificado*, so I did all the graphics for that, and that was working with a guy called Geraldo Velasquez, who passed away from AIDS. Although I didn't know this at the time, but he had also done all the music for Harry's videos. It was so weird, because he was a really nice guy. It was a shame he passed away.
- KMD: So you were able to do some of this graphic arts business to make money.
- BC: Pay the bills, yes.
- KMD: Yeah. And was it mostly independent, or connecting up with others?
- BC: It was mostly working with other people. I didn't do a solo kind of—I didn't start doing that until much later. I also did really odd jobs, like I worked at Universal Studios, doing artwork for the Bionic Woman and the Bionic Man, and the Hardy Boys series.
- KMD: Really?
- BC: Yeah. And it was—yeah, my boss was a Chicana lawyer, Loretta Sifuentes, worked for her. Roberto Sifuentes's wife, teaches at Cal State Northridge. But anyway, I did stuff like that. And I did—I started doing portraits for—also to make money, which I didn't enjoy doing, but I did them well enough to make money from.
- KMD: Tell me a little about the artist-in-residence at the Children's Hospital?
- BC: Well, that came much later, but it was—
- KMD: Yeah, you just mentioned it, so I was curious.
- BC: Yes. It was a job that a lot of artists applied for. It was through the Mark Taper Foundation and the Johnny Mercer Foundation, but that came later. But they were looking at different artists who were visual artists,

and then there was a poet-in-residence. To place them in the hospital to work with kids who are sick and dying, and it was a really difficult job to do. [Artists like] Yreina [Cervantez] and Alison Saar. I worked there for three years, doing work with kids who have anywhere from cancer, cystic fibrosis, all these different illnesses that are life threatening.

KMD: And you were doing like studio work with them?

BC: The artist before me was more into craft-oriented work, and she had been working there a couple years, and then when I came along, I decided to introduce fine art materials to the kids. I brought in scratch-board, silverpoint, acrylic paint and canvases, and it was the first time the artwork was shown outside the hospital. We had work at the Barnsdall Junior Art Center, and different places, and it was just a really great experience working with the kids there. It was both challenging and—actually personally, it was very challenging, because it was real hard to—

KMD: Watch young people die.

BC: Yes, it was very sad. But I really enjoyed working there.

KMD: They don't have that anymore?

BC: Yeah, it's still going on. In fact, one of the poets that came towards the end of when I was there, he's still there.

KMD: Is it considered in the arts community, the people that you know, is it considered like a decent—like an important—artist in residence?

BC: Oh, yeah. Because all the artists who work there, they're all pretty well known in their own fields. Like Harry's considered a pretty good video artist, he's been in a lot of exhibits. And then Roberto Bedoya was one of the poets. He's a really well-known poet. And then of course myself. But then the other poet that took over was—I forgot his name—Richard Garcia, who's also a pretty well-known poet.

KMD: Did you work with the other artists in the other art fields, or would you just go in and do your—you know, if you were doing painting with the young people?

BC: Well, we had a community board right next to—in the hospital, so we had to work together. We had regular meetings, and we'd talk about what some of the challenges were about working with a particular age group, or kids who had a particular illness. And it's interesting, because one of the kids told me, he asked me a question that just really was amazing. He said, "Barbara, can I ask you a personal question?" and I said, "Sure." And he said, "Is the reason why you don't come on Saturday is because you don't get paid?" And I go, "Yes, that's true." No, but they're so incredibly honest, that's the thing that was amazing. It was amazing how much courage they had. You just—the thing about the kids, working with kids, I think, is that a lot of people don't really appreciate how much they know, and how much they can contribute, and how much they love new experiences, like the different projects that we did with them.

KMD: I just wanted to ask if the work you did with young people who were facing death, how that affected or gave you insight for your own recovery from cancer.

BC: Well, you know, when I was diagnosed, some of the kids at Children's Hospital knew about it, because I think my daughter was only eight months old, so I had already returned to work. She was eight and a half months old when they gave me the bad news that they had found a growth in my neck, and they had to do a biopsy. And so when I told the kids, I said, "I'm going to have to go through this," they all said they were going to pray for me. But I remember when I went through—when I was in the bone marrow transplant unit across the street from Children's Hospital, I thought about the kids every day. I was in the hospital for thirty-six days. And every—I had their pictures on my wall, I had a picture of Dolores Huerta, because she had come to see me the day before I went in the hospital, and there was pictures of all these friends of mine that I consider very strong women, and older women that are sort of spiritual advisors to me, like Patricia Para, Elizabeth Perez. They were just good friends that really always encouraged me. And so I kind of drew on all of these different energies from all these different people, including the kids. The kids were amazing.

KMD: Did that impact your work afterwards? Did you do anything—

BC: No, I did some work about it, but I haven't shown anybody.

KMD: You haven't shown it.

BC: Because it's just so personal. It's real difficult, it's hard to look at the work. Because I did a drawing—Shifra Goldman came by and gave me a sketchbooks and some pencils, and that was really nice of her, and I did these images of how I felt about what was happening to me. Because we were putting so many chemicals into me, and some of them were toxic, some of them were going to kill the cancer cells, but they're also killing the good cells. So that was the scariest part, is that I was really well aware of this—my chances for survival were fifty-fifty, and I was just really afraid, that's the word. I can't describe it. But I was trying not to focus on that. I was trying to focus on my daughter, getting back to my health so I could continue as a mom.

And so it was really amazing. I did a drawing of all these toxic little creatures going into my IV tube, and they're really weird. It's kind of a strange drawing, but they look like fish, like deformed fish, and they were . . . I don't know why. But I was on drugs, and at one point, I was on morphine for nine days, because I got a—what do they call it—a blood clot in my shoulder, and it was extremely painful. So I don't know if the morphine affected the drawings, probably did. But I was addicted to the morphine in nine days, I was addicted, and that was one of the worst experiences of my entire life, coming off.

KMD: Did they break you of the addiction in the hospital?

BC: Nope. Didn't tell me I was going to be addicted at all. I was released and went through cold turkey withdrawal on Halloween night. Harry took Barbie out trick-or-treating, and I was going to jump off the balcony. I was just—I can't describe it. It was the worst night of my life. It was worse than the bone marrow transplant. It was really horrible. But there was something that really touched me in the hospital was right next door to me, a woman from Mexico City had a nine-year-old son who was going through a bone marrow transplant next door. She didn't know me at all, never met me before, came over every day to pray for me. I just couldn't believe that lady. She was just totally amazing. And her son is a survivor. I see him at all the City of Hope annual events. He's a big, tall guy now, but he was a little tiny guy. He was very lucky to get the bone marrow transplant—his bone marrow came from his brother. See, my bone marrow was taken out of me and frozen and then put back into me after they gave me heavy doses of chemo.

KMD: I had come across this artist-in-residence on somebody else's resume, Children's Hospital. I thought, "Wow." I didn't know this was a common, regular possibility in a career. I mean, it obviously shaped your life. I don't know if, outside of the stuff you haven't shown, if you felt like it shaped some of the direction in your artwork. I know at other times you talked about how, after the transplant, you didn't feel your hand was as steady. It has been some time since that interview that was done in '99 and you made those comments. Have you regained any of that steadiness?

BC: Yeah, thank God. I think it's—I don't know, it takes several years for all those toxins to get out of your system, to really get rid of them. But I haven't felt . . . There were six months where it took me, six months physically to recover, but I really believe it took like five years to recover. I didn't really feel clear of mind at all until recently.

KMD: And I'm wondering what it was like, if it's not too much to ask, when you're picking up a pen, or—I think last time you talked about it, it was the ballpoint pen, not doing that kind of detail work, because you didn't feel you had the steady hand. When you pick it up and you recognize that your hand is not responding to—your body is not responding to what you want to do—what was that like?

BC: It was really frustrating, because I'm used to having a lot of control. But I knew that I was going to regain it, though, just as my hair grew in—my hair didn't come back the same. I had this real kinky hair, that came out of me. Then I spoke to other cancer patients and cancer survivors, and they all told me that it took several years for everything to go back to normal. Your skin, complexion, everything is totally changed. I don't know, I think the hair loss thing was probably really difficult for me, because I had this long hair, and I was really vain about it, according to my sister, so it was really difficult to get over that. But the actual losing control is personally really disappointing. And then I had to really work at getting it back, because I

remember just every day doing little sketches here and there, even if I didn't feel like really drawing, just to get my hand conditioned back into drawing.

KMD: Did you do those Catholic patterns?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: You did.

BC: Yeah, I did. It's amazing.

KMD: Catholic training helps after all? *[laughter]*

BC: Yeah. Because my daughter was going to—she was in elementary school, and I remember she was just learning cursive writing, so I had to like—I was helping her do that. And I thought, oh, my God, here I am, my hand is unsteady. But she had a really old-fashioned teacher from Spain, so that woman was into the old-fashioned cursive writing. I mean, she introduced it in first grade, when normally it's introduced in the third grade. So I liked her. She was—I liked her a lot, she was a very disciplined teacher, that's what I liked about her.

KMD: So during that period while you're recovering—I'm just curious, as a mom—Harry's being mom and dad all at the same time?

BC: Well, actually, Harry was working many hours, so my sister Frances helped so much. I mean, she was substitute mom for a long time. She—we moved into the same apartment building that my sister lives in. She had been there for several years, and when we moved in, she's right downstairs, so it was real easy for her to just walk Barbie downstairs and then go off to work. It was perfect, actually. And we still live there, even though—but it was really great, because it was a load off of Harry, because he was working two jobs at the time. It was really difficult for him.

So everybody kind of helped. My mom and my sisters, both my sisters, both took care of Barbie, but it was really my sister Frances, she's the one who was there 24/7. Because while I was in the hospital for thirty-six days, we had already moved in there, while I was still in Silver Lake, or West Hollywood. Or—is that considered West Hollywood, Children's Hospital?

KMD: Yeah. I wanted to go back a little, since we've come all the way to the late '90s. I wanted to go back to some of the '80s work that you did with these other groups. I mean, your association with Public Art Center, we've talked about. We've talked about your work with the Latino Writers Workshop, *Chismearte* magazine, some work you did with the Woman's Building. You talked a little about *Caminos*. That was work for hire?

BC: Yeah, that was a steady job. That was right there in Highland Park. It was at the old jail. It's near Lawry's, in that old jail, and the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts was right around the corner. But that was . . . They did several publications every few months, and I basically did all the editing. There were other writers writing for the magazine, but I wasn't really—I wrote a few articles, but not too many.

KMD: Mostly editing?

BC: We had—our illustrator was—he's a pretty well-known illustrator. What was his name? Ignacio Gomez.

KMD: Now, when you said it was a steady job, does that mean that's the only job you're having, or is this just one of many?

BC: No, that was the only job for that period of time.

KMD: Yeah?

BC: Yeah, that was it. But at the same time that I was doing that, I was also working on other things. 1980, I'm—what year are we talking about now, 19—this is probably '80.

KMD: No.

BC: It's going to be '81 or '82, or before that.

KMD: Yeah.

BC: It could be '80, 1980. Because 1981, I had already gotten the mural commission.

KMD: Uh-huh, which I didn't want to go into today. Well, maybe we should stop, since we're at a breaking point. We'll stop for today, thank you.

BC: All right, sounds good.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2007

- KMD:** This is Karen Mary Davalos with Barbara Carrasco, and today is the twenty-first of September, and we're continuing our interviews. This is our third session. And today, Barbara, I wanted to talk, to just finish up a little bit about the artists that inspired or the artwork that inspired you when you were in undergrad at UCLA. Were you looking mostly at European, Latin American, American arts?
- BC:** Well, the formal training I received from my art instructors was based on European art, Michelangelo, Botticelli, all these different artists. But as a student of—I mean, as an undergrad involved in MEChA and *La Gente*, I started going a lot to the Chicano Studies Research [Center] Library. And that's when I saw for the first time images done by Chicano artists like Willie Herrón, and the artists who did—what was his name?—the Brownie painting.
- KMD:** Oh, Mel Casas.
- BC:** Yeah. I mean, it really struck me, because I thought—it was the first time I really saw some pretty well executed and well-thought-out images done by Chicano artists. Frida Kahlo's portraits, and at the same time, the other Mexican artists. [Jacinto] Quirarte's book [*Mexican American Artists*] was out there at that time, too. Anyway, there's very few women in that book, of course. But I was struck that that was extremely exciting, the way Mel Casas did the—especially since I was a Brownie myself and a Girl Scout, so it was really interesting to see. And Willie Herrón's [*Hechizo*] *Spells*, the book he illustrated, by—I think it was based on a poet, right?
- KMD:** Yeah.
- BC:** Ricardo—I forgot his name. Anyway, but I really, really admired the way he drew—the skill, I guess, that Willie had as an artist. And then as far as the Mexican female artists, besides Frida Kahlo—what's her name?—María Izquierdo, I really liked her work. Those are just a few of the ones that really struck me.
- KMD:** So how did you end up sorting up this—you're getting one kind of training in the classroom, and then you're giving yourself your own training.
- BC:** Well, I felt after . . . You know, when you're involved in MEChA, they talked about colonialization and all that kind of thing. So I remember thinking, well, they're not introducing it in the classroom, I never heard Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco's name mentioned in the art history department, or the art department. And even though I did take Cecelia Klein's early pre-Columbian art history class—very difficult. But as far as the contemporary Chicano or Mexican artists, we never heard any of them mentioned in the classroom. So I felt like it was necessary for me, just as I thought it was necessary for me to get involved with the farm workers and other sociopolitical movements outside campus.
- KMD:** So you graduate in '78 with a BFA from UCLA, and by that time, you're already doing exhibitions.
- BC:** Yeah. Well, mostly group exhibitions—well, all of them were group exhibitions.
- KMD:** So what were some of the early important ones that you would note?
- BC:** Well, I think when I had—I was in a show at Self-Help Graphics, an early, early show at Self-Help, and it was—I had in there the front cover of *Essays on La Mujer*, that was in there, and the *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*. And then I had this one line drawing of an angry pregnant woman, I don't know where that came from. Anyway, but there was a couple older Chicano artists that came up to me and told me that they thought my work was really good. One of them tried to get a teaching position in the art department at UCLA, but he was turned down. I forgot his name; he was a really good artist, actually, too, and now he's in Chicago—or, no, he lives in the Bay Area now. He married one of the Mujeres Muralistas sisters—oh, I forget his name. Ricardo, I think his name's Ricardo something. I forgot his last name. But anyway, he was a really traditional kind of old-school artist, and he told me that I had a lot of skill, that I needed to continue that kind of work that I was doing.
- KMD:** This would have been in the '70s?
- BC:** Yeah. This was—actually, it was like—I graduated from UCLA in '78, and then—well, I was in an exhibit, too. The earliest show I was ever in was in San Diego, with Carlos Almaraz and John Valadez and a bunch of

other artists. I actually found that invitation that day, it was really—oh, that was the first one, it was in—I think it was 1980 or something.

KMD: Oh, yeah, yeah, that does say you're—so this is accurate on your résumé.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Nineteen-eighty is the first group exhibition, the six LA artists.

BC: Yeah. I was really proud to be in that show, because I was pretty young. I was the youngest of the group.

KMD: Who were some of the key influential people that were advocating for your work at that time, right after graduation?

BC: Well, I think early on, I met people like Rosamaria Marquez, the head of the Chicana Service Action Center, and she was sort of like a really encouraging, nurturing type of role model of me, because she was really involved in the community, and I saw all the work she did there. And I became friends with her, and she was sort of always encouraging me to keep on doing my work. And she was a singer also at the same time, a performer. She performed at the Inner City Cultural Center. Anyway, but she was early on, she was before Dolores worked there. So but I really admired her, because she had her art, and she had her sense of obligation to the community. So I thought I really liked the way she balanced those two out.

KMD: So then you get an opportunity to do a public project, yeah?

BC: With a big—oh, yeah, that was 1981, when I was working along with five other Chicano artists at the Community Redevelopment Agency [CRA]. Our boss was Frank Romero, who's the head of the graphics department, and it's John Valadez, Judithe Hernández, Carlos Almaraz, Dolores Guerrero-Cruz, and myself. And so we were in the graphics department there doing topographical maps and map presentations for the CRA, and it was just one of those job kind of jobs. *[laughter]*

KMD: Graphic designing.

BC: Graphic design jobs, yeah. And then one of the architects approached me and asked me if I would be interested in doing a mural on the side of the McDonald's building, across from Grand Central Market. So at that point, I was still an employee, so when I started working on the mural sketch, there was some question about copyright and all those kinds of things, but it wasn't really directly presented to me. I kind of talked to other artists, and they were the one who presented that to me, that I should definitely get it copyrighted. So on all the sketches, the early, early sketches, I had a copyright logo on the bottom, and the CRA didn't realize it until many months later, when there was a problem about that, and about other additional funding, because it was—they told me to do it on Los Angeles, and I decided to do it on the history of LA. And the dimensions they gave me were sixteen by eighty feet, but it was supposed to be on—they wanted me to do them on plywood, or some kind of wood.

KMD: Because they wanted it to be portable?

BC: Yeah, I guess. It was weird. First I thought, why not directly on the wall, but for some reason, they wanted it on portable panels. So I met with John Lopez from McDonald's Corporation, who was actually the licensee of the McDonald's building. So he took my entire sketch [to Chicago for approval from McDonalds Corporation]. Well, before I did this sketch, I consulted with three historians, Bill Mason, Jean Bruce Poole, and Rudy Acuña. And Bill Mason was—he's passed away, but he was the head of the Museum of Natural History, and he was a really—he was a great source of information, actually.

Anyway, and then I did the preliminary sketches, based on all the stuff that I was provided by—all the historical information that the three historians helped me with. But then I went out and talked to people in Little Tokyo and told them I was going to do this mural on LA history, and wanted their input as to what kind of images would be—would they think would be suitable for the LA history mural that would depict their history. And all of them said the Japanese internment. It was amazing, every one of them. I interviewed a lot of people.

KMD: How did you get—you were funded to do that?

BC: Well, I was funded to do it, but a very low amount. I mean, the funds were absolutely, embarrassingly low. But I looked at it as a great opportunity to do this big project. I had worked with Carlos and John, and I

knew that community input was important, so I went out and I went to talk to the black community, and that's when Bidy Mason came up, and I didn't even know anything about Bidy Mason. But her whole story was pretty intriguing, and she was the source of inspiration to the black community, so she's in there. And then the Chinese . . . So all the historical scenes were kind of based on all those interviews I did with people.

And when I presented the final sketch to the CRA, they were really good about not coming out and using the word censorship or—they used the excuse—their argument was that there were too many images in the mural, so they wanted to reduce some images and eliminate others. So the word, it never popped up. They weren't that direct, actually, but they wanted me to take out the Japanese internment, because they thought that was a negative image. Then I had to tell them that I talked to a lot of people [in the Japanese community], and that that's just not true, that that was the one image they strongly felt should be part of the mural.

KMD: It's like a photograph design, right?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: So did you get that from the history museum, the Natural History Museum?

BC: No, I just got them from historical books. Manzanar and other relocation camps. And so the photograph of the little girl we found in—Bill Mason I think gave us that, that appeared on the front cover of many newspapers. It became kind of a popular image about that whole scene. But the Owens Valley Aqueduct is in there, Tiburcio Vásquez and Vasquez Rocks, and the early—as far as the early history of the native people in LA, I talked to the descendants of the Gabrieleños Indian people—they have an organization at San Gabriel—and Yang-na, the descendants of the Yang-na people, and those were . . .

I think that's extremely important to mural making, the actual interviews. They gave me so much insight about the history and how the native people have been robbed, their land swindled away from them. Anyway, but they told me, you know, after I met with them, I came up with some of the other images and asked them if they thought they were appropriate for that time period and all that. I found this book on Charles Lummis, and he had said, even though he was a great humanitarian or considered to be one, there was one line that struck me as pretty racist. He said that "the white race is superior to all others." That was a direct quote from him. So I was surprised.

KMD: Kind of late 1800s anthropology, that's what I had seen of his work.

BC: Anyway, but that's why I put this San Gabriel Mission and all the native people making the mission, and the Virgin Mary sort of reversed image, and she's sad, she actually has tears coming out of her eyes. So it was kind of interesting, because I remember the—the last battle that was fought in LA, the defending Americans were fighting against the Mexicans. All these different scenes of LA history I thought were really—it was hard to eliminate, because I did eliminate a lot of them, but there's fifty-two scenes in total. And then the larger, the last scenes are sort of a reflection of the LA community at the time. Tom Bradley was mayor, and all the kids who worked on the mural, and so it was kind of—

KMD: Can we just back up a little bit?

BC: Sure.

KMD: I didn't realize that you were—I mean, when you came on to teach at LMU [Loyola Marymount University] last year, that was one of our first conversations, how you were going to do it. And my response was, you know, doing the mural this way, I would call that the methodology of Chicano muralism, going out into the community.

BC: It's the tradition.

KMD: Yeah. It's the method. So are you taking notes, are you compiling stories, audiotape?

BC: I didn't do any audiotape, and the reason why I didn't is because when I was talking about, say, like with the Gabrieleños Indians descendants, there was this whole way how people acquire information.

KMD: Yes.

- BC:** And I was sort of respectful of the fact that they didn't want to be taped. They were very generous with their time, actually, they gave me a lot of written material, articles that they had written themselves. And so I still have all of it. It was supposed to go to Stanford, [*laughter*] but I still have all of that information. And I really was impressed with how they really respect the whole art.
- KMD:** Of oral history?
- BC:** Oral history, yeah. I didn't take any photographs of them. I just sort of really didn't want to do the same thing that other anthropological approaches have taken place before. I wanted to avoid that, and just listen to them. I think that's the most important part is actually really listening, hearing what they really want to say about their history.
- KMD:** How long were you in the research phase?
- BC:** Oh, several months. I was doing a lot. I went to so many meetings, I can't—I have documentation on all of that, too. I kept every single . . . At the time that I was doing all of this, I was working at the city hall east building, on the fifteenth floor. There was a vacant floor, I worked there. It was an old Masonic temple many years ago. It had become their building, a community service organization building, where César Chávez and Dolores Huerta started. So here I was. It was just really weird that I was in this old building doing this mural. But that's how that . . . I think it was like three months or something, or four months.
- KMD:** I didn't realize, because I've only seen these reproductions of the mural, that at the end here, that must be the names of the people who worked with you, and you said this particular image is the people who worked with you. How did you get the team together?
- BC:** Well, I called up . . . I had worked on murals with the [Citywide Mural Project].
- KMD:** Inner City Youth?
- BC:** No, it was a mural program that Glenna—Glenna Boltuch was working with that. Citywide Mural Project, that's what it was called. And I had worked with Glenna Boltuch Avila in the past, and she assisted John Valadez on some murals. And I worked on his mural on what was formally Brooklyn [Avenue and] Soto [Street], now it's Cesar Chavez [Avenue]. But there was a mural there. His mural was whitewashed and then the Streetscapers set another mural on top of that. I don't know if you know about that.
- KMD:** I know a little bit about it, yeah.
- BC:** It used to be Art Snyder's office, a councilman. But anyway, that was one of the early murals that I worked on with John, he invited me to do all the faces. Anyway, but Glenna was kind enough to agree to work with us, and through her . . . We also went through the CETA program and got the seventeen kids to work on the mural from various neighborhoods, I think Eighteenth Street and Compton. And so these four—I think four different groups of kids, they were getting paid through the Summer Youth Employment Program, so that money was . . . It was kind of good, too, that the money wasn't coming from the CRA, it was coming from other sources.
- KMD:** Yeah, to hire the kids, you wouldn't have to write a grant, because that's already a standing citywide federally funded program. But you were on staff doing the research, in the research phase?
- BC:** Yeah, I signed a contract to get a certain amount of money, and that later became my argument for the copyright also, because I was a paid employee. I was actually—at the time that I signed the contract, I was a commissioned artist, and they tried to use the thing that I was an employee, that I was a staff member. And I wasn't, because my lawyers argued that as soon as I got that contract I was no longer a regular employee at all. So it was just really—it was kind of unfortunate, because I think what they were seeking in trying to get the copyright was right to the actual images, and right to reproduce it, and all that kind of thing. That's what we think.
- KMD:** Oh, not just the right to censor it.
- BC:** Well, that too, probably. Very many issues involved. But it was interesting, the two attorneys . . . When the CRA refused to talk to me at one point, because I refused to take any of the images out. Then I went public with it. I contacted certain media people and they did stories. Bill Stout from Channel 2, Frank Cruz from Channel 4—or 2, I forget, Channel 4, too. And then "Two on the Town" did a thing on it, a lot of people.

Right after that, they went on a meeting with us, all our attorneys, and they said they were washing their hands of the mural. They gave me a contract saying that the mural was physically mine, and they don't want anything to do with it. So this big sixteen by eighty foot mural and no place to put it, it was kind of a sad thing. But at the same time, it was okay, because I felt good that I didn't give in to their demands.

[break in audio]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos and Barbara Carrasco, we're continuing. This is tape 3 on the twenty-first of September, [2007,] and Barbara was telling me about some of the issues that come up with the—do you call it “The History of Los Angeles: A Mexican Perspective”?

BC: No, that's actually incorrect. It's *LA History: A Mexican Perspective*.

KMD: *LA History: A Mexican Perspective*. And the mural had different—people were interpreting it differently. I was curious also about the composition. I can see in this particular reproduction, which you said was originally from—

BC: *La Gente* newspaper.

KMD: *La Gente* newspaper, and was recirculated again in *Chismearte*, is that what you said?

BC: Yeah, it was reproduced in *Chismearte*.

KMD: Okay. In these reproductions, you can see the panels. So a little bit about composition, a little bit about how you had to tackle a mural sixteen by eighty feet long. Did you grid it out the way you had talked about doing the large stuff last time we spoke?

BC: Yeah, we did actually. All the kids who worked on the mural primed all the—they turned out to be forty eight-by-ten-foot panels that weighed about seventy pounds each, and they're—and they had to be gessoed. And there was a sealant placed all the way around on the backs and the side of the wood-reinforced Masonite. And that was a lot of manual labor, actually. But once the gesso was applied, then the grid was applied, and then some of the images were drawn out and some of them were projected with an opaque projector.

You know, when they said anything on LA, for some reason, I decided to focus on the original title of “El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula,” the LA River. But when I—so it sort of came to me that it should be a female representing the city of Los Angeles, the queen of the angels. So I had my sister pose for that, that's my younger sister posing for that. And that *trenza* on top of her head is her crown, and then her hair forms the framework for different historical vignettes. And it was kind of—I really enjoyed working on it. It was just until we encountered opposition to some of the images that it became hard.

KMD: Did you enjoy working with the kids?

BC: Oh, yeah. Yreina Cervantez, Glenna Boltuch also, and Rod Sakai were the main artists who worked with the kids, and then I brought in some other guest artists, like Magu [Gilbert Luján], and—what's his name? Mr. Norte, the artist. Carlos Norte, his name was—he's an older guy who passed away several years ago.

KMD: But were you bringing in these guest artists because you wanted—was it part of the curriculum, or you needed it for their technique, or their . . .

BC: Well, at some point, a lot of the kids—they were kids, so they painted a lot of the images. But then when we needed someone to do a lot of detail work, someone who—and so Yreina—Yreina and Rod Sakai were both really good, as well as Glenna, in teaching the kids different mural painting techniques. And then at the same time, we had these older guest artists coming in showing the . . . Like when Mr. Norte came, he was just totally amazing. Boy, he was just able to paint so well. And the kids were able to see this really great artist paint in person.

KMD: Did the young people work about like four hours at a time, and that was it? I remember CETA programs would have limitations.

BC: Yeah. But we had other things going on. We took them on field trips, we got offers for Bird to come and visit, because the police department was right below us—I think they were right below us, so they'd come

up and bring the police bird with them, the parrot. So we had a lot of taking them to museums, galleries. We even took them to a theme park. It was really—that part was really wonderful.

KMD: So Yreina, Rod, and Glenna were part of this team that managed the kids? You didn't have to like take them by yourself?

BC: No.

KMD: Did they organize those events, they organized—you were able to focus on—

BC: The mural.

KMD: The mural. I know you've talked other places about the whole battle, the legal battle. I don't know if you wanted to mention that anymore, about some of that process.

BC: Well, it was just real frustrating, because in the process of getting support for the mural, once the CRA refused to talk to me and there were talks about eliminating images. I remember I had went out and asked other artists for their support and letters of support from all the organizations that I approached, including their histories. So the Japanese community as well as all these different organizations wrote really wonderful letters to the mayor. I have copies of all of those letters. One day I'll put it all together somehow. But they—that part was really great. And in the process, too, some of the artists who worked on the mural were telling me they didn't want to sign their name to the mural, because that would probably—

KMD: They're all getting funding from the Citywide Mural Project?

BC: No, the city, and they thought it would hinder their chances of getting funding. And these are artists that I respected, so I was a little disappointed. I mean, groups of—some were groups, some were individuals, some were really well-known individuals who said that—some artists would actually tell me they'll call me next week, and they'll never call, and then I'll call them over and over and they'd never return my phone calls. These are artists who now claim to be strong political artists representing their community and all that, and they're . . . That was pretty disappointing.

KMD: What becomes of the mural?

BC: Well, right now, the mural is back in storage. It was momentarily taken out to be part of the LA Festival. But it's back in storage right now, and I'm hoping that one day it will be displayed permanently somewhere in LA, hopefully in LA.

KMD: It was part of the LA Festival put on by the city?

BC: Well, Peter Sellars—it was partly the city, Peter Sellars was in charge of that. And he did meet at UCLA with all of these Chicano artists, and it was interesting that several of the artists, they told him, "You have to look at Barbara's mural," that was pretty interesting. These are some of the artists who didn't want to sign their name to it now said that. So that was kind of—maybe they felt bad or something. But I'm glad that he selected it. So it was up for three weeks at Union Station in 1991 as part of the festival.

KMD: I understand it's been exhibited partially at other times.

BC: Only at Otis [Otis/Parsons Art Gallery] as part of the *Agit/Pop* show that was curated by Robbie Conal. And then it was shown at an MIT exhibition called *LA Hot and Cool* by Dana—Dana Friis-Hansen was the curator. That's another one where that was really great, because I wasn't here when he selected—

KMD: *Agit/Pop*?

BC: No, for the MIT exhibition.

KMD: Oh, okay.

BC: I was in Russia during the time that Dana came to LA. He was really great, he was very open, he was one of those few non-sexist individuals. But I think the mural will be exhibited one day.

KMD: I mean, it's a fascinating composition of t realistic photographic-type montage, and then some . . . You know, like this one in red, it's all red and this is pretty much all green . . . That looks like a horse with a carriage, is that like—

BC: Yeah, that was—it was called *Calle de los Negros*, and that's where they lynched twenty-two Chinese people in the 1800s.

KMD: That's right next to Olvera Street, isn't it?

- BC:** Yeah, where Union Station is. That part of history is pretty interesting, because they would chop off all the braids of the Chinese people before they killed them, and it was sort of the most degrading thing you could do to them. And originally McDonald's Corporation censored that one part. I had a noose hanging in there going into the red scene, because it was a black and white photo. Just black and red, because I did red to symbolize all the bloodshed that it was causing me. But McDonald's Corporation didn't—they objected to the noose. They loved the entire mural except the noose. And so I took it out, and put a black woman looking at it, and she was an employee of the CRA, she was our friend. I just had her pose for me.
- KMD:** Did you have her pose, take a photograph, and then work from the photograph?
- BC:** Yeah. And then some things were not taken—some of the . . . Like Biddy Mason was taken from a photograph—all the purples, monochromatic purple. And then the first car in LA . . . There was a lot of really nice things in the mural that were overlooked, because of the controversy. But you know, the red cars are in there, the Grand Central Market—
- KMD:** Yeah, here's the red car.
- BC:** Yeah, and Angel's Flight, Union Station, the Pico House. There was a lot of different things in there.
- KMD:** Oh, I see. Now this is Siqueiros painting the mural.
- BC:** Yeah. And right above that is the 1932 Olympic poster, the Olympic Games poster. So that—in order to do that scene, too, I met with . . . Jean gave me a lot of information, Jean Bruce Poole. So I had Siqueiros looking at his mural while these buckets of white paint are going across his mural. In comparison to what's been painted since then, this is a pretty mild mural, I think. I mean, what could be considered radical in there? I think that's the thing that's so frustrating, because I know that several professors have used my mural in their classes, and they just can't believe all the controversy over it. I mean, it's ridiculous; this is all very accurate LA history.
- KMD:** I'm curious about something you've mentioned twice. You said you still have all that material. So you haven't deposited some of these things at Stanford, and I'm wondering why.
- BC:** Well, the reason being is that those are the—I told the Stanford people that I would definitely send them one day, but that wasn't part of the original, the fifteen boxes that went over there. It was—this is additional material, and . . . But I really wanted to look through that material. It's sort of painful in a way to look through it, because it was so—it was a really hard time for me. I was really disappointed in a lot of people. And Dolores Huerta was really great during that time, because she said that there were people that you think you are going to be behind you that will not stand beside you. And then there are people that I was surprised that they did take a stand and support me. It was a really confusing time for me.
- KMD:** So who were some of the ones that did support you?
- BC:** There were some artists there that I just—actually, the women, the wives of some of the artists who wouldn't . . . I don't want to say their names, but one wife actually told—her husband's very well known—but she said, "Barbara, you have more balls than all these men do." And then she told me that, and I—she almost like was apologetic not supporting me, and I said, "Well, you know, I understand why." It's the people who don't tell me directly, like people who say, "I'll call you next week." There was one artist who did that all the time, and it just was so insulting. I don't know, there was just . . .
- KMD:** Dishonest.
- BC:** Yeah. I'd rather—I'd appreciate them just coming out and saying, "I don't know want to—I can't support you because the funding might not come my way if I do something too political, like work on your mural."
- KMD:** Did anybody have the guts to say those words?
- BC:** There was a few that actually did, and I appreciated it. I think that's really great when you can be honest with somebody, to actually . . . There was a lot of people . . . I don't know, I was just surprised. I actually have to admit that there were more people supporting me than there were people who were not, so.
- KMD:** I see this as a key opportunity [*laughter*] but it was obviously really tough on you. You've spoken other places about how you got a reputation as being really tough, loud—I don't know what the other words

were, but *tough* was one of the words that were used. What other things were coming your way? What other opportunities were coming your way? Before you go off to the MFA.

BC: Oh, well, actually, the *LA Times* did that series on Latinos, and—the one that won the Pulitzer Prize—and there was a photograph that was taken of me, and I look really angry, and the caption read, “The artist is known for her stormy temper and iron will.” That photograph and that caption would never have been—actually, the caption would never have been attributed to a male, there’s no way. I can’t even see that. There are so many artists that have tempers that are really horrible, and I’ve never heard anyone refer in print about their tempers. I won’t mention names, but there’s a few of them that have horrible tempers, and . . . But anyway, that part was hard to live down.

And also, you know, I was not invited to art exhibits because of that, and then I was invited to—other opportunities came my way by all the press that this generated. This was on the front cover of *USA Today*, and it went all the way—people in Boston, Massachusetts, read about me, so they invited me to go to the Soviet Union. So that was a very good thing. I went twice.

KMD: So yeah, I would see that as the opportunity that came out of this, the going to the Soviet Union, and working again with young people, right?

BC: Yeah. All young people. That was really great, it was a really great opportunity. But it also was a bad thing, too. I mean, that’s how I got my cancer. I drank the water the year after their Chernobyl accident. But it’s interesting that all the kids who went on the trip. That was the first trip I went on in 1985, it was eleven kids and eleven adults, and then the second time I went a year and a half later, there was twenty-two kids and a lot of adults on that trip, too, I don’t know how many adults, but there were a lot more kids. The second time I went, I took Dolores Huerta’s son [Ricky] with me, so he was thirteen years old at the time. So that was a really great experience.

KMD: I actually never put it together that it was right after Chernobyl, and you’re doing a public project, from what I understand, right? The first one’s a mural, and the second one’s on a trolley, or something like that?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: I mean, you’ve been doing what I would call public works in California. Did you see yourself as kind of staying in that realm, or were you also thinking—

BC: Yeah, it was public art, definitely. And it was also community work also, working with people in the community. The second time we went, I think, was a lot more exciting, because it was involving a lot of children, and from the Children’s Museum in Yerevan, Armenia. And what was really great is that all the kids and adults who worked on that trolley bus . . . I don’t think it’s ever been done before, it was one of those first time it’s ever been done there. So on the day we finished it, we went on throughout the whole city in the trolley bus, it was really great. But it was—again, it was a lot of people, a lot of effort went into getting—we had to go to the city council and show them our sketches and try to convince them to let us take the trolley bus off the lines to work on it. And we had a lot of women, Armenian women helping us, an Armenian councilwoman helped us a lot, I forgot her name. And there was an artist that helped us.

KMD: Was this all communicated in English?

BC: Well, we had a translator. Our guide was a translator also, so she helped us a lot, and she—it was amazing. But a lot of times the artists we worked directly with didn’t speak a word of English.

KMD: Right, I’d imagine.

BC: That was a little frustrating.

KMD: Yeah.

BC: But it was amazing how close you can get to somebody after three weeks of working with them. It was really sad to say goodbye to everybody. So there were a lot of really great artists that we met there. There was one guy, [Ashot Bayandoor], that was his name—he was a really great artist, and he was wanting to come to America, he—you know, and his work was very—it wasn’t very political, but it was really pop art, it was real non-traditional Armenian art. It was very, very modern art, and I could tell that he was really frustrated working with the real traditional kind of atmosphere there.

- KMD:** How would you describe the styles that you were using for the public art, for those two projects?
- BC:** Well, the trolley bus project was really sort of pop art. They were stamps all over, like they were all plastered all over the bus. So we had to scrape off all the enamel. It was a lot of work. And then physically take all the enamel off and then put the primer on there and then paint it and coat it with a protective coating. But I think the style was really diverse. All our kids, the American kids, were doing images, and the all the Russian artists and kids, and Armenian kids, were doing really nice, like almost abstract art. Ours were very figurative, and there's were very abstract. But it's just really amazing that it went well. It looked beautiful. It was amazing. And we were really conscious of showing like not all the Americans in one section. It was American, Armenian, American—
- KMD:** To mix it up.
- BC:** Yeah. And then the reason why Armenia and Yerevan were so important to us is that Boston and—what is it, Boston, Massachusetts—oh, no, excuse me, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Yerevan are sister cities.
- KMD:** Right, right.
- BC:** I told you—I said that before, there's no translation for “sister” in Armenian. So on the bus, it says “sister cities” in English, and in Armenian, it says “brother cities.”
- KMD:** That's fascinating. No word for your translation for girls?
- BC:** Isn't that weird? I think that's weird. We couldn't believe it, we were very shocked. So it went up as “brother cities.”
- KMD:** You know, during this time period—I guess this is the '80s, right, before you go to graduate school—you're getting into group shows, and then you have a solo at the B-1 Gallery.
- BC:** Yes.
- KMD:** How did you do that?
- BC:** Well, it's funny, because when I approached Robert Berman and asked him—told him I was interested I having a solo exhibition, he was really reluctant. He said, “Well, don't you do murals and public art?” And I said, “Yeah, but I do also small drawings.” And he was real reluctant to be open to that, so a friend of mine, Robbie Conal, approached him and pitched it to him for me. And it's amazing, something clicked there and he agreed to the show, and it got so many good reviews that Berman later told me that I could have a one-person show anytime.
- KMD:** Did they sell?
- BC:** They all—a lot of them sold. It was based on a Day of the Dead concept. It was really—I was sort of trying to move away from real traditional Day of the Dead, and that's why I came up with this questionnaire that I asked ten individuals to respond to, and they were all based on questions about death, so it was kind of weird.
- KMD:** Can you share some of the questions that you were asking people to reflect on?
- BC:** What's your greatest fear about death? What would you want—what items do you want buried with you? How would you want to be remembered? But I thought the “what's your greatest fear about death” was a real funny one, because everybody had such funny comments. Rudy Acuña, I think, answered, he wanted to be remembered as someone who gave back to his community. So everybody's answers were pretty different. It was amazing at the exhibit itself, the questionnaires were framed right next to the actual finished works, and people actually took the time reading them. I mean, I saw so many people reading them, and I thought that was great.
- KMD:** That is pretty amazing.
- BC:** Yes.
- KMD:** Can you tell me more about that methodology? Like, why did you decide to use questionnaires to generate, or did they generate the images, or was it just another kind of inspiration?
- BC:** No, well, the questionnaires came about—like, the title of the show was called *Here Lies/Hear Lies*—because I think a lot of people don't want to be honest about those kinds of questions, either. And the fact that some people are reluctant to talk about death, or are afraid to talk about death, that was interesting

to me too. So I—you know, we were talking about every Day of the Dead, we honor those people who have passed away, and while they're alive, we never have the opportunity to tell them or appreciate them in person while they're alive. And a lot of times, Chicano artists, we were talking about also the fact that we get together a lot at these funerals, and we get together a lot when someone is sick, but we don't get together a lot for—on an informal basis. And so I thought it would be really good to start asking questions about death before you died, so that maybe it might trigger what they're doing in life. Like just to reaffirm one's commitment to whatever they're doing in life.

It was interesting, because I saw—I know a lot of Chicano artists, and myself included, are really inspired by traditional Day of the Dead imagery and altars. But then I thought, "Well, you know, our experiences are so drastically different from the art, the life and art in Mexico." It's very different. And so I wanted to bring it back to real personal kind of imagery.

KMD: It's an amazing way you came to think about death. I mean, you're right, most of us don't want to face it. And several of your other works have that kind of not wanting to face the reality of sexism, living in a patriarchal society. Did you get identified as that kind of artist, too? I mean, the way you said that—Robert Berman said, "Oh, aren't you a muralist?" Did people say, "Oh, she's the—"

BC: Yeah, those labels are sort of—

KMD: Using them against you, especially.

BC: Yeah. And they can inhibit you, too. So I thought, it's almost the same thing how mainstream art institutions view Chicano art. And I wanted to break away from that, and I think a lot of times we contribute to a lot of stereotypes by doing like the same old images all the time. I just got sick of it. In the same way, like—you know when something that just seems too easy, and so the experience is not really based on reality, it's based on—I don't know.

So that's one reason why—I don't know, when I did—at the same time I was doing the *Here Lies* show, there was two images that I did that were part of that show that were about sexism, actually. And they were, *She's Given A Bone* and *He's Given Meat*. I couldn't believe how many women really—men and women both—responded to those images. They were two little four by six inch drawings. It was really amazing. It was a real risky thing, because a lot of portraits and drawings and mural work relied heavily on photographs, and then when I change from using the photograph, I stop using the photograph, when I did these other smaller, more intimate drawings of the woman on all fours with the bone in front of her. It was just all freehand, and I got such a good response that it really made me try to experiment more.

I think a lot of times, the fear of doing something new sort of stalls—it sort of puts a damper in the creative process. So I don't know. And I remember that was told to me by a teacher at UCLA. Remember I told you that? He said that I—and try to be so precise that you're not really experimenting, you're not going beyond what you could do. So I kind of thought about him a lot, and it was an interesting scene.

KMD: You know, when I was putting your work together, just the stuff I have in the office, it's actually a good amount. But there's more out there, so we need to have another conversation about the actual work. I was struck—I don't know why it hadn't come to my attention—but you love to play with words. Here lies, here lies, she's given a bone, he's given meat, are two excellent examples.

BC: Well, it's funny, because I think because I have an interest in—well, you know, this whole thing about labels, because even in Catholic school, we label these people who are not baptized as "pagans," and that's—the whole idea of labeling somebody without really knowing them or appreciating their life history or whatever, those kinds of things. Like, you know, it's amazing, because dogs are usually—I mean, I have both figures as in dog position, and there was still this thing about meat, because men are still like treated with all this respect and preference over women, and it's just really always bothered me. So I think even in exhibits, too, it's amazing. I mean, a lot of times the exhibits in the early days were curated by men, and then—actually, there were several women too, but the men would tend to leave the women out, and the women didn't do that. The women included men. So I was real conscious early on, too, how the gallery curators would be sexist towards artists.

- KMD:** Are you talking about in exhibits at a particular location?
- BC:** No, just the local Chicano art exhibits, different here and there. They had like the same . . . You know, the early days was just the same old artists all the time. I mean, and that's why when they asked me to be in that show in San Diego with the six artists. I jumped at it, because I thought it was a real honor to be included with Carlos [Almaraz] and John [Valadez] and Frank [Romero], and whatever.
- KMD:** Did you . . . I was wondering if we could switch gears a bit, talk a little bit more about some of the groups that you were working with. You talked earlier about the Concilio de Arte Popular—no, actually, you were talking about the Centro de Arte Público, right?
- BC:** Mm-hmm.
- KMD:** And your work with Carlos and John Valadez, right?
- BC:** Mm-hmm.
- KMD:** You also worked with Self Help Graphics?
- BC:** Yeah.
- KMD:** And that was the *taller*, or was there other projects that you did?
- BC:** Well, at Self Help Graphics I did—in the early days, I did just mostly—I didn't really work there doing projects, ongoing projects. I was invited to be part of exhibitions. And I know that there were other projects going on, and later on I joined some of them, like there was a woman from Mexico City who was part of a real famous Mexican art group. I forget what they're called . . . Felipe Ehrenberg was a member, and I forget what it was called. But she did a class called "Artistic Mimeography," and Yreina Cervantez, Leo Limón, and myself, and a bunch of other people, we participated in that workshop. Her name was Armandina Lozano, she was married to Lozano, the guy who was a photographer. Anyway, but she—that was an early kind of an experimental printing process from Mexico, and that was to me really interesting, and then there were other workshops there.
- KMD:** Did any of the workshops that you did at Self Help kind of influence your own style and approach?
- BC:** No, not really. I didn't really—I mean, I did the workshops, but I don't think it was really realistic for me to get into mimeograph machines, those old-fashioned ones at work. You know what I mean? It was just to see in the same way that I couldn't actually do sculpture, because you need a studio to do sculpture. You know what I mean? And at that time, very few artists had studios back then. Even though we had a group studio, it was just still really difficult.
- KMD:** Right. The group studio was through—
- BC:** Public Art Center.
- KMD:** Public Art Center. So the artists who had studios at Self Help were people who were doing anything in print genre.
- BC:** Yeah.
- KMD:** Did you also work at Mechicano or collaborate with that group at all?
- BC:** Mechicano, I did actually—they actually did two projects with me, or three projects with me, but it was mostly in the silk-screen area, they did silk screen. Some work that I did . . . And I just found one that they did recently. It has their Mechicano logo stamped on it. That was pretty cool. I forgot I even had that. But it was early, it was for *La Gente* newspaper, it was a fundraiser for *La Gente* newspaper. But they were really great about lending their space to me when I had to do a paper mural for a women's art—a women's conference, it was a women's conference at—I think it was at USC. I'm not sure. But it was an early, early conference. I remember it was a governor's conference or something, and so I did this . . . I spray-painted, like, a logo of several women's profiles. And so I have all of that, I just found it too. I had to go through all my stuff the other day. So that's on card stock, and it's actually spray painted with a spray can.
- KMD:** Wow. [laughter]
- BC:** And then there's another one that was painted on paper that I did at Mechicano too. And—
- KMD:** Who were some of the people that were at Mechicano when you were there?

- BC: A guy named Jose—I think his last name was Hernandez? He now works for Sybil Venegas. God, that’s so weird, he’s a contractor. He gave up art. He’s the only one I remember. I don’t remember the other guys, there were several other guys working there. But he’s the one I dealt with the most.
- KMD: The person you dealt with the most.
- BC: He was very nice. I mean, he was really supportive. He said, “Barbara, any time you need a space to work, you’re more than welcome.
- KMD: So they were functioning as—
- BC: An art collective.
- KMD: An art collective, and they would do—similar to the Public Art Center, they would do graphic art projects to make money, but they were also doing more fine art stuff, too?
- BC: Yeah.
- KMD: And you were coming in to do graphic arts for them?
- BC: With them.
- KMD: With them.
- BC: But they were actually like a service—like an art services place, too. They would do silk screening—for me, they actually silk screened my poster that I designed—and then they silk-screened t-shirts. But all that stuff that they did, they did that sort of like they were doing the kinds of things that Self-Help were doing, but more . . . They didn’t get like city funding or anything like that, I don’t think they did.
- KMD: Right. What were some of the other groups that you were working with?
- BC: Well, there was—besides the Public Art Center, there was the *Chismearte* magazine, and the Latino Writers Workshop. They were kind of one and the same in a way, because we met in the same space, right there on Eighth and Spring Street, and right across the hallway was Carlos Almaraz and John Valadez’s studio. But we were designing the magazine. We were meeting about different articles that would appear in the magazine, and then talking about different statewide meetings that were taking place.
- KMD: So when you say designing the magazines, you’re doing layout, or you’re doing the illustrations?
- BC: Both. Layout, illustrations, and actually writing the articles. So I did all of that.
- KMD: And who were you working with there?
- BC: Guillermo Bejarano was there, and Linda Vallejo worked a little bit there for a while. But Helena Viramontes was really involved. I think—
- KMD: The author?
- BC: Yeah. And, let me see, who else? Oh, Luis Rodriguez, the writer. Jesús Mena. Oh, I forget. Some other ones. And it was really nice, I really liked being a part of that.
- KMD: Was that completely funded through—well, I guess I want to make clear—*Chismearte* was a publication that was sold, right?
- BC: Yes.
- KMD: And Latino Writers Workshop was—I guess it was a grant-winning organization had to get grants to get you guys going, or . . .
- BC: Yes. It was through state funding. It was . . . Guillermo Bejarano wrote all the grants and all that. He was the one who did—he handled all the money aspects of that organization, he did all the grant writing, and the business, the organizing. I think he . . . I don’t know who was paid, I was not paid staff. No, I was more like on the volunteer side.
- KMD: Why’d you join that group?
- BC: Because I really felt it was important. It seemed kind of a feeling of commitment to producing work from the community, for the community, and with the community, it was both. And it was that kind of feeling, like *La Gente* newspaper—I started off working with them. And then I worked with so many other publications, it was really crazy. *Corazón de Aztlán* magazine, *Americas 2001* [with] my ex-boyfriend, Robert Rodríguez. So it was like a lot of different publications all the time. I even had a job on a Spanish-language—what is it, it was an ad [magazine].

KMD: An ad agency?

BC: It was like—it was called *El Clasificado*, with Gerardo Velázquez. I told you I found out later that Gerardo had done all the music for Harry's videos.

KMD: Did these writing groups, or—I don't know if you want to focus on one . . . I don't know if we can go through all of them. I really wanted to, but you've been so many places, it's hard to—

BC: Yeah.

KMD: You know, I'm curious what kind of conflicts are coming up, what kind of challenges. Obviously funding is one, but if there was ideological challenges, if there was just getting space, getting the machines, getting the materials. How did you guys handle those things?

BC: Well, you know, I wasn't really part of that aspect. There were problems like—back then, there were a lot of, like, labels that everybody used against each other, like *sellout*, the word *sellout*, always used, and *proletariat*, and all these . . . *lambiscón*. There was all these different innuendo kind of comments that were about really challenging your commitment to the community, and that was really frustrating, because it's funny that some of the people who were the worst name-callers gave it all up and they're making money now. That's just funny to me.

KMD: Were these words used against you? Were you ever called a sellout?

BC: No, not me, thank God, nope. Nobody called me that at all. But we would go to these statewide meetings, and it's like all the artists from the Bay Area, artists from San Diego, all of them would come in one space, and there were vicious fights about attacks on each other sometimes. "You're not doing enough," and . . . I remember one time, two of the artists found out the other one was a lesbian. Oh, my God, it was a big old attack on her. And it's just in front of a lot of people.

I remember I sat down one time at one meeting with José Montoya and the RCAF people, and we were just laughing, because it was—it was like a big show, it was between . . . Somebody called someone out for being a lesbian, and it was just really embarrassing that one Chicana artist called the other Chicana artist a lesbian, and it was like really scandalous at the time, like really terrible. We just all freaked out, "Oh, my God." I remember—and then another—one of the other statewide meetings, there was a guy from Mexico City, real activist guy brought out a gun and scared the hell out of everybody. He was a real famous activist, I won't mention his name.

KMD: So when you said statewide meetings, were you talking about the Latino Writers Workshop, or—?

BC: The Latino Writers Workshop would participate in the statewide meetings of the Concilio de Arte Popular. But Concilio was—I guess it was a group of several organizations, and that was part of it.

KMD: Umbrella organization.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: And they're bringing people together out in California. And the goals of those meetings?

BC: Were just to be, you know, keep everybody abreast of what was going on in different neighborhoods and reaffirming our commitment to showcasing Chicano talent, Chicano artist talent, stuff like that.

KMD: Well, we didn't have the Internet then, so we had to get together, right?

BC: Yeah, and share all these ideas and announcements of what people were doing, and gathering support for different causes. It was a lot of groups involved. There was, like, *teatro* groups, and it wasn't just writers and artists, there was, like, musicians in part of it.

KMD: Right.

BC: That was really exciting, too.

KMD: Does this coincide with when you were doing the LA mural?

BC: No, this is before. Very much before. And then, you know, all the way up—I think they were really involved all the way—I wasn't involved at a certain point, I was just totally immersed in this project.

KMD: The LA mural project.

BC: Yeah. I didn't participate. In fact, I even dropped out of the—informally, I dropped out of the Latino Writers Workshop. I was friends with [Helena] Viramontes, the writer. I remember we did a talk at—when

Manazar Gamboa became the first Latino to be the head of the Beyond Baroque foundation in Venice, he did a thing there, and I participated in that. But that was the last time we got together as a group was there at the Beyond Baroque. I forgot what year that was, actually. But I remember being really happy for Manazar, because he was the first Latino director.

KMD: What about your work with Mechicano? Were you—you know, when they dissolve, does that leave a hole for you to do some of that work?

BC: No, actually, when they dissolved, I remember thinking it was kind of sad. But at Self Help, there was always Self-Help Graphics that was doing the same things. So I went there. Everybody went there.

KMD: I'm just trying to get a sense from the work that you've done—a lot of public work—I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about some of those. We're heading right into the moment where you go into grad school. So what about *Pesticides!* in Times Square?

BC: Oh, the *Pesticides!*? Oh, that was interesting. Well, the CARA show was right before the pesticides thing.

KMD: The CARA show is 1990, I'm pretty sure. It opens in UCLA.

BC: Oh, yeah. Right before the CARA show, I was nominated to be part of the Spectacolor light board artists. They select twelve artists for each year, and each artist got a month for their work to be shown at Times Square. And so when I got that, I decided to work on *Pesticides!*, because I thought it would be a good project to have animated on the light board. And again, I had this problem of the work being censored. The president of Spectacolor censored two scenes in my sequence of animation sequences because he thought they were too harsh. I have two kids that are eating grapes, and they get sick, and they both put their hands over their mouth as though they're getting ill, and he said that he didn't want to see two kids getting sick. So I had to take that image out, and I instead substituted that image for the kids. Instead of eating the grapes, they throw the grapes in the trash can. And it goes up to the viewer and you could see the grapes, and they all turn into skulls. And so that was my . . . He didn't have any problem with that, he didn't have a problem with the farm worker picking grapes and then falling flat on his back as a result of the pesticides. He didn't have a problem with that.

KMD: So I mean, you're commissioned to do this work, right? Is it a good commission?

BC: No. I didn't get a penny for that.

KMD: Oh, you don't get a penny for that.

BC: No. It's an odd—it's sort of like an artist having an art exhibit. You don't get paid to do it, but it's a really—I thought it was a really wonderful project. I really liked it, because I know that one of the artists—what's her name—Leon Golub—the widow of Leon Golub, I forgot her name [Nancy Spero]. Oh, she's a really great artist. She's a real strong feminist. Well, she—her work was censored, and she refused to change it or alter it or anything, so she was left out. And I remember feeling really bad that she was left out, because I thought I really liked her work a lot. Her work is a lot on women and goddesses, and she does this whole thing about—it's really—and I thought it was really a shame. I forgot exactly why they censored her work, too, but she was a real political artist. Leon Golub was a really, really strong political artist, and his work was really great, and her work was, too. And so when my work was censored, just that one scene, I thought, I could say I'm not going to do it, like what's-her-name did, but I thought it was such an important venue. I thought, how could anyone turn that down? You can't turn that down. And so I turned in the substitution image, and they accepted it.

KMD: It actually sounds much stronger, it's much more powerful composition.

BC: I know.

KMD: Yeah.

BC: Well, the original submission was totally censored. My original submission was *Undiscover 500 Years*, and it was about Columbus. And that's going to be shown at my exhibit. The actual original sequence is, it's a Native American looking at a ship arriving, and he waves to the ship, and they blow a bullet through his hand, and then the his hand goes across his eye, and he has a teardrop in his eye. And then they get off the ship and they give him money for the land, and he—

KMD: That money falls through.

BC: The money goes through, yeah. And then he catches . . . It was such a—it was really strong. And they said—the letter I got back was that they publicized Columbus Day, that Spectacolor publicizes it, and they couldn't endorse something that was anti-Columbus.

KMD: Tell me a little about technique, because this is really over my head. I can understand brush, I can understand paint, I can understand—

BC: Animation is difficult, yeah.

KMD: Yeah.

BC: This is really early computer animation. It was really archaic, almost, because they were pixels—they were actually light bulbs, they weren't even pixels, they were light bulbs. And it's just a series of . . . When I saw—when I met with the animator, she takes my sketches—I did like four storyboards—

KMD: Okay, so you do the storyboard—

BC: I do the storyboard in ink, black ink. And then she takes them and she scans them, and she puts them—she sees them only in terms of light and dark. And it was just kind of really rough, but it was so—

KMD: And then you work with her to refine that?

BC: Yeah. And then she—we go over—she was really good about keeping to my original storyboard. There's a couple things that were altered a little bit, but they were okay. And it starts off with a crop-duster coming down and spraying pesticides, and then a farm worker is picking grapes, and he falls down as a result of the pesticides.

KMD: So your line drawings—I'm sorry, your storyboard is line drawing, very simplistic, not a lot of detail.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Cartoonish.

BC: Because you couldn't do a lot of detail anyway. It had to be very . . . In fact, a lot of the other artists, the eleven other artists for that year, '89, were—they did a lot of text in their images, a lot of text. And I only used text twice: the word *pesticides* was in there. Because when the crop-duster comes down, the pesticides actually form the letters of *pesticides*, so—

KMD: Right.

BC: Well, you saw that—did you see it?

KMD: I've seen part of it. I haven't seen the whole thing.

BC: Oh, okay.

KMD: And they're still, they're still images. I was going to ask you, do you have documentation of it?

BC: Yeah. That'll be shown at the exhibit.

KMD: Oh, great.

BC: So I didn't [*inaudible*].

KMD: You obviously were doing documentation of your work prior to this point, because you end up with fifteen boxes that you send over to Stanford. When are you starting to think about, if I can go out of order here.

BC: Okay.

KMD: When are you starting to think about documentation? When does that happen?

BC: Well, actually, my association with Harry Gamboa. But when we became friends, he's the first person to tell me that documentation was extremely important, that I should photograph and audiotape and videotape as much as possible, all the work that I do. And you know, he's really—he was really a good friend, because he would question almost everything I was doing. He thought a lot of the work that I did, I tell you—that was the work that I did for the farm workers, the work I did for other women's groups—it was sort of a way of avoiding doing more personal work. And that's—I disagreed with him. I think part of it is true, in terms of like how much time I spent working with other people, because that was a lot of time. And I remember Yreina Cervantez was another person who really encouraged me to do more personal imagery.

But at the same time, I don't think there were a lot of artists documenting their work at that time. We weren't really into documentation. A lot of the early, like, community-based banners I did, I have no

documentation on them. I didn't take photographs of them, and I really regret it. Some of the photographs I do have are taken with a little tiny camera. They were out of focus and all that.

KMD: So one of the things he's encouraging you is of the end product, right? Are you also documenting process?

BC: No. The process is zilch.

KMD: Except for *LA History*.

BC: Yeah, that's very well documented.

KMD: Because of all the conversations you're having, the court case, the—

BC: Yeah. Everything. Even phone—people who called me. I have all the telephone slips, when people called at the—I have all of them. It's a big stack. And then the actual original line drawings. I made several copies of those, and you could see the changes in them. Every time I change anything, I kept the one that—I didn't destroy the change, or the previous drawing. I kept every stage, all the stages of the drawing. Because a lot of times that happened. I remember a lot of artists doing that, throwing away the image, but I remember I really wanted to document this really well. And, in fact, I even documented all the politicians who wrote me letters, and what's his name, certain Senate bills pertain to copyright ownership, I have all that stuff. A lot of phone calls.

KMD: And then the other projects that you're doing that are public, or just your own series of things, that documentation is mostly the end product—you know, a photograph or a slide?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Did you ever start scanning things, does it become digital?

BC: Yeah. A lot of my stuff is—yeah, I started scanning things. But I also started keeping—I used to throw away all the sketches, the sketches for paintings, I used to throw away those. I keep all of them now.

KMD: Tell me about what year you started keeping them.

BC: Oh, not that long ago, actually.

KMD: Oh, it's after the MFA?

BC: Yeah, I started keeping them after. Well, actually, right before the MFA, I started keeping some of the sketches.

KMD: So you mentioned that Harry was the one that kind of gave you this insight. Can you help me understand how you—what intention you start to have for this archival material, in terms of, like, this is my story, or for my child, or—what's the why?

BC: You know, believe it or not, it was like more—I was still of the kind of perspective that I was just one of many who were doing stuff about our community, and this is for our community, so—that kind of thing. I really believe that. Harry used to get pissed off at me, because he would tell me that, you know, you need to start thinking about yourself. And there was a lot of artists out there who I think benefited from that whole thing of thinking about themselves, but I didn't. I didn't think that way.

I mean, all the work—at Stanford, the archivist, he was so amazed that I kept everything. I kept the flyers announcing different political and social and cultural events. He said, "This is great. Why did you keep this?" And I go—and he said, "No one keeps this." And I said, "I just thought it was important." I mean, I have Dolores Huerta on there, Harry on there, I got, you know, even Carmen Lomas Garza, I think, when she did a talk about . . . Anybody that was related to our community, I kept this stuff. I just thought it was important. And all my—all the letters that all the artists wrote to me, like Tony Burciaga [and Edward James Olmos]. People—all these little notes that people would write. I thought they were just wonderful letters, and I couldn't see throwing them away. They were done by people who cared about the direction we were going in, that kind of thing.

But as far as the sketches, I think it's really good to keep the sketches to show, as a teaching kind of technique. When I was teaching at Fullerton, I taught a figure drawing class there, and I remember when . . . I don't know how I kept everything. But from UCLA I kept Jan Stussy's notes on how to teach a [class]—I mean, not how to teach, but all the stuff he gave us when he taught us life figure drawing. And I'm so glad I kept it, because it really helped me develop my own teaching method at Fullerton. It was really

amazing, because all the students said, “Oh, this is really difficult,” and I said, “This is nothing compared to what he was asking us.” I mean, I was like, I toned it down a lot.

KMD: Yeah. Let’s take a pause and have lunch.

BC: All right. Sounds good.

KMD: You ready?

[*break in audio*]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos again with Barbara Carrasco. We’ve returned from lunch. It’s still the twenty-first of September, [2007]. And we were just going to finish up a few comments about the different groups that Barbara’s worked with. I’m interested in your work with Self Help Graphics because you’ve actually done two ateliers—two workshops there.

BC: Well, actually, I did two—I actually did more than two workshops. I’ve done a total of about six of them. So

...

KMD: Okay, go ahead. Let’s go through these.

BC: The other workshops were not part of the atelier [program], they were separate projects. Actually, I did another mural project at Self Help too, with Christina Miguel-Mullen. That was not too long ago, that was about four or five years ago or something. But in the early days of Self Help, after the workshops by some guest teachers or professors, they had this series of ateliers. And [there were] a lot of community meetings there, and there were all these discussions about who retains copyright, and several artists were concerned about Self Help Graphics. The wording in the contract was that Self-Help Graphics retains a copyright on the images, and so a lot of artists got upset about that, and wanted it changed. And I remember the meeting when Tomás Benitez was there and said, “Okay, we’ll change it to the artist retains the copyright.” At first it talks about the oath of both Self Help and the artist to jointly own the copyright, and then that was a problem with some artists, so they changed it. He seemed really flexible. He didn’t have a problem with that.

KMD: Do you remember about what time that was?

BC: That was doing the first women’s atelier.

KMD: Okay.

BC: Yeah, because there were talks informally before that, but that was the first time there was actually a meeting specifically about copyright. It’s when Yreina Cervantez was heading the first women’s atelier.

KMD: Right.

BC: And um—but you know, I think Self Help in the early days, they were really great about . . . It was sort of a really good place to—for artists before the Internet and all that, for artists to know about what specific art projects were available to artists, what kind of funding was there, what kind of grants were there. I remember Mari—what’s her name?—I forget her last name, she was Sister Karen’s assistant. [Mari Cárdenas—ed.] She was really great because she would send out little notices, “This grant is coming out, why don’t you apply for it?” Or, “This is coming up, it would be great to see you there.” She was really great about that in the early days. And then, I don’t know what happened. I think she left Self Help and went to another—I think with the Craft and Folk Art Museum, I think she went later. But everyone really appreciated her. She was really wonderful. I can’t believe I forgot her last name.

KMD: Did you ever take advantage of any of those opportunities she was sending along, to apply?

BC: Yeah. I went to a lot of artist talks, and even when art historians would speak, Shifra Goldman—

[*break in audio*]

KMD: This is Karen and Barbara again, and we’re on side B. And Barbara was talking about Mari, the assistant at Self Help Graphics that would send out announcements for different opportunities, and Barbara was saying that she attended artist talks and scholarly lectures, for example one by Shifra Goldman. Did you take advantage of the other kind of grant opportunities that were announced?

BC: Yeah, there were grant workshops that were held at Self Help to prepare the artists for the actual grant writing. Those were really great. And I think they were initiated by Self Help to the organization, because a lot of artists would get frustrated in filling out the forms that were so complex. And you know, it was just so much paperwork, and I think it really helped the artist to really have a walkthrough on how to fill them out properly. So that was really helpful.

KMD: Do you think that influenced any of the awards that you were able to get in your career?

BC: Well, it was kind of strange, because I remember in the early days, too, I would get a lot of awards for . . . At that time, after the mural thing, I had a few art exhibits. But I remember I got an award from *Caminos* art magazine, *Caminos* magazine, and it was—I was up against—the other nominees were Bill Meléndez, who makes about eight million dollars a year doing Charles Schultz’s MetLife commercials. But I actually walked up to him and told him I think he should have gotten the award, he was more deserving, because he had been around a long time. I felt really guilty about getting this award over somebody who was my senior. But anyway, so I remember I got up on the stage, and I said that if this award meant I’d been recognized for fighting censorship and standing up for my rights as an artist, then I’m glad to accept it, because there’s also something really strange about getting an award: once—a lot of times, I think—when they give you an award, they want you to focus on the award itself, and not what that award means.

And I think that’s really—I have problems with that. I’ve seen a lot of my artist friends—not just artist friends, people in the entertainment industry, other friends, other friends and people that I know—they get these awards, and it somehow changes the way they look at things and look at themselves and carry themselves, and I think that’s a pretty dangerous place to be. I’m real cautious about that. I remember when I made the comment onstage of . . . Katy Jurado was onstage with me, a very famous Mexican actress, and I remember feeling really honored to meet her, and . . . But I was looking at some of the expressions on the people’s faces in the audience, and they were like, “Why can’t you just say thank you? Why can’t you just—why do you have to give us this lecture?” It was just funny. I’m used to that look, that look of, “Why can’t you stop? Why does it have to be—” And I’ve heard other people refer to—not that I’m in the same league as Dolores Huerta, but I remember seeing Dolores being interviewed, and people saying, “When are you going to hang up your radical work? When are you going to hang it up and just enjoy your life?” And she said, “That is my life.” It’s just interesting to hear the way people—I don’t know, when they talk about your life’s work, I think they think that some people feel forced into doing certain types of work, as opposed to really believing what you’re doing, which is the way I would like to see my—I would like people to see me as someone who believed in what I was doing, not just going through the motions.

So that’s really—I don’t know, it’s really interesting. I don’t know exactly how to explain that. But one year when I was looking at all the awards on my wall, and Harry—I started going out with Harry—the first thing he said was, “Take all that shit off the wall.” [*laughter*] Because he thought it was going to definitely affect my ego and limit my ability to see things clearly, which I think is true. I’m glad I took everything off the wall. You know what I mean? Because it is—it’s a little kind of tricky—

KMD: Inflation of the ego?

BC: Yeah, inflation. I didn’t realize it until I talked to my sister, people who were close to me, and they were honest enough to say that they thought that I had a good, healthy ego—that’s how they said it. But you know, it’s also a defense mechanism, too. I had a lot of rejection, and then I felt like that was—some of the awards, I felt really proud of.

KMD: What ones?

BC: The ones that came from the community. Some of them aren’t listed on there, on my résumé. But I got an award from Cal State Northridge once, for all my community work. And I have a lot of them, those are just some of them. But I liked the ones from smaller organizations, and the ones that really acknowledge the fact that I was involved in the community and representing the community. They meant more to me.

KMD: What about the JP Getty trust fund for the visual arts fellowship?

- BC:** Well, that was the first time I ever received that, an enormous amount of money. I remember Elizabeth Shepard called me—she was one of the judges—she called me to inform me that I had received the award. I was really, really happy, but because—you know, it was really nice to get recognition from a prestigious organization like that, but also, I was just really happy, as an artist, to get the money.
- KMD:** How much was it?
- BC:** I think it was fifteen thousand dollars at the time, and that was a lot of money. I mean, for me, it was a lot of money. And I remember I was in debt, and art supplies . . . everything is so hard to make it as an artist, and so it really came in handy.
- KMD:** Is that was you used it for? I'm curious.
- BC:** For a lot of art supplies, but I also bought my car with it. So my down payment for my car, my little blue Honda.
- KMD:** And Venice High has honored you.
- BC:** Oh, yeah, Venice High School, yeah. They gave me an award from the alumni association, which was really wonderful, because it's also a community-based organization of past alumni members. It includes some pretty active people. And I remember Bobby Smith came to that event. Bobby Smith was the director of Upward Bound, but he was also a very famous football player when he was young, so I felt really happy that Bobby Smith came, because he also was another really great role model for all of us when he was the Upward Bound director. He was just really great. Nice, very nice person, very supportive.
- KMD:** So what other grants helped you, or awards allowed you to do your work?
- BC:** Well, I think I also got—actually, the money—I don't know, the money grants were good, but I think as far as getting my work, I think the UC Regents one was a pretty impressive one, because people took me a little bit more seriously. When I got that I was nominated by Tiffany López for that one, and I just really have a lot of respect for Tiffany, and to be nominated by her was wonderful, a great honor, actually. So I don't know, I think it did, it impressed some of my friends and colleagues. And it's actually probably good. It opened a little bit more doors for me to seek employment in higher institutions.
- KMD:** I wonder if you had anything else you wanted to say about working at Self Help or working with these different workshops. I understand what you were saying, that some of them were special. Those were not invited, were they, though?
- BC:** Yeah, they were.
- KMD:** They're all invited. The atelier that Yreina did and that you led, you were trying to create the right atmosphere, the right group of people, right? Am I correct?
- BC:** Yeah. Well, before Yreina did her atelier, I was part of several of them. In the early years, there was—I remember Richard Duardo was part of one of them, and Alonzo Davis. A lot of really great artists. And I think that was what's really great about the ateliers, they brought artists from different backgrounds to work together and talk about their work. That was wonderful, because you're not only producing a print, but you're also talking about the work, about the process, the different options you have in creating a serigraph. There's different methods and techniques that you could use, and we went through some really great professional printers. Steven Grace was one of them. I thought he was really great. And of course, José Alpuche, he's also a very talented printer. But just to work with other [artists], to look at the way artists are going through their very steps in creating a piece was actually a really educational part that I really enjoyed.
- KMD:** Did it influence anything that you ended up producing?
- BC:** No, I think more of an approach, because I saw certain artists exhibit signs of, you know, real professionalism by keeping the work clean and neat and presentable, and presenting the work in a timely manner. Those kinds of things impacted me more than the actual work itself. Although the work itself, the artwork I really enjoyed looking at, but I just liked the way the artists worked along with the printer. I think every artist does their work in a different kind of time and method and all that, but it was really wonderful to see how each artist does that, how—you know, because we all have our [ways]. Like we go through these

different stages of creativity, and to see the finished project, all the process and then the finished project—sometimes it's so drastically different from the very first sketches. Which that in itself is just a really exciting thing to see.

KMD: Is it also somewhat relief? Like, "Oh, they have that process, and I have this process, and there's another process, and they're all okay"?

BC: Yeah. It opened my eyes to all the different options that we have in the creative processes. It's not—it doesn't have to just be this one way of looking at things, this one approach.

KMD: One of the projects of Self Help is to get artists to sustain themselves economically, right? Isn't that what's meant by "Self Help"?

BC: Oh, that's true.

KMD: It's not just helping yourself to artistic development. It's helping your economic—

BC: Oh, yeah. Oh, the division of the prints themselves. Yeah, the artist gets half the edition. And there's a stipulation in the Self Help, their grant-writing, that it has to sell—the print has to sell for a certain amount of money, regardless of who it's sold to. So at their annual print show, for example, they have this show, they have to sell all the prints at the same price. But when the artist gets that other half the edition, the artist is able to sell the print for double that amount, triple the amount, whatever. And that's a really great thing about the atelier, is that the artist can make a profit from the sale of their half of the edition.

KMD: Did you ever make a profit?

BC: Oh, yeah, it helped a great deal.

KMD: Really? Which ones?

BC: I think it helped all the artists.

KMD: Really?

BC: Every print I did, of the *Self-Portrait* one that was in '84, that one sold out like right away. It was amazing. It was a seventeen-color silk-screen print, and I did that with Steven Grace, and he was the printer. And I remember I really enjoyed working with him on it, because he looked at it like it was a real challenging kind of a project. I mean, he said initially, his first reaction to seventeen colors was, "Well, that's a lot of work, Barbara." I go, "Well," and he goes . . . But he was really wonderful, because he was into getting a process done in a really clean, precise way.

KMD: Seventeen colors, this one.

BC: Yeah. It includes a split font—two split fonts are in there, one on the flame that I'm holding, and then also on the t-shirt design.

KMD: Right.

BC: And that's not easy to do. It's extremely difficult.

KMD: And going in, you know that, right?

BC: Yeah. It's the Catholic schoolgirl in me that looked at it like, "Okay, I can do this." But no, it was really—and also on the brush, the white brush that comes in from—

KMD: The roller?

BC: The roller brush, that's also a pattern. There's two different whites on there. You can't see it on that heavy reproduction.

KMD: I have another reproduction.

BC: No, but the actual reproduction itself, it's a semi-gloss on top of a matte, and the reason why that is, is because you see the texture on one level, but the texture's also revealing. It's a "CRA-LA" on there without the texture. So it's something you have to see the actual print itself before you—it doesn't reproduce well in books or magazines or anything. So anyway . . . but it was a lot of work.

KMD: So all of the ones you did, you were able to sell?

BC: Yeah, every single one of them. Except for some of the lesser known . . . When I started doing the—after the Dolores print, that was the most popular print I did. It sold out on the day of at the annual print show, it sold out immediately, because the prints were going for one hundred dollars. But my half of the edition,

Dolores autographed my half of the edition, and those are all completely sold out. And then later on, years later, I did a Giclée print with the Patricia Correia Gallery, and I only have three autographed Dolores prints left. They're for five hundred dollars, too.

KMD: Giclée? You're kidding.

BC: Yeah. So if you know anybody. . . Anyway, so those three—those are—they're not as special as—they're not as like valued as serigraphs, for some reason. But since it has Dolores's signature on it, they're worth—

KMD: Did she sign the Giclée?

BC: Yeah, she signed those. Those are the three I have left.

KMD: What were you selling the prints for? I mean, were you able to get . . . Is it, like, start-stop at two hundred and fifty dollars is the first sale, and then—

BC: No, I started off at five hundred dollars, all my editions, because the first signature was on them.

KMD: Oh, okay. On those.

BC: And I gave Dolores Huerta on the Giclée prints—when we did the second run at Self Help—at Patricia Correia, Dolores received the other half. And that was so she can sell those for as much as she wants to, to any of the potential sponsors for different fundraisers. I think all the artists appreciated that they could generate funds from the sale of their own prints.

KMD: And this kind of marketing your work, you're doing that by yourself?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: You've never had a dealer?

BC: No. Robert Berman did represent me early on, and I did sell a few things from him. But I don't know, for some reason, I don't know what happened, I just started doing more work, in the home and in the community, and . . . It was this whole thing, I remember after my solo show at Robert Berman, I remember some people, as well as a critic, said that I was selling out by showing in a prominent west side gallery. It was in the Santa Monica *Breeze* newspaper. Man, I forgot the critic's name, but he said that I basically refused—up to that date, refused to be ghetto-ized, and that for some reason, I was selling out my prints, both by showing in a prominent west side gallery. I couldn't believe it.

KMD: Did you respond to that?

BC: Well, I didn't directly, but Harry wrote a letter on my behalf that said that—in effect, that his article was a borderline racist kind of commentary on Chicano artists thinking to go outside their neighborhoods to sell their work, that no one's going to attack an Anglo artist for selling in a west side gallery.

KMD: Was it a Latino or a Chicano reviewer?

BC: No, it was an Anglo. Colin Gardner, that was his name.

KMD: I'm just confused. On what grounds would they know—

BC: I don't know. He felt like I was selling out because I had never shown in a gallery before that, so all of a sudden, here I am, this political artist showing in a gallery. I guess it was seen as—

KMD: So the one in San Diego, that was a community gallery?

BC: Yeah, it was a community [gallery].

KMD: Oh, it was. The name, I wasn't sure. What is it? Slope, or something?

BC: Sol Art Gallery.

KMD: Sol Art. Oh, okay. I'm reading it wrong here.

BC: It's *S-O-L-A-R-T*.

KMD: Yeah, you're right. I'm reading it like a name. Now that's in '88 that you have that show, so that would be kind of late, wouldn't you think, to be making those kinds of claims?

BC: For him?

KMD: Yeah. I mean, you talked before that those labels were around. Had that kind of labeling stopped by then, or really was it still being discussed?

BC: Well, apparently, when he wrote that review, I think he was upset, too, because I was commenting on different archetypes in our community, like the lawyer, the writer, the . . . And he said also in the article that

I didn't have a poor person in there, I didn't interview—which is true. But all my artist friends were poor, so it's kind of interesting that he didn't see that, it that way. But I guess he—it was really weird, because I didn't expect him to attack me on that level, it was just so . . .

KMD: I guess what I'm trying to ask about is, you had said before that people were using that language, and I assumed you were talking about like late '60s, '70s.

BC: Yeah, '70s.

KMD: And then here he's making—this comment is made in '88.

BC: Oh, yeah, that is weird. Is it listed in there? I wonder if it's listed in there.

KMD: As a—

BC: Oh, yeah, that's true. That is kind of late.

KMD: [*inaudible*] Bibliography. That's why I was trying to get a sense . . . In '88, were other people that you were circulating with, you were talking with, were they using that language?

BC: No, no. People had already stopped using that language by that time. But there was this kind of like—there was a few people there who . . . I overheard a conversation with these two Chicanas, actually, but they didn't know who I was, they didn't know me personally. And I was—my back was to them, and I remember I heard them say, "Oh, she's—now she's showing in a big west side gallery." It was the same thing that Colin Gardner was writing, but it was just more hurtful to me, because they're people in my community. And I was surprised, because—I mean, it's just so—this assumption that we're supposed to stay in our own communities. I think that's really horrible.

KMD: Did you make a conscious effort after that to demonstrate your commitment?

BC: No. I thought they were wrong. I had—at that time, Carlos—Robert Berman was showing other Chicano artists, so I didn't feel like—

KMD: Yeah, he was showing, what, Gronk . . .

BC: Everybody.

KMD: Carlos Almaraz . . .

BC: John Valadez.

KMD: Right, John Valadez.

BC: I think even—I don't know about Patssi—no, I don't think Patssi was showing there at that time. But anyway, it was just kind of unusual to hear. I was surprised, actually, to hear—

KMD: Getting back to Robert Berman, was he deliberately doing work like Patricia Correia is now? Like, I am a Chicano gallery?

BC: I think he was really into the Chicano art scene early on. He was of the early—he was the first person to actually really take Chicano art seriously and promote it. I think he was consciously doing that. And he had befriended several of the male artists, Chicano male artists. I know that he was personal friends with a lot of them. As well as other artists, too, like, "Robbie Conal is a friend of yours" and stuff.

KMD: Right, right. I wonder, without a dealer, how do you—you talked about Self Help, but how else do you—

BC: Make ends meet?

KMD: Market your work.

BC: Well, actually, you know, a lot of the—because of my reputation as a community activist, artist, I was being asked to speak a lot at different campuses. So I actually spoke at Fresno State University, and I got a huge honorarium for that, I couldn't believe it.

KMD: What's huge.

BC: It was like—

KMD: More than one thousand dollars?

BC: Like fifteen hundred dollars. And I xeroxed it and framed it, because I was surprised. It was right when the lotto came out, the lottery, so that was lotto money, or lottery money, so I remember being real happy about that. But you know, that's one of the ways I was . . . And UCLA, I was always like speaking at UCLA in

different classrooms there. What's his name's classroom, I forgot his name. Jonathan Friedlander's class, and—

KMD: Jonathan Friedlander is in what department?

BC: I think he's in social—I forgot what—I forgot right now what he—

KMD: But it's not in art.

BC: No, it's not an art. It was amazing, because they—I spoke almost three years in a row in that class. But he was teaching a class—he was talking about history a lot, and—I forget what his class was, I forgot exactly. I could look it up.

KMD: I wonder if it's "World Arts and Culture," that's what I'm thinking.

BC: No, it wasn't.

KMD: No, okay.

BC: He wasn't in there. That wasn't even in existence back then, I don't think.

KMD: Oh, okay. So you're getting guest lectureships at institutions, universities.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: In California, only Southern California, or around?

BC: No, I was speaking everywhere. It was weird. San Diego, all these little community colleges. That was kind of—I really liked doing that too. Cal State Northridge.

KMD: You made good money, you're saying, on that.

BC: Oh, it was like five hundred dollars here, and three hundred dollars there. It depended on the school. And I wasn't one to turn away like a small honorarium, like a hundred dollars. I mean, to me, it wasn't a small amount back then, you know what I mean? So I—and then I did a lot of workshops, too, that I was getting paid for, like Day of the Dead workshops, and different centers and community centers.

KMD: You're doing Day of the Dead workshops, and yet you are trying to expand iconography of Day of the Dead. So what are you doing in the workshop?

BC: Well, even though my workshops were—they were based on the *Here Lies* images. I asked people to fill out those questionnaires, and these are just regular community people. I did that at the Santa Monica Museum [of Art], and people loved filling out those questionnaires. I mean, I'm talking about like little kids as well as kids, teenage kids, and adults. They were filling them out and enjoying filling them out. And then doing the drawings. They were doing drawings of themselves. All those images, I didn't do the drawings, they did them themselves. And then we made altars, and my altars were not real, real traditional altars, they were based on traditional altars, but they were more fun.

KMD: Were you keeping that material too, did you consider it—

BC: Yes, I documented all of that stuff. In fact, I mean, I was . . . I remember for Day of the Dead, I color xeroxed different frames, and then I had everybody bring pictures of people that died, or animals or pets that had passed away, and we just put them in back of the laminated color Xerox as frames, and that saved—it was real transportable, very portable altars that we were doing. And then I think for Self Help Graphics, the murals that we did, we did a mural project one year, and we did a Day of the Dead altar on a banner, on a canvas banner, and then we had plastic sleeves where people could just put the photos inside. They were really amazing, they were fun.

KMD: Clever, yeah.

BC: You know, they were flat, but they were painted to look three-dimensional.

KMD: Were you designing them in the style of what I think of as kind Oaxacan altar, the three levels, symmetrical . . .

BC: Yeah, four levels.

KMD: Four levels, use of fruit, and the flowers?

BC: The flowers, the marigolds. Yeah, it was all traditional items in there, on the actual altars. And I remember one year, a local newspaper did an article with my daughter, actually, was photographed in there, but they had the photograph of the altar. And then we brought . . . It was like a big thing at my daughter's school,

because the principal was impressed that she came out in the newspaper. It was a Culver City newspaper. Anyway, but—so I was invited to do it in the classroom, and we brought *pan dulce* there for the kids.

KMD: So even in the elementary school, you're getting these kind of guest lectureships, and that's making the ends meet, as you said?

BC: Yeah, well, not a lot, but a little bit. But that came a little bit later, I just thought about it. My daughter was—she was in kindergarten when we did the first altar. It was a Spanish immersion school.

KMD: Right.

BC: A lot of the teachers were Mexican or had known about Day of the Dead. It was very different from when I worked—in 1990, when I started working at Children's Hospital, Day of the Dead was strictly prohibited. I could not do anything. And I tried really hard to convince them that it wasn't a negative, that it wasn't a depressing type of project, but because kids face death, it was too much for them. Even though the kids wanted to do it, too.

KMD: Oh, the kids did want to do it? Wow.

BC: Yeah. But I was not allowed to do it there.

KMD: We're going to run out of time today, but I wanted to see if I could ask one more question about this kind of market, getting your work out there. If we don't have enough time, that's okay.

BC: Okay.

KMD: Taking on commissions, and some of your most important commission work.

BC: Well, I did a lot of—in the early days, I did a lot of portraits of people. I was doing portraits all the time. I did a portrait for an organization called *Nosotros*, with—it's an actors' kind of an organization. I've actually done a lot of work for them. I did their *Nosotros* annual banquet cover design. I did a lot of cover artwork for different publications, and I did a lot of—for Venice Family Clinic, I did a lot of artwork for their fundraisers, their invitations, their—stuff like that. I sure did a lot, I did a lot of stuff for a lot of community-based organizations. And there was—I think the portraits were the biggest source of money making for me, because I did portraits well. And I did—they would pay me like three hundred dollars, real small—it was a small amount of money. But at that time it seemed like a lot. Three hundred dollars to five hundred dollars to do a portrait, so.

KMD: And you're doing them in—

BC: For individuals, and for—

KMD: Ink? I mean, what's the medium?

BC: Oh, I was doing it in acrylic painting, and also ink drawings, ballpoint pen drawings. I did one in silverpoint, the entire portrait. So there's just a lot of different types of—it depends. I did miniature portraits in silverpoint, on clay-coated paper that Carlos Almaraz bought me. That paper was—that was also used for all the *Here Lies* drawings. That place that he took me to was a place in Eagle Rock, or—it was an art paper, a paper company, and he went in there, and he bought me this big tablet of clay-coated paper. I still have some of that left, after all these years.

KMD: When you do a commission, do you sit down to get to know the person, if you're doing a portrait?

BC: Well, that's a good question, because yeah, I think I have to. I mean, one thing I notice about portraits is that oftentimes an artist can capture the person's physical likeness exactly, but if they don't know the personality of the person—I think it has a lot to do with the eyes—that's when you lose it completely. I've seen portraits like that where it looks exactly like the person, but their soul is missing, or their essence.

KMD: So how do you do it? How do you—what do you, go to tea, go to coffee, just hang out?

BC: Yeah, just get together and talk with them first and get to know them. I think when I did Dolores Huerta's portrait—I think the reason why it came out so well is because I really love her as a person. And so—and I really wanted to convey to the viewer, not just Dolores, but to the viewer, that she was both a really strong person, but also a really beautiful person. I mean, she was a very giving person, and the combination of the actual black and white imagery of the drawing, you know, and the colors, I think, work really well to convey that.

She's just the most beautiful person. I have never met anyone like her in my life. And that's what I— I remember when we had the critique of my print as part of the women's atelier, I remember when I said all this that I'm saying to you about what went into doing it. I mean, everybody said they thought it was a beautiful portrait, so I felt like I succeeded in doing exactly what I wanted to do, show her in—with those two dual kind of attributes about her, that's she's also a very kind person. People don't know that, how incredibly giving she is. I mean, I've seen her where a million people are trying to get her autograph, and she'll stay until the very last person needs their autograph given. She'll stay to the . . . I've seen her at campuses, at different events, and she just never turns anyone away. I've never once seen her turn a person away. I don't know anyone like that. I've seen a lot of other celebrities who, you know, after three or four autographs, they're out of there.

KMD: Have you ever done a portrait where you didn't feel like you captured that kind of soul?

BC: Yeah. I did one work-for-hire once, and the person I was doing it for was really kind of an egotistical person, and I was just doing it for the money, it was just a work-for-hire. And there was something that didn't look like the person. It looked like the person physically, but there was something missing, just because I didn't really—I think that's what happens when something was just not there.

KMD: Can I ask a stupid question?

BC: What?

KMD: What's the difference between commission and work-for-hire?

BC: Oh, it's almost the same thing—it's actually the same thing. But I think like when I did the Self Help Graphics atelier, that was not a commission, really, it was my art that was being sponsored by Self Help, and when I chose to do it on Dolores, she's also a friend and a mentor, so it was something I really wanted to do.

KMD: But the ones you did for Nosotros. Those are kind of commissioned, where somebody sought you out—

BC: Yeah, and asked me to do them. Yeah. And paid me very little. *[laughter]* But anyway, yeah. It's different. I think when it's your own work, it's a whole different way of approaching the work, as opposed to work-for-hire.

KMD: Yeah. And those commissions, those kinds of commissions that you that were portraits that were more for hire, and you say you get to know the person. Do they also tell you what media to use, or is it—they've picked you because they want you to do it a certain way?

BC: Yeah, just—like I think with Nosotros, they wanted a portrait of Ricardo Montalbán, and they knew I did portraits well, and they said, "Can you do it in. . ." They didn't want a painting, so they wanted a smaller format. I think it was eleven by fourteen. But they wanted it—they were going to present it to him, so I did a ballpoint pen drawing. And not too many people were doing ballpoint pen. There were people in the prison system doing ballpoint pen. And I actually was not aware of that at the time when I started doing them in high school. I had no idea that other people were using them. I thought it was a real unique kind of technique and all that, but a lot of people were doing it.

KMD: I have one other question about this kind of commissioned work, the other end of it. Do you have a group of collectors?

BC: Yeah, I do. I have a good amount of people that collect my work. I feel—you know, some of them belong to the Chicano Art Collectors Anonymous. I think Armando Durón owns about six or seven pieces of mine; a lot of early pieces, he owns. I think he owns a couple of the most well-known pieces. The *Frida y Yo* piece was in the Frida show at Plaza de la Raza, when the actual—it was going to coincide with all of Frida's original paintings that were brought over here by the collector of Frida's work.

KMD: Right.

BC: I forgot her name. What was her name? I forgot her name.

KMD: I'm blanking on it too.

BC: Anyway, but I remember when I went to the opening, Armando had purchased that drawing and reframed it, and it was just a really beautiful frame. And there was a comment that I heard at that event, by Margo

Albert, and she just said something like, “That’s the most beautiful, professional piece in the show.” It was really nice to hear that. I think it was nice. But I didn’t know her, and I just was happy to stand there and ask somebody who she was, and they told me. But that show coincided with the opening of Frida’s personal work, at Boathouse, I think it was. So that pretty exciting to see all of Frida’s work in person.

KMD: Some of these collectors are coming to you through shows you’re getting, or are they—

BC: Yeah, they’re both coming to regular shows, and then some of them were in other organizations with me, like Anita Miranda was in the Southern California Women’s Caucus for Art. She was also buying other Chicano artworks, like John Valadez’s work and all that. So then she brought some of my work. Anyway, but then there was this . . . Other people recommended me to other collectors, like I think Chaz Bojórquez told somebody, Judy and Stuart Spence, about me, and then they started collecting my work, and then they donated their collection to the Laguna Art Museum, who now owns three or four of my pieces. Actually, they own a piece that was here at Loyola Marymount, it was shown here at the *Image and Identity* show.

KMD: Really?

BC: Yeah. They own the *Names Can Hurt* piece, the Laguna Art Museum. It was shown here at Loyola.

KMD: Wow. Right, I have the catalog.

BC: Yeah, it doesn’t show everything in there, just one piece.

KMD: No, it only has one of yours, it’s the *Milk the Pass*, another one of the examples of your wordplay.

BC: Oh, that’s—Cheryl Mendoza owns that one. She’s another collector. She owns that one as well as three other pieces.

KMD: So you do have kind of a group of people that—they’re not just collecting one, it’s two, three, four, five.

BC: Yeah. It’s really . . . The last couple years, I’ve been more conscious of documenting that kind of thing too, like when they buy it. That’s what’s really good about Patricia Correia. She actually—every time she sells a piece of artwork, she has the name of the person who bought it, and a contact number, and also—it’s really great, she’s really organized.

KMD: Well, are you seeing that there’s resale?

BC: Well, sometimes, like with the Stuart and Judy Spence piece, I don’t know if it’s considered a resale when they donate it. I don’t think so.

KMD: Probably not.

BC: So—but it was just good to know what happens to the work once it’s sold to somebody, and then someone else [owns it]. And then I had another collector, her mother passed away, or her father passed away, who bought my work. And I don’t know, it was a real—I don’t know, I still don’t know what happened to the piece. They were in Ohio, so they bought the piece way over there. It was real confusing. So I’m really conscious now of keeping in contact with the people who purchase my work, because that could be a problem when you want to have a retrospective or compile a book.

KMD: But aren’t you entitled, if there’s a resale?

BC: Yeah. I think it’s 5 percent or something. It’s a really low amount of money.

KMD: Two percent, 5 percent, something like that. Yeah, getting the money. Have you had any—I mean, you said you were with Robert Berman. I didn’t see if you were with any other gallery exhibitions where the dealer didn’t give you your fair share.

BC: No, no. After Robert Berman, the only other person that represents me now is Patricia Correia. And I know that she’s really good about documenting everything, so.

KMD: And the stuff you’ve been doing there is mostly the—

BC: Jewelry work.

KMD: The jewelry work.

BC: She just wants jewelry work and small, tiny pieces. And I think it’s because she’s got various artists in different kinds of media and different styles, and mine is unique. She refers to me as one of the “miniature artists.” I do miniatures. So I don’t mind at all, because one day, I want to do a big exhibit of just miniatures, and then I sell my other larger pieces to other collectors and people.

KMD: So those are selling as well, though, right?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: The Patricia Correia stuff? I understand it's selling really well.

BC: Yeah. And I bring it to her, too.

KMD: And you get—what kind of deal do you have with her?

BC: I think it's a fifty-fifty.

KMD: Fifty-fifty? Wow.

BC: And some artists have—I mean, some galleries take 60 percent, I don't know if you know that. But some take 60 percent. But then there's other galleries, like I think Reyes Rodriguez only takes 40 percent, and the artist gets 60 percent.

KMD: Yeah, that's what I heard. That's very nice.

BC: Yeah. And Kathy [Gallegos] does that, too.

KMD: Yeah, Kathy's very generous,

BC: She's good.

KMD: Yeah, at Avenue 50 Studio.

BC: And I think it's good, because she's an artist herself, too. So is Reyes.

KMD: I'm curious—I'm wondering if we're running out of time, so maybe we should pause it.

BC: What time is it right now?

KMD: I have twenty 'til.

BC: Twenty 'til two [o'clock]?

KMD: Let's stop for today.

OCTOBER 10, 2007

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos with Barbara Carrasco on October 10, [2007]. And we're here in Los Angeles in her home to talk about her work. And some of the earliest work is the image that was on *Essays on La Mujer*.

BC: Nineteen seventy-seven.

KMD: Nineteen seventy-seven. You did as a pen and ink?

BC: It was an etching.

KMD: An etching.

BC: So—and the original etching belongs to Maria Echaveste, so I gave it to her as a present.

KMD: And then you did the—

BC: *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*.

KMD: *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*.

BC: That's also '78, so a year later.

KMD: And this [referring to the artwork]—they have a similar feel.

BC: The hair.

KMD: The hair, but also the use of shadow, the content itself. I mean, it's a sad piece. I don't know . . . why don't you tell me about it?

BC: Well, actually, I was taking a lithography class at UCLA, and I decided to do a drawing on a zinc plate—or actually, this was an aluminum plate. And based on the way my brother's relationship with his then-wife, it just escalated into this argument where he told her he didn't want her to go to college, she was pregnant. He didn't want her to go to college. He thought her role was to be a mother in the home. And so I did this. She was knitting a baby bootie, and I asked her if I could borrow it, and I took it home, and I did the drawing in one night. I was pissed off. So then when I did this drawing, it was amazing, the art department—people in the art department thought it was a wee bit strong. And I didn't know until years later that they all viewed me as a radical, an extreme radical. Because Alan, the lab technician in the art department, told me that recently at [the] Ray [Bounds] art exhibit. "Oh, we thought you were such a radical!" Anyway, but the drawing itself is related to—it represents my sister-in-law's forced role as a mother, to stay home and take care and nurture that baby, and forget about any ambition she might have to pursue an education or better her life.

KMD: I think what's really striking about the piece is the composition with the baby bootie is so tender, it's so delicate.

BC: Oh, yeah, it's a real delicate drawing.

KMD: It's realistically rendered, but it has that kind preciousness, right, that when you see a baby bootie, you go, "Aww," you know, like you can almost see the pink or pastel blue color. And then the knitting needle, it's quite frightening. It's like an instrument of death.

BC: Well, you know, it's interesting, also at the time that this was done, *La Gente* newspaper—I mean, I was the first woman editor, so I published an article about women in Puerto Rico and other parts of the United States that were being sterilized without their consent. And so a lot of people thought it was about that, because a knitting needle actually does look like an instrument where—an abortion kind of instrument. And so a lot of people took it that way, and some people were really offended by the woman's breasts, exposed breasts.

And it was in a show at Self Help Graphics, and I remember a lot of people were really commenting about this very strongly. Either they really liked it or they couldn't stand it. And so some people were telling me, "Why are her breasts exposed?" and I said, "Well, this is—I mean, what's the big deal? We all have breasts." And I took the position that it would be more effective if she was nude, and to see her body, that she's pregnant. I wanted that to be really visually out there. And so people—you know, I think it was

really interesting to see all these people hung up about nudity. Other cultures don't have a problem, but ours does.

KMD: The paper that it's on?

BC: It's printed on Japanese rice paper, and the reason why I did that is because—it's quite faded right now, but it's pink, there was pink initially. And so I was doing that to add to the preciousness of the bootie, and then—you know what I mean? And that whole role of pink relating to women, and we're branded with that color, and the idea of motherhood being an obligation, and a full-time kind of situation.

KMD: The only thing she's allowed to do. What else do you have?

BC: *Essays on La Mujer* . . . I don't know how this was done exactly. I read some of the essays before I actually did the drawing. And then I did the drawing. I did that on a zinc plate and did it in the art department where the acid bit down through the wax that was on there. It was a difficult kind of process to do, but it was a pretty strong image, a lot of women really liked that image. And then I had some other older images that I never showed anybody.

KMD: Never showed anybody because . . .

BC: Well, because they're just little drawings that I don't—I don't exhibit these, because I went through a period of time where I was real either mad or really depressed. So these are angry women that I've done over the years, and they . . . I used to do them much larger, and I exhibited them at places like the Score Bar, with Gronk and Harry and all these other people. And people—and then they started questioning why I was so angry.

KMD: Well, her mouth is open, and her makeup is even almost like warrior paint, and her eyes squinted, and—

BC: And her eyebrows are really downwards, so she's definitely angry. But it was—I had this thing with hair, and it was this braid, because I used to wear a braid a lot, and I think the braid was sort of like camouflage. Harry started to get upset with me that I wore my brother's army jacket, and then I had this long braid, and I wore no makeup. He would suggest that I get rid of the braid, get rid of my army jacket, my anger. So. [laughter] All these processes.

KMD: And in this image, she's cut off the braid.

BC: She cut the braid off, yeah.

KMD: So what about—what is the year on these?

BC: Oh, these are early. These are like in the '80s, 1980s. Like maybe '80—'79, '80.

KMD: That fine hand is certainly . . . Other artists, what do they call it? Hand skills.

BC: Hand skills?

KMD: That's hand skills—that's incredible detail.

BC: Oh, thank you.

KMD: And what is this rendered in?

BC: It's ballpoint pen on paper. This is before I—oh, this is actually much earlier, because this is before I got into clay-coated paper. And—oh, this is a drawing I did—

KMD: The tablet that Carlos had given you?

BC: Yeah. So some of the—this is a really odd drawing, too. A lot of my drawings, when I was depressed, I would do these weird drawings of me being stuck in a milk bottle. And I think the reason why—you could barely see it, but *Milk the Pass* was based on this whole thing, too, the painting *Milk the Pass*. I wish I didn't do this; I was talking to someone on the phone—

KMD: And you cut it.

BC: And I cut it off. But anyway, these are all just early drawings, and you could see that I did a lot of angry women. And then later on, I started doing more—

KMD: That same composition, side of the face, mouth open, eyes . . .

BC: Yeah.

KMD: These are a scream.

- BC: These are just old, old stuff. So the—oh, here they are. That’s what I was looking for. And then later on, I started doing more upbeat kind of images—well, I don’t know if they were upbeat, but I took a class at Self Help Graphics, and it was done by these artists from Mexico City, the teacher, and it was an artistic mimeography, so we had to do a drawing, and then when I came up with this image, it was called *One-Way Ticket*, it was a self-portrait done in 1985, and had already started going out with Harry. So everything was—and I had gone to the Soviet Union, and so I did this drawing about travel and being exposed to the world, and—
- KMD: That’s what’s on her forehead? Like this medallion of the world?
- BC: Uh-huh.
- KMD: It’s her braid cut, the other side of the braid is like a paintbrush—is that a—
- BC: A nuclear bomb.
- KMD: A nuclear mushroom cloud, yeah.
- BC: Because I had gone to the Soviet Union, and everybody thought that the Soviet’s were going to nuke us. But it’s—I don’t know. And the number thirty . . . I guess I was thirty years old at the time.
- KMD: And here’s “Cut along the dotted line,” right above her mouth and below her nose?
- BC: Yeah, it’s sort of like a self-censorship thing, too, because—well, you know, tickets, they always have a perforation, but I thought that would be a perfect place to put it. Anyway, but this was exhibited at a lot of places. And then when I started doing graphics, a lot of different types of graphics, people would always comment about how strong the work was. And I remember Gloria Alvarez selected this for this publication that she was putting together about Day of the Dead. And she liked it so much she put it on the—sort of on the cover.
- KMD: So this is [*calacas*].
- BC: [*Machiteras*].
- KMD: *Machiteras*.
- BC: I don’t know exactly what that means.
- KMD: Artwork, *calaveras* collection. And it’s got quite a few people in it.
- BC: Yeah. Frank Romero, Yreina [Cervantez], Dolores Cruz, Eloy Torrez, Margaret Garcia. There’s a lot of people. So anyway, but that was done several years ago, and—all these early drawings, it’s kind of amazing, because it felt so different. I have like a couple different styles, you know?
- KMD: Yeah.
- BC: But I think that when I started doing the paintings with this real more hard-edged kind of paintings. That’s one Patssi Valdez. I was taking the graphic style to an extreme, I guess. You know, I wanted to get more and more . . . what’s the word? You know, I was just really super-minimalist, and I think . . . I don’t know, it was something I always liked. I liked seeing that in pop culture, that kind of graphic. And even within our own culture too, that everything is so cramped and so detailed, I wanted to get away from that, and just go super simple.
- KMD: And what about the coloration?
- BC: Well, the coloration—you know, it’s interesting, because I think this is a photograph—this is based on a photograph Harry took of Patssi. And this whole thing of, she told me that during a certain period of her life, that she was extremely depressed, so I kind of did the purple based on that.
- KMD: Purple hair.
- BC: Purple hair. And then this kind of mauve, dark mauve background, purple. And she—I think, I don’t know, I like it a lot, because she’s looking straight into the viewer, and looks very direct. So the painting itself is direct.
- KMD: You did that in 2003?
- BC: Yeah. I did Barbie Gamboa. At first, I wanted to do—these were side by side and show the contrast between skin color. Patssi’s more dark-complected, and my daughter’s a little *güera*, light-complected. So I have her holding a Barbie doll that looks similar to Patssi, sort of that whole—because there’s been

studies where it's actually the direct opposite, where young girls always go for the blonde-haired doll, for some reason. But Barbie, since she was a child, we always exposed her to Mexican dolls, and dolls of different—representing different nationalities. So she has been, you know, not subjected to all that racial stereotypical stuff, you know?

KMD: Did you do these one right after the other?

BC: Yeah. They were hung side by side.

KMD: Hung where?

BC: At Self Help Graphics during a women's show. Oh, then there's that. This is called *Trauma*. It was—it's a more recent one. I just did that this year. But it was—but I liked the clean—it's super minimalist. It's a little boy looking up at his balloon, and it's flying away, and it's just a super minimalist graphic. Some people get really irritated by that, I don't know why.

KMD: Well, it's extremely powerful with that—you know . . . He's in black and white—

BC: Oh, yeah, and then he's looking at a colorful balloon.

KMD: A colorful balloon that got away. He's got a tear. Is that 2004?

BC: No, it's 2007.

KMD: Two thousand and seven? Oh, it is really recent.

BC: Yes. Damn, that's right. Oh, then this is more—this is last year or something.

KMD: Yeah. This was at Avenue 50 Studio.

BC: Yeah. So that's a self-portrait.

KMD: With your cleavage. *[laughter]*

BC: With my cleavage, a little bit of cleavage showing. But it was also because it was a show of sensuality, remember? And I felt like since I became a mother, that part of me has been sort of not been the focus. Motherhood has been.

KMD: Now, the hair in this one has the detail, the—you know, there's shadow in your hair, in your portrait, whereas the others. . . I guess there's shadow in his, in the boy's. It's white.

BC: Yeah, there's none in Patssi's.

KMD: None in Patssi's.

BC: Patssi's sort of is like—her hair becomes her sort of cloak, too. It's like covering her shell.

KMD: Well, let's talk about the one from—

BC: *The Chicano Codices?*

KMD: The *Codices*.

BC: Well, you know, when they—the curators talked to us about what their intention was in doing this show, that Chicano artists were invited to do personal codices or books related to their personal experiences. I thought it would be really good to do sort of like a stele type of piece. There's five paintings that make up one piece, and so they're like twelve by twenty-four inches, and they are all different aspects of my growing up. There's a photograph of my mother and my sister and I together—

KMD: In the top register.

BC: Yeah, in the top panel. And it's taken in the housing projects where we grew up. And then in the second panel, it's also my mother and my two brothers on the other side. Our little sister wasn't born yet. And it's painted—those are—this is a mixed media piece, so those are laminated photographs on top of a painting of the housing project building itself. There were several buildings, we lived in building 55. And so the second one is—

KMD: Wait, you lost me. This is a photograph—

BC: Uh-huh. And it's laminated. It's sewn directly on top of the painting.

KMD: And the background, it looks like wallpaper.

BC: No, the background—it looks exactly like a building, a housing project building.

KMD: Oh, wait. What you're saying is that is the part you painted. The building, the landscape . . . I'm lost.

BC: See, the building back in there—that’s a building in back of there. Well, all I did was make the entire panel a building. These were individual doors.

KMD: Oh, I see.

BC: You could barely see them. And these are the windows on top.

KMD: Oh, I see.

BC: So we lived in barrack-type buildings, and—

KMD: And again, that’s that like pastel—

BC: Yeah.

KMD: From kind of that pop—

BC: Yeah. And then in the second one, too, there’s a little bit of mixed media also in all of them. The Clorox labeling is actually taken from a real Clorox bottle and then glued onto the actual painting. But then all the rest are actually painted.

KMD: Right. The Spam, the Tang, Carnation.

BC: Yeah. And that all related to all the types of food that we were eating.

KMD: And are those cockroaches on the bag?

BC: Yeah. The cockroaches, because in the projects they would fumigate so often, and they kept thinking that we—I don’t know, there was this underlying kind of feeling that we were somehow not as clean or something, so they always had to—I thought it was terrible that they fumigated so often. And then the middle panel is about religion, because in our home we had the—a lot of saints, and Martin de Porres, and crosses, and rosaries all over the place, and the photograph of John F. Kennedy in our home, and that was pretty typical of a lot of Chicano families. And then the one below that is connected to children and how I felt as a child growing up, because we had this feeling that we were going to get nuked by the Soviets. And so I have—I glued—I mean, I actually sewed onto the canvas Army men, my brother’s—

KMD: The little plastic—

BC: Little plastic Army men. And then that’s a real clothing pin, clothesline pin. And then right, the Barbie doll. That Barbie doll is actually glued onto the canvas, too. And the two little kids are watching a television set with Casper and Wilma from *The Flintstones* on there. And there’s also the Disney—

[*break in audio*]

KMD: [This is Karen Mary Davalos with] Barbara Carrasco, and today is October 10, 2007. [We are continuing with a new tape.] And she was telling me about the—one of the panels in her Codex piece, with Casper the Friendly Ghost and Wilma from *The Flintstones*. And dealing with a nuclear blast, just symbolic of the fear that we had that we were going to be nuked. What’s the tag on the Barbies?

BC: The tag is a really—it has “Property of Mar Vista Gardens toy loan” on there, because that’s how I got my first Barbie, is through the toy loan. We would borrow toys, and everybody had a card with their name on it, and every time you brought it back in good condition, you got a star next to your name. And after you bring back enough toys, five or six times—I forget how many times—then you get an actual brand-new Barbie doll that is yours to keep, which I thought was a really good program. I really liked toy loan a lot. We used to look forward to going all the time.

And anyway, and then on the bottom one is also just pictures of my family in the projects. It’s a nice—it’s a group photo of all of us kids, and then my sister and I. And then while I was living in the housing projects in high school, my last year in high school, I got an award from Tom Bradley for being an outstanding student in a housing project. [*laughter*] And then my mother came out in the newspaper, because she had saved the life of a little boy whose downstairs apartment was on fire and his mother had passed out. So my mother said, you know, “Jump from the second story,” and the little boy jumped and my mother caught him. So the *LA Times* did this article on my mother and referred to her as “the burly Latina woman.” And so she was a little upset with that.

KMD: Burly.

- BC: “Burly.” Pissed her off! *[laughter]*
- KMD: Is that what it says underneath? Or—because you have writing on this final—
- BC: I forgot what it says on there. My sister owns the painting. My sister Frances owns that painting. Oh, and then also there’s—my Girl Scout pin is there, also.
- KMD: What’s the card? Two of hearts?
- BC: Oh, just that was one of our favorite games, playing cards. We played cards all the time. And we played with the Army men, like we’d line up all the Army men. We didn’t have very many toys, so that was our form of entertainment.
- KMD: So this particular exhibition, these were all commissioned works?
- BC: Yeah. Well, they were—yeah, I wouldn’t say commissioned. We were all invited to be participants in this art exhibit. No one was paid to be in the exhibit, but—
- KMD: But you created pieces specifically for this show?
- BC: Yeah.
- KMD: And then it went on to travel?
- BC: Yeah, it traveled. So it was pretty good. I mean, I think the concept was really good, for people to do personal codices. I thought that was nice. So Marcos—
- KMD: *[Sanchez-Tranquilino.]*
- BC: Uh-huh.
- KMD: This was done in—I want to say ’94, because—or ’92, because of the year, but I’m not finding it. I’m not finding the year anywhere.
- BC: Oh. I think it was earlier . . . Wasn’t it earlier? Ninety-one or something. I don’t know.
- KMD: Yeah, I’m not seeing a year.
- BC: I should have put the date on it.
- KMD: Ninety-two is when it exhibited, so you’re right, you must have finished in ’91. Was that the only interaction you had with the Mexican Museum *[in San Francisco]*?
- BC: Well, no, I was in other shows there. I think all of us were. And they were, more in the Bay Area, more connected to the Galería de la Raza than to the Mexican Museum. I don’t know why, but I think that was the case for a lot of us.
- KMD: Let’s go back to this codex. About how big is it?
- BC: There’s five twelve- by twenty-four-inch panels. So it’s kind of—it’s like five feet in the—there’s about three inches in between *[each panel]*.
- KMD: In doing a mixed media piece, what’s your artistic process like? I mean, I’m assuming it’s going to be different from when you do a painting, that you might take from a photo or a sketch.
- BC: Well, for this particular piece, I did a sketch of it first, just with pen and ink, and then sent it to the Mexican Museum. I think they were—I think they asked us all to do some kind of sketch and submit it first, and then I proceeded to it as—I wanted it to have that look of a stele, so I did it so that it would be vertical. And—but also the panels are horizontal, so I would just do the painting first, and then sew the objects onto the canvas, or glue them onto the canvas.
- KMD: I want to talk some more about the technique you used for your painting. I’m seeing a change from the earlier work that you’re doing with the UFW. Here’s one of the banners, right? On the front of *Beyond Aztlán*, by Mario Barrera. I mean, it has some suggestion of those pop colors. The background to the corn is a kind of mauve. The corn itself is rendered in a very simple line.
- BC: The heart, too.
- KMD: The heart.
- BC: I did this whole section—the farm workers, and Dolores, and the television set. Yreina did the section right next to that.
- KMD: Yeah, so here, the farm workers, you can see that kind of simple—you were calling it minimalist approach. Flat—

BC: Yeah, very flat. Textureless. Well, I've always liked that, because—I don't know, when I grew up, I would see a lot of Mexican art, and a lot of stuff—religious art, and it seemed like it was just so crammed with so much material, and so many images, and I just wanted to go away from that. That was, I guess, my rebellious nature. *[laughter]* Because, you know, you see earlier, with the drawings, that I can get really detailed. I just have—I can really go there with filling it with complete detail.

I wish I had a slide of this one piece I did about—it was heaven and hell, and I . . . This guy bought it from England, and I don't have a slide of it, and it was—that was extremely detailed. And it was packed with so much information, and I did it sort of in the same way that the early artists who did work with the church, like doing a lot of church renderings, like Hieronymus Bosch, and all these . . . Because I grew up with all those kind of artists, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci and all those people, Botticelli. And what I wanted to do was to take from all that detail some of the sensitive lines and all that, and just make it super simple, just really distill it to a fine line. I just liked the idea.

KMD: As we look at the early work, I'm wondering, is there a difference? Does it come over time, or is it the subject matter that you approach? In other words, one question could be, was the approach to have it this flat, minimal, does that come at a certain year or set of years, when you move away from this fine detail? Or is it just the subject matter?

BC: Well, yeah, I think it's the public art, but very public stuff. Like when I started working with the UFW, I know for a fact that some people had a problem with—even the early *Chismerte* cover, remember that one women's issue, it was a woman—it was my sister putting her makeup on. But that pissed off a lot of Chicano artists. The older guys, like . . . I won't mention their names. But they let me know that they didn't think it was—it didn't look like Chicano art, because it didn't have any of the iconography, like the burning heart, all these little symbols. And that was a special women's issue, and I wanted—with that piece, I wanted—I intentionally made it real simple. It was—my goal was to just talk about women, and women putting on makeup, and how that's sort of like a—it could be looked at as being attractive for men, but also women covering up their own emotions and concealing themselves.

And so when I did that, I remember, everybody was upset about it. It was weird. Not women. All the men were. It wasn't women that were upset with it, except for a few older women, just because it was different. It didn't go along the lines of the other work that was being produced at the time.

KMD: But doesn't it also make sense, to use that kind of approach, this very graphic style, for a newspaper?

BC: Yeah, but some people just—they didn't like it at all. It was weird. I remember—but you know, some of the artists who are really into graphics, like—they liked the idea a lot. Like I know Guillermo Bejarano, when he put it on the cover, he thought it looked really good. He said, "This is a really good graphic, and I think it's going to be really effective, and people will pick it up." I think John Valadez had done a women's issue cover with two women holding hands, and it was in crosshatching, ink and crosshatching, and that was graphic too.

KMD: Have your sources for inspiration changed over time?

BC: Yeah, well—yeah, I think so. I think I'm looking more at like people like Magritte, because I think for this guy to do so many images of women, they were pretty strong images. I don't know . . . there's one piece he did where a woman is trying to pull off an image of a man that's sort of like on her skin. Did you ever see that painting he did?

KMD: Mm-hmm.

BC: Oh, I just . . . I saw it in person at—I think at LACMA—and it was just so good. I really liked his work, and he has that graphic sense, but he also used a lot of—he was into blending, too, so he mixed both flat and shading and contour. He mixed a lot of different types of techniques, and I think he was really effective in doing that. And that's something I'm looking at, is maybe where I could continue doing this graphic thing, but also introduce other techniques and styles in there.

KMD: What about the comparison to Andy Warhol?

BC: Oh, some people have said that about my—it's nothing. If you look at Andy Warhol, he used photographs, those are photographs he used. I'm not using photographing. I'm using—I'm basing them on photos, but they're very stylized. Andy Warhol just—he used a lot of silk-screen techniques with halftone, which nobody uses anymore. But at that time it was real popular to use halftone. And he did a lot of stuff like that. And I saw his show at MOCA, and I don't know . . . He came from an advertising background, so it makes sense that he would go into that super-graphic style. But I don't—I think what he did—Like even when he did his portraits of people, he never put their names on them. I mean, I didn't see the names on there. Like when he did a portrait of Russell Means, or Elizabeth Taylor, or Marilyn Monroe, I don't see their names anywhere.

See, I think that—I don't know, I want to . . . With the portraits of Dolores and Antonia and other people that I'm going to continue in that series, portraits of women, I want people to see these women as strong women and to know them on a first-name basis. That was my intention to do that, because Dolores Huerta is extremely well-known but it's unfortunate, a lot people still don't know who she is, a lot of our young people don't know who she is. And then people like Che Guevara, that image has prevailed all throughout [history]. I mean, that image is so incredibly popular, and I think it's because it's a great graphic. It's a really clean, good graphic, and the poor guy who took the photo of him, that guy hasn't a penny. I think he died poor, didn't he? Someone tracked him down that actually—it was a high contrast photograph, and the graphic was based on that.

So, no, I think my work is quite different from Andy Warhol. I don't care what anybody says.

KMD: Where do you normally paint or work?

BC: Here in my bedroom. Or if I'm lucky, I get to paint with friends in their studios. I've painted in my friends' studios before, which is really wonderful. And that was—I started off doing that in the early days, with Mechicano, and the Public Art Center, just asking people if I could paint in their spaces, because everything's full of—there's a rug here, and it's not really conducive to painting. And then I have to worry about my daughter, her being exposed to art materials that might be dangerous to her.

KMD: So in the '70s, you were able to use Mechicano and Public Art Center?

BC: Yeah. And also friends' studios, a lot more than now. Like I had a couple of Chicano friends who were more successful, and not really—they didn't really participate that much in Chicano [events]. They were doing their own thing, they were sort of individualistic-type artists. But they were really generous about letting me use their space. So I did a couple of [prints]. I actually did a dry point, and one of my friends used one of her presses, printing presses. She's pretty successful now, so . . . She just showed me her studio, I couldn't believe it. She's the only Chicana I know who has her own building as a studio. She owns the building.

KMD: Wow.

BC: Margaret Gallegos. She does mostly landscapes. Anyway, but she was maybe about ten or fifteen years older than me, something like that.

KMD: And so that was just a favor, no rent?

BC: Yeah, no, just every once in awhile. She's a very nice person.

KMD: When you were at Mechicano and Public Art, was that just because you're a member of the group, or did you have to pay a fee to use the space?

BC: No, I didn't have to pay—when I was a member, I didn't have to pay at Public Art Center. But Mechicano, it was for really isolated kind of things where I'd go in one day and spend the whole day there, and then maybe a couple of months later, do the same thing. But it wasn't like an ongoing thing. It would be very infrequent. They were really nice guys, they were very supportive. They were one of the few of the men who were extremely supportive during that time. There was a lot of sexism back then.

KMD: So you've been in this apartment for about how many years?

BC: Eleven years.

KMD: So in the '90s, this would be the place you paint?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: You'd work?

BC: But I was—

KMD: The '90s were the recovery years.

BC: Yeah, I didn't really—I wasn't . . . I had my bone marrow transplant on October 9 of '96, and Barbie was born in '94. I got married in '93, Barbie was born in '94, and then I got sick right like eight months later, when she was eight months old. So, what was that? Yeah, I think it was '96 was when I had the bone marrow transplant.

KMD: Do you normally work quietly attacking a painting?

BC: I work when everyone is asleep, including Harry and Barbie, both of them have to be asleep. I can't work when they're awake at all. In fact, Harry can't write when I'm here either, so we have days where he's here alone, and Barbie and I take off, and let him have the whole day to himself, and then he does the same thing for me. I just finished doing a project, and I asked him to take Barbie somewhere, just an outing all day so I could finish it. I just can't—I don't know how people do it. But that's been the case for a lot—my friend Margaret actually said the same thing. She can't paint when her husband is home. I know a lot of creative people who are like that.

KMD: Now, these painting you're showing me are acrylic, right?

BC: Acrylic on canvas. And they were all done here.

KMD: And acrylic dries quickly. Do you work on more than one at the same time?

BC: Never.

KMD: Never.

BC: I just—I don't understand how someone could do that myself.

KMD: Neither do I. *[laughter]*

BC: No, but I know that some people do. Like for the—let me show you real briefly.

KMD: Sure.

BC: The COLA [City of Los Angeles] exhibition paintings, they're all in here. These were done—this is Barbie. These paintings right here were—they were done here, and I did work on the backgrounds. The TV sets were a dark grey, with different shades of grey to create a television set effect. But anyway, I did work on a lot of them at the same time, the actual backgrounds, but not the individual paintings of the children that are in the TV sets, those I did [separately].

KMD: Do you want to get them all out?

BC: Yeah, if you want to.

KMD: Okay, so this was for the COLA exhibition in the—

BC: At the Armand Hammer.

KMD: At the Armand Hammer.

BC: Yeah, and this was . . . What is this . . . I think I put the year on it. Oh, 2000, in the year 2000, I did seven paintings of children as angels within TV set monitors, but they're actually just paintings of TV set monitors. And they're twelve by twelve inches, acrylic on canvas, and there's no—nothing added to it, just acrylic on canvas. But all the kids are offering something to the viewer, and Barbie has a little candle there, and my nephew Matthew is holding a spoon, a ladle with water in it, and then there's rain. But I was making comments about children and their futures, how safe is our water, how safe is our food going to be. Rosie's holding corn. And then Lanisha—this little girl passed away at Children's Hospital—she's holding a rose. She was such a sweet little thing. God, it was so sad when she died.

But the other two paintings is Sebastian, the son of a friend of mine. All of these kids are kids that I know, so—but I wanted to show how . . . Olivia, my niece, also is holding a bowl of crayons that she's offering. Just, you know, children want to be creative with other people and adults. This is also like an appeal from children to adults also, of course.

- KMD:** You know, I'm struck by the combination of a flat painting approach and then the detail, like their lips are just beautifully rendered. There's many colors, there's detail, there's light and shadow, expression.
- BC:** Yeah. Some of the hair has detail and highlight, and some doesn't. So I don't know, it just depends on—like Lanisha, for example, I just wanted her face to show, to stand out. She had such a really beautiful smile. And then Rosie holding the corn, she has this real innocent look on her face, it just kills me. But all of them have wings; all of their wings are in each of the paintings.
- KMD:** Oh, that's what the backdrop is.
- BC:** Yeah, they have their little wings. And Barbie, when I did her portrait, I did spend a little bit more time on it, maybe, because she's my daughter. Special treatment. *[laughter]* The highlights are there also in her—in the eyes. So the eyes have a little bit of shine to them.
- KMD:** And the fine detail of the eyebrows.
- BC:** Yeah, the eyebrows all are pretty detailed. But it's also—just to get to that level of being really precise and flat and clean is actually something I've been working on for a long time.
- KMD:** Tell me about it.
- BC:** I really liked the challenge of taking paint on a brush and being able to lay it down on the canvas where it lies flat and textureless. And I remember the Patssi painting [that] was shown at the Riverside Museum of Art, there were two guys standing in front of the painting trying to find out if they could see any brushstrokes.
- KMD:** That's exactly what I was doing.
- BC:** *[laughter]* And it was funny, because they couldn't find any. They said, "Oh, my God, she must have silk-screened these," and that's a compliment.
- KMD:** Yeah, it almost looks like it was digitally reproduced, because it's so flat.
- BC:** Yeah, it's a Catholic school training.
- KMD:** *[laughter]* Catholic school training.
- BC:** You know, that just trying to be really precise, I don't know. And then doing it on a smaller scale, when I did that for a painting that—the prince and Cinderella painting from—I did it as part of a show at the Brewery. It was called *Little Girl's Room*, and that painting was in the *Little Girl's Room*, [which] was an installation. And people thought that I had glued that on there, onto that canvas, but it's actually a painting.
- KMD:** So why the TV sets?
- BC:** I think the TV sets is because we all look at television so much to get our information, and I think it's a shame, so the—I'm using the TV sets for the same reason, that people will always want to know what's going on, on television, so that's why they're framed within the TV sets. And then I also did another series that was using television sets, and it was a modern-day altar series, with Princess Diana holding a black baby. That was real controversial because it was "un-princesslike." Anyway, and then there was another photograph of César Chávez embracing his grandson during the fast that he went through right before he passed away. And then the other one was Mother Teresa holding the child. And then those TV sets, in front of the TV sets was also Princess Di. There was a yellow rose, she was into yellow roses. And then César Chávez, it was also a big ladle on his—oh, no, that was Mother Teresa. And then César Chávez, it was a UFW—a little flag. But the same thing, though. The television sets are very important.
- KMD:** As a new site of worship?
- BC:** Yeah, it's sort of like become our focal point in our homes, you know? It's amazing.
- KMD:** I have two questions of things you've already mentioned. These TV boxes, this set is so incredibly detailed. Do you like sketch it out first, the lines, so you have this precise line?
- BC:** Oh, yeah, I do. You know, I was telling my daughter, I use math a lot. I mean, yeah, everything is [measured]. I do everything in pencil first, and then I actually tape off certain sections. When it's flat lines like that, I use tape, masking tape, and it's really great, because—then sometimes you can't use masking tape, you can't use masking tape for all those details, you know. So it's like . . . some people were making comments one time about, why can't you use, or why do I rely heavily on the photograph, or the overhead

projector, like some artists like John Valadez uses the overhead projector. And I think if the artist can use—can create an image without using all of those on their own, that’s—there’s no problem, it’s just a shortcut. It makes things a little faster. But it’s a criticism that comes up all the time.

KMD: Even though the masters are now using them.

BC: Yeah. It’s kind of a shame.

KMD: Tell me about how you get the paint so flat. Is it really another way of thinking of brushstroke? I mean, it is such a controlled brushstroke.

BC: Well, you know, it’s all about consistency. I actually make the paints a little—I add water to the paint, and then I do several layers of that same color, and that’s why it’s so flat. Because if the paint was thicker, then the brush would have to be a super-fine brush for it to go down really flat, or hard bristles. The firmer the bristles, you can also get a really flat effect. But in my case, I use—I water the paint down, and it’s all—it’s really important to do that.

KMD: The other thing that strikes me about this particular series is the skin tone.

BC: Oh, yeah. They’re all so different.

KMD: Yeah.

BC: That’s the reason why I wanted—I really wanted it to be a lot of bright colors, for that same reason. Like while Lanisha’s very dark-complected, the little black girl, and then my cousin’s—my daughter’s cousins, my nieces and nephew—are a mix, actually. Their father’s white and their mother’s a Mexican, of course—my sister’s kids. And so they have different shades. Just like in my own immediate family, there’s—my sister’s darker, both my sisters are darker-complected than I am.

KMD: Are those the colors that you see on their flesh, or is that in composition, that’s the color you select?

BC: That’s a good question. Sometimes it changes. That’s actually a really good question.

KMD: I’m trying to figure out Barbie, the one here in the TV set and then the portrait you did of her.

BC: Well, you know, light—when you’re at night and the light hits your face, do you look a little bit more lighter for some reason, because of the light. But yeah, that’s more her coloring over there, but that’s—I kind of put a little bit of yellow in there, so that she looks like she’s enlightened herself.

KMD: She glows.

BC: Yeah, she glows. Or the light is reflecting on her face. But all of these, I think, are pretty natural colors. They reflect—they’re pretty accurate, they look like the kids.

KMD: How do you make a hand look so human?

BC: I think hands and feet are the most difficult things to draw and paint. But you have to really just study them, look at them a lot. I’ve done some pretty—you know, like a lot of artists, I’ve done stuff where the hands don’t look very good. Like the self-portrait, remember that one silk-screen print I did called *Self-Portrait*, where I’m holding a paintbrush. That hand’s terrible, I think. Now I look at it, and I’m so embarrassed looking now. Because it just sort of looks like she’s going like that. [*gestures*] And her hand looks like a Mickey Mouse hand. There’s no detail on the hand at all, it’s just an outline of a hand. So but I don’t know. Just—I think hands are difficult, this portrait I did of my sister—

KMD: Oh, that’s beautiful.

BC: It’s a little—this is a ballpoint pen, too.

KMD: And when was this?

BC: I don’t know. A year, it’s right there, but I have to get a—

KMD: A magnifying glass. [*laughter*]

BC: You know, I never used to use a magnifying glass—1989.

KMD: So you’re able to write so incredibly teeny tiny that—

BC: And that was done without a magnifying class.

KMD: Our forty-year-old eyes and fifty-year-old eyes can’t see it. “For my pretty sister.”

BC: Is that what I wrote?

KMD: Yeah.

BC: Oh, my God, you can actually read that?

KMD: I had to take the glasses off.

BC: “For my pretty sister.” Oh, I think my sister is beautiful. Anyway, she’s—those are her kids. All those—oh, and this little tiny drawing I did for Harry, a long, long time ago. That is really old.

KMD: It’s like a heart?

BC: Yeah. It’s bleeding heart.

KMD: A bleeding heart.

BC: This is 1980—is that ’88?

KMD: It could be ’88.

BC: Yeah, it’s ’88.

KMD: How the heck do you make your hand—such tiny letters? I mean, that’s not even—it’s like a sixteenth of an inch or less.

BC: Oh, it’s really small.

KMD: What was that for?

BC: That was just for Harry. He liked it a lot. It was part of a show, and this is when we were just starting to go out together.

KMD: Which—

BC: Let me see. Which show was that? I forget exactly what show it was for. It was—I don’t know, I forgot.

KMD: Now, are you getting these things together for the upcoming exhibition [at Vincent Price Art Museum]?

BC: Yeah. These are all going to be in the show.

KMD: Really?

BC: Exactly like this, but they were done on—with really toxic ink on vinyl. So I started using vinyl because the UFW didn’t—remember we talked about this?

KMD: Yeah. Yeah. More lasting, more sturdy.

BC: Yeah. So, anyway. But there’s a lot of other drawings that I have—well, the *Here Lies, Here Lies* exhibit? Those drawings are going to be in the show, too. I’ve been finding that those drawings are—I have to take a lot more care with those drawings, because the paper, the clay-coated paper? See, this is clay-coated paper. I did—this was in the old Galería Ocaso exhibit. What year is this?

KMD: Let me pause this.

[break in audio]

KMD: We’re back. We’ve determined that this—you said ballpoint pen?

BC: Ballpoint pen on clay-coated paper, and silverpoint, this was done with silver.

KMD: Right, the skull.

BC: The skull is silverpoint.

KMD: In ’84, you were saying. Día de los Muertos. Tell me about scale. I mean, this is tiny, just like the heart.

BC: Well, I love miniatures, I’ve always liked miniatures, because when I was growing up, I told you my mother had a lot of Japanese stuff, and the Japanese are into miniatures also. And just the—it’s sort of like a challenge, to get really detailed. Like the coffin I did, the very first one I did that was exhibited got a lot of attention. *Self-Portrait in a Coffin*, the one that Armando Durón owns. And it was in the CARA exhibition. People are saying, “Oh, my God, how could you do all that.” But it’s sort of like—I go in like in a trance when I do these. I feel like sometimes when I’m drawing them, it just feels weird, like my hand actually takes over, it’s amazing. I don’t know how to explain it.

KMD: I can’t figure out how you make lines so fine. And this is unforgiving, this—

BC: Yeah, you cannot make a mistake on this.

KMD: There’s erasing, you can’t redo it.

BC: You can’t even erase the silverpoint. The silverpoint, that’s all very . . . And the silverpoint there is not lines, it’s actually gradations and shading. But all of this is—yeah, you can’t make a mistake. And they’re

really good pens, they were called—back then, they were—I used to use Lindy pens. I don't know if they still make them. I don't think they make them anymore. The Bic ballpoint pens are also real good, because they had to least amount of . . . Sometimes a gob of ink would come out, it would just . . . And I'd put them all on my hands, like do about three strokes and clean. It was crazy. And no tissue paper, no, because one time I made the mistake of using tissue paper, and I got fiber from the tissue paper, [which] made it skip. That just pissed me—it was just so terrible, because . . . But all these are really super-delicate lines.

KMD: And this, it's this natural-looking skull with the very realistic long braid again, and at the end of the braid is the paintbrush with the drop of paint.

BC: A drop of blood.

KMD: It's a drop of blood?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: And then the rose that's in the mouth of the skull, some petals are—

BC: Flying away.

KMD: What is that?

BC: Drifting away. I don't know, there's something—it's like life, life and death, it's the opposite. The rose represents life, and then even—but even life, even roses die off. So the petals are sort of reflecting that, too.

KMD: Where did you say this was?

BC: This was shown at the Galería Ocaso exhibit, with Curtis Gutierrez and Diane Gamboa, my sister-in-law. It was that exhibit. And I remember a lady came up to me, I didn't know who she was or anything, and she came up to me and she said, "These drawings are going to go far. People are going to really like these drawings. Keep doing them."

KMD: And they were all small like this one?

BC: They were all small, and I sold all of them. They're all just—I don't know, all these . . . And I was really terrible about documentation back then. I didn't document anything. I mean, who bought what. And then years later, I did a portrait of Harry that's this small It's a drawing of Harry and I—

KMD: In, like, an inch?

BC: It was one by one inch. And Harry was at—get this, Harry was at a coffee shop, and some man was staring at Harry . . . And it was called *Despite All Odds*, because there's a little flame in between. Just that small, too, the flame was that small, because . . . Imagine, there's his face and my face and then this flame. And anyway, the guy who bought it was a lawyer. He recognized Harry from his drawing. Isn't that weird?

KMD: That's amazing.

BC: He said—and Harry said, "Well, what are you looking at?" You know, after awhile, Harry came up and asked him. He goes, "I'm sorry. I was staring because—aren't you Harry Gamboa?" And he says, "Yeah, why?" "I wake up to you and your wife every day." That's how he said it. Isn't that a weird comment? That's a weird comment, I think. And so anyway, but Harry thought it was really odd, and then they start laughing later. But—what's this doing in there?

KMD: Hold on. I found another one here. It's a little bit bigger than one by one, or is it. . .

BC: It's a little bit bigger.

KMD: Little bit bigger. You and Harry, a portrait. Now you said it's a rejection?

BC: Yeah, it's not one of the better ones. That's why I never showed it anywhere.

KMD: And what's wrong with it?

BC: It's just not well done.

KMD: It doesn't look like Harry, is that—

BC: Well, it looks like Harry, but at the time I was taking some old photograph, because my hair is long right there. But I did another one called *Harry Has My Trenza*—that one. Did you ever see that one?

KMD: Yeah.

BC: Well, that one is the nice one, and so I did several versions of it. *Harry Has My Trenza*. So there's about three of them out there. But I don't think that was one of the better ones. And I think sometimes, when I

feel like a drawing isn't really that good, I keep it, I never show it anywhere. So that's been in my collection for a long time, with all those other drawings.

KMD: Not even when they come to say, "Let me see your" . . . You know, like for the CARA exhibition. Did they come to see your—

BC: Oh, yeah, that was different. I think when—well, also because I work with the curators. I work with Marcos and Holly. I was working as a design assistant to Tom Hartman for that show, so I knew them on—I knew them before the exhibit began. So when they came and looked at my stuff, I showed them a lot of stuff. There's other stuff I haven't shown anybody, though, including them, and that's my notebooks. [*inaudible*]

KMD: So the notebooks are sources of inspiration?

BC: They hold—they have really odd drawings. [*laughter*] There's . . . some of the drawings are of like me looking very tormented, because I think throughout my . . . A lot of artists have this problem where sometimes you can't create, you don't feel creative at all, but you're able to express it in writing. So I would write about how I felt. I'm not inspired, I need to experience things, and then get inspiration. Like right after I got sick, right after I got sick with cancer, I didn't want to draw anything or do any art whatsoever, and the few drawings I did, I haven't shown anybody. But I did—one of them was really odd. Harry has one of my drawings. He just brought it out the other day. It was a drawing, a self-portrait with all these weird fish going into my feeding tube, my [Hickman] catheter. It was just real ugly. And then it said, "I'm ugly, I might die," because they gave me a fifty-fifty chance. So those kind of drawings I haven't shown, because they're much too personal, and they're not like—they're expressive pieces of work, but they're not—I would never show it.

KMD: So these notebooks have writing and images?

BC: Yeah. And a lot of it—I've had several bouts of, throughout my life, depression, so I've been fighting—I fight it all the time. But ever since my daughter was born, I haven't allowed myself to ever get to that point. I don't know if you feel that way. You can't really do that with kids.

KMD: No. You don't have a lot of time off. [*laughter*]

BC: No, not only that, but I think it's not good for your children, either. It's a real—I think it's a real selfish thing to do to your children, to go into your own world of depression or sadness. It's just not fair to your kids. So I haven't allowed myself to get—every once in awhile, when I do that, when I feel like I'm going there, I have to sit down and draw or write, and if I don't do it, I feel like I'll slip into that. And I talk to a lot of creative people, a lot of poets, writers, actresses, friends of mine, and they all have that problem. Most creative people have that problem. And then the *LA Times* came out with an article, I told you about this article—

KMD: Yeah.

BC: Years ago, where they link creativity to madness, which I don't doubt. [*laughter*] No, it was a really interesting article, but it said that creative people, the reason why we're creative is because we find chaos, everything is—things don't make sense to creative people, so that's the reason why they have to sit down and draw and release—make their own world, create their own world.

KMD: So how do you—what world do you create?

BC: Well, it's—I want to share my view of the world with other people. I think I've always been a people person. I like working with people, and I think it's still established from being Catholic, from that whole Catholic—of serving people, of being of service to people, and not thinking of yourself, and all that kind of thing. I really think that really had a big impact on me. But when I do these paintings, like [for] the COLA exhibition show, all those children—I wanted people to look at children that they have something to say, and most of the time, children are just completely ignored in our society. People don't value children. In fact, people who commit crimes against children always get off, if you ever notice that, they just [get] a slap on the wrist for doing some heavy damage to children.

KMD: I'm wondering if you could tell me more about . . . You keep a sketchbook. I mean, you talked about these notebooks that you don't show, but—you know, like how do you get to that painting? And so far, we're just talking about the paintings, we haven't—we've only talked about one mixed-media piece.

BC: Yeah. Well, actually, it's really—it's almost like it's embarrassing if I—if I were to show you some of the sketches I did for some of these, they are so messy. That's weird—it's so weird, because I go from extreme messiness to extreme neatness. And, but the process for—it's a concept sketch, I always call them concept sketches. And then, like even with the Dolores print, I had an idea of how I wanted to frame the whole Dolores print and all that, and it's just an idea. And it's real important for the artist to put that idea down right away, or else she could lose it. Sometimes it just gets lost. I had a lot of really good ideas, and, "Oh, my God, I forgot to write it down," and then it's sort of gone.

But a lot of the sketches are done really loosely, and it's just a concept but sometimes it's part drawing and part writing. It's not even a whole sketch. And even with this COLA thing I did, all I did was a bunch of squares, and then they're real fast sketches of all the kids, how I want the kids to look, and why I want to do this series—what's the purpose of this series? And so it's just like that. But I haven't shown—I think one day I will show them, but I'm not ready to show them now.

KMD: So do you that over and over again? Or do you just go, "Okay, there's my rough sketch, my concept sketch," and then you go to the canvas?

BC: Well, actually, no, sometimes it'll take four sketches, four different sketches, and I select the one I think is the best one. But sometimes a sketch will go from a real loose concept sketch, and then everything changes from that sketch to the third sketch. It'll be totally changed. It's weird. But there's something about the first sketch that impacted the third one. So you know—I don't know, I think it's—it's like when someone does—writing an article, a first draft, second draft, whatever.

KMD: Are you also working with color at that stage, or are you just doing composition?

BC: Well, I think about color, too, because with each kid, I'm thinking Barbie in the dark, she's light, and then Matthew, a light background, because he's dark-complected. You know what I mean? So those, they do—color is important.

KMD: You'd have to solve the hair.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Of the doll.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: I don't know. I think it's awfully dark. And—

BC: No, I mean the background.

KMD: Yeah, the dark background for Patssi works. It makes it look—

BC: I don't know. Anyway, it's just . . . So I don't know, color is extremely important, but I think if you don't have a good sketch, you're not going to have a good painting. That's my—but then there are painters who totally disagree with me, and they go straight to the canvas. They don't do any sketches. Everything is done on the canvas. I just—I don't know, I wish I could do that, but I've never been able to. I tried to do it once, and it just—it looks structure-less. You know what I mean? It looked like it was lacking. It's like when people do bodies, and they have no knowledge of the human anatomy. It's like that. I don't know. For this, I already saw it in my head before I did it.

KMD: To sketch that would be just [*inaudible*], or do you—

BC: No, I just came up with the skull first, and then the hair came—the hair is easier. The skull was a little bit more difficult.

KMD: And this is referring to the Day of the Dead, Día de los Muertos piece from '84.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Hold on just a minute.

[*break in audio*]

- KMD:** Okay, we're back. This is another pen on—ballpoint pen on that clay-coated paper. And—
- BC:** What year was that? I don't—
- KMD:** Ninety-one. It's a little larger. It's about two-sixteenths of an inch. [*laughter*] Your name, your signature, and the year. With, you know, the Madonna, right? And in her mirror is the Virgen of Guadalupe, she'd holding up—
- BC:** A mask.
- KMD:** A mask.
- BC:** Yeah. It was—I wanted to do that, because, you know, I did drawings of her before. I've done paintings of her, of the Madonna, but never the Virgen de Guadalupe—the *Image and Identity* show, when I did a triptych. But in this one, I wanted to just get back to the feel of the old—like the paintings from early, early history, and just do something real intimate with both of them. So I don't know, I really liked that drawing.
- KMD:** Yeah, the Sacred Heart is just beautiful.
- BC:** Yeah, and the glow around her—the halo. And the haloes are real hard. Like they say, if you get a gob on there, that's it, your drawing's ruined. In fact, I think I did get have a couple mistakes. Sometimes I hide it really good, just going over, several lines over the drawing.
- KMD:** When you said ballpoint pen, you mean the kind that you get at the store?
- BC:** Yeah.
- KMD:** Ay, I don't know how you make those lines with ballpoint pen.
- BC:** Yeah, those are all—on her face, too, that's where it's really delicate.
- KMD:** Yeah, the shadow. [*inaudible*] Yeah, so brown and blue and yellow and red and green. But you're able to turn it into pink and light blue and shadow. That's a very delicate image. The Virgen doesn't look so—I mean, it looks like the *tilma*, in the Basilica [de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe], but she also looks a little bit more cheerful.
- BC:** Oh, yeah, that's true. Something—yeah, it looks a little—or she looks younger, doesn't she?
- KMD:** That's what it is. Yes. She looks younger.
- BC:** A younger look on her face.
- KMD:** Was that deliberate?
- BC:** I don't know. It just came out like that.
- KMD:** So I'm guessing that you do large-scale murals, you do the pesticides display in Times Square, and then you've got these tiny, teeny tiny . . . Is that—is that contrast deliberate?
- BC:** Well, no. I think that I have a lot of artist friends who are muralists, and they do the—a lot of my muralist friends do different types of works, so I think it's pretty normal for artists to have different media that—and different kind of approaches to art. The personal work is smaller and the public art is larger. But really, I love miniatures, I've always loved them so much, but I look at them as something I really enjoy doing. So—
- KMD:** What about subject matter? You've been painting your portrait, and now your family's portraits—
- BC:** Well, that's true.
- KMD:** For a long time.
- BC:** I was inspired by Frida Kahlo. Frida Kahlo's—how many self-portraits? She did a lot of them. The—I didn't really like doing self-portraits until actually I was talking to Yreina. And she creates images of Frida, and Yreina's done self-portraits. And I kind of, like, started doing the self-portraits when the *Image and Identity* show came up. It was talking about identity so much. And I remember when I did the *Names Can Hurt*, and I did a portrait of myself putting on dark makeup—did you ever see that one? Oh, okay. Well, that one—I remember, you know, and it has all these names that people used to call me, *güera*, white girl, *pocha*, all those names, and I did it for all of the other like . . . It was weird, because I started seeing that there were a lot of light-skinned Mexican women or Latinas who felt like they were being left out, and they felt like they were not welcomed in either their own culture, and then the dominant culture. Where do you fit in? And it just—so I kind of just—I started feeling good about these self-portraits, because more people talked

about it to me. It was amazing. I would meet all these people, even in my—I would talk to people, and they would say, “Oh, you know . . .” Because that’s where it was, the show—

KMD: Right, at LMU.

BC: Was there on campus. And they would say things like, “God, nobody talked about it in our family, but my mother always made my sister feel bad, because she was dark-complexed.” Or, my sister got better treatment, because she was light-complexed.

KMD: Light-complexed.

BC: So there’s those same things that I experienced in my own family. So many people have the same reaction. And there was another painting I did in that show, too, called—it’s a self-portrait also, but it’s really odd. It’s called *Torture Tradition*. But it’s really amazing, because I’m using myself. And it’s a little ridiculous, because in that painting I’m an older woman, I’m not a little girl, and my mother’s pulling my hair back. So it’s actually a really interesting painting, if you think about it, because I’m talking about how even today, it bugs me that she did that to me. She was so—that she made me go through that kind of pain.

KMD: To pull back your hair into a *trenza*.

BC: Yeah, that was ridiculous. Did your mom do that to you?

KMD: No.

BC: No. You were lucky. My mom . . . Almost all the little Mexican girls I knew, they all hated it. It was one thing that they—well, that’s why I never did that to my daughter, never.

KMD: But you—I mean, several images are the *trenza*.

BC: Oh, yeah. I like the *trenza*, but because I, even in high school and college, I used to put my hair into a braid all the time. That’s one thing. But when your mother does it in a really . . . My mother used to put a braid—she would do a braid first, which is very Mexican—a braid up here, and then it was attached to a ponytail. That was a real old-fashioned way. People—you know, there’s different ways people did their hair, but my mom—oh, she was terrible. I mean, it was so hard, and so painful. I remember even taking it down at night, it was painful. Oh, I would—

KMD: And it was done every day.

BC: Oh, yeah. It was terrible.

KMD: I wonder if I could change the subject a bit.

BC: Sure.

KMD: You were talking about the *Image and Identity* show at Laband Art Gallery at Loyola Marymount. My understanding is Sybil did that show, Sybil Venegas did that show as a dialogue with the CARA exhibition.

BC: Oh, yeah, because it coincided. Yeah, didn’t it? Yeah, I think because a lot of women felt that the CARA show ghetto-ized women, Chicanas, in the exhibit. We were in one little room, and we’re not seen as a part of the whole movement, the Chicano movement itself, and that’s unfortunate, I think, because—especially for some of us who are extremely involved in the community and the Chicano movement itself. I don’t know why that was, but I really think it was unfortunate that they did that. And people like Sybil are wonderful, because they give voice, and they show a different perspective. And there’s all these women that are out there doing really strong work about women, and almost—that show was a really good show, I think.

KMD: Were you aware of that going in? I mean, when she invites you to do the show, or says, “I want to look at your work to put in the show,” however it occurred—were you aware of that? You yourself had that critique of the CARA exhibition?

BC: Yeah. Because prior to the exhibit opening at UCLA, I was told by the curators that the *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn* might not go in the exhibit. And I said, “Why not?,” and they said, “Because someone, one of the curators, didn’t want it in there, because they felt offended by the woman’s exposed breasts.”

KMD: I’m curious—I mean, have you ever done an image of a woman’s body that . . . Or, I guess, what is your definition of a compromising image of a woman’s body?

BC: Well, I think—well, exposing really—like explicitly exposing a woman’s private parts maybe, I think, is going a little too far. But then there are artists who—there was an artist who was part of the atelier, she did that. She was a really good artist from Arizona—what’s her name?—oh, I hate when I forget names. Yreina knows her, but Yreina invited her to be part of the women’s atelier when she was the head of it. And she did—well, actually, she didn’t show the private parts. I think she initially did, and then opted for just the torso.

KMD: Just the torso.

BC: Yeah. I don’t know too many women who do that, actually.

KMD: But the breasts in the *Ball of Yarn* are not—I mean, they look like a pregnant woman’s breasts. They don’t look prettied up, and they don’t look perky.

BC: Prettied up. *[laughter]* Yeah, they look like a pregnant woman’s breasts.

KMD: Hanging off to the side and large and—they look like a woman’s body.

BC: Filled with *leche*. *[laughter]*

KMD: Yeah.

BC: It’s so funny, I didn’t think of it that way. But it’s true. And it’s so funny, because I just did that—that image is really amazing, because I did that image without looking at any body, no body. It was in my head. And my sister-in-law was pregnant, so I kind of saw her body with her clothes on, and I remember thinking, “I’ve got to do this—I have to make this a nude figure.” And that body came up out of the clear blue. And the weird thing is, that looks like my body when I was pregnant.

KMD: *[laughter]* And what about other portraits that you’ve done? You’re working from photographs, or do you sit people down sometimes—I mean, do you shoot the photograph yourself, or is it from a photograph in the family collection, or . . . ?

BC: Oh, no, I take pictures. I shoot the photograph myself. I have to, because . . . I sometimes, in the past, in my early years, I did use other people’s photos, and it just didn’t work out good, because I really respect photographers as artists and I don’t feel like it’s right for a visual artist to use a photographer’s work. I have a lot of photography friends, people who are photographers, like Harry. I did use one of Harry’s photographs to do an art piece once, but that was with his consent. But I remember talking to a couple of other photographers, and they expressed some disappointment that other people have used their photographs. And even though they’re flattered, still . . . They were never asked for permission or—

KMD: Or acknowledged.

BC: Acknowledged, yeah, or given credit.

KMD: Pause again.

[break in audio]

KMD: We paused to get out some more [of Barbara’s works]. Now, these are prints.

BC: Yeah. These are silk-screen serigraphs, silk-screen prints. And this one I did for the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, and it’s a bird of peace holding a leaf. But it’s sort of like a brush, a paintbrush, also. And the actual dove is sort of in the shape of an artist palette.

KMD: Yeah. *Artistas por la Paz*.

BC: Yes.

KMD: You did it in 2004.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: So was this a commission piece?

BC: It was commission, yeah. And I really liked—the silk-screen artists were really good from up north. They had seen my Dolores print and really were looking forward to working with me.

KMD: Now, is that the group [Taller, Tupac] . . .

BC: Amaru?

KMD: Is that how she says it?

BC: She knows—yeah. What’s her name? I forgot her name right now.

KMD: Is that Favianna Rodriguez's—

BC: Yeah, Favianna, yeah. That's her business. Yeah, so that—so this is . . . I really like doing this. I hand-cut the stencils for this.

KMD: Wow.

BC: It was all hand-cut. And I also liked that—see, it's just that clean—that clean effect there. And then this is the *Primas* print that I did with Barbie and my niece Olivia. And then this one was a fun one, because—this one—that was '01. But this one, what I liked about this one a lot is that their hair. —It's just really flowing in the wind. And then this braid—it is symbolic of something old that they're not part of. You know, you don't see too many girls nowadays wearing braids, young girls. So this was a really challenging kind of a print.

[break in audio]

KMD: This is Karen Mary Davalos with Barbara Carrasco. Today is the tenth of October, [2007,] and we're looking at some prints. I was commenting on this one, *Primas*, a print she did at Self Help Graphics in 2001, where it has that—a similar feel, although you're working in a different media, it has a similar feel to the paintings. The—it's a flatness, and then the technique of highlight in the hair or something.

BC: Yeah, it sort of conflicts, if you think about it. But I don't know, I like that idea that when you're working with silkscreen, and you're working cutting Amberlith, it becomes—it's the canvas, sort of. And then the X-Acto knife, the cutting tool actually allows for a super clean line. Extremely super clean. So it really lends itself really well—I mean, you couldn't—even with a brush, it would be hard to get those points.

KMD: On the braids, or against the hair.

BC: Oh, yeah. That would be—that's a challenge, unless you've got an excellent painting brush.

KMD: Tell me about your coloration in this.

BC: Well, the coloration was—I wanted to make it really kind of pop colors, too, and that turquoise is pretty popular among kids, and so is the lime green. But also, the contrast between Olivia's skin color—she's darker-complected than Barbie, and Barbie's light-complected—so it just looked kind of . . . I don't know, it was really fun colors.

KMD: And then you had to—

BC: One, two, three, and then the background. I think there's only four colors in this one. Yeah, this is a four-color run. The hearts, the purple—purple, turquoise, green.

KMD: Green, and the blue that's in the hair and the shirts—

BC: And her skin color. Yeah, there's five colors.

KMD: Yeah, five colors.

BC: But the background color, I like that. It's sort of like a salmon color. It's not pink, but it's salmon.

KMD: It's very close—in this light, it's very close to your daughter's skin tone that's used here, but not.

BC: Oh, yeah, that's true. She's a little lighter. She has more yellow in her skin than she does pink. That was just—Olivia's holding her hair, and Barbie's holding her hair. Both are holding each other, because . . . Hair is sort of like this ongoing theme with me, I don't know why. I just love hair. And then—

KMD: Even though it was torture as a child?

BC: Yeah, it was torture. But then I lost it all one year, so it was—I don't know, it made me more sensitive to men who are balding, such as my husband. Because once you lose your hair, it's just like part of you, your identity is gone. So I don't know. Barbie and Olivia always—they've always had their hair down. I've never seen their hair up, or pulled back in a braid or a ponytail. So they're both really a new generation of young girls, real free-spirited kids.

KMD: Mm-hmm. What else do you have?

BC: I have the Dolores print, which you already saw. That's the Giclée print, and then this is—

KMD: This is the actual—

BC: This is the actual silk-screen print. Only one left, mine. But it says, "To my dear beloved Barbara, with respect, Dolores Huerta."

KMD: Right, you told me she signed it.

BC: I have to get this framed, but also I have the *Antonia* print in here too. And *Antonia*, this was done at Self Help Graphics also, and it was all hand-cut also. It was extremely . . . And this was a commission piece. I was commissioned by—it was . . . What's his name? From the University of Notre Dame. I forgot his name.

KMD: Oh, Gil Cardenas.

BC: Gil Cardenas. So they—her husband, [Judge] Michael Stern, provided me with the photograph, and then . . . It was really difficult, because she's smiling with her teeth open, and that's really difficult, to do teeth. I would have preferred her not doing teeth, but that's not her. In all of the photographs, she's smiling like that.

KMD: Hand-cut as opposed to—

BC: You could do an ink drawing and then have that transferred on. But that would be really hard. So, and then the colors, I like the colors a lot. It's like a super-deep red. She's a very strong person, Antonia [Hernández], and she's got a long history of being a civil rights attorney. And now she's the head of a very big organization [Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)]. So I don't know, I really like doing portraits of strong people.

KMD: It's an interesting piece, and again, you've got purple hair.

BC: I know, purple's in a lot of the hair, even on Dolores's print. I think purple, as opposed to black, it's just a nice alternative. It's not that dark, and it's—after awhile, you really don't notice it's purple that much.

KMD: Well, the composition works. I mean, it works really well with the red, and then the background, that light violet. The one of Dolores—there's something about . . . Of these three that you have out, that is very different in Dolores's portrait. I mean, it's the same media, the same artist. We know it's a different subject.

BC: What do you mean? You think it's really different?

KMD: Mm-hmm.

BC: I don't understand. How do you think it's real different?

KMD: Even though you have this flat—you know, it's done as a print, and you make use of that flatness of the media, something you've done with your painting. It has a softness to it, and I don't know if it's the color composition of the shadow.

BC: Oh, yeah, it's the colors.

KMD: There's shadow in *Antonia*. Was there shadow in *Primas*?

BC: No, not really. Very little. But this one, Dolores's—I think because I spent a lot of time working on the color comp, the colors, the Dolores—the pink, sort of that rose-color pink, is overlaid on top of the green, that sort of like mint-green background. And it changes. It alters the color of the pink, because it's on top, right? But I wanted it to be subdued, to be in the background. And then that yellow ochre really brings Dolores's face out. It's really—you really focus on her face, and I think that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to show . . . She has such a cool expression on her face, just like an appealing—kind of right to your . . . It's just amazing, because I wanted to show how strong she was as a person, but also how extremely generous she is as a human being to other people.

KMD: And all the women in these portraits and the young girls are all looking right at the viewer.

BC: Always, yeah. I like that directness.

KMD: Except for the ones you showed me first in the box that you said you never . . . The profiles.

BC: Yeah, they're not looking at—yeah, that's interesting. All the angry women are not looking at the viewer at all.

KMD: You did a—I can never say this—Giclée?

BC: Giclée print. And that's quite different. Doesn't it look really different?

KMD: Yeah.

BC: It's just—you have to hold it up. The colors are so different. This is a very different green. It's almost like a pistachio green. But I think it does—it's different because the inks are different. The silk-screen ink is

extremely—you can get real subtle colors with this. But I think it's very different when you go to an inkjet printer. They have certain colors that—they're more vibrant. So—

KMD: And why would you do a Giclée?

BC: The Giclée prints are pretty popular, actually. Patricia Correia, she's done so many with all the artists. And it seems to work with her. She says they—people purchase them more easily than they do originals, because they're more—they're less expensive than an actual serigraph. So I don't know why that is, but they are. And in that particular case, we did that also for Dolores's foundation, to raise money for her foundation.

KMD: Right, you donated—

BC: So Dolores got half the edition. And then they made—you saw the buttons, right? They made buttons out of those.

KMD: Now, you don't have anything here that I've seen at Patricia Correia's, the jewelry. When have you been—

BC: That's a watercolor painting, made out of watercolor.

KMD: Wow. The Frida image?

BC: Yeah. I want to get into watercolor, actually.

KMD: When did you do this?

BC: Many years ago. I gave it to Barbie about four years ago, something like that. But it's Frida as a young girl, one of her young girl pictures. But I gave it to Barbie, because Barbie said, "Oh, you never give me anything." But it's weird, because watercolor is really, really different, too. That's a hard technique, you know? A media, I mean. Because you can't really control it that much. That's why I really admire Yreina's style, with her—she's so good with watercolor.

KMD: This is your altar?

BC: Yeah, this is my altar right here, and this is my—these are my grandparents on my dad's side, and that's [Justo] Carrasco, and there's my dad and my uncle, my father's right here.

KMD: Your uncle's in the military.

BC: Yeah. I look like him. It's so weird, I look like . . . And this is the artist, Esperanza Martinez, who passed away. And my Aunt Lola, who died. She was a champion bowler in Mexico, that's her bowling trophy. Nineteen fifty-four. I brought that back from El Paso. And then, anyway, Ray Cano who died, he was a good friend. On my dad's side. That's my dad right there, my father right there. I have to—I was going to make a better copy than that. And then there's—Harry's father died. And Barbie's—my mom's dog that Barbie loved a lot, Pokey. So we're still adding to it, because I wanted to put the other artists who passed away. Rosalind Mesquita just—she just died just recently. I just added her name.

KMD: Oh, the palette, is that what that is?

BC: Yeah, these are all the people that we know that were artist types that died. Teddy Sandoval, Gerard Velasquez. Minna Agins was a friend of mine. She wasn't a Chicana, she was a really cool person.

KMD: Did you know her when she was at SPARC?

BC: Yeah, I took her class. I took a woodcutting class with her. I mean, a linoleum-cutting class. Yeah, I did a portrait of Minna for her art exhibit; she had a solo exhibit. Her portrait. Here's Esperanza Martinez. Cindy Honesto, who was a poet. Lorenzo Flores, who just died a couple years ago, and Ricardo Valverde. Harry knew this photographer—I didn't know him—Luis Carlos Bernal. But Rosalyn Mesquita—she was about ten years older than me. I didn't know her really well, but we would get together every August, because—a bunch of us Leos would get together and talk about art. And Tomata du Plenty was a really cool artist. Did you ever meet him? Tomata?

KMD: No.

BC: They call him Tomata. He was an artist, he was a good friend of Gronk's. But he was a really cool guy. He was on the *Tonight Show* once a long time ago. But he was a cool guy, because he was very supportive of Chicano art, and he came to my exhibit at—the one where I had the Día de los Muertos drawing, the—it was called Galería Ocaso. So. But anyway, I do have a bunch of other watercolors I'll show you.

KMD: Yeah, I've never seen any of your watercolors. Let's pause for a minute.

[break in audio]

KMD: Whoa, *Jetter's Jinx* poster. Asco, '87. You did the—

BC: Nineteen eighty-six. I did it.

KMD: Excuse me, '86, the—wow.

BC: This is a portrait of Gronk and a champagne . . . Oh, yeah, I didn't realize we put that on top of—

KMD: Yeah, they gave you credit.

BC: That seems so—we should have put it on the side. *Jetter's Jinx*, copyright by Harry. But I don't know what happened to the original, someone has it. I don't have it.

KMD: Did you do it with ink and—

BC: Ink on a board, art board. So they want to frame this for a show at the UCLA college. And they did a bunch of other posters too, so—art symposium—

KMD: "Arts and Histories Reconsidered: A Symposium on Current Debates," March 7 and 8, 1986. Oh, with Holly and Marcos, and John Tagg, at UCLA.

BC: Oh, yeah. What ever happened to John Tagg? I don't know, I lost contact with him. We have an extra *Jetter's Jinx* poster.

KMD: Fascinating.

BC: I have the original art for this, but I don't have it for the *Jetter's Jinx*. I don't know what happened.

KMD: This sounds like one of the early discussions that led to CARA.

BC: Yeah, I think it did. Because John Tagg had a lot to do with the early—God, I remember those meetings all the time. They would always talk about John Tagg. It's old. [laughter] It's not that old, actually, huh, if you think about it.

KMD: What was the other one? You didn't want to show me.

BC: No, that was an extra *Jetter's Jinx* poster. I thought we had other stuff, but—where did I put that folder? Did I put it over here? . . . This is all just stuff I've done. For different artworks I did for flyers and community organizations. This one here, this was the Gordon Castillo Hall case. I remember he was a real popular case, because he had been released by Justice Rose Bird on a first-degree murder charge on his own . . . It was like the first time in California history someone was released. I think the police definitely framed him, because he got—he was shot later by a gang member, after he won his case. He was shot. But I was part of his defense committee, along with a lot of people, a lot of pretty good people. Anyway, and I did this for Nosotros, the organization.

KMD: Their banquet in '79?

BC: Yeah.

KMD: So these kinds of things, did you do for pay?

BC: Yeah, this is the work-for-hire stuff that I've done. And this one I did for Helena Viramontes, she asked me to do this. So—there's the braid again.

KMD: Mm-hmm. There's the braid.

BC: But anyway, and then I did this for Vickie Castro, a fundraiser. She has—I don't know what happened to the original artwork, either. It's gone. And this was for one of Harry's plays.

KMD: That's interesting, your graffiti style.

BC: Yeah, that was weird. But anyway, so that's—and then I did stuff for the Venice Family Clinic, just things like . . . So I keep this stuff separately, this work-for-hire stuff.

KMD: You think about that differently, that kind of work?

BC: Yeah. And then—I really need to put this in an art—or actually, I did this—this thing actually—oh, this is fun. I want to show you this thing right here. This is a watercolor.

KMD: Oh, wow.

BC: Isn't that weird?

KMD: That's miniature.

BC: And then—

KMD: Lines.

BC: I saved it for anti—what is it? Angel dust. It was—

KMD: Oh, that’s fascinating.

BC: *Anti-Angel Dust*. It was a stipple drawing.

KMD: A stipple drawing. And it’s a skull, and the head has a halo and the eyes, the eye sockets are a man and a woman smoking, instead of just a plain eye socket for the skull.

BC: And that’s Muhammad Ali’s signature, autograph.

KMD: Did you run into him at an event?

BC: Yeah, I saw him, and I just wanted his autograph. So weird. Anyway, [*inaudible*]. Just little weird drawings, such really odd drawings. And it would be in notebooks, and then I’d tear them out. And then I noticed—like see this, this is a ballpoint pen drawing and after a certain amount of years, it starts going through the paper.

KMD: It bleeds through.

BC: Yeah. And then also it fades.

KMD: It fades.

BC: If you put ballpoint pen in the sunlight, it’ll fade a lot.

KMD: That’s what I was wondering about.

BC: I did a portrait of this actress, Lupe Ontiveros’s parents. And I did it on vellum, and it was really nice, but she had it near a window where sunlight got it, and it faded it so badly.

KMD: You sound like you’ve done many commissions.

BC: Yeah, I did lot. Yeah. And I didn’t document any of them. That was the bad part. Like I did a lot of portraits of people. I did Ricardo Montalbán’s portrait for *Nosotros*, but I remember, they didn’t have the check for me, so I still have the drawing. I never gave it to them, because . . . So a lot of stuff like that would happen. When Carlos and John needed somebody to help them on—

KMD: Carlos—

BC: Carlos Almaraz.

KMD: Almaraz and John Valadez.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: When they were working with the UFW?

BC: No, when they were working at Public Art Center.

KMD: Oh, okay. Public Art Center.

BC: They would do stuff in the community, and they would get paid for it. I think we were doing a sign for some fruit stand or fruit—some business. And they would pay me to do detailed lettering or something. But I never documented any of those. I didn’t take pictures of any of those things. I didn’t think it was important back then. I wish I did, because I did really a lot of work back then.

KMD: And the commissions that come to you, how do they—other than Public Art Center, how do they come?

BC: Just by people who have seen my stuff that I did at an art show. “Barbara, could you do a portrait of my daughter, or a portrait of my son, or . . .” You know, some family member. So I would do portraits, but I really hated it after awhile, doing portraits. I didn’t enjoy doing them, because it was—you know, people don’t really see themselves as they really are.

KMD: Right. And what about, they want your style, I’m imagining. They want this flat—I mean—

BC: Yeah, or I would do—

KMD: That’s not your only style, but that’s in—

BC: Or more like my sister, the portrait I did of my sister where it’s a more realistic rendering—it was more in that style. But that’s what—I would do that to make money, to make ends meet. And then sometimes I would do graphics, a lot of different logos for people. I don’t know. It’s really a shame I didn’t document those early things, those early projects. But now I know it’s important, so.

KMD: Let me pause and we'll look at the next thing.

[*break in audio*]

KMD: Okay, we're back in the box, [which contains] the things that she doesn't show and she says they're strange, or—

BC: Too personal.

KMD: And this is an ink drawing.

BC: It's an ink drawing of a poet or something, someone in some historical book. It's—I just did this drawing of India ink on vellum paper.

KMD: And the vellum is yellow.

BC: And the vellum's always turning—but the yellow, it's turning yellow because of the tape.

KMD: The tape, that's right.

BC: It's not because—there was probably some kind of acid in the tape. But the paper itself is also yellowed. But anyway, that's a very old drawing when I was experimenting with just flat ink drawings. But this is an example of some of the sketches I did when I was depressed, where she just looks confused, and she doesn't know where to go. I have a lot of drawings like this. I have a whole box full of these. It's terrible. You know, like just misery—misery drawings, I call them.

KMD: Let's get the ones out that you went that way with.

BC: Oh, these?

KMD: Yeah, the ones that you were—they're underneath there.

BC: Oh, right here?

KMD: Yeah, that I didn't—

BC: Oh, this one there?

KMD: Is that pencil?

BC: Yeah, that's pencil. I did this drawing while I was on a bus. I was taking a bus somewhere, and I was just letting the pencil—

KMD: With the vibration of the bus? And this shoe is from high school, you said?

BC: This is a high school drawing.

KMD: Oh, my God. That's gorgeous.

BC: It's a pencil drawing. Look at this cheap paper. That's how poor I was. I used to use the cheapest paper.

KMD: The realism is amazing.

BC: Experimenting with watercolor.

KMD: Watercolor.

BC: So—but I still wanted to do like super—even with the watercolor, I wanted to still do that graphic style.

KMD: That detail.

BC: Just simple lines. I don't know. It's more—I think watercolor's more difficult. This is a clay-coated paper drawing of—

KMD: Now, this is extremely different, this one. You have another one like that as well. It's like those angry women—I mean, it's not realism, it's—the faces are contorted, larger eyes, strange angles on the jawline.

BC: It's just like feelings, different expressions of frustration and—I don't know. I don't even know why I did them.

KMD: Yeah. The eyes here—

BC: But I was also experimenting with different paper. Like this paper had this—I did a couple of drawings on this paper. It's like a glossy bond paper, or card stock, and it's—it really looks—I mean, you can get some really cool detail in there, with the—

KMD: With the ink pen.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: Again, a watercolor face, very simple.

- BC: Looks pissed off. *[laughter]*
- KMD: Yeah, those eyes, those evil eyes.
- BC: Yeah. This was funny. I liked this paper too, it's got'
- KMD: What is that?
- BC: This is a vellum.
- KMD: Oh. "Don't get bitter Barbs?"
- BC: Yeah, "Don't get bitter Barbs." I don't know why I wrote that. Maybe somebody told me I was bitter. But—and this is an early, early pissed off drawing.
- KMD: This is like—linoleum?
- BC: Yeah, it's a linoleum. I don't know where it is. It's in here somewhere.
- KMD: You know, now that I look at that mouth, that angry mouth, it's like the self-portrait that you did.
- BC: Oh, it is. The silkscreen.
- KMD: The silkscreen.
- BC: Yeah.
- KMD: Yeah. The '80 . . . was it '84?
- BC: Eighty-four Olympic games.
- KMD: The '84 Olympic games, yeah.
- BC: And this is something I did for a women's conference.
- KMD: Oh, I've seen that before.
- BC: It was huge. It was for a women's conference at some—I think Cal State LA. And then what we did was we made a big paper mural. It was a big—it was all just made out of paper.
- KMD: Well, wait. We've passed up Minna.
- BC: Oh, Minna.
- KMD: Minna.
- BC: Minna Agins. This was done for her exhibit at SPARC, many years ago. I forgot what year that was. Oh, does it have the year there? Shit.
- KMD: It does. Eighty—I'm pretty sure that's 1980.
- BC: Oh, yeah, 1980. But she had asked me to do her portrait, because she didn't want a photograph of her. And so this was right next to the signage about her exhibit.
- KMD: About how large was the original?
- BC: About double this. It was a little—it was a life-size portrait.
- KMD: Oh, like twenty-four by—
- BC: Yes.
- KMD: More like twenty-four by thirty, maybe.
- BC: Yeah. And I don't know what happened to the original. Someone has it. But it was all stipple drawing, and it was her at her desk. I took the photograph—I have the photograph, actually. So I had a Polaroid camera at the time when I took this picture of her.
- KMD: And the idea that it was a gift for her?
- BC: Hmm?
- KMD: Was that a gift for her?
- BC: Yeah, I did it for her exhibit, and I think she took the drawing, or somebody at SPARC has the drawing. I don't know. I never found out what happened to the drawing. And then this was for a women's conference, "Woman to Woman." What year was this? A friend of mine, Helen Hernandez—
- KMD: A dialogue of the '80s, for the '80s, so it must have—oh, '86.
- BC: Nineteen eighty-six. Oh, yeah, it was at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel.
- KMD: Let me see the graphic that you did.
- BC: It's a silhouette of two women talking to each other, and it's the infinity symbol also.
- KMD: Their hair makes that.

- BC: So this is a really simple logo. Helen [Hernandez] asked me—I had to work with Helen before I was introduced to Helen by Dolores Huerta, and then Helen works for the entertainment industry. She puts on the Imagen Awards every year. And so that’s—her and I have been friends for a long time. And then these are just things that have been printed in magazines, different art publications. Nineteen eighty-eight. Little black and white drawings. Oh, this sad little lady, weird lady. But I like doing—I used to like drawing on this smooth surface of a board. Oh, this was an early silverpoint, my first year in college. I did this one when I was at West LA College.
- KMD: A portrait—
- BC: Of a Native American man.
- KMD: Of a Native American.
- BC: And this was also done in the same year. This was done for a drawing class I did at West LA College. But it’s amazing, because when I was there, I had couple . . . Oh, this was the *Antizona* one, for Harry’s play. I didn’t notice they had that one. I like this one. This is Harry and I in a skull.
- KMD: In a skull.
- BC: Oh, and this is an early litho, this is 1977. This is a lithograph. And that’s a mistake, the acid bit right onto the plate.
- KMD: So tell me about this. This is like a person’s hand over their face.
- BC: Yeah, that’s me laughing, I’m laughing. And the first thing I did is, I did a color Xerox of myself, where you put yourself right on the Xerox, and then I based this drawing on the Xerox. And it’s—you draw with a crayon on a fine-toothed aluminum plate. And then you have to—
- KMD: And here’s the hints of your attraction to hair, too.
- BC: Yeah, you can see it.
- KMD: Little tiny lines.
- BC: Oh, then we talked about that already, right.
- KMD: Right.
- BC: We talked about the mural, too, right?
- KMD: Which?
- BC: The big huge mural?
- KMD: No, we didn’t.
- BC: Oh, we never talked about my big huge mural?
- KMD: This is *Chismarte* Southwest issue. Oh, yes, we did talk about that one. That’s where I have the photo from—you’re right. Wait, that’s embossed.
- BC: Oh, I embossed it.
- KMD: Oh, you did?
- BC: My name? Yeah. So nobody will steal it. [laughter] Anyway, so I guess we talked about all of these early drawings and sketches. But this is just one little box, I just—the other stuff—I think—I didn’t know you would be interested in this kind of early stuff, but I do have several boxes like this.
- KMD: I’m just fascinated by the artistic trajectory. I mean, in some sense—maybe people want to see change over time, but there’s a combination of consistency, that incredible hand, that love of detail, the ability to render realistically a portrait. Even though these acrylic paintings, for example, that you talked earlier for the COLA show, don’t have that kind of detail, now that I see many examples of ink drawings, you know, ballpoint pen, and the liveliness of the pen starts to come through in the painting. Even though it’s flat, it’s just the way you attack the coloration of the lips to give it shadow, or the eyes, the eyebrows, the eye-lashes. I mean, it echoes that skill.
- BC: All the detail.
- KMD: Yeah. You couldn’t have gotten there without the other. I mean, that’s why I was interested in the older work. For the show, how are you thinking about it?

BC: Well, they wanted to do it with . . . Karen and Sybil are both co-curating the mid-career survey exhibit. But they want to put it in—like all the COLA together, and they want to put it historical in—like a historical kind of context. Like all the work that even comes close to this time period, they want to put together. And then I was suggesting that all the drawings be in one area, because they're so—the miniatures are one thing, but then they have other ballpoint pen drawings that . . . She has some stuff already, that's why I wish I could show you some of the other stuff that I gave her, handed over, like an early ballpoint pen drawing that is big. It's about this big, of a pregnant woman, and she's pissed off. It's a profile of her. But she has her hand over her stomach. And I showed that at Self Help Graphics a long time ago, and people were very upset about that drawing, because her breasts are exposed, too.

KMD: Was that the show that Shifra Goldman did at Spark?

BC: No, at Self Help.

KMD: At Self Help Graphics, I'm sorry.

BC: Yeah. The one at SPARC was—that's where the *Pregnant Woman in the Ball of Yarn* was exhibited for the first time, in that show. So, but the one at Self Help, it was the pregnant woman, I had that pregnant woman, and the other ballpoint pen pregnant woman, both of them next to each other. And that was when people were really upset that—why am I showing their breasts exposed, and—

KMD: We're a little hung-up, aren't we? [laughter]

BC: Yeah. I thought that was ridiculous. And then I did another piece called *Holly Would*, and it's a sculpture piece I did when I was a student at UCLA. And that piece, a couple of Chicano artists refused to have that piece in the show, because the breasts are exposed, too. And the breasts aren't entirely exposed; it's just mostly cleavage. But—and then it says on her chest, the lettering says, "Holly would," but it's spelled *W-O-U-L-D*. I have a photograph of it, let me get it.

[break in audio]

KMD: So we're looking at a photograph of a sculpture that's—

BC: It's a clay sculpture, and the glaze—it's heavily glazed with this real, you know, ugly blonde hair that this woman has, and some heavy false eyelashes and eye shadow, and then it says—the words "Holly would" are really three-dimensional words, that say Holly *W-O-U-L-D*. And then this piece was in the student show at UCLA, and everybody was upset about it, because it was so garish, her eyelashes and . . . I was making a statement about Hollywood, so they got a little offended. And I gave this to Dolores Huerta as a birthday gift many years ago, and now Karen wants to put it in the show. So I don't know. I guess that's my critique of Hollywood. That's me and Jackie Cooper. [laughter]

KMD: So you have a lot of photographs of all the folks that you met through your work.

BC: Yeah. There's Glenna Avila, who's now—she has the best, she has the photo. This is a bad photo. There's my little sister. [Rod Sakai]. I was working on the mural.

KMD: These are the students in front of the *LA History* mural.

BC: Yeah. That girl is right there. So all the kids who worked on the mural are in the mural.

KMD: When you finally started to document your work, how did you do that? It was slides, you shot slides?

BC: Yeah. They were all—I have a really pretty good slide collection. I gave both the curators a lot of slides, so they're going to transfer them onto DVD. I think that's—what's really unfortunate is that in the early days, a lot of us didn't document our work at all. In fact, I had a really—I didn't take good care of stuff, either. I had an original John Valadez, and I put it in a box, and then the box somehow got some mildew on it or moisture on it, and the whole drawing was ruined. And it was a beautiful drawing.

KMD: But you might not have had—hold on just a second. You might not have had your own sense of an early period to document, but you eventually get an incredible sense of documentation, because you deposit—I don't know how this happened, so I wanted to ask you about it—mural sketches and drawings are deposited in the permanent collection of works on paper at the Library of Congress in DC. That happens in '89. Documentation of your early—of your mural work is archived in the California murals collection at the

Smithsonian, '83. And then in '96, you get your—establish the archive at Stanford University Special Collections, Mexican-American Manuscript collection. So how does that happen?

BC: Well, actually the collection at the Library of Congress came about through a recommendation by Robbie Conal to the curator. Bernard Reilly was the curator at the time, and he was—he came to LA, and he looked at my sketches and purchased five or six sketches. I think it was five of them. And one of them was the mural sketch for the *LA History* mural, which was about five feet long, so it was a pretty big sketch. So he purchased those, they paid for those, and it's now in their permanent collection of works on paper.

But then the Stanford University thing came about by—and this is where I think women have to be assertive, more assertive than we are. I actually went to Stanford to speak in Yvonne's class, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano. And while I was there I made an appointment to meet with Robert Trujillo, the archivist, because I thought—I knew they had purchased Harry's work two years before. And then I said—so when I had a meeting with him, I told him that I had a lot of stuff that I think he would be interested in. That's how I presented it to him. I had about eight or nine boxes of—a whole box just on Harry's work, Harry's stuff that he had sent me in the mail, and just stuff—it wasn't personal stuff. It was just stuff about Harry's work. And then his eyes lit up, because a lot of stuff that was missing from Harry's personal collection, stuff that had been thrown away by people in his life, that sort of, like, filled in—

KMD: Supplemented and filled in, yeah.

BC: Yeah. So he was really happy about that. Then I had another box of just flyers, like political flyers, cultural flyers, and he—you know, the first thing he asked me was, "What made you save this?" That was the first thing he said. And I said, "I always thought it was important." But he was so happy to see that, because he said, "Political flyers—"

KMD: Oh, so these are events that you'd been to or were a part of.

BC: Yeah. Either I was a part of it, Dolores was a part of it, or Harry was a part of it. Or close friends. And so I thought, "Hey, well, I'm going to keep these," and I just started keeping them in a box, and that stuff was pretty organized. I mean, not like my art. It's so weird. The paper stuff was pretty organized. Because when he came to LA and he saw my stuff, it was—he couldn't believe it. He said, "You're really organized." I had a big box full of all the—just the flyers, and then I had another box on Dolores—I mean, not just Dolores, but letters that Dolores, César, writers, artists, poets, everybody had sent me. It was all—it was like—he really liked that box full of stuff, too. He said, "Wow, that's great." Just even letters like Antonio Burciaga would send me, like a little letter [that says] "Barbara, I saw your work, keep up the good work," you know? I cherish those kinds of notes. Those, to me . . . And, what's her name, Carmen Lomas Garza would—everybody would do stuff like that. And that's what I really loved about all the artists. They were very supportive. Patricia Rodríguez [of] *Mujeres Muralistas* . . . I mean, one of most supportive people I've ever met, a really nice person. So she would—you know, just little notes and letters. "Hey, I saw your stuff," or, "Why don't you apply for this," or . . . So to me, those were really, really important. I never threw any of that away. And then he couldn't believe that I had a whole box full of rejection letters. I saved all of my rejection letters.

KMD: Rejections from grants, and—

BC: Like grants and mural projects, different things that I had been rejected from, and I kept all of them. I was pissed. I looked at them as sort of reminders of how much more work I've got to do. It was interesting to see his response to the collection. He really—well, he came down, and we were living in Silver Lake, and I had all the boxes out there for him to look through, and he just tripped out. He said, "Wow, this is wonderful." But I initiated that. I did that. Because I don't think he was interested. I don't know, he didn't know me, and I had to—

KMD: So that happens in '96, when it actually gets deposited. When did you start documenting your artistic work? When do you get that slide collection going?

BC: Like right when I met Harry. I started . . . In the early '80s Harry—well, when we were friends, he used to tell me about documentation. So I started—we started actually going together in '86. Eighty-five, '86, something like that. But I remember before that, he used to tell me that. Even when we were friends, he

would say, “It’s important for you to document that. Go ahead and take photos, or I’ll take photos.” And I remember Carlos Almaraz actually took some early slides of my work. I’d asked him. He wasn’t a very good photographer. But then Harry started taking over and taking photos, so that was really good.

But all the like—all the stuff that’s at Stanford, a lot of that—for some reason, I just kept all the stuff. It wasn’t very good. It wasn’t put away in separate boxes until this thing with Stanford, when Stanford bought Harry’s stuff. I think they only purchased four boxes of Harry’s stuff. It was only four boxes, did you know that? It was a small amount. And then I had like nine boxes. *[laughter]* And then I remember Harry said, “Why don’t you throw that stuff away?” But they purchased it for a good amount of money, which was something we needed at the time, so that was great.

KMD: Let me pause for a second. We can reorganize.

[break in audio]

KMD: I wanted to end with a question, your reflections. When you consider the relationship between politics, feminism, and art, what are your thoughts now, as a mid-career artist?

BC: Well, I think that given the fact that we’re left out of so many shows or overlooked or not considered to be . . . The *WACK!* *[Art and the Feminist Revolution]* exhibition is one of—a good example. They always pick the same artists to be in these exhibits. You know, the token Chicana artist, and we know who that is. But I feel like right now, *[as well as]* my entire art career, I’ve always considered *[myself as]* expressing myself as a feminist and including myself in the feminist movement, even though we’re overlooked oftentimes. But the fact is that I think that my work is going in a direction of—that’s really powerful, and I want to make powerful images that women can relate to.

KMD: And feminists can paint nude bodies, or draw nude bodies?

BC: I think that’s also an extension of how strong we are, and how we identify. I mean, our bodies is part of our identity as a female. And I think that anyone who has problems with the female body has problems with women, then. I remember thinking when one particular artist was objecting to the breasts being exposed, I said, “What’s the problem? We all have breasts. What is your problem about it?” I don’t understand. The artwork is going to be left out on that basis, that the breasts are exposed? That doesn’t make any sense to me.

KMD: What if someone said, “Well, it objectifies”—that it goes along with objectifying women’s bodies more?

BC: I think it’s how you present it. Like in the *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*, it was essential that the body was nude. It was important for the overall message. I couldn’t see doing it any other way.

KMD: And the composition.

BC: Yeah.

KMD: How would you render the clothes? It would get lost in the ball of yarn, which is the hair, right?

BC: Yeah. And then it’s not like it’s appealing or anything, or—

KMD: Sexualized.

BC: Yeah, it’s like . . . And so I think it’s just really interesting, how people are—why people object to certain images of women. I mean, I think if a woman—I think it’s important for me to do my rendition of the human body, the female body, because men have—their intentions are so drastically different from ours. And mine is not any way exploiting or humiliating or degrading women in any way.

KMD: Several times throughout the interview sessions you’ve said that certain men were very supportive. Can you first tell me what you meant by “support”? Like what did they actually do or say? And then, secondly, if you can reflect on whether that has changed. Has it gotten better, is it the same?

BC: Well, the men that I refer to as being supportive in my early career were older male artists who . . . And it’s interesting, they were the more political artists, the more involved artists in the community, and I think that has a lot to do with them being supportive of women artists. They realized that they have to acknowledge that someone is creating work that’s going to be reflecting their views, too, as well—inclusive with their ideas. So I think like Carlos Almaraz and Harry, my husband Harry, they were supportive in—real specifically, by saying, “This work, you need to develop it more.” They were critical, but they weren’t. And

to me, the artist who didn't say anything—I was more offended by those artists than the artists who gave me criticism, because at least the artists who are criticizing my work are acknowledging my work.

KMD: Engaging it.

BC: And engaging it, yeah. And like the criticism from Carlos was really—it came from his heart. And he actually said, “Barbara, you’re doing really important work. You have to really develop your style, and. . .” He’s the one who made me realize that it’s not just the message that’s important, it’s also the technique, the style, the presentation of the work. It’s all integral. It’s not—and Harry, he was supportive of all my work. Not just my painting and drawing, but my writing, as a writer. He told me, “You’re a really good writer, you should write more.” He encouraged me to write this book, whatever it comes out. And I actually have a book that he gave me that’s dated from 1980—I think it’s ’80, in 1980—and it’s a blank book, and all it says is, “The writings of Barbara Carrasco,” and there’s nothing in it.

KMD: He was hoping you’re entering—

BC: He was hoping I would enter, yeah. But I still have that, it’s funny. But you know, they were really extremely—and Harry was very critical, too. I mean, I remember as a friend—he was my friend back then—we would have meetings at Philippe’s, and he would say, “Barbara, you’re just doing all this work for the UFW, and all this work for the community, and that’s important, and that’s good, but what are you doing about how you feel as a Chicana artist who’s a creative person? What are you doing that’s personal, that’s going to express who you are as a person?” And I would just look at him. I didn’t know what to say, because no one ever asked me those questions. Never. He was the first person to do that. And also the whole idea of documenting—he . . . I don’t know, I think I wouldn’t have been documenting my work at all if it weren’t for him. He was very insistent on it.

KMD: Has it gotten easier for you, as a woman artist?

BC: No.

KMD: No?

BC: I don’t think so. I think there’s still a lot of sexism, and I think the curators out there—most of them are sexist. They are. And if there’s something happening . . . The few male curators that I’ve met have actually been pretty good. The one at MIT, Dana Friis-Hansen, he was great. But I think now, there’s some kind of—something weird is happening, I think, because the political climate in the country is reverting back to days of conservatism and—it’s scary. I think it’s very much a threat. And the advertising world is really objectifying women in a way that is really offensive. My daughter and I were driving yesterday and saw a billboard with a—I don’t know if you saw that billboard of a woman reclining, and it’s called—*Nip and Tuck*, it’s an ad for *Nip and Tuck*.

KMD: Yes, another *Nip and Tuck*.

BC: And it was awful, it was just absolutely horrible. But they’re doing it through clothing that is targeting young girls. I don’t know . . . I think we’re living in a pretty interesting time.

KMD: What is your next step?

BC: My next step. Oh, that’s a good question. I don’t know. My next step, I definitely think, is really to commit myself to being a more serious artist, doing more work. Trying to find a balance between my career and motherhood. It’s really difficult. I really want to be a good mother, and that’s the reason why I’ve been involved in my daughter’s school, and her education, and all that. It’s really difficult to do work when you have all these responsibilities. And it’s—but I’m finding ways, where like I told you, like I do my work at night. And then I think it’s going to get a little bit easier as my daughter gets older. I think it’ll be easier for me to go away and spend some time and do work elsewhere, or she can go on little trips and I can be alone to do my work. [*laughter*] It’s just really hard, it’s real difficult. And I think financially, I have to get to a place where I can be very stable financially, so that I could afford to have a separate studio. I think that’s where I have to definitely do that. I did have a studio years ago, and it did make things easier. I had a studio on Ninth and Broadway, and it was a really wonderful studio, at the old United Artists building?

KMD: Yeah.

BC: I was in Greta Garbo's old office.

KMD: Wow.

BC: Well, her studio—her office was my old studio. So, anyway, but I think I need to definitely have a studio space completely just for being creative.

KMD: One last question. When you think about your development as an artist, from the commissions you've had, the graphic work you've been hired to do, the paintings, the exhibition, the challenges of censorship, would you have done anything over?

BC: Oh, yes. Yeah, I think I—I think if I look objectively through my career, there was times where I was—my state of mind was—it was really detrimental to my producing work. I think I was too angry, and I didn't see the bigger picture a lot of times. And I think that if I had put all my energy into really producing good work, and less involved in fighting and arguing with people and trying to change people, it's just . . .

It was really distracting, actually, because I was a really angry person for many years. I don't know where that anger—the anger, I think it came from just the feelings of being objectified and not taken seriously, it really stemmed from that. I mean, on one hand, I told you, on one hand I was flattered that people thought I was attractive, but it was really a problem. I mean, everywhere I went, it was like—it was really difficult. Even in my last interview he made a comment about how very attractive I was when I was young, and I remember thinking—well, it bothered me, because this was right before the interview starts, and he said, "Well, you sure were quite a looker back then." And it all kind of brought back memories of all these guys—all the artists not taking me seriously, and always hitting on me, and always commenting about my appearance. And I don't know, I guess to some people, they would love that, but I did not like it. It actually used to piss me off. And I remember when he said that, it kind of—I just felt angry immediately. And I didn't—I'd never—I didn't say anything to him, because I don't think he meant it to be—he didn't mean it—

KMD: He thought he was giving a compliment.

BC: Yeah, he thought he was definitely giving me a compliment.

KMD: Are you saying you wouldn't have fought for the *LA History* mural?

BC: No, not that kind of fight.

KMD: Okay.

BC: It was mostly battles with—

KMD: At the individual level.

BC: Yeah, just individual level. And just even on a personal level, just being so hard on myself. I was really hard on—I really bought that whole thing about you have to do this type of work and not other work, and real rigid about experimenting with different—even with different community groups. I never really went outside my—you know what I mean? I think it would have been really great to go outside and work with the black community, or work in the Asian community. But I didn't really do that, because I was involved in the Chicano art movement, and the movement itself, and so—I mean, the farm workers came closest to being more inclusive of any other organization. They had everybody working for them. So I don't know, I think I would have changed just the—yeah, I was a little too antagonistic, the word is. I was, I was . . . I don't know why, it was just all a lot of factors. But—I'm sure glad I get an option to edit this later. *[laughter]*

KMD: *[laughter]* Thank you.



INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA CARRASCO

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