



# CSRC ORAL HISTORIES SERIES

NO. 7, NOVEMBER 2013

## JOHNNY GONZALEZ, with IRMA NÚÑEZ

INTERVIEWED BY KAREN MARY DAVALOS  
ON OCTOBER 28, NOVEMBER 4, 11, AND 18,  
AND DECEMBER 17 AND 20, 2007

Artist and businessman Johnny/Don Juan Gonzalez is recognized as one of the founders of the Chicano Mural Movement in East Los Angeles. He co-founded the Goez Art Studios and Gallery in 1969. His mural designs include those for *Story of Our Struggle* and *The Birth of Our Art*. A resident of Los Angeles, Gonzalez is a partner in Don Juan Productions, Advertising, and Artistic Services.

Educator Irma Núñez has taught in the Los Angeles Unified School District and has been involved in citywide adult education programs. She is the recipient of the CALCO Excellence in Teaching Award from the California Council for Adult Education. She is a partner in Don Juan Productions, Advertising, and Artistic Services.

Karen Mary Davalos is chair and professor of Chicana/o studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her research interests encompass representational practices, including art exhibition and collection; vernacular performance; spirituality; feminist scholarship and epistemologies; and oral history. Among her publications are *Yolanda M. López* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2008); "The Mexican Museum of San Francisco: A Brief History with an Interpretive Analysis," in *The Mexican Museum of San Francisco Papers, 1971–2006* (UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2010); and *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

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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.

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## 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.

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## 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

# INTERVIEW WITH JOHNNY GONZALEZ AND IRMA NÚÑEZ

OCTOBER 28, 2007 . . . . .	1
NOVEMBER 4, 2007 . . . . .	34
NOVEMBER 11, 2007 . . . . .	90
NOVEMBER 18, 2007 . . . . .	143
DECEMBER 17, 2007 . . . . .	236
DECEMBER 20, 2007 . . . . .	285

## OCTOBER 28, 2007

**Karen Avalos:** Thank you for taking the time to be here this weekend. I just want to start, Johnny, with some really basic questions about when and where you were born.

**Johnny Gonzalez:** I was born in 1943. June 20 of 1943, in Aguascalientes, Mexico, the birthplace and hometown of José Guadalupe Posada, which I'm very proud of, which I had no knowledge about for many, many years. And this has so much to do with the fact that I had so little knowledge on my culture. And my dad was Juan Gonzalez, he was a carpenter. And my mother Guadalupe Duarte Gonzalez, who was actually born in Arizona and at the age of seven went to Mexico, and then got married there.

I'm the third of six siblings: the first was my brother Joe Gonzalez, the second was Rebecca Gonzalez, I was the third, Imelda Gonzalez was fourth—we were all born in Aguascalientes, and my younger sister, Alicia, was born here in the United States after we came here. So I came here at the age of four years old. And then we have a younger brother who's about fifty years old, who was also born here in the United States.

**KD:** Do you have any sense of why the family came? I mean, you're awfully young, but maybe the told the story later?

**JG:** Yeah. They came because my dad's—my dad was actually self-employed, he had a cabinet shop, cabinet-making shop, and they robbed them, completely. Everything, they stole everything. I think all they left was a chisel that he found in the sawdust when he went back in. So there was no way of making any more money. And since my mother was a citizen of the United States, and my brother, Joe, the oldest, was also a citizen, because at that time, anybody born of a citizen outside the country, before the '40s, was automatically a citizen. So my brother was automatically a citizen.

My mother had a cousin here in—it was called Pio Pico, a little community between Montebello and Pico Rivera. So they decided first to move to Juárez, and then from there, my mom came over. They worked—actually, my mom worked a little while in Juárez, she used to come over the border and clean house for a lady, and so the lady, the family, was actually very nice people, and they actually helped her—the fact that she was already American, they sort of helped in setting up things so that she could be able to come over here. So she came over here with Joe, my brother. Joe was eight years old. And my mom decided to come over here and start fixing papers for the four of us which lived with my dad: my older sister, my two sisters, and myself.

So she spent like six months working here, odd jobs, and suffering a lot, trying to get things going. And she was living with a cousin in Pio Pico. And in order to get my dad over here, she had to find a job for him first. So she found a job in construction for him. So that's how he finally managed to come over here with the three of us.

**KD:** Is that in '47 then?

**JG:** That was in '49.

**KD:** Oh, okay. So much after the war.

JG: Yeah, it was in '49. Well, let's see it could have been maybe '48, because I was [five] years old. And so when we moved to Pio Pico, it turns out that Pio Pico was like a little ranch town, they had no paved streets, and of course there was no lawns or anything like that, that was totally unknown about at that time. But it was a little community which was maybe three blocks by two blocks long, just a little tiny area, and it was located right by Rosemead—Rosemead was a gigantic street for us—to me, I was a little kid, I was [five] years old, and it was so scary to go by Rosemead, because cars moved fast over there.

And then we were separated from, I guess, other areas of Montebello because there was a river, a river went through there. But it was a lot of fun for us, being kids, living right by the river. And then there were orchards that—it just seemed like a long long distance, maybe a couple of miles or something, to get to Whittier Boulevard, and that's where my mom struggled very much, because she got a job working in a sewing shop, downtown LA, so she had to walk, on her own, all across the orchards to get a bus on Whittier Boulevard. And that was a very difficult thing for her, [especially at night]. So she had to take like three buses to go all the way downtown, and then come back, [many times at night,] all the way being over there.

Irma Núñez: How long was she alone before your dad came—

JG: It was like six, seven months, somewhere around there. And her boss was very nice, Jewish owner of the sewing factory, but she used to mention, she spent a lot of time crying while she was working on her sewing, because she went so many months without seeing any of us, and he used to comfort her a lot. He used to say, you know, "Don't cry, Lupe, don't cry"—my mom's [name is] Lupe—"don't cry, they'll be here, they'll be here." And finally, when she got the papers all fixed up, she went to work and asked permission if she could get out, because she was going to go meet us at the train depot, and the owner of the factory was so excited that he hugged her and everything and said, "Go on, go on, go with your family," he says. "But you know that I'm going to save your chair here. Any time you want to come back." And as it turns out, he tried like three times to get her back, and my dad being a true Mexicano said, "Nope. I'm the breadwinner. I'm going to do the work now. You stay home with the kids."

So that's when my dad started working first in construction. And then after the rainy season came, there was no more work in construction, so he got a job with an uncle—my Uncle Angel, who was his uncle, he was my grand-uncle, it was his uncle, actually—he got a job working as a gardener for the owners of a soap company, it was a residence, but they actually had—it was a three-story home, they had an elevator in the house, and it was a gigantic—I mean, it was on top of a mountain, and my dad and my uncle used to take care of the whole mountain. Beautiful trees, it was just wonderful. I used to go up there a few times, and it was just this gigantic mansion, I remember he was making forty-five dollars a week, I think. Forty-five dollars a week.

And what happened is that to go all the way without having a car, my dad wasn't driving—without having a car, to take a bus—and this was in Hollywood, up in the hills in Hollywood, to take a bus from Rosemead all the way to Hollywood, up in the mountains, was very difficult. So he asked around, if anybody could find a place closer, and it turns out that a friend of the family found a place in East LA. And so that was my introduction to East LA. So when we arrived—and the house that we lived in Pio Pico had an outhouse, outside. The house was two rooms, the kitchen and whatever we wanted to use the next room for, it was a combination bedroom, living room, everything, we used to take baths in what we called a *tina*—

KD: Yeah. [laughter] Yeah.

JG: So we had no bathtub there, and no bathroom inside. Like I said, it was an outhouse. So when we moved [from] Pio Pico, and we first went to the house [in East LA], when we pulled up, this elderly lady came out, and it seemed strange to me that we were going into a house that somebody already was living in. You know, what's this lady [doing] coming out of our house. But it turns out that we were going to be living in the back house, but it became a wonderful experience, because it turns out that the lady that owned the

house actually lived there when there were very, very few houses in East LA, and she used to go downtown LA shopping on a horse and buggy.

KD: Wow.

IN: What was her name?

JG: Mrs. Stone. So she had—when she was [first] there, I think she said there were like three houses right around the whole area. So she actually owned like a little ranch. And now, she had built two houses on the side, but she still had, next to us, she still had—[our backyard and a lot.] The lot was big enough to have three more houses in it, and what it is, is that she had like a six-foot fence, chain link fence, that separated or locked in what used to be a whole barn, I guess, animals, you know, she had tons of animals. So it was all there. But she had two beautiful—we used to call them Al Capone cars, gigantic cars, the old cars that she had. But it was like an avocado orchard. This felt so fortunate, we had so many trees. So it turned out that we had the biggest yard from everybody in the neighborhood, and we had a bathtub, and we had a bathroom in our own house, which was a wonderful experience.

And she had tons of lumber. I don't know why she had so much lumber, but we loved it. Because my dad being a carpenter and having the tools, and we have the lumber, we were able to build everything. We used to—he used to make teeter-totters, stilts, we used to make hot rods, we used to make scooters. We made everything you can think of, because my dad never had the money to buy us anything. So we were able to make all our toys, which was just wonderful. But the other thing is that like, you hear a lot of these people that the kids, when they say that they were very poor but they never knew they were poor—well, that was our experience. The only reason I knew that we were poorer than the others is because mostly everybody else had a television, a car, and a telephone, and we didn't have any of those.

KD: Oh, wow.

JG: So in regards to the television, that's the one thing that I felt we missed an awful lot. There was different—we missed all the different things, for different reasons, but in regards to the television, we'd be playing with the kids in the neighborhood, and my dad was very, very strict, and the fact that we had such a gigantic yard, he says, "There's no need for you to go out and play in other people's houses or in the street. Have them all come over here and play in the yard." And then we had what we grew up calling an *enramado* [arbor], which was like a patio, a long patio with—

IN: A *ramada*?

JG: With grapes, with a grapevine growing all over the top of it, and it had—it must have been thirty feet long, and it had—on one side, it had a bench where we could all sit down, and on the other side, it had a whole picnic table that was thirty feet long with two benches all along it. So the picnic table, we used to use it as a stage, and we used to put on productions up there, and we used to change underneath the picnic table.

IN: Change your costumes? [laughter]

JG: Yeah. [laughter]

KD: About how old were you at this time?

JG: Six, about six years old. Six, seven years old, somewhere around there [until about ten or eleven]. Anyway, it was just a wonderful experience.

And in regards to the television, we'd be playing with the kids. Of course [when] my dad went to work, we wouldn't pay attention, we played in the street, but the minute it was four thirty that he was ready to come home, we were in the house behaving very good. But anyway, we'd go play with the kids, and even go down to their houses [and they would many times invite us to stay and watch television], and then at a certain point, when my dad came [home], we'd have to come, so we'd miss television. We'd never be able to [see all the great programs that started after we left]. We could see TV, a little bit of television, when my dad wasn't around, but when he was around then we had to come home.

And we missed television until somebody, one of our neighbors, felt real bad and said, "Look, I'll open the window to our house [so you can look at our television from your yard]." And our yard was so big that we had a house in the back and two houses on the side. So anyway, the first house [to do this] was one

of the houses in the back on the side that said, “We’ll open the window,” and it was a window through the kitchen. So he says, “You can keep on looking at TV, we’ll open the window.” And we sat on top of the lumber, so we’d get our blankets, and my dad allowed us to just stay at night, we’d take out the blankets and everything and stay on top of the lumber and look through the window of the kitchen, so we looked at movies but we never heard the voices. So then—

KD: Do you remember what you watched?

JG: Possibly—one of the things that we used to look at were the chapters. They were the chapters, the serials, which the serials would be, *Flash Gordon*, there was one called the *Green Hornet*. *Tim Tyler’s Luck*, it was about jungle cruisers and a little kid that used to be like a patrol out in the jungle.

IN: So a lot of adventure.

KD: Something that could hold your attention, since you weren’t hearing very much.

JG: Yeah, oh yeah. There were cowboys, there was *The Range Rider* [and *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok*] with Guy Madison and Andy Divine.

IN: And I think that triggered your love for adventure, for travel, which you did later.

JG: Oh, yeah. Well, something that I forgot in regards to Pio Pico is that in Pio Pico, there was one house that had a television in the whole neighborhood, and they used to charge five cents for anybody to go there, so the place would be full of people, and the owner . . . The first image that I ever saw on television was *Hopalong Cassidy*, and it was sponsored by Barbara Ann Bread, and that was on KTLA. So that was the first thing I ever saw on television. But one of the experiences that I missed in regards to Pio Pico is that the kids used to call us names, they used to [make fun of us]. Because we were from Aguascalientes [Mexico], they used to call us [*huevos*] *calientes* [hot eggs], and they’d say *pochos* and stuff like that, and—what is it? *Mojados* [and much worst names later].

KD: *Mojados*.

JG: Yeah. So they’d make fun, and my brother got a lot of that when he came first, but I saw a lot of that. I was only [five] years old, so I didn’t get too much of it, but I experienced [it], I saw it, and it always—that began the concept of me feeling afraid or ashamed to say that I was from Mexico. So anyway, coming back to East LA, when we started looking at television through the one window, the other neighbors got excited and said, “Well, we’ll do it too.” So before you know it, we had three windows. One of them was through the kitchen, the other one was through the living room, but the other one, in the back, was through the bathroom, which meant any time somebody had to go to the bathroom, we had an intermission. They closed the window and everything. [*laughter*]

KD: Because they knew you were looking in. [*laughter*]

JG: Yeah. Well, they all intentionally would open the window, because they felt bad that we didn’t have a television. But once in awhile, they’d invite us to go over there, and we’d be able to hear television. [*laughter*] Which was—so we had a ball in—that was in Blanchard.

IN: Talk a little bit about Mrs. Stone and her castanets, and her Halloween outfits.

JG: Well, Mrs. Stone, our landlady, she spoke perfect Spanish.

KD: Really?

JG: Perfect Spanish, she spoke perfect Spanish. Very, very good Spanish. And she was very, very talented. She played the piano, she had a piano. And that got us very excited, because we’d be hearing the piano. Actually, she lived—it was actually one big house, and she subdivided. I guess she just closed off the door. So we could hear the piano. We were actually in the same house. She played the piano, beautiful piano.

She played—and I’d never seen it again—but there were pieces of ivory that were about six inches long by a half-inch wide, and about a quarter-inch thick. So she’d get four pieces of ivory and put them in between her fingers, and play them like castanets. So she played beautiful music just banging them against each other. And then the other thing she did is, she got—they look like bowling pins, and she’d do all kinds of tossing them around, she was just—

IN: Juggling.



JG: Yeah. She wouldn't throw them in the air, but she'd just pass them through. And I think she did juggle, too, as a matter of fact. I think she influenced my sister, Rebecca, and Rebecca started juggling. So Rebecca was the one that learned how to juggle.

But anyway, she was a great influence, and one day, she told my brother, "If you clean part of the yard here"—I don't know how much it was—she says, "I'll give you a guitar." So she gave my brother a guitar, which the inside said, "The original Hawaiian teaching guitar." So that was the first guitar that I ever played. But at that time, my brother started playing a few things after that, but because he got into—he was playing rough with one of his friends, or the friend was playing rough, he broke a little finger, so he couldn't play the guitar anymore, so then I took over on the guitar. And that was the first time that I started playing the guitar, [and kept on playing to this day]. So she introduced us to a lot of things having to do with music. And also her husband was a sheriff, and there was times that she would dress up in her husband's outfit—

IN: Well, he passed away, though.

JG: Yeah, he passed away, he had passed away. And I think those cars that she had . . . So, obviously, she was very wealthy at one time, because she owned so much property there. And we saw pictures of her, very elegant when she was very young. And obviously they used to have some pretty elegant parties there, because that whole picnic area that she had in the back was really nice.

But she would dress up in her husband's sheriff outfit, and she had a grandson, and she had one son, and her son had two kids, a little boy and a little girl, so they'd come over and they'd stay, and they started learning Spanish with us too. But anyway, so it was very nice, and then she'd come out as the sheriff saying, "I'm going to arrest you young kids for doing these things," and stuff like that. But what was very interesting is that for Halloween, she would make taffy, taffy candies with pecans, and she'd wrap them up and all that, give them out for Halloween. But the other thing, even more, is that she would—she had long white hair, so she would let her hair down, she would take out her false teeth, and she would dress up exactly like a witch. And when the kids came in, she'd come out with a broom, and say, "Heh-heh-heh-heh!" [laughter] And they would run away.

KD: Obviously. [laughter]

JG: So everybody used to say, "Are you going to go trick-or-treat at the witch's house?" Nobody wanted to go over there. So at the end of Halloween, us kids would wind up with all the taffy candy. [laughter] Because everybody was afraid to go in there. [laughter]

KD: Now, I would imagine growing up, you didn't have—you had to learn the ritual of Halloween.

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah.

KD: Do you remember—

JG: Actually, the first time I heard about Halloween was in Pio Pico. And when they used to say "trick or treat," they used to say, "Make sure you give people candy, because trick means that they're going to break things," and they used to literally break things. So it was a scary thing for me, because I thought, "Gee, if . . ." And it sort of—I was too small at the beginning to go out and trick or treat, because I was probably four or five years old. And so my fear was that if they came to my house they were going to destroy something if we didn't give candy. But later on, after we came to East LA, then I started learning more about it, and I got real excited, because we were able to really get candy. [laughter] We used to go trick or treating all hours of the night, we were probably the last ones out, and we'd get candy for the rest of the year. So we'd really load up on candy, so that was quite an experience.

And the other thing is that we always had our Fourth of July the day after the Fourth of July, because we would get up early in the morning on the [fifth] of July, and go throughout the whole street looking for all the fireworks that weren't burned up. So we'd get sparklers and everything that weren't burned up, and the next day, we had our Fourth of July with all of the leftovers. [laughter]

IN: What about the basement under the house?

JG: There was in the house, we had—it was a very interesting house. The kitchen was probably almost half of the entire house, the kitchen was a gigantic kitchen, and at the beginning, we first had one big bed, and

the four of us slept—all four kids slept sideways on the bed. And then later on, we got another bed, so my sisters and Joe and I had different rooms. But the kitchen was a gigantic kitchen, and the bedrooms were all smaller, but the kitchen was gigantic, and it had in the very center of the kitchen, it had a gigantic trap door, like to go down to the attic.

IN: The basement.

JG: The basement, yeah. It seemed like a really, really big, [me] being small. But as far as we all recall, it was at least five feet long by maybe four feet wide, and it had a little area where you could grab onto. But it was so big that none of us ever dared. That was like, you can't go down there. But we had in the pantry, I guess you would call it, at that time, they used to have screens, so the cool air from the bottom would come up. Well, I managed to move that screen out and crawl through that screen, that hole, into the bottom of the cellar. And what we found there, it was—Mrs. Stone had tons of bottled—they used to can their fruits.

KD: Oh, okay.

IN: Preserves.

JG: Preserves. And she had just tons. It was gigantic, it was quite an experience. But we still—it was just too gigantic, the door, to open up, so we never even—it was like, a no-no for us to even consider that. But one day that my mom and dad, on Fridays was their grocery shopping day, and they would take the bus to—my dad didn't drive, so they would take the bus to Grand Central, the Central Market.

KD: Central Market. Mm-hmm.

JG: And I don't know if they went to the show, but anyway, it was a Friday night.

KD: Oh, they went on Friday nights, okay.

JG: Yeah, they went on Friday nights.

KD: Oh, okay. A show too.

JG: When my dad came back, they would go—they'd come back with all the groceries. So I don't know, maybe they went to the show first or whatever. But anyway, the bottom line is that we had a ball. We'd stay home, and we'd all sit around the radio. We didn't have a TV, so we'd sit around the radio, and my dad was a fanatic for politics, he loved politics, because my uncle in Mexico, his uncle, was actually the mayor of Aguascalientes. And when he became the mayor of Aguascalientes, he put my dad to be a warden in the women's prison. So my dad was assistant warden, and there was another gentleman by the name of Luis Urzúa, who was the warden, and he was in there because of political relationships also. So anyway, they were in there for the duration of the time that my uncle was the mayor. And what my dad did while he was there is he managed to put bathrooms and showers in the prison, so all the women were crazy about him, because he was so nice that he would manage to—

IN: Because they didn't exist before that.

JG: They didn't have—they'd take baths however they possibly could, and he put baths in for them.

KD: Wow.

JG: But anyway, it was after my uncle left being mayor, that, he [my dad] had to get out, and that's when he started going into cabinetmaking. And originally, my dad went into seminary, he was going to be a priest. [laughter]

KD: Wow.

JG: This was like maybe four years earlier before that. So about the age of fourteen, he was going to be a priest, because he developed such a great relationship with priests that he felt that was something that he wanted to do. But he found out pretty quick, I would say. Well, my mom probably walked by. And he said, "I'll change my mind," but that was actually a lot later.

KD: So that means he had some schooling then too.

JG: Oh, yeah, he had very good schooling. He learned Latin and he learned music pretty well, he learned how to sight-read. And he played the trumpet [cornet], they called it *el cornetín*. So he learned—yeah, he got a pretty good education. He wasn't in there for a very long time, I think actually it just lasted months. But it seems like he took a lot of pride in his Latin and in the music.



- IN: And your parents read all the time.
- JG: Oh, yeah. My dad always read—
- IN: And your mom too?
- JG: Oh, yeah.
- IN: Even to this day, she's ninety years old, and she still reads.
- JG: But my dad was a fanatic in regards to politics and newspapers, and he had to read the newspaper all the time, all the time.
- KD: So was he reading *La Opinión*? Or, what do you—
- JG: Oh, yeah. At that time, here in LA, it was *La Opinión*, and then—
- KD: Oh, *Excelsior*. I can't say it, yeah.
- JG: *Excelsior*, yeah. And he bought a shortwave radio to hear the news from Mexico, so at night, real late we could hear (sounds of poor radio transmission), you could barely hear it. But he had to hear it. And actually, my mom was very excited to leave Mexico, because my dad was so much into politics, he used to go campaigning with politicians, and he used to travel around the local towns politicking. But there were assassinations on those politicians, and they mentioned even one time, they bombed one of the headquarters, and my mom was scared, but my dad really loved it. And she was afraid he was going to run for politics, and so when we left, she was very happy about that. But while we were living in East LA, he was still very much into it. As far as he was concerned, he was trying to get as much information on politics as he could. But now he was a long ways away from Mexico.
- KD: So he kept track of Mexican—
- JG: Oh, yeah. No, he kept track—he was more in track of everything that was going on in Mexico than was going on here in the United States.
- IN: He always had intentions of going back.
- JG: He always had intentions of going back.
- IN: How old was he when he finally became a citizen?
- JG: Probably ninety years old.
- IN: He lived to ninety-five.
- JG: Or late eighties. Close to ninety-six, yeah. But anyway, he just always felt that he wanted to go back, until. . . And the thing about it is he was always getting us to make sure we vote and all that other stuff.
- KD: Wow. So you learned how to think of this civic kind of—
- JG: Well, actually, I'm going a little too much ahead. But anyway, so East LA was a wonderful experience, and then we went to Malabar Street [Elementary] School. And to me, Malabar Street School . . . In Pio Pico, I actually started kindergarten, and in Malabar, I think I started the first grade [and did all of the second grade]. And in Malabar, when I [first] went into Malabar, I said, "Wow. This school is gigantic." I mean, it was. Pio Pico must have been one-tenth the size of Malabar. And it seemed to have layers, layers of—
- IN: Levels.
- JG: Levels, different levels of the playground. So when we started there, the other thing is that we all lined up outside by the flagpole, and then we'd all say, what I remember, the Pledge of Allegiance, out in the field, and then after they'd play this beautiful music, marching music, and I don't even remember which one it is, but I don't know, it could have been—some of the marching music from—military marching music, but it was just great music, and it just felt so good marching into the classroom, we'd march from the field, the very top field, we'd march out to the front of the sidewalk, and then start going back into the school, and march into . . . So it was really great.

And then my first experience in art, well, actually my mom said that I was drawing before I could even walk. She said I'd just lay on my stomach and draw and draw and draw. But the first time I think I experienced color was in Malabar Street School doing finger painting. They'd get all different colors, and it was just so much fun getting my hands all dirty with paint and doing all this color, it was just wonderful. The

other thing that I was introduced to were the—what did you call them . . . Those—they're viewers, that you're able to look—

IN: That have slides?

JG: They're stereo viewers.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Stereo viewers.

KD: There's two images, and when you look through it, it's a little bit more 3D?

JG: Yeah, exactly.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, yeah. And I said, "Wow." I started feeling like I'm in another world. And that was really my first experience feeling a part of other worlds, and I used to love to just look at them to see mountains and everything, and it was just so wonderful. And then the other thing is that we had the maypole dance—this was way before I ever heard of Cinco de Mayo, so this was maypole dancing.

IN: The May Day—

JG: The May Day.

IN: When did you look at the book about the [Great] Wall of China?

JG: That wasn't until Assumption School.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: But anyway, in Malabar, the other thing is that one day, as I was going to school, I saw some movement, a lot of legs at the distance, and as I got closer, it turned out to be a bunch of horses. And as I got closer, it was a beautiful pinto horse, and this cowboy dressed real elegant, and he had a stagecoach, and it was right in the street. And it turned out that it was Monte Montana, [a very famous cowboy].

KD: Oh!

JG: And I still wonder, is Montana a Latino, because we always call him Monte Montana. And he was going to be putting on a show inside our school ground at Malabar Street School. So anyway, it was just a great experience, that I was going to school, and here I managed to see him and even talk to him on my own.

KD: Now, in your elementary school at Malabar, what was the racial and cultural composition of the students? Is it mostly Mexicano?

JG: At Malabar? Oh, no, no. There were—this is Boyle Heights in the '50s, [as a kid from Mexico, I felt like] there were very few Latinos. A lot of *judios*, a lot of Jewish, Japanese, whites, [Chinese, and Russians]. Yeah, we had very few Latinos there [in comparison to now].

KD: Now, I imagine you're speaking Spanish at home. And when you come to school—

JG: Yeah, then it's English. My mom said that we started learning it pretty quick in Pio Pico, so I don't know how much, but anyway, I know my struggle in school [was English], and I used to feel scared and intimidated when I started. Actually, in Malabar, there wasn't too much—I guess I was too small—reading and stuff like that, so I didn't feel it that much. But the difference that started happening, [when I really began feeling confused,] is that they changed my name from Juan to Johnny.

KD: Oh, that's when it happened.

JG: So all of a sudden, I was Johnny. I was Juanito, then—and then all of a sudden I was Johnny. And that created some confusion for me because, in one end, I felt that Juanito wasn't accepted, and it confused me, all of a sudden having another name. But it also made me feel good, because now I was Johnny and I was being accepted, and the kids weren't going to make fun of me as being a wetback, a beaner, a greaser, a TJ, and all these other names that I used to hear. And the fact that I had an accent—well, being that small, obviously, but I always did have problems with certain words, especially the *ch*. And right away, that would give me away, and they'd make fun of me. So that lingered on, so I always had—

KD: Now, help me understand. Did you one day go into school, and the teacher said, when she was calling roll, or he was calling roll, you were Johnny? Or . . .

JG: I don't remember. I don't remember how sudden it happened, but I do remember that it was probably a gradual thing or something, but there was some confusion in my mind in regards to that. But I know that it had some effect on me. And, like I said, in one end I was happy about it, and on the other side, I was confused and feeling that it was happening because I wasn't accepted. Juanito didn't exist anymore.

KD: Did they have those overt kind of stigmas about language as well? Did they tell you not to speak Spanish at school, and punish you for speaking Spanish?

JG: No, I don't remember that. I personally don't remember that. I don't remember—I guess I was just too small, maybe, or maybe I was—

KD: Or that's just the way it didn't manifest itself. Certainly changing your name, and you having a sense of other people being called greaser and beaner and all those other derogatory names—it was in the air, but just not manifesting itself.

JG: Yeah. Well, the other thing is, eventually I tried hiding the fact that I was from Mexico. I guess I couldn't hide that I was Mexican, but at that time also, I thought anybody who had a Spanish name was Mexican. I didn't know about any other Latino cultures. To me, everybody was Mexican. And everybody that spoke Spanish there, as far as I knew, was Mexican also. It probably wasn't until my older [years], or maybe somewhere in the fifth grade [that I learned there were other Latino cultures] or . . .

Well, anyway, then my dad wanted—my dad and my mom wanted the best education for us. So to them, it was for us to go to Catholic school. So there was Assumption School. And my younger sister, Imelda, hadn't started school yet, so Rebecca and Joe, my older brother and sister, they went to Assumption, and I stayed in Malabar so that I could go with Mela [once she started school there]. So Mela and I went to school for another year. So I went to Malabar, I think, in the first and second grades, and Mela started—oh, so Mela started kindergarten. So Mela was in kindergarten and I was in the [second] grade. So by this time Joe and Rebecca were at Assumption School. I'm not sure exactly what grade [but I think Rebecca started in the third grade and Joe in the fifth]. And then once Mela was able to go to the first grade, then we went to Assumption, so now we were—all four of us were at Assumption Catholic school.

KD: Because the Catholic school probably didn't have the kindergarten.

JG: No, it doesn't have the kindergarten. So now we were all in—at Assumption School. And now Assumption School was very small compared to Malabar, but it became a very intimate—intimate in regards to families knowing each other, because first of all, we had so many kids, and what I heard recently, the tuition was two dollars a kid a month at that time, and it was very expensive for us, so they gave us a discount because we had four kids.

KD: Right. Now was that your local parish too? Or was that just the closest?

JG: Yeah. That was the local parish. Now, the church was further down. The school was quite a bit further than—actually, the school was maybe more than twice the distance of what Malabar was, but the church—now that's another story. To me, that was on the other side of the world. It was very interesting. There's what you really call East LA, and then what is City Terrace. And if you see—if you go to City Terrace [from lower East LA] through Gage, or any of the other streets out through Gage or through Eastern, those, those streets go through. But in our area, there was no streets that went through, because we were blocked off. There's—the street [Folsom] is like a mountain ridge the way we see it. In other words, you've got to go over the mountain to go into the valley, the valley of East LA. And there's no through street that goes through there. There's a little alley that goes up to the top, and then there's another street, very short, steep street, and then there's Malabar. But in order to get to the steep street, you've got to go over another little alley, dirt alley.

So anyway, it was like an obstacle course just to be able to get into the valley of East LA. And the church was in the valley of East LA, so we had to cross, either walk through the [Malabar] school, or go through the alley up the big hill, and through another alley, and so it was pretty complicated for us to get over there. While walking, you know, it's not really complicated, but if you're going to drive, it makes it very hard. And we didn't have any cars, so my dad didn't drive.

KD: Did you go every Sunday to Mass?

JG: Every Sunday. So, which meant that most of the kids, or a lot of the kids at Assumption School, their parents also were very devoted in regards to the church, which meant that the parents knew the kids, and everybody—we all knew each other. So it became pretty bonding. And then they had the—what they called the nocturnal adoration, *adoración nocturna*, which meant the men would stay overnight once a month, for some religious rituals. And then they had the Holy Name Society, and then they had the Boys and Girls Club, so there was a lot of clubs within the church itself. So we all got to know each other pretty well.

IN: And you were so close that you're still having reunions every year. And which reunion is coming up?

JG: Well, we just had the Assumption reunion.

IN: The fiftieth?

JG: Yeah.

IN: Just had it.

JG: No, we had the fifty-fourth reunion.

IN: Oh, fifty-fourth.

JG: Assumption School.

KD: So that's an elementary school—

JG: Elementary school.

KD: And they still get together—

JG: Yeah, we just got together about two months ago.

KD: Now, elementary school went to what grade that year?

JG: Eighth grade.

KD: Eighth grade. Oh, okay. So there was no middle school, you went straight from there to high school.

JG: Yeah, Catholic school.

KD: Well, no wonder, too.

IN: And their reunions are fundraisers to support the school so that the school can stay in existence, because it's been threatened to be closed over and over again.

JG: But the fact that the school was so far away from the church, because the church was built many years [before the school].

KD: Yeah, that's unusual, actually. They're usually on the same property.

JG: Well, it's because the church—and I don't know when the church [was built], because the church was a little tiny church—it looked like a little mission, it was a little tiny little old church, and many, many years later, they opened up the school, which was really far away, which was on Evergreen and [Winter]. And as fundraisers, they would have what they call luncheons, and they would sell a hot dog and potato chips and, I don't know, they had hamburgers.

But anyway, so all the kids, once a month, they'd have a luncheon, and all the kids that could afford it, twenty-five cents. They'd be able to get out of school early at lunchtime, and all walk to the church, so it was quite an adventure. Well, we didn't have the money, so we never had that adventure. And I always saw that almost as a punishment that we didn't have money, so we had to stay in school and continue our classes while all of the other ones that had their twenty-five cents were able to go have a luncheon over there, and they could come in a little later.

KD: So certainly, I guess by, what, second, third, fourth grade, you're having an awareness of who's better off, in terms of economics?

JG: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, the experience—the traumatizing experience is that I started Assumption in the third grade, and my younger sister started in the first grade. And because of my English having problems, the fact that I could not go home and ask my mom questions about my homework, I didn't have any resources to help me in regards to my English. And that really hurt me a lot, because I had a lot of trouble trying to understand certain things, in regards to English. And as a result of that, I flunked the third grade.

But by flunking, that even devastated me more, because all of the sudden, I saw all of my class moving up a class forward, and I saw all of these little kids coming up, and now I'm with them. That was in the third grade. And that was pretty devastating for me.

KD: Yeah. They since decided that that's not a good practice, right?

IN: Mm-hmm.

JG: Yeah, because it just always made me feel that I was less, and the teacher that flunked me happened to be the teacher that was a music teacher, the piano, she's the one that played the piano, and she turned out to be my older sister's piano teacher. And that teacher, we just also recently saw her, she's back East somewhere. We didn't see her at this reunion, but we saw her at one of the other reunions. And then the teacher from the second grade was Sister Mary Dominic, she was the artist of the school. And I remember seeing drawings that she did of, I think, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. And then I did them, and she got very excited about them, and then she started showing them throughout the whole school. So that was like the first thing that I ever drew [there in school].

KD: Your first exhibition? *[laughter]*

JG: Yeah. *[laughter]* But anyway, then I started getting recognition as an artist at the school, because I was doing the best drawings in school, in my class anyway. And that started giving me some self-esteem, some self-worth. Here my English was making me feel less, and the fact that I flunked [I] felt [even] less, but the fact that I was drawing good, it was helping me out. But one of the things that I started experiencing also is the geography book. I started, now, reading the geography book—and doing the homework on that was very difficult, because there were certain words that I didn't understand. And I could [have gone to] my sister and my brother that were in higher classes, but still somehow it just wasn't the same [as getting help from an adult]. They'd help me in certain things, but they were also little kids too.

KD: They've got their own work and their own—yeah.

JG: Yeah. But I started seeing geography books, and I started seeing the world. So I was seeing the world. I said, "Wow." And the two things that I recall very good was supposed to be Lake Titicaca in South America, and the Great Wall of China. And in the geography book, they had this little boy, Chinese boy, walking down the Great Wall of China. And I'd just stare at it and stare it and say, "Wow." I was just so excited.

So what I started doing, I said—I started trying to get myself into the picture. So what I started doing is, I started making like a little telescope [with my hand], and I'd look at the picture, and I'd block out all, everything else that was around the book, so that little telescope would take me into the picture, I'd be able to experience the picture. And every time I saw a pretty picture, I'd make that little telescope, and I'd call it a hand-scope, and I'd just really get into the pictures. And I started having a passion to want to travel. I mean, I never thought of traveling. I just traveled in my mind, I traveled through that little hand scope. So it wasn't, I think, until after I finally passed the third grade . . . *[laughter]*

And it was in the fifth grade where there was another artist by the name of Rudy Ramos, and so he was the one that was also a good artist. But it seemed like I always got more recognition on it. And I remember one time that we did a drawing on the blackboard, and I did the *Pieta* [by Michelangelo] on the blackboard with color [chalk].

KD: Wow.

JG: Yeah. And I remember that. I don't know how good it was, but anyway, I remembered it, and they saved it, because they liked it. But anyway, Rudy Ramos, Friday afternoons after lunch, was our drawing day. And I just couldn't wait for that. That was wonderful.

KD: And what were you using? Crayons or pencils or pens?

JG: Crayon. Crayons. And the other thing that I remember being very good at—it was in English, we had diagrams, diagramming the sentences. And I think because it was visual, and I could see it, I became very good at diagramming sentences. But the other thing that I became good at in arithmetic was geometry, also because there were pictures. So anything that had pictures, I learned to—

KD: Visual learner.

JG: Yeah. So those two that I felt that I excelled in, but of course Friday afternoons was wonderful, because that's when we would draw. So anyway, after—well, when we had a recess in the afternoon after the drawing [class], the teacher would collect them and put them on her desk, and everybody would run out and go play. And I would stay there, and I remember one day Rudy Ramos and I were looking at all of the pictures [on the teacher's desk] to see who else drew what, what did they draw nice, and all of the sudden, we looked at one, and we saw a dinosaur. I guess [we] both felt a little intimidated.

KD: You weren't drawing dinosaurs.

JG: Yeah. *[laughter]* Oh, no, no. And I saw it, and I don't know if I—I can't remember feeling intimidated, I just felt impressed, you know, that somebody else was drawing something nice. And we looked at it and said, "Wow, I wonder who drew this." And all of a sudden, some guy raised his hand, and he was still sitting in there. And it turned out to be a kid by the name of Ernie [Castillo]. Well, Ernie and I then became very close, very close.

And the fact that we were both artists, and Rudy Ramos, we were pretty close too, after class, we used to play marbles. And of course, the games that we had at that time were marbles and tops and cards, we used to get cards—there were all kinds of things. Now it's basically baseball cards, but at that time we had football cards, and baseball cards, and we had the American Classic cards. American Classics, and I loved those. American Classic cards were from the Classic comic books, and the classic comic books were actual history, stories, about the Hindenburg—anything. That's where I started learning more about the classic comic books. So they had Classic cards too. So with the Classic cards, we'd play—we'd call it "far-sies," which would [show] who would throw the card the furthest, and whosever card went the furthest, you won that other person's card. So there was five of us playing, then you win all of the cards, and you have—then we have what we called "topsies." Topsies, we'd spin it, and—

*[break in audio]*

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez, and we're on tape 1, side 2, and Johnny was telling me about playing topsies.

JG: So we'd spin the cards, and if it landed in a certain way [matching the other cards], then we'd win, but also, it was like heads or tails, we'd call it, and whoever called it right—in other words, if I call heads, and I land on heads, then I'd win so many cards. And then the other thing was "closies," and it was close to the wall. We'd throw it, and whoever got the closest to the wall would win all the cards. If you threw it too hard, it would bounce off [the wall], which would—you'd wind up losing. So anyway, we had a ball with that. We had a ball with making stilts, the fact that we had so much lumber in the backyard, we had access to be able to build all kinds of different things.

IN: What about Straight Arrow?

JG: Oh, yeah, the Straight Arrow was a comic book character. And Nabisco Shredded Wheat used to have, I don't know if they still have them, but they had the big shredded wheat, they used to come in rectangular boxes, and they had layers of—one big shredded wheat. In other words, you don't get a lot of little ones, you get one big one, and you break it up and put it—but in between, it was separated by Straight Arrow cards. And the Straight Arrow cards were cards that taught you how to do—build things that the Indians used to build. You built tents, how to build fire, all kinds of different things. You built your own bow and arrows, built everything. So we learned out of that.

But one of the things that it taught us is how to make your underground huts or cabins. So we had a lot of empty lots, so we dug holes in the empty lots, and then we'd put a board on top of the hole, and then we'd throw dirt on top of it, and we'd leave a little opening, so we'd go underground and you couldn't even tell there was anything. So that was our little clubhouse.

IN: So also, you used to play tops, didn't you?

JG: Yeah, with tops, if you hit the other top, and your top still spins—

KD: Still spinning, right.



JG: Yeah. Then you get certain points. I don't remember playing [too rough], because the tops were expensive. If we got those tops, we couldn't buy a lot of tops, in other words, to win the guy's top, so we'd just win points out of that. But if you made them hum, then you were really good, and the guys that were really good is—when you weren't real good, you go like this, and we call them like a sissy, you go like this then like that, and you had the top that had like a little round tip, but then the guys that were tough had a sharp point on it, and we'd even sharpen it. And you don't go like this, what you do is you throw it fast and you swing your arm around to the side, instead of pulling it back. And that would really make it hum, and then you'd hit that top, and you'd say, "Boy, I really got you." *[laughter]*

And then in regards to the marbles, the marbles we had—of course, you put a ring, you'd draw a ring in the dirt and then you'd put—each one put so many marbles in the center, and it's almost like pool. You shoot in there, and if your marble gets stuck in there, then you stay in there, and the other people start shooting it [your marble], and as you take turns, whoever shoots more marbles out of the ring, those are yours. So if you shoot at it [a marble] and you hit it and you send it out, then it's yours. So every time you hit a marble and you send it out, you have another turn. But if the marbles stay in there, you don't get another turn.

IN: So your mom was the artist of the family, right? Your mom had gotten a lot of—

JG: Yeah. Yeah, uh-huh.

IN: And so she did two things. So why don't you talk to Karen about the crocheting and all that other stuff, and then also your drawing lessons.

JG: Yeah. Well, I'll finish with the marbles.

IN: Okay. I'm sorry.

JG: There was another game with the marbles that was like, we'd make holes, a bunch of holes, and it was almost like miniature golf, or like golf. We'd shoot it [a marble] in [the hole]. But the trick was to not allow the other people to get into the other hole, so we could shoot the marble and send the marble out if we hit it [far from the hole]. But if we missed it, our marble goes way out. And so the trick was to get into the holes, but always somebody else was trying to get you out.

KD: And again, is this playing in the yard, where your family's home is?

JG: Yeah. Oh, we had tons of dirt, so—dirt was wonderful for us. Grass, we couldn't do anything, but we had no grass. It was all dirt. And we had a lot of dirt, and then we had the—what we call the patio, the enramado, the fact that there were benches parallel to each other, they were probably separated, and being a little kid, it seemed like a long distance, but they were probably separated about four feet apart, and we'd put a big board across, and then we'd get a gigantic board and put it on top of that one board, and it would make a big teeter-totter out of that. So we'd make gigantic teeter-totters. And the stilts, we made big stilts, really high stilts, and we'd have to—it was a little . . . There were two little houses that she [Mrs. Stone] had in the back, and I don't know if they were like little guest houses, but we were able to sit on the roof and start walking with the stilts, they were real tall stilts.

KD: No one ever got hurt?

JG: No. No, on the stilts, they never got . . . Little kids fall, you know, they don't get hurt. *[laughter]*

KD: Never get hurt. *[laughter]*

IN: So now, the fact that your mom—because you couldn't go out and play, your mom had to keep you busy.

JG: Yeah, my mom would get us to—she didn't separate us, in regards to the guys or the girls. She had us knitting, she had us crocheting, I guess is what it is, crocheting. So she had us learn how to crochet with my sisters, and we had to do all the dishes, we had to do everything that the girls did. My mom, she says, "I'm not going to have you guys grow up the way we grew up, where the girls are so separated from the guys, the girls have to do all the chores in the house, and the guys just go out and play."

KD: So she's articulating this new womanhood and manhood.

JG: Oh, yeah.

KD: And are you aware that it's different as a child? Are you aware that—

JG: Not a lot, no no.

KD: You just did what mother said.

JG: We all had our turns, we washed the dishes, and to me, I'd count the dishes, and if there was an extra dish from what—I'd protest. *[laughter]* I said, "There's only six of us in the family, how come there's seven plates? I don't want to wash that seventh plate! Whoever dirties it should be washing it." *[laughter]* But the other thing I used to do is I used to make such a major production just to go wash the dishes, because I'd sit on a high chair, and I'd fill the sink up with [warm] water, and it was cold, so I'd stick my elbows [and arms] in [the warm water], I'd practically get into the sink. *[laughter]*

But the other thing is, we had a pot, I guess a pot, and it had a lid that—with a handle that was loose. So what I'd do is I'd hold onto the lid[s loose handle], and I'd squeeze the water to shoot it with force on the lid, and it'd spin the lid, and the lid would be spinning and the water would be splashing all over the kitchen, man. *[laughter]* Boy, they would come over, "What are you doing?" But I just had a ball spinning that lid. *[laughter]*

IN: Were you at Assumption when your mom started giving you drawing lessons, paying for those—

JG: Yeah, yeah.

IN: Okay, so tell Karen about the—

JG: So what the—I don't know how old I must have been. But anyway, and it's still out there, it's the American art institute. [Art Instruction, Inc. — ed.] I think it's with the correspondence art lessons. And they still have it, if you draw a pretty face and you send that in, and they come back. And anyway, I sent it in, and it turned out that they said it was wonderful. So they came over, and they said, you know, "You have the potential of making so much money as an artist," and I was a little kid. And they said—I still remember, they said that . . .

I must have been older, later on when we got a TV. Because like I said at the beginning, we still didn't have a telephone, a car, or a TV. And I guess the telephone was the first one that we got, I think—I can't remember. But that was—I said, "Wow. We're really coming up in life. Now we have a telephone." And then . . . Well, in regards to a telephone, it was an experience that we had.

At a certain point, when we were in Pio Pico, there was a friend of the family that—or a friend—we didn't know at that time—that went to Mexico, and some friend of my mom's sent a set of dishes, bowls, little Mexican bowls to eat soup and stuff like that. She sent them with a friend, and that friend brought them over in Pio Pico. And that friend turned out to be—her name was Lupe Posada. And she was beautiful. She was—even being a little kid, I remember her being beautiful. And it turned out that Lupe Posada used to—was an extra in movies, but also, she became pretty well known as the Posada Sisters, there were two sisters that were singers. And so she sort of introduced more the showbiz area. But we became very, very good friends. She became very good friends to the family. And such good friends that when my youngest sister, Alicia, was born, she became the godmother. And when my sister Licha, we called her [Licha], was born . . . She was born at Santa Marta Hospital, when Santa Marta Hospital looked like an Army barracks. When she was born they didn't let us go into the hospital, so my dad lifted up [Licha] through the window within reaching distance. In other words, it was ground level, it was only one level. And so my mom peeked out the window, and my dad showed [Licha] to us out the window.

But anyway, Lupe became the godmother to [Licha]. And she had four kids. It was Joe, Pepillo, Stella, Dolores, and Mary. There were five kids. So Joe—oh, Carlos, it was Carlos, I think. Carlos. And actually, their name was—I think it was Diaz. Lupe Posada was actually her actual name [maiden name], but when she got married, it became Diaz. And so we had playing partners. In other words, Carlos would be with Joe, Stella with Rebecca, Pepillo with me, and Dolores was about my age. But anyway, Dolores and Mary were more with Mela. So we became very, very close. And he used to have a Model T. And they had a phone, and we didn't, so they would come over and visit us, and sometimes pick us up and take us to their house. So imagine—I don't know how, all of us jumping in a Model T, and it had a rumble seat. So all us kids would jump on the rumble seat and go down to their house. And they lived in this gigantic Victorian home,

two-story Victorian home, but they were renting downstairs. The people in the top would go through the back [outdoor stairway to leave the house].

KD: Was this in Pio Pico or Boyle Heights?

JG: This was in Boyle Heights. It was in Boyle Heights. This house was across the street from Ramona High School, which was considered the high school for bad girls. It was right across the street from Ramona. And so anyway, that was an adventure. They'd pick us up—

IN: And what does that have to do with the phone? You went into the tangent—

JG: Yeah. One day, one Sunday, the fact that we didn't have a TV, and the kids would go into their house and go look at the chapters, and it's like Sunday was an all day event. You'd see the East Side Kids and all the chapters, and then they'd continue with *Wild Bill Hickok*, and then after that they'd have the Sunday Night Movie. So we had nothing to do, our entertainment were comic books. We used to trade comics, we used to have piles of comic books. We used to trade comics. The minute we'd finish seeing them, we'd find people to trade comics. That was the big thing at that time. We'd find people who had comic books, and we'd trade with them, so we had to—and while my dad didn't allow us to see romantic comic books or scary comic books, but we'd really get those scary comics, we loved the scary comic books. But my favorites were Casper the Friendly Ghost, Mighty Mouse, and Captain Marble. And on my scooters, I'd paint Mighty Mouse and Casper.

And I first started with my brothers, my brother had—he did his first scooter, which was a big box, we'd have a two by four, and we'd nail a crate, and then we'd put handles, so I painted lightning, Captain Marble's lightning on the front of his, and he put me inside the box, so I fit in that first one. And then later on, I was able to build mine with a smaller—and it had the crates, the wooden crates that would be—would have—they were sort of at an angle, and I had a chance to be able to paint three different things. So I would paint three different things. I would paint Mighty Mouse, Casper—

KD: And what are you painting with?

JG: I guess crayons.

KD: Enamel?

JG: I don't know. Maybe I did it with crayon. I don't remember having paints.

KD: You didn't make the model—A lot of boys played with models, they constructed models that came with enamel paints.

JG: Oh, yeah. Oh, we did. Model planes? Oh, that was a passion. That would take us forever to save to be able to go get a model plane.

IN: So the paints that came with it—

JG: No, but the paint came with it. The paint came with it.

KD: I'm trying to think, what might you have used on your scooter?

JG: I don't know. I don't know if it was watercolor—I don't know if it was crayon, because crayon—I don't know if I was introduced to watercolors. I think they were in those little pads. So we did watercolors, but I don't remember anything else. [Maybe I used my dad's paints.] I tend to feel maybe it was still crayons that I was using. So I was doing it in crayons, and I know I remember just having a passion for crayons. I used to look at that logo and just drool over it. I loved the crayons. And then I remember getting a box where you open it up and there's layers and layers. I'd go "Wow." Oh, man, I was just so excited. I remember just my dad at one time buying me—it was a color book, and it was also some type of a workbook where you connect the dots to draw a picture. And it had different things on it, and I think he bought it maybe on a Saturday or something, and I remember I had to go to Mass, and I just couldn't wait to get back from church so I could get back into my book. [laughter]

But in regards to feeling—but in regards to the phone, going back to the phone, is that when they came over [visitors]—they always surprised us, you know, they couldn't write to us [or phone us], "We're going to stop by Sunday," so people would always surprise us. And a lot of times, we'd just expected nobody. And we didn't have any luxury meals, but sometimes on Sundays my mom would make fried

chicken, what we called it, *empanizada*, breaded chicken, or she'd make *mole*, something special that took chicken. That was extra meat for us. And it turned out that all of a sudden, we'd see a car coming in, and it was relatives. "Oh, my God, we're losing our meal." It was exciting because they were coming over, but we were drooling over, all of a sudden my mom had to make tons of beans and rice and cut up the meat to make it a little . . . Yeah.

KD: Smaller, spread it.

IN: And so in regards to the phone?

JG: Yeah, so anyway, one Sunday, I was feeling lonely, because we weren't able to go look at the TV with the kids, and so I went to Mrs. Stone's house, and I asked her, "Could I borrow your phone?" So I called Lupe Posada's family, and I said, "My mom wants to know if you could come down and pick us up." [laughter]

KD: You learned at a young age. [laughter]

JG: And they came over, they picked us up. They came over. And they said, "Here we are." I guess they said, "Responding to your call. Juanito called and he said that you wanted . . ." Oh, my gosh, man. My dad—

KD: Did you—

JG: No, well, they were there, and they insisted, "No, no, let's go." They [my parents] started scolding me and telling me off, but Lupe and her husband, Pepe, his name was Pepe, they said, "No, come on, let's go, let's go, let's go." So we went with them. But my Uncle Manuel and my Aunt Chavelita, my—

IN: Which is your mom's sister.

JG: My mom's sister, my Aunt Chavelita is much younger, she's almost like ten years younger. And she actually came to the United States before my mom. She came originally . . . My mom was born in Morenci, Arizona, and that's where all the different mines were, the different little [mining] towns. And my Aunt Chavelita, she came with a cousin to Morenci, and somehow or another she managed to go into Pio Pico with the other cousin there. So she was actually in Pio Pico before we did.

So she met this man whose name was Manuel, and she started dating him, and so I think by the time we came, she was married already to him. I'm not sure. But anyway, he was a tile setter. And he had a pickup, and to us that was big money. He was the rich uncle. But anyway, he had a pickup, and he's the one that helped us move to East LA, on Blanchard. But he'd always throw us into the back of the pickup, all the kids, and we'd take off, and we'd go to the beach, and we'd go to Knott's Berry Farm, when it was free. But because of him, we were able to experience a lot of these different things, which was always a lot of fun. And he had—he was actually a widower. He had been married and his wife passed away, and he had two older daughters from his first marriage. And then he had [four] kids [with my aunt], which were close to—they were actually the age of my younger sister, Alicia. And the older daughter was actually more the age—our age.

So anyway, we'd all jump in the back of the truck, and we used to go on a lot of outings. And they were coming down—they'd hang out at our house almost every Sunday, which meant that it was a challenge for my mom to be able to cook for everybody. [laughter] But anyway, that's where our adventure, that's when we had a chance to have an outing, for us to go on [Sunday outings]. But once in a great while, all of us would jump on the bus and go downtown to the Million Dollar [Theater]. And my bad experience in regards to that is, I was very independent, very independent. I didn't want to be—I thought I didn't want to be seen with the family, because I thought it was sissy. I wanted to be a big boy. So we used to go—one time, they all went—it was the sixteenth of September [Mexican Independence Day], and they were going to have a *variedad* [variety show]. And so they were all going [the entire family], and I said, "Well, I want to go work, I want to go. . ." I was going to go shine shoes at the sixteenth of September parade, so I could make money with a lot of people there. So anyway, I went to First Street to go shine shoes, and they all went to the Million Dollar. And it turned out they went to go see Jorge Negrete, and I missed him.

IN: But also—they used to—your sisters and brother used to go to Mexico while they were young, and you never wanted to go, right?

JG: I missed him. [Jorge Negrete was my first motion picture hero, who rode a white horse and out sang any American cowboy I ever heard. This was the regret of my life.]

KD: [inaudible]

JG: Yeah. I didn't have much interest in going to Mexico, because of all the negative things that I was experiencing. I just—I was very observant in regards to the fact that first of all, starting to look at television, and we used to see the East Side Kids, the Bowery Boys, we'd call it the East Side Kids. They were all white, and they had one black kid, but there was no Mexican, no Latinos there. And I started noticing the more I saw, especially the beginning of the *Mickey Mouse Club*, there was no Latinos. And they just—they weren't anywhere, and I started feeling—I started thinking in my mind, what is it—I didn't think of it being discrimination, I thought that maybe we just didn't have the talent or the skill to be able to do those things.

And I remember one time seeing ballet and never seeing Latinos, and I remember telling my dad, "So do Mexicans dance ballet?" He says, "Oh, of course they do, of course they do." And he says, "Oh, yeah." He says—as far as my dad [is concerned], Mexicans were great at everything, but I never see it anywhere. So I started not believing what my dad said, because I never saw it anywhere, I never read it anywhere. And I started thinking that, obviously, we probably weren't smart enough, we didn't have talent. I thought less of us than society.

KD: Right.

JG: And then going out and seeing . . . But one thing my dad always mentioned was Camarena, who invented a color TV. And he [my dad] always stressed it, but it would go in one ear and out the other. But I guess it sat in my brain, but I never saw any proof of anything. I never heard about it anywhere. [As an adult I learned that Guillermo González Camarena was a Mexican engineer who invented a color-wheel type of color television, and who also introduced color television to Mexico.]

KD: And this awareness was coming in the—

JG: In grammar school.

KD: Grammar school.

JG: Maybe fourth, fifth, sixth grade, somewhere around there. And then also, looking at all the billboards and all the businesses and everything, never seeing a Latino name up there. I never saw a Latino name on a big sign or anything. So it just made me think that we just didn't have any talent or anything. But when the *Cisco Kid* came out, then I said, "Wow." It was just so wonderful. I mean, he was a *charro*. It was just wonderful, wonderful. And it was a great, great experience for me. But because of Lupe Posada, she always talked about Anthony Quinn. And she—I always heard that Anthony Quinn was at a wedding of one of her friends or relatives at Lourdes [Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church], so as a little kid, I heard that Anthony Quinn. . . So I started learning that Anthony Quinn was Mexican, so he was the first actor that I ever heard a name about. And then when I saw him. . .

Now, the first movie I think I ever saw, possibly even before that, was the *Bullfighter and the Lady*, the *Bullfighter and the Lady*, with Gilbert Roland and Robert Stack. And then there was—Robert Stack's name was Johnny, and there was the girl, the white woman [Joy Page, who was half Mexican American and half Russian-Jewish, who played a Mexican]. Her name was Anita, and I was in Malabar at that time, and there was this little girl named Anita who wanted me to teach her how to draw. So the fact that I was Johnny and she was Anita, and it was the same as the movie, I really related to it. So I guess I had a little crush on her, too, and it just felt wonderful to see a bullfighter in Mexico. And I saw that movie at what's called the Unique Theatre, and we always called the "Eunuch" Theatre. [laughter] Because we never heard it as Unique, we said it in Spanish.

IN: In regards to Lupe Posada, was there some relationship with José-Guadalupe Posada?

JG: And afterwards, [I] told my mom, and my mom says, "Yeah, Lupe Posada always talked about José-Guadalupe being an uncle or a great-uncle."

KD: Wow.

JG: I never knew about it—

IN: Until you were in your twenties, when you found out?

JG: Well, it wasn't until we started the gallery.

IN: Yeah, when you were in your twenties.

JG: Yeah. I mean, I didn't know anything about Guadalupe Posada until after we opened up the gallery. I didn't know anything about anything.

KD: Well, let's take a break. I've been making you talk much too long.

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen Davalos again on October 28, 2007. We took a quick break for lunch, and I'm back with Irma and Johnny Gonzalez. And Johnny, you were telling me about the correspondence classes that your mother paid for, the art classes. I wonder if you could share a little bit more about that story.

JG: Yeah, at that time—and I know the school still exists, because I see it promoted on television—but at that time, they had it in comic books. And they said, "Draw me," so you draw a face, and you send it in, and if they feel that it's good quality, then they come and try and sell you an art school class, a correspondent art school. Well, anyway, it turns out that they thought that I did a nice job, and they came to the house, and my mom was excited, of course. Like all mothers, very, very supportive. And she was always very excited about me, my drawings. But she got very excited about the fact that they believed that I had the talent. And one of the things they started communicating . . . Now, I was saying that by this time I guess we already had a TV, because the way that he was selling, he was saying that Walter Brennan's son became a commercial artist, and that he's making real good money. So by using Walter Brennan, it sounded like that's a prestigious name, and if the son's making art, doing art, obviously he's doing very well. So anyway—

KD: Is Walter Brennan a newscaster, or . . .

JG: Walter Brennan was [on] *The Real McCoys*, the television [show]. *The Real McCoys*. And so my mom just got excited about them, saying that I have talent. And she decided to buy the class for me, and it's four hundred dollars, and that was a lot of money at that time. But she, some way or another, did it, I guess she managed to get the money from my dad and sent it in. So anyway, I took the class for quite awhile. But having things by mail, and not having someone to talk to, I think made it a little more difficult, and not very enjoyable. There was a lot of questions that I had. So I would send the drawing, and they would send the corrections, they would send my drawing back with a transparent—what is it—

IN: Tissue paper?

JG: Tissue paper over it, and their drawing of how it should be corrected. So anyway, this went on for a while, they sent all kinds—I still have the books, they sent a lot of booklets, or books on perspective and composition, a lot of them are composition, and things like that. And I think I still have some of the drawings and corrections that they sent, and all that. But to me, it got a little boring, and—I don't know if the word is really boring, but I guess feeling that I really couldn't communicate to someone. I had a lot of questions.

IN: So not inspirational.

JG: Yeah, it was an inspiration, motivating.

KD: And your questions were about technique, or—

JG: Yeah. In other words, design, and whatever the class was in, I couldn't just communicate it. I couldn't really write the questions. It was more that they sent the corrections, and they wrote down corrections. But for me to write questions, I wasn't really all that good, I felt I was not that great in regards to communicating or writing what I was feeling. I was feeling too much to be able to communicate. I never felt myself being a good writer or anything. So eventually, it seemed like it just died out. I don't know to what point I got it, but I got all the books, and it was a little bit helpful, but it wasn't real enjoyable.

IN: So at Assumption—

JG: So being at Assumption still, it was great, because the five o'clock classes—I mean, the afternoon classes in drawing, then I really got a chance to excel, and in a sense, make a name for myself.



- KD: Are those classes structured, or—
- JG: No, there wasn't any. There wasn't an art teacher, I don't think.
- KD: So it wasn't, put out a still imagine, and then—
- JG: No, they just said, "Here, draw."
- KD: Draw.
- JG: Everybody drew whatever they wanted to draw. But it was just a lot of fun for me, and it made me feel important.
- KD: What are you drawing at that age?
- JG: I don't know. I don't remember.
- IN: We still have a painting that you did in school. I don't know if it was Assumption or if it was at Salesian, it's like a guy on a horse?
- JG: Yeah. That was actually my first—I think my first oil painting that I did, and I did it on—
- IN: At what point—
- JG: Oh, I don't know. Pretty young. And I did it on regular paper, so the oil bled on it. I don't know if it was canvas or what. But it was my first experience.
- IN: What grade were you in? Were you at Assumption or Salesian?
- JG: Oh, no, Assumption.
- IN: So it was still Assumption. So we have one of his—I'll bring it next time just to show you if you want.
- KD: So when does it get more—obviously you end up picking up oil painting. When—
- JG: That painting was probably the first—I think my dad bought me a small oil painting set, and I had no idea how to use it or anything, and I just started painting on—I think—I don't know if that's a canvas, or—
- IN: I think it's more paper. Board, maybe illustration board.
- JG: But anyway—
- KD: So it wasn't at school, this was something you did—
- JG: Yeah, it was at home. I never had anything at school, in regards to any lessons. It was a nun, and just say, you know, "Just draw." Rudy Ramos's brother drew, or was an artist, and I remember one time going to his house, and he showed me some of his artwork, and that was the first time I ever saw drawings done with ink. And I said, "Wow." We called it India ink. I said, "Wow, it looks like print." Like if it's printed, it looks just like a real—I guess reprinting job. And I was just real impressed that it could look so nice with black ink. So I actually started doing some drawings with ink, and—but at that time, also, right around that time that I met Ernie, the other artist that raised his hand that he could draw—
- IN: Who did the dinosaur.
- JG: Yeah. It turns out that Ernie also played the guitar. And so we started both about—I guess about the fifth grade, sixth grade. We became very good friends, because he drew, and one of the things that we used to really get involved in drawing were real weird faces, real ugly faces. So we'd draw all kinds of different weird faces.
- KD: Were they monsters, or—
- JG: Well, no, they were bizarre faces.
- IN: More like that comic book? Who was the guy with the weird face?
- JG: Well, they were normal people with tongues hanging out and eyes hanging different. We'd see who was more creative at doing an uglier face. *[laughter]* So we got into drawing those type of things, and then we got into the music too. So we'd start, little by little, we both started playing duets on the guitar. But more, we got into singing. And then we heard the song by Robert and Johnny, "We Belong Together," and started listening, and I noticed they were both singing two different things. So I started following—he had a higher voice and I had a lower voice, so I started following the lower voice, and he started following the higher voice, and that was the first time I started harmonizing. So from then on, we started getting into our music and harmonizing, and so music started becoming a pretty dominant thing. And at school, when

we'd draw, and during the fun things, we'd do some of that stuff, but music started becoming stronger and stronger.

And then the other thing we had . . . His father, I think, was in the service, and he had an old bayonet, and the bayonet broke. So we put tape on the bayonet, and we started going to palm trees and learning how to throw it, to stick it. We get to see who goes the furthest, and be able to throw it and get it to stick. So we practiced, we just did that for fun.

And the other thing that was very interesting at that time is that khakis was the wardrobe. Khakis, [shoes with] French toes, and the shirt was the area where everybody would sort of rotate. But my dad wore khakis, and he wore French toes, and it's interesting that compared to now, the kids dress totally different from the parents. But we became more extreme in being ultra-neat. So the thing was with the French toes, we used to do the spit shine. The trick, [was to] see who could get it the shiniest, getting it to look like patent leather. And we became very good at getting them spit shined. You do it sometimes with alcohol, and put fire on it, and then all of the sudden you shine it real quick. Sometimes you could just spit on it and then it shines very, very good. And then with the khakis, we'd starch them, the crease, and have them perfectly creased. And we'd get our [Sir Guys] shirts, and then we'd crease them exactly right to meet the crease of the pants. It was like military. We were neat, man, really neat. And then in regards to the hair, it was pomade. Had a lot of hair, the duck tail, and—

IN: Pompadour.

JG: Pompadour, a *chongo*. And—but my dad was very, very strict. He gave me my haircuts. My dad always gave us our haircuts, and he used to do it with a hand—the old hand—

IN: Clippers?

JG: Clippers, yeah. Not scissors. But they're the—

KD: You mean, it's something you use on plants?

JG: No, no, it's for the hair. But it was a hair clipper, for hair. You go like that, and it's got a—like a little machine—

IN: So kind of like a razor—

JG: That has blades.

KD: Oh, okay. Okay.

JG: They go back and forth, and sometimes they get stuck, and ah-h! [*laughter*] But anyway, he'd give me my haircuts.

IN: So no ducktail for you.

JG: Oh, no. He said no. "Que cola de pato, es para los pachucos." And no ducktail for me. But Ernie had a great ducktail, and a nice big *chongo*, and he had all the pomades, and he'd sculpt it, because of the pomade, Dixie Peach pomade.

KD: About how old were you at this time?

JG: We started that probably about the fifth, sixth grade?

KD: Really?

JG: Somewhere around there, yeah. But it wasn't considered that we were—because, like I say, we're just neat.

KD: Sharp.

JG: In regards to my dad, he never saw it as being a *cholo* thing, or—the word *cholo* wasn't used then, it was *pachuco* at that time.

KD: Right.

JG: And the fact that we were ultraneat, it didn't look like—it's only the hair that maybe looked like a *cholo* or like a *pachuco*.

KD: And you're ironing and starching your clothes by yourself?

JG: Oh, all the time. All the time, all the time. My mom used to always compliment me, that I did all the women's work.

- KD: Is your older brother doing the same?
- JG: No.
- KD: No.
- JG: No, no.
- KD: You're the one in the family that's got a sense of style.
- JG: Yeah, [that extreme]. As a matter of fact, yeah. Yeah, I got into this. No, Joe, he's four years older than me, so he was way into another world. [He had his own style,] in a sense. But we [Ernie and I] used to look great, but we walked like robots, because the minute—it was starched, and the minute that—it was so—
- IN: Stiff.
- JG: So stiff that if we bent our knees, it cracked, it'd crack the perfect crease that we had, and all of the sudden, oh, I'd be so disappointed. We wanted to be really looking sharp. *[laughter]*
- IN: So while you were at Malabar, there was one incident with a guy sitting next to you or in front of you with a pencil.
- JG: No, that was at Assumption.
- IN: Oh, that was at Assumption. I'm sorry, at Assumption.
- JG: His name Eugene, Eugene Camenduran.
- IN: Because you have this very mild-mannered personality, but I think that demonstrates your dual personality.
- JG: He teased me, and he'd get a pencil or a pen and go like this, and he'd— *[gesturing]*
- KD: Poke your knee.
- JG: He'd poke my knee. And [I] was full of tattoos, because they were ink, so actually, I don't know if I even still have some, but anyway, for years, I still—and he used to really bug me. And one day, he got my hair, and he cut it with some scissors, I don't know what he was doing. And boy, I just went berserk. I just attacked him inside the classroom. I just flew. And he was big and husky, and we were both punished together, and the fact that we were together, we became very good friends.
- IN: How were you punished? You had to stand in the hallway—
- JG: No, that was high school. That was the second incident.
- IN: Oh, that was the second incident. *[laughter]*
- JG: But anyway, the other thing is that I was so shy. I was so shy in school. I remember they used to have us go up and talk in front, and one time, I went up, and I think I got lost for words or something, and it was interesting, you know, I still remember—I don't know if it was at that time, maybe before. But I got paranoid being in front of the class, seeing all these eyes looking at me, I literally crawled underneath a desk. *[laughter]* I got so scared I crawled underneath a desk. But I remember having turns later on in speaking, and one of the things that they had us do—this is when Sputnik went up—and I think we just celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of Sputnik or something like that. Been a lot of years. Maybe the fifty years since Sputnik went up.
- KD: Yeah. Yeah.
- JG: And I remember the teacher saying, "I want everybody to add onto the sentence that, 'What effect will Sputnik have in the future?'" But that's in relationship to what was going on at that time. But anyway—
- IN: Did you go up and speak?
- JG: Maybe. Probably, I might have adjusted a little bit, but still, I was pretty scared to go up.
- IN: But in regards to your shyness, something else, I think, when you were at Salesian, and they wanted you to be an altar boy—was it at Salesian?
- JG: Oh, it was at Assumption.
- IN: Oh, it was still at Assumption.
- JG: It was at Assumption, in the fifth grade. The minute everybody reached the fifth grade, all the guys had the opportunity to go become altar boys. So the pastor of the church would come over to the school and say, "Okay, I want all the best letters, I want you all to write me a letter telling me why you want to be an altar boy, and the best letters will be the ones that I select." I said, "Go up in front of the whole church?"

[laughter] “Is he crazy? I’m not going to go up there.” So I wrote a little letter saying, “Thank you, Father, but maybe next time.” [laughter]

KD: And were other boys trying hard to do it? Was this—

JG: It seemed like everybody became an altar boy after that. I think he just wanted somebody to write something, but it seemed like everybody that wrote the letter became an altar boy, except myself. [laughter]

IN: So maybe now is the time to go from Assumption to Salesian with Ernie, because you and Ernie, the artists and—

KD: I actually have a question that takes us back—well, I’m not sure if it’s taking back, but you had mentioned, and Irma had helped you think about, that your mother was very creative as well. Is she crocheting, knitting, sewing?

JG: She actually did art in school.

KD: Oh, really?

JG: Yeah, she was an artist. And she still has an oil painting on glass that she did back then in school. And she liked art, but she didn’t have the money to study it.

KD: So she was born in the US but was schooled in Mexico?

JG: Yeah. She was born in Arizona, and at the age of [five], 1920 I think, or ’21, somewhere around there, she went—they went back to Mexico. And they went back because my grandmother missed my great-grandmother. And it seemed like the minute—just right after they got back, she passed away. So they spent—yeah, I guess. . . But my grandfather, he just went back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. You figure, in the Revolution, he was working in Arizona, and they used to go across the border to go drink in the bars, and as he was coming out drunk with some of the other guys, he saw somebody sitting there, and he signed up. And it turns out, he signed up for the Revolution. Before you know it, he was in the Revolution.

KD: Oh, no. [laughter] Don’t sign anything when you’ve been drinking. [laughter]

JG: He said, “Boy, it was hell. It was hell.” But he made it to some high official, and it turns out that because he was a high official at a certain town—

IN: You mean a high rank?

JG: Yeah, a high rank. I don’t know exactly how high, but anyway, being at a high rank, they were in a small town, and in the small town, they invited him to go to a dance, only the high-ranking officials, which were nine, I think. They invited him to go to a dance there, and when they went, it turned out that it was an ambush of the enemy. So they got all nine of them, and they put the hangman’s noose on them, they were all ready to be hung, and it turned out that just as they were ready to—I think they hit the horses, they were sitting on the horses, the—

IN: *Federales*?

JG: No, the *federales* were the ones who were hanging them. Their—the allies came in, and they saved them from being hung. So it was right after the Revolution—

IN: But your grandmother thought he died, right?

JG: Yeah. And they. . . A reporter did a report on it, saying that all the—they gave the names of all the people that were—that he said were hung. And so when my grandmother read the story, she was in *luto*, you know, mourning, in her black, for like six months. And one day, some men were riding on horses into the town, and the people would get scared that they were *federales*, so everybody would run in. And it turns out that they heard the horses stop, and so people were in the houses just wondering, you know, “Why did the horses stop?” And then all of the sudden, they heard footsteps walking towards the house, and so the women were all scared, everybody was scared, but the women especially, because these guys have no respect for anybody. And then all of the sudden, they saw the door open, and they said, “Oh, my God.” And then all of the sudden, they see these—this one figure, and it was just a silhouette, because the sun was shining from the back, and the silhouette started walking closer, and all of the sudden, my grandmother sees him—she faints, she drops. And it turns out it was my grandfather. He was saved.

- KD: I would have fainted too. *[laughter]*
- JG: He was saved. *[laughter]*
- IN: A ghost.
- JG: So anyway—
- KD: What a great family story.
- JG: A little after that is when they came to the United States.
- IN: But your mom in Mexico, she went to school in Mexico? Because I think she learned a lot of craft type of—even though she didn't have formal fine arts training, I think because she crocheted and painted and did a lot of types of—until she's ninety years old, she just turned ninety years old, and she's still—
- JG: No, she's ninety-one.
- IN: Ninety-one, and she's still crocheting, she falls asleep crocheting and then wakes up, fixes her mistakes, and then keeps going. I mean, she just—nonstop.
- KD: So was she making clothes when you were a child, or sewing curtains and tablecloths and other things, furniture?
- JG: Oh, yeah. Bed sheets, she'd crochet a whole bed sheet, she used to give those out for presents to different people. She crocheted a lot of stuff.
- IN: And every time a child was born into the family, they all got their little baptismal outfits, little hats and little booties and dresses or gowns, depending if it was a boy or a girl, and just for years and years and years, she just did that nonstop.
- KD: Hold on just a minute, I realize we have the door open. *[pause]* Go ahead, we're back, talking about your mother's creative abilities. Did she also paint at the house when you were a child, or—
- JG: No, she didn't paint. I don't think I ever saw her paint.
- KD: And what about decorate—the way she decorated?
- JG: I don't think she was much into decorating. What she really got into was her crocheting and embroidering, that kind of stuff. Yeah, she didn't do that too much afterwards.
- IN: She was singer? Did she have a nice—
- JG: Yeah, she sang a lot.
- KD: Oh, really?
- JG: She sang a lot in the house.
- KD: You grew up listening to her sing?
- JG: Yeah, we used to make fun, because we used to, say, you throw out a word, and she sings a song related to the word. Every time we said a word, she'd come out with a song related to whatever word we had. Yeah, she was always singing. And at some point, maybe after my grandmother died or something, that sort of stopped. But when we were real young, she was always singing around the house.
- KD: What about in terms of—you were mentioning just now that you were being encouraged by the priest to become an altar boy. Was the family also encouraging you to attend to religious devotion?
- JG: Oh, yeah. I mean, they're very devoted Catholics. Oh, no, for Lent we'd say the rosary every night, and then for Holy Week, I think we wouldn't even talk. *[laughter]* I think maybe Friday, Good Friday, we weren't allowed to do anything. But anyway, it was very, very religious. Very religious. To this day, my mom is still very religious.
- KD: What about it—was Christmastime big, or was Three Kings Day more important?
- JG: Was Christmas—what?
- KD: Christmastime, was that a big celebration for the family? Or was Three Kings Day more important?
- JG: Oh, oh. No, I guess it was more Christmas, but they—at the beginning, it sort of crossed over from—I guess it—the Three Kings and the Día de los Reyes Magos, and the Día de Niño Dios, and we still did a little bit of what they did in Mexico, is that you put in your note in your shoes of what you want, a request of what you want, and so one of the things that I experienced when I felt that obviously we were poor, is I craved a pogo stick. I really wanted a pogo stick. And what I remember still at that time is the pogo stick

cost eleven dollars, and I never got it. My dad couldn't afford it. What I got instead was a copper burning set, that you push the little sheet of copper, thin sheet of copper that they used to sell, and you push hard on it, and it makes it like three dimensional.

KD: Oh, right, right.

JG: Yeah. I think you have a—

IN: A burnishing?

JG: A burnishing, something that you—with heat, it gets dark in certain areas and stuff like that, and that's what I got instead of my pogo stick.

IN: During the holidays, your mom is always the one who sort of leads the religious ceremonies, right?

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: Like the Rosary, she was—

JG: My mom was always the leader in regards to the Rosary. We used to love to have her say it, because she could knock it out, you know? *[laughter]* She'd say it so fast, we were so excited because she could say it real quick. My mom, in regards to everything in the house, she was the leader. But she'd always scare us by saying, "Well, wait until your dad gets home!" *[laughter]*

IN: And in regards to your mom's creative—

JG: Oh, one other thing, to show you how strict my dad was, to make sure that we never got things—in other words, make sure that we never stole anything, he always wanted an answer, specifically, if there was anything in the house that we had that he didn't know where it came from. One day, I was sitting in the front porch of Mrs. Stone's house, which is the front of our house, with Mrs. Stone, and—

*[break in audio]*

JG: So anyway, the dolly fell off the soda truck and landed right in the middle of the street, and the truck just continued, and he never noticed that he dropped it. And I just saw it out there, and I said, "Wow! I'll get it, and if he comes back, then . . ." So I got it, and I was in the front porch with it. And meanwhile, some of the other kids that were playing jumped on it, and we were playing around with it. And it never came back. The soda truck never came back, never noticed that it dropped it. Well, anyway, when my dad got home and he saw it, he says, "Where'd you get that? Where'd that come from?" I said, "The truck, the soda truck was driving down the street and dropped it off right in front of the house." He says, "Oh. You go back and you put it exactly where you found it." I got the dolly, took it, put it in the middle of the street, a car drove by, picked it up, took it away. *[laughter]* There was no way that we were going to have something in the house that he didn't get us, or that he didn't know exactly where it was from.

IN: In regards to your mom's creativity, I think, to sort of give more a feeling of her personality, is maybe you should talk about her work in the garden, and the birds.

JG: Oh, my mom had a fantastic green thumb. Fantastic. When we got to Mrs. Stone's house on Blanchard Street there were tons of trees, tons of avocado trees. As a matter of fact, I used to have fun with the avocados—I don't know if you heard of Potato-Head Man?

KD: Mr. Potato Head. They renamed it.

JG: Well, I did that with avocados, because we had so many avocados. I would do Mighty Mouse with the avocado, and I'd swing him around and he'd fall apart. But we had a ball with the avocado trees. Then we had a fig tree. We used to have, like, a cork rifle, and we'd push it into the fig tree and the bark of the tree would come out, and that was *[our cork to shoot out]*. So the poor tree had holes all over the place, the bark, without a bark. But anyway, we had a ball with the trees, and there were tons of avocado trees all over the place. And like I said, there was a lot of dirt, a lot of dirt.

And my dad was very much into gardening. Well, more into—when he was in Mexico, he lived in Belen, a little town, he was born in Belen, in a little town in the state of Jalisco. And it was just right in the—practically the borderline of Aguascalientes, which meant that Aguascalientes was actually closer to



him that Guadalajara was. So he worked in the fields, he knew a lot about cultivating plants, and he knew how to—

KD: Grafting?

JG: Yeah, the trees, and different things. And so when we got there, there was so much land that both my mom and him—my mom loved flowers, and my dad loved to plant pumpkins and corn and all kinds of—so he'd plant different things. We had a gigantic section, maybe thirty feet long, it was the length of that patio that we had, it was just in the side of the patio, and it might have been about twenty by thirty area that just was nothing but dirt, and that became his farmland. So one time, we'd be having corn, then we'd have pumpkins, and he'd just grow all kinds of things.

And my mom, throughout the yard, there were little spots of dirt all over the place, but it was very interesting, because it was bordered with cement, different areas, like they were built to be for plants or something, but they didn't have any plants, nothing but dirt. But within a few months, boy, our house was booming. First my dad had all this corn or pumpkins growing in one part, and my mom had all the plants, beautiful flowers, she just loved flowers. And she loved birds, canaries. And so she had a batch of canaries. And there'd be times that they were dead already, practically, and she'd put them under a little glass, and she'd hit the glass and get their heart going again, and they'd come back to life. She was very good. Feeding them with the mouth, and all kinds of different . . . But anyway, she just loved the birds.

IN: Did she used to whistle with the birds?

JG: No, that was my Uncle Pancho. My Uncle Pancho, which was her younger brother, she had—both my mom and my dad were both from a family of three. And they were both from two women and one male. My dad had two older sisters and he was the youngest, and he started working when he was very, very young. And my dad was the youngest, and he was the male, and my mom was the oldest, and she was female. And my Uncle Pancho was in between, and he was a great whistler. He could whistle all kinds of different birds and everything, he was just really, really good at that whistling. So we grew up with him just—hearing him whistle all the time.

KD: Now, was the family—how much of the family is in California, or at least in Southern California?

JG: They're all here now.

KD: Oh, and when you were growing up?

JG: Well, my aunt, my Aunt Chavelita, she got here first. And then my mom came months later. But my Uncle Pancho was still in Mexico. He actually got married, his first wife, she had—where you bleed to death?

KD: She's a hemophiliac?

JG: Hemophilia.

KD: Yeah.

JG: So he was married just a little while and she died of that.

KD: So the family is—I mean, I know you talked about the Lupe Posada, who's very close. Are those the people that you're getting together with at Christmas or Easter, or—

JG: We get together every weekend. *[laughter]*

KD: Every weekend. *[laughter]*

JG: Every weekend.

KD: So this extended family is very close. Lots of visiting. Are birthdays a big deal, or is that not such a big deal because your family's poor?

JG: No, I don't think it was a big deal, because we were so many. We'd be having birthday parties every weekend, we were getting together already.

KD: The five, and Lupe Posada's family—

JG: Yeah. I remember my little sister, I remember her having a birthday, I guess because she was the youngest one at that time. And—

IN: And there was a bigger age gap, too.

KD: Right.

- JG: Yeah, there was a bigger age gap. It was my Uncle Manuel and then my Aunt Chavelita, which was my mom's sister, and Lupe Posada, those were the close ones. Those were the ones that we were very close with. And then later on, my Uncle Pancho had got married to my Aunt Carmen. And they were still in Mexico for quite awhile, and then they moved, also to try and come over here, so they lived in Tijuana for a while. And I think my uncle was here first for quite awhile, working to try and fix up everything. And then finally they came over, and he has—oh, let's see, there's four males, four sons, and three daughters, one and twins. And I think they were the only ones that were born here, the twins, possibly [and the youngest brother]. And finally they came over, and then we would get together with them. But for a long time—they didn't come 'til quite awhile.
- IN: What I find very interesting is from hearing Juan talk is that within this community of Boyle Heights, there were other people from Aguascalientes who came and went to school with him, like, Joe Urzua's father.
- JG: The ones that came when we were in grammar school was the person who was the warden of the prison [with my dad in Aguascalientes. Joe's father, Louis] Urzua. So he came with his family, and it turns out that his wife's sisters worked in the same factory with my mom, the sweater factory. The sweater factory is one of the big places in Aguascalientes that used to hire a lot of people. So eventually, they moved over, and then we became very close with them also. And eventually, his son—you know, we still keep in contact, because we were in the music together.
- KD: So you were saying before, sometimes your mother would be making these wonderful weekend meals that included chicken. When the family gets together, and the extended family gets together, what kind of food are you eating? Is it Mexican? Beans and rice?
- JG: Oh, yes. Beans and rice go a long ways.
- KD: And what about—
- JG: We'd stretch maybe the *mole* with chicken, so we'd have a lot of *mole* with little tiny pieces of chicken for everybody.
- IN: But your mom makes *enchiladas al estilo de Aguascalientes*, or *nopalitos*, and she's got all these exotic dishes.
- JG: But it's something very interesting, in regards to the meat. My dad would buy the meat for the week, and my mom would separate these little chunks of meat for each day, and she'd make. she would make . . . I mean, we never had a steak, we never had a big piece of meat. And maybe that's why my dad lived to be close to ninety-six years old, and my mom is ninety-one right now. So it was a blessing in disguise. And my mom loved meat, I think because we had such little, but my dad wasn't real crazy about meat. He loved the *cocido caldo* [beef soup], but when it was dry, my mom would make—a few times, my mom made—
- IN: Meatloaf.
- JG: Meatloaf. And my dad would just say, "Ya me traes esa carne de perro?" [Now you're bringing me that dog food?] [laughter]
- KD: Dog food. [laughter]
- JG: But anyways, so my mom—
- KD: So she doesn't take on, as your growing up, like an American cuisine?
- JG: Oh, no, no. She had such great food.
- IN: She still does.
- JG: With every little piece of meat that she had, she'd make a major meal, because she'd make it in stews or *caldos* [soups] or different things, and she just mixed it up with—like for example, *chile colorado*, *chile verde*, she diced little tiny pieces of meat and have a lot of the chile with different things on it.
- IN: And then she still cooks, she still makes all the dinners. *Sopa de fideo*, and—
- JG: Oh, everything. But it was just wonderful food. Wonderful food. I'm cooking a lot of that. She really influenced me.
- KD: And did she—did you end up having Thanksgiving as children? Did you celebrate Thanksgiving?

- JG: You know, from being very young, I don't remember a lot of Thanksgiving. I remember it in school, you know, the turkeys, and then we went to the Variety's Boys Club, we used to go to Variety's Boys Club, and we used to have turkey shoots, so we'd see who could shoot, like Gary Cooper and Sergeant York?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: We'd have like contests to see who could win turkeys and stuff like that.
- IN: Were you shooting real turkeys or pretend turkeys?
- JG: No, no. It was on a paper.
- IN: On a paper.
- JG: To see who got closest. But I don't remember. I personally don't remember a lot of celebration for [it]. I mean, to buy a turkey, you know, something else. At that time, we couldn't even get a full chicken.
- IN: So it wasn't until what age that—because now, you have major Thanksgivings.
- JG: Yeah, it wasn't probably until we started growing up, that I remember, I may be wrong about it. But I don't remember at home, really celebrating Thanksgiving.
- IN: Now Thanksgiving is a major production, but your sister always does the cooking.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: Your older sister [does the majority of the cooking and the others would pitch in, like potluck].
- KD: You also talked about your family, your parents doing a lot of reading.
- JG: Yeah. My dad read a lot of politics, a lot of government stuff.
- KD: And were they bringing things for you to read as well as children?
- JG: My dad wanted us to keep on learning how to read Spanish. So he would always give us the comics, Tarzan and all the other ones in Spanish, from *La Opinión* or *Excelsior* [Spanish newspapers]. So that's how he tried to get us into that.
- KD: What about the Bible?
- JG: No, they never really got us into reading the Bible.
- KD: So you're good Catholics. [laughter]
- IN: But your mom reads novels.
- JG: Oh, yeah. My mom reads everything.
- IN: She's read all of the Harry Potter books.
- KD: Wow.
- IN: What else has she read?
- JG: I don't know. She reads the *Times*—
- KD: And when you were growing up, was she having time to read, or . . . ? Do you remember her reading as well?
- JG: She'd read certain things, but I don't know if she read entire novels.
- IN: Well, since I've known you, for twenty-five years, she reads, maybe because you're all grown up now, and she—
- JG: Yeah, she probably has more time.
- IN: She has more time.
- JG: Yeah. But I don't know if she really had time to sit down and read. I don't remember. There were small magazines, *revistas*—
- KD: Yeah, that's what I was wondering.
- JG: That she would read. Yeah, she would read those things. Something that was short. But I don't think she got into some major novels and stuff like that.
- KD: And then what—you mentioned that your uncle would take you to the beach and stuff. Did the family have leisure time, or was your father working five days, six days, seven days a week?
- JG: No, no—well, my dad worked five days, [but sometimes he had small freelance weekend carpentry jobs]. Yeah, we had Saturdays and Sundays, but it was—and sometimes we'd go to a show together, the whole family. I remember going to the Brooklyn Theatre to go see *Abbott and Costello Meet Captain Kidd*, with

Charles Laughton. I remember that one, because I remember right after that, we went to go visit, I think, the Urzuas, who lived right around the corner from there. So there were times that we'd get together and go as a family. But most of the time, the kids, it would be the four of us kids who would go. My sister Licha was very small—

KD: Too young.

JG: She was like ten years different. So we would go to the show. But a lot of the time, it would be [my brother] Joe and I who would go to the show. So it would vary.

KD: And what about outings as a family? Did your family—did they go camping or anything?

JG: Oh, no. How would we go camping? No. But there is one experience in camping that really made an impact on me, is that we had a neighbor in the back house, the Floreses. The father was named Manuel, the son was named Gilbert, the daughter was named Candy. Helen, we called her Candy. And then they had a little baby sister named Debbie, who was real small. And of course, the mother. . . I feel bad right now, I don't want to forget the mother's name. But anyway, they were wonderful. But they were—I think they were very involved with Boy Scouts and things like that. And one summer, the father came over, and asked my dad if Joe and I could go camping with them. And we had no idea. We heard about camping, and probably saw it on TV, but we had no idea what we were going to go do. And he treated us to the whole thing, he paid for everything.

So we went to Lake Arrowhead, which we called Deep Creek. It went way down into nowhere, a beautiful creek down there. And we went camping, and I don't know how long we were there, maybe a week, a week and a half, I don't even remember. But it was a wonderful experience because we slept out in the tents, and did the campfires, roasting the marshmallows. What it is, is he invited maybe three or four other guys, Joe and myself, and then Gilbert, the son. So it was about six kids, and it was just a great experience.

We were—one of the things that happened is we were all around the campfire at night, and it was pitch black down there, because there was nothing down there, nothing. We were like the only ones there. And we were all in the campfire, and we were all talking, and all of the sudden, we're talking about spooky stories. And one of the things we'd bring up is were saying, "God, what if a bear came over here?" And one of them says, "If the bear came out, I'd just get the stick with fire and throw it on his face," and another one said, "I'd go up and get my slingshot and shoot them." So we were all talking real brave. And then all of the sudden, the father goes, "Sh-h . . . I think I hear something. Shh. Oh oh. I think it sounds like—it sounds like a bear. It is a bear!" And boom! Everybody flew. *[laughter]* They all jumped and ran into the car. Man, we were inside the car within seconds. So his father was just cracking up, and Joe was, too. Joe was four years older.

KD: He understood the joke.

JG: But it was a great experience, and then the year after that, he says, "I want to do the same thing. I want to treat—I want our second trip," and it was wonderful. He says, "Now, there's a place further out that I'd like to take you guys, called Yosemite. So it's up to you guys to make a choice. Do you want to go to Yosemite, or do you want to go back to Deep Creek?" "We want to go to Deep Creek, we want to go to Deep Creek!" *[laughter]* "Forget Yosemite! We want to go to Deep Creek." And then he says, "Well, I'm going to make the decision, we're going to go to Yosemite."

IN: Thank God.

JG: So we went, disappointed that we weren't going to Deep Creek. But when we got to Yosemite, and wow, what an experience. What an experience. It was a wonderful experience up there. And, boy, we just enjoyed it so much. We wanted to go swimming like crazy into the water, and up there, it's like melted snow.

KD: Ice, yeah, it's ice.

JG: And we were in the water, and we were purple, but we were in the water [in spite of Gilbert's father telling us not to]. *[laughter]* And I don't know if that caused it, but afterwards [years later], I started getting sick with asthma. I got bad problems with asthma, sinus. Now, I don't know if that was the reason, but I started

having real bad problems with my asthma, my sinus. [But, since I didn't get sick right after Yosemite, I'm sure it was caused by something else.] So from then on [years after Yosemite], my sinus started really coming up, my nose would get just plugged up like crazy, and I started using Dristan, I started getting worse, it started getting worse. And my asthma would get bad. My younger sister had asthma, and actually I started using—I never went to the—we never went to doctors. So I would use her inhaler.

One time she had an asthma attack, and they had to come pick her up. As a matter of fact, just this weekend, I think, or was it yesterday when I saw my mom, or the day before yesterday? Yesterday, I just saw her yesterday. And she was saying—we sort of mentioned that, and she says, "Yeah, we took years' paying for that hospital bill, that ambulance," she says. "Took years." It lasted a lifetime, because they didn't have any insurance or anything. She says it took a long, long time.

So I started getting asthma, and I remember running from Ernie's house and coming home wheezing. And I'd drink tea, hot tea, and I remember it going away. But as I started growing older, it seemed to start getting worse, but I'll get into that in the older years.

IN: In regards to your dad, because Karen has asked about your dad, maybe you should tell her the stories of how he used to make Mexican candy. And then about building the extension to your house.

JG: Yeah. Now, the extension to the house came in high school.

IN: In high school. So I don't know if you want to go to that yet.

JG: We could get into that, I guess, later.

IN: About the candy?

JG: With the candy, my grandfather and my grandmother actually owned the town store. So my dad grew up doing a lot of things out in the field, and they used to make candy and sell it. So they owned their little store there.

IN: In Belen.

JG: In Belen, in the little town of Belen. So my dad learned how to make Mexican candies, he used to make it every so often. So we learned a little bit, but now I forgot. Too much learning. *[laughter]*

KD: It sounds like a very rich childhood. I mean, obviously you had a sense of your family's poverty at a certain age. Actually, a rather young age. Most people don't have a sense of that until high school.

JG: Yeah, well, I guess, like I said, it was so obvious, the fact that we never had a car, and that's—

IN: Your dad bought a car one time, though.

JG: Yeah. Actually, my uncle—one uncle that, from my dad's side of the family, he came over here and started working. And he did pretty good, he used to drive—he used to work out in Simi [Valley], and he used to drive the big trucks pulling the. . . The fact that he was able to drive carrying the oranges and the crates and stuff like that. And so he had a car, and then he decided to go back to Mexico, and he didn't want to take the car back, so he sold it to my dad. And my dad didn't know how to drive.

KD: I was going to say, had your dad ever driven?

JG: No, my dad didn't know how to drive, so he left it there, parked in front of the yard of the house. And my dad was thinking, "Okay, well, I'll have to start learning how to drive," and, boom, somebody wrecked it. And he says, "Well, it's obvious." They wrecked it just parked there. So he says, "Well, it's obvious that it was meant to be not to drive." He says, "You know, I'm very happy with my bus," he says. He just moved all over the place real easily with the bus. He says, "I can fall asleep, I can do anything."

IN: He had a bus pass to, to go everywhere

JG: And he had so many friends. He says, "You know, the minute I start walking, 'Beep, beep! Juan, Don Juan! Vengase, vengase Don Juan.'" And everybody would pick him up, and my dad was *güero*. *Güero*, very light-complected, very *güero*, and tall. I don't know what happened to Joe and I, but my dad's. . . I's unusual that—the kids normally are taller, but my dad was really taller than Joe and I.

IN: And very distinguished and aristocratic, very proud.

JG: Yeah.

IN: He stood tall.

JG: They had a lot of respect for him, because he respected everybody. Men his age, everybody, he'd say, "Si, señor, si, señora." He'd talk to everybody with a lot of respect. And since we lived in a predominantly Jewish community, I mean, right up the hill from—you know where the Salesian Boys and Girls Club is?

KD: Yes.

JG: Well, that was the Jewish center, we lived down the hill from there. And that was the Jewish center, so it was predominantly Jewish around there. And him being totally *güero*, they all thought that he was Jewish also. Now, everybody'd go up there and start talking to him, and then by the time he started talking, they realized that he wasn't, but he managed to make conversation. He wasn't very good at English, but some way or another, he managed to make conversation with people. And he'd come home from work, he'd work at Vernon, at Gillespie Furniture Company, that was the last job that he got, and he worked for a lot of years there. And from Vernon, he would go take the bus downtown to Central, Grand Central Market, and buy the produce and stuff, and then he'd take the bus coming into City Terrace.

And I could just remember him carrying full shopping bags, four of them, and just walking down, and seeing his hands totally red, practically cutting through his fingers, but him walking down there. He'd be walking, and all of the sudden, all these people would start talking to him. The Jews would start talking to him, and he'd forever be walking down there with some women that were getting off the bus. And they would say, to my mom, "Don't you get jealous?" "Nah." [laughter] She says, "He talks to everybody, [if I was a jealous wife, I would have already divorced him]." So my dad just made conversation. He was very polite, very dignified, very sharp dresser. Very sharp dresser. Very quality. He may not have a lot, but he had quality. What he had was quality. I mean, he had beautiful shoes that he would have made in Tijuana.

KD: Really?

JG: Like they were boots, really—not cowboy boots, but dress shoes.

KD: Dress boots, yeah.

JG: And his undershirt, T-shirts, they were always, I think, silk, real nice. He dressed really sharp, and he always wore a hat.

KD: A hat.

JG: A hat. Always wore a hat. Always. If you saw my dad, he had really nice hats. Very, very nice hats. And it's not like he was taking a lot from us, because you know, he dressed us up pretty good too. And I felt we always had fruits as dessert. We rarely had candy, it was always fruit. If we had for dessert, we'd have a can of cocktails—

IN: Fruit cocktails.

JG: Fruit cocktail, and so with one can, my mom would feed all of us. And there was a dessert that I used to love that she used to make. It would be strawberries with banana and sour cream. Boy, it was really good, that was my favorite.

KD: More like a Mexican *crema*, or a sour cream?

JG: Yeah, well, it was sour cream, but the way she did it, it was just wonderful, wonderful. But in regards to candy, you know, there was rarely that we ever had candy. I think one of the times that we really went wild with the candy was Assumption Church. The pastor had a great relationship with a candy company, chocolate candy company, and they would give him boxes of candy that was crushed, and they'd give it to us, and we'd have a ball with that candy. [laughter]

IN: To show your father's pride and self-respect—two stories you've told me. One is that he never would go outdoors with a t-shirt.

JG: Oh, yeah. Oh, no, no, no, no. No, my dad was—always a shirt—

IN: Full dress.

JG: I mean, you rarely even saw him outdoors without a hat. [laughter] The hat was—he walked in, he'd get his hat, boom, hang it up there. Right as we were walking underneath the hall. As a matter of fact, I think we still, to this day, I think the hat is still hanging in the hallway of our house, where he used to walk in and just put his hat right on a little hook right above the hallway. [laughter]



IN: And then the other story was Christmas, the priest, because you were so poor, would bring you a basket of food, and what would your dad do?

JG: Yeah, there was a few times that the church found out that our situation was so bad, in regards to feeding the family, and they came over with bags of food. My dad got mad, and he said, "Take it back." He says, "I know how to feed my family." So anyway, he had a lot of pride in regards to that.

KD: Wow. Do you remember being hungry as a child? Were you hungry as a child?

JG: I don't remember ever that. I never remember that. He always managed. We went through some hard times, we used to get the milk delivered by Golden State Dairy, and there was this milkman by the name of Johnny. He was a redhead, he might have been Irish. He was a wonderful, wonderful milkman. Wonderful milkman. He used to come in and bring the milk all the way into—put it in the refrigerator and get the other stuff, and just had a great personality, and just loved our family. I don't know if he loved everybody else, but anyway. And he was a funny guy, too, and he actually had a cow horn, he was the only guy who had a cow horn. I remember it was a little metal rod. He'd push that down, instead of the car going "beep beep," it'd go, "moo, moo, moo." [laughter] And he would take me, he would pay me fifty cents or something like that to go with him, just to hang out. He says as an assistant. So I'd go over there and I'd help him.

And I remember he took me—it's probably one of my first restaurant meals, to—I think it's Doña Maria on First Street. I remember he took me there to eat. Well, anyway, Johnny, for Christmas, would always give us snowballs, which was an ice cream ball with coconut and stuff like that, for each one of us. So he'd give that for Christmas. And there was a time that we couldn't pay for the bill, for the milk, and Johnny just—he said, you know, they wanted to cut off the milk, and Johnny didn't allow them to. So I don't know what he did, but he managed to keep it going, and eventually, we caught up. But some way or another, you know, my dad always managed to catch up.

KD: Is it when your father was between jobs, or there was some kind of emergency in the family that extended the funds?

JG: Well, I'll tell you, one of the things, I'll tell you, one of the things that—

IN: I think you should get closer to the mic.

KD: Oh, he's okay, I've been watching.

JG: The tuition, I think, at one time, went up. What it is, is that once, Mela and I went to Assumption School, that means they had to pay four dollars more a month. And you figure, my dad was making forty-five dollars a week, I guess. And then the rent, I think the rent was forty-five dollars a month at that time, and then the rent went up. So it was times that certain things went up that became pretty expensive.

There was an incident that happened when we were living on Hick Street. We were sitting in the house, and all of a sudden—I guess we were all doing different things, and we heard a very unusual noise. Very unusual noise. And we sort of popped up and tried to listen carefully. And it started getting louder, and louder. It was like a rumble, rumbling noise, and it was getting louder. It was getting—it seemed like something was getting closer and closer, and it was getting—it was like the loudest noise I've ever heard in my life, a loud rumble noise. And so we went out. I went to the front, and all of the sudden I saw a lot of people cross the street, looking towards my house, but looking above into the sky. And the noise was—I mean, it was a loud, loud noise. And we ran out, and looked up to the sky to see what it was, and it seemed like hundreds of military planes. Hundreds of military [planes]. And I remember them being in formation, the V's. Just—I mean, tons of them.

And right now, there's a group of military planes that fly from Van Nuys Airport on Sundays, and there's like maybe six or eight at the most that get together, in military planes. And those planes make a lot of noise, I mean, just to have six of them. But to see these—I mean, what to me seemed like hundreds of them. And that was quite an experience. And I think maybe it might have been at the time of the Korean War. But you know, it'd be nice—I'd like to investigate it and see what it was at that particular—

KD: Yeah, what would be flying over. Now, you hadn't mentioned Hick Street before. You talked about living on Blanchard, and then over in Pio Pico. So when does the family move?

JG: Okay. In Blanchard, we lived maybe from 1950 to maybe '54. Fifty-four, somewhere around there. And then we moved around the street, and then we moved because the rent went up on Blanchard, [and the new house was bigger]. And also, I think my mom said we moved because Mrs. Stone, being the landlady, she was too strict with different things. And so we moved around—just around the block, around the block. And so now we were living on Hicks. Before, we were living on Blanchard and Hicks.

KD: Okay. And was that a single-family house that you were renting, or . . .

JG: Yeah. That one was a single. But there were still three houses in that lot.

KD: Really.

JG: But we were in the front house.

KD: Okay.

JG: We were in the front house, and if you didn't—I mean, if you just saw it from the front, you'd say it's just one house, but you have to go to the back to see there was another house in the back, and then there was a house on top of where the garages were. So there was—if you went in the driveway, there'd be maybe two or three garages, and on top, there was a house.

And one of the persons that moved in there was—I think he—well, he was a divorcée who had one son. And he had a nephew and a niece living with him. So he was a single man with a son, a niece, and a nephew. And his name was Danny Ledesma. And he was a boxing coach. And his brother was the Olvera Street blacksmith. I don't know if you remember, many years ago there used to be a blacksmith in Olvera Street, Ledesma. That was his brother. And Danny Ledesma senior used to go to the Main Street gym and coach. And he took Danny Junior and myself every so often to the gym there. So we got a chance to meet at that time Art Aragon, the [famous] boxer. So that was a nice experience.

KD: So this is when—you're not into high school yet.

JG: No, no. I'm not into high school, I haven't brought in high school yet. This is still my older years at Assumption School. So Danny Ledesma was, at that time, was one of the kids from the neighborhood, and all this time, I was still hanging out with Ernie. We were into the music, and we started getting deeper and deeper into music. And by this time, Ernie started hanging out more towards—it was the Flats area, the guys from Flats. And it's because they—some of these guys had some beautiful sisters. [laughter]

KD: Ah-h. [laughter] So you discovered girls.

JG: And also, it turned out that some of these guys played some great guitar. So he'd go over there, and he'd start learning certain things in the guitar, and come over and show me them, and I'd say, "Wow, pretty wild." So he was experiencing more of the neighborhood, which I couldn't experience.

But fortunately, him being so much into the music didn't ever get him into the serious stuff with the gangs, you know. But eventually, he wound up marrying the sister of one of the guys that he was first hanging out with. But Ernie and I, then we go onto the music—oh, there was an experience at Blanchard Street, there was a family called, named Alemanes—they were Alemán. And they were older brothers and sisters, they were much older than us, they had—I think there was . . . They had a Beto, Enrique, Esther, Charlie, Eva, and Terry. And Esther was—I think she was the oldest. And Esther, there was also this house, they lived in a house that also had three houses in the same lot, and it was all the family. So Esther and her husband lived in one of the houses, and they had two kids, which was Cuco and Corfey.

And Cuco was—when we started first getting together, when I first saw Cuco, he was still with a baby bottle. He was a little baby. And he started growing a little older, we started playing on the scooters. He was about three or four years younger than I was. So if I was like six or seven, he was about two or three years old, somewhere around there. But little by little, we started having our own scooters, and we used to enjoy singing.

So with him, I actually started doing, we used to like doing—I don't know if you heard of Miguel Aceves Mejía. Miguel Aceves Mejía is known for falsetto. He was a superstar of falsetto and the *rancheras*.

And so Cuco and I used to enjoy doing the falsetto. We used to go down on the scooters doing falsetto, and to do falsetto, it takes a diaphragm. And so, which means that if you just keep it up when you're a little kid, it helps you do falsetto, and it helps you build up the diaphragm. And I remember the fact that I kept that up, when the Chantels came out—remember the Chantels? I used to imitate the Chantels with my falsetto, because I was using the diaphragm. But when I stopped doing that, I started drifting away from the falsetto. And I guess I stopped using my diaphragm, where later on, I wasn't able to do that.

KD: Or you just hit puberty and you couldn't do it anymore, maybe. *[laughter]*

JG: True. *[laughter]* That's true. Yeah, that's true. But Cuco kept on singing, and it got to—when he was at Malabar Street School, he—I guess his teacher used to have him sing and stuff. But anyway, it turned out that he had a beautiful voice. He became—they used to say he was like the Elvis Presley at Malabar [this was about the time that Elvis Presley first got known]. They—he was a little kid, and he was singing. And he used to sing in a beautiful voice, very nice voice, but he used to like the sing the *rancheras* and Mexican songs. So it was one of those situations where he was a real Chicano. I mean, at that time, we didn't call it "Chicano," but he was—he was from a family, from the United States, that spoke mostly a lot of Spanish and English. So the English and the Spanish was both chopped, neither of them were perfect. They didn't speak perfect English or perfect Spanish, [because they were just starting school]. But anyway, he had a beautiful voice, and his teacher was just so impressed with his singing that she had connections—I don't know if you ever heard of the [Robert] Mitchell Boys Choir?

KD: Yeah.

JG: Well, she had connections with Bob Mitchell.

KD: Wow.

JG: So she wanted to take him to Bob Mitchell. Bob Mitchell seemed very anxious to be able to hear him also. And it turned out that Cuco, which is Refugio, Cuco, he—being a real barrio kid, just felt too intimidated to go out. I mean, these were Beverly Hills kids, they used to go sing for the Pope and make movies with Bing Crosby and all those other people. And he turned it down. He turned it down.

IN: So was he actually—did they actually hear him audition, and was he actually chosen?

JG: I don't know, but I know that he turned down going over there. And I know that they had interest in him and everything. [But I'm sure he did go to audition, because he told me that he turned it down after seeing all the kids, and that's what scared him.]

KD: And you knew of that as a young person.

JG: Yeah. Well, I remember the name, the Bob Mitchell Boys Choir. And I remember it was very famous at that time. And after I checked into it, it seems like he just died pretty recently at the age of ninety-seven years old. But—so anyway, after we started—well I'll go into it later, but when we started our band, I thought that maybe he just didn't want to sing. But when I asked him, you know, "You want to sing with our band?" he got real excited. So he wound up being one of our singers later on. So it was Ernie, Richard, and I, who were singers. So it was like my best, lifelong friends, from little kids to grammar school, little—we're in the band.

IN: So this is when you're going to Salesian.

JG: Yeah, this is something later on.

KD: Maybe we should stop for the day. That's a good breaking point for high school, right?

JG: Yeah.

KD: So, thank you.

## NOVEMBER 4, 2007

**KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez, and today is [November] 4, 2007. This is our second session for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series], and we're talking . . . Johnny wants to start with some thoughts that he's been—just some things that he's been thinking about. So why don't you—

**JG:** Yeah. I just want to go back to, just real quick, some of the things that really made an impact and that I still remember very strong about. One was when we were first living on Blanchard, we had a ragman that would come around with a horse and buggy, and he would yell, "Ragman, ragman!" and people would come out and bring out their rags. And he would drop a weight, a heavy steel weight that held the horse from taking off. And he used to have his horse and buggy right down the street, right by Malabar Street School, [where Malabar Street] used to go. End up into an alley, and in that alley it looked like there were small ranches. And that's where he used to have his horse.

And the other thing was the ice trucks. This is before many people had refrigerators. They had ice-boxes, so there would be trucks delivering big, gigantic pieces of ice, or blocks of ice, that you stuck into the icebox. And that would keep your food cool. Well, anyway, what the guys would always do is run up to the ice truck and try and grab pieces of ice, that was a major thing for us.

And the other thing was Helms Bakery. Helms Bakery would come in their trucks, and they would open up these gigantic drawers. They would slide out these drawers that were probably the width of the truck, and maybe four feet long, and then we'd just drool when they'd open up these drawers. They had all these baked goodies, sweets. Our favorite were always the cream puffs, and it was quite a treat to be able to get a cream puff.

The other thing that used to happen at that time that we never see anymore is planes used to fly low and drop leaflets for advertisement or promotion of things.

**KD:** Wow.

**JG:** So they used to drop them all over the place. *[laughter]* So they'd be landing on roofs and all over the place. But anyway, it was just very interesting. These are things that you don't see anymore.

**KD:** No. I'd actually never heard that story at all. *[laughter]*

**JG:** The other thing, the street signs, they used to flip up and down, instead of having a red light, it would say "stop" and "go." But anyway, those are memories that really stick in my mind.

**IN:** And the P-car.

**JG:** Yeah. The P-car had the tracks, we used to—so we used to drive on tracks. And then with the cable on the top, the electricity. And most of the trolleys used to run like that, too. That was the—from City Terrace, the one that used to go downtown, used to have that.

And the other thing is that we made most of our rides or toys or whatever, and one of the things that we made were our own bicycles. Because we didn't have money to buy a bicycle, we would find old parts of bicycles and put them together. And actually, that's what my brother did in order to be able to get his first [paper] route. They offered him a paper route and he didn't have a bike, so he got pieces and put them together. And then he got a bike route, and then with that, he bought his first bike. It was a Schwinn. And on Sundays, I would go with him, I was probably nine years old, and he was probably about thirteen years old. I would go with him to deliver, and he would put me in the back, I'd ride in the back.

And eventually, I made my own bike, but the only parts I could find were from a racing bike, which meant that the racing bikes had brakes, hand brakes, and the parts that I bought didn't have hand brakes. So my bike didn't have any brakes. So [as a substitute for brakes] what I would do is I would stick my shoe in between the tire and the [front frame] bar that came—that was holding up the bike, [in order to put] the brakes. So little by little, my shoe got worn out. *[laughter]* But that was my brakes. So with Joe's paper route, we were eventually able to buy our first TV, and that was a major thrill.

**KD:** Really, from his paper route?

JG: Yeah. With his paper route. So before that, we were actually able to get a telephone, so the telephone was the very first thing that we got, and then later on, with his paper route, we got the television. So that was quite a treat. We were now able to stay home and look at television ourselves. And of course, like everybody else, television has a major influence in our lives. And looking at TV shows, we never saw Latinos in there. So that made a big impact on me.

KD: So at the time, as a young man, I guess you would have been fourteen. No, eleven.

JG: Yeah, I was probably nine, ten, [eleven, or twelve] years old.

KD: And at [eleven] years old, you're noticing—

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was noticing it, because I was noticing that—what made it more noticeable is when I did see a Latino, I got so excited. But most of the time, the Latinos were bandits. And once in awhile, like with Gilbert Roland, I was able to see something positive.

IN: He was the Cisco Kid.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah. Gilbert Roland, yeah. The Cisco Kid, Duncan Renaldo, and Leo Carrillo were the first. But actually, Gilbert Roland was doing—Gilbert Roland was doing the Cisco Kid. And his partner was—I forget his name now. [I believe Cesar Romero was the first Cisco Kid, and Chris-Pin Martin played Pancho for both Romero and Roland, who came later.] But anyway, it turns out that his partner, who was the original Pancho, later turned out to be related to people that became very close to me, and I'll talk about that later.

IN: Chris-Pin—

JG: Chris-Pin Martin, who was in the original *Stagecoach* with John Wayne, the movie that made John Wayne—

KD: Oh, right.

JG: John Ford movie with John Wayne. So Chris-Pin was in that movie, and many, many other movies. But anyway, later on, he became a person that was related to other people, which I'll talk about later on.

But anyway, seeing—like I had mentioned, that Gilbert Roland in *Bullfighter and the Lady*, was one of the first movies that I saw that really, really started making me notice that we were not included. So it's not the fact that I didn't see ourselves that I noticed. And yeah, I just had a lot of fun looking at television, seeing . . . But when I saw the [Little] Rascals, and they had little black kids, then I noticed that we weren't in there. And then when I saw the East Side Kids, and they had a little black kid there too, then I noticed that we weren't in there. So whenever they had another culture in there that wasn't us, then I started noticing that we weren't being included. If we weren't—like with the Mouseketeers, the fact that there was no other [non-European] culture. I didn't notice it a lot, but the fact that Annette Funicello had dark hair, I noticed that we weren't—that was the closest, but it wasn't Latino. It wasn't Latino.

So that, little by little, started affecting [me]. I started looking and searching, and also I started reading credits. In the credits, I started noticing that there was never a Latino name in there. And it started affecting me, started affecting me, saying, "Maybe we just don't have the intelligence to do what these white people are doing." I never thought of anything being political. I just thought, "Maybe we just don't have the talent, the skill, to be able to do these things." [After seeing Gilbert Roland in *The Bullfighter and The Lady*, the first American movie I ever saw with positive images of Mexicans, I began to notice we actually had the potential of being included in the movies. Before this, I just accepted we weren't part of that world and felt that it was only for whites.]

KD: Can you remember, when you were about nine years old, are you—what's the word you're using to call these folks?

JG: Mexicanos.

KD: No, the white folks. Was it *blancos* in your mind, or is it *anglos*? Is it *gabacho*? is it—

JG: Oh, the white people?

JG: *Gabachos* [or *gringos*].

KD: It was *gabachos*. Okay.

JG: Yeah. I would probably think *gabachos*, [*gringos*], and Americans. And with us, it was *Mexicans*. I never thought of ourselves as Latinos [or even as Mexican Americans at that time].

KD: No.

JG: Because I never thought there was any difference, I never—I thought every Spanish name was Mexican. I didn't even think much about Spain at that time, but I did hear [the word] once in awhile, saying, "Nuestra madre tierra, tierra madre," our motherland, in Spanish. But I never thought too much about any other cultures. So in one end, I started noticing that with television. I started really trying to pay attention. And there was one of the first shows that I noticed that I got really excited was Tito Guízar, who sang "Aya en el Rancho Grande," and who was a superstar in Mexico. He had a variety show, in English television. And that was quite a novelty. Quite a novelty. So he's probably the first Spanish or Mexican person that I saw in the live show in television.

And then later on, there was a show called *Fandango Rheingold*, it was "Fandango," but it was sponsored by Rheingold beer [Rheingold Brewing Co., Los Angeles], so they called it *Fandango Rheingold*. And it would open up with a camera panning in to a wrought-iron gate, and the wrought-iron gate would open up into a beautiful Mexican patio, and then you'd see all kinds of Mexican dancing and everything. And so that made quite an impression on me. And later on, [in the 1970s, Pete Rodriguez, who was ABC Channel 7 community affairs director, told me that he and his brother Eddie Rodriguez were the producers of *Fandango Rheingold*].

KD: You mean like *folklórico* dancing, or—

JG: Yeah. Everything that was Mexican, just a lot of Mexican—you know, mariachis and *charros* and—

KD: Wow.

JG: You know, at this point, I never thought of it as *folklórico*, I just saw Mexican dancing.

KD: I'm just trying to figure out what kind of dance.

JG: Yeah. But they'd be dancing, and anything that was Mexican, cultural, because what I related it to were the Mexican movies. So I had seen Mexican movies going to the Million Dollar [movie theater in downtown Los Angeles] with my parents, and also in Mexico, I went to see some movies. As a matter of fact, the very, very first face that I remember seeing in the big screen was Pedro Armendáriz. And Pedro Armendáriz, to me, scared me. He looked mean. His eyes looked piercing. And to think that later on, he was going to be an actor that was going to be making movies in the United States too, [such as the James Bond film *From Russia with Love* and the *Three Godfathers* with John Wayne].

IN: What was the movie that you saw him in?

JG: I don't know. I just remember his face. And the first—I always saw him as mean. So whether he was a good guy or whatever, you know, his face looked mean to me.

IN: Very intense.

JG: Yeah. Very intense. But the one that really made an impression on me was Jorge Negrete riding his white horse and singing, beautiful singing and all that. So those were the positives. But I never related—you know, it was just a funny thing, that in Mexico, the Mexicans had talent, and they were smart, they had big businesses, big signs in Spanish, but yet the minute we were in the United States, I never saw those things anymore. So it was confusing why they had talent over there and we didn't have talent here.

KD: So you were aware of the—

JG: Yeah. I was aware that they had—because they were famous over there, in other words. And then the radio—

KD: Now, you knew that Pedro Infante or Jorge Negrete—you knew that they were famous Mexicans.

JG: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah.

KD: Okay.

JG: Not only that, it was the Million Dollar [Theater] who was showing these movies, and we'd go as kids together to the Million Dollar. So I was aware of that. And my mom and dad would talk about it and everything, so it was very clear about the fame. And being four years old, [or less in Mexico] you know, I did see



some of their movies, still. I still remember, like I said, Pedro Armendáriz and Jorge Negrete, but it was just strange that here, I didn't see any of that.

IN: When you say "here," do you mean primarily on television, though?

JG: In the United States.

JG: Yeah. Well—

IN: Because the Million Dollar was in the United States.

JG: Yeah. But I knew that there were movies from the—in other words, if it was in Spanish, they were famous, and they were talented, and they were smart. But if it was in English, they were dumb, they were waiters, they were prostitutes, they were *banditos*. Anything in English, we were negative. Anything in Spanish, we were positive. And listening to the radio, my mom would always have Elena Salinas, and she was a female disc jockey, or had a radio show, who went on for hours and hours, we would come home for lunch and she was on, and my mom would be listening to the radio show, so it would be Elena Salinas, and it would be Rodolfo Hoyos, who had also a radio show. So this was all in Spanish, and it was all positive, so I was able to hear a lot of the music that was Mexican. And little by little, we started listening to radio in English. And English—of course, Mexican was never included in there, but we started getting into probably English—and I was going to say, the very, very first song that I ever remember, in Spanish or in English, which was really Spanish, I think it was when we were coming from Mexico, the song "La Burrita" was very popular. [*sings*]

Arre que llegando al caminito aquimichú, aquimichú.

A qui mi chula a mi burrita, aunque vaya enojadita.

Porque no le di su alfalfa, porque no le di su maíz.

Arre que llegando al caminito aquimichú, aquimichú.

A que mechuda tan bonita me refiero a la burrita

Y si para la trompita es pa' que me guste más.

No te fijas mi burrita no te vayas a espantar

Que una mula en la milpita se ha venido a retozar.

No hay cuidado la burrita no se puede ya espantar

Como siempre andan juntitas ya se supo acostumbrar.

Fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui

Fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui

Arre que llegando al caminito, aquimichú, aquimichú.

Ah que la burra tan flaquita necesita su alfalfita

Y si se forma paradita se la da mi capitán.

Pobrecita la burrita ya no quiere caminar

Da unos pasos pa' delante y otros tantos para atrás.

Arre, arre mi burrita no nos vayas a dejar

Pos ya pronto llegaremos y te van a dar tu maíz.

Fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui

Fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui

No se ponga tan arisca que se puede tropezar

Y el tropieza va a ser duro porque duro es el capitán.

No se ponga tantos moños porque puede resultar

Que esos moños sean adorno de una gorra militar.

Fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui

Fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui fui

Well, anyway, that's probably the first song in my life that I ever remember.

But when we started getting into radio [in English], then the very first song I remember and made an impact on me was "Mr. Sandman." And what I liked so much was—which I probably didn't realize, or

understand the harmony, but it was the harmony, and the way they were able to—each voice was able to go [*sings*] “boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom.” Well, anyway, I just had strong memories about that. And then the other one was “How Much is That Doggie in the Window.” And the reason I remember that was because that was a song that my little sister [Licha] was already singing before she was even one year old. She started singing it very, very young.

And then one of the songs that followed after that was “Tell Me a Story,” [sung] by [eleven- or twelve-year-old] Jimmy Boyd. And it would be, [*sings*] “Tell me a story, tell me a story, tell me a story, remember what you said. [You promised me, you said you would, you got to give in so I’ll be good. Tell me a story, and then I’ll go to bed.] You’ve got to be . . .” No . . . Well, anyway, I forgot the rest. But anyway, it was “Tell Me a Story.” And Jimmy Boyd was [also] an actor, he did switch professions. It impressed me that he was an actor, a young kid, and I don’t—he did the recording with an adult, and I don’t remember who the adult was, anyway. [The adult singer, I recently found out, was Frankie Lane, who has always been one of my favorite singers. Around 1998, when he was about eighty years old, a musician friend named Tony Garcia introduced Frankie Lane to me and Irma backstage when he was performing at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza with him.] But these were the first songs that started making an impact in English.

So little by little, I started going towards the English. And these were songs that kids were also more into, so I was becoming acculturated to the American culture.

KD: And your sister, obviously, she speaks English as a child.

JG: My youngest one.

KD: The youngest one.

JG: Oh, yeah. The youngest one right away started speaking English. My mom said that we learned English pretty good, but according to her, we learned it very well, but according to us, we still lacked a lot, and I know that I was pretty insecure about it for quite awhile.

IN: But your younger sister spoke English and Spanish, not just English.

JG: Yeah. Oh, yeah. The fact that we were beginning to start speaking English in the house—and what was always interesting was that with the kids, we started getting into English, and then when we’d talk to our parents, we’d speak in Spanish. And it became a habit where we just—even if our parents were around us, we’d keep on speaking English. It sort of eliminated them, but it was hard for us to speak Spanish to each other when we knew that we spoke English. So little by little, English became our primary language. And with me, I remember, the minute I met somebody in Spanish, I would continue, even if they spoke English, I would continue speaking in Spanish. And if I had met somebody in English, I would continue speaking in English, [even if they spoke to me in Spanish].

So with me, I always felt that in regards to my name, if people felt comfortable—if I met them in Spanish, I was Juanito, and if I met them in English, I was Johnny. And I felt very uncomfortable when somebody in Spanish was trying to call me “Yanni.” They couldn’t say “Johnny.” In other words, I didn’t want them to feel uncomfortable. And when somebody in English wanted to say “Juanito,” [and they couldn’t pronounce right,] I wanted them to say “Johnny.” So I didn’t—I’ve never liked people feeling uncomfortable on what they’re going to call me. I want them to call me what makes them feel comfortable, and what they can say correct also.

KD: Right.

JG: So that part started making me very multicultural, or bicultural. But in regards to the music, little by little, that started making an influence. And I remember the first—probably the very first—way back at that time, the only record players that most of the people had were a little tiny box. And they’d put the 78 [rpm], I think was—

IN: [The] 45-[rpm].

JG: Or 30—

IN: [There were] 45s and 78s.

JG: Yeah, the big ones.

KD: The big ones were the 78s.

JG: [The] 78s, yeah. So we'd have the 78s in just a little tiny box with a little speaker. But some way or another, somebody gave us a [large] cabinet [record player], and we were able to have a cabinet. And it was somewhat beat up, but the record player worked, and the speaker was bigger.

And the very first song that I remember, very first record I remember having, was "So Rare," by—I think it was Tommy Dorsey—and that just made an impact on me. And at that time, we were hanging around with Lupe Posada's kids. And I remember they were a little bit older. The older ones were older than Joe, and I think they were more into the community already, because they were born here. And they introduced us to a record called "Gee," by the Crows. And that was probably the first rhythm and blues record by a black group that I remember, because at that time, most of them were white singers, and there were very few black singers that were into the crossover market for the white audience.

So all of a sudden, rhythm and blues started coming in. And the first radio show that I remember that started playing the Top 40s was Al Jarvis's *Make-Believe Ballroom*. And Al Jarvis, to what I've heard, is that Al Jarvis actually went to Roosevelt High School, and he discovered Nat King Cole. This is what I recall hearing. But I found these things out later on. But anyway, Al Jarvis used to have his radio show, and then he started playing the Top 40s, and it was mostly all white music still at that time. If you got into the black music, which was the rhythm and blues, there was—and I don't even remember if it was white yet at that time, but later on, it was—I forgot the radio station. KH . . . I forgot the radio station. But anyway, it was one specific radio station that played the black music [KGFJ].

So Al Jarvis had his radio show, and then it was Joey Yocam, I remember—yeah, Joey Yocam, I think, or Joe Carver—who was the announcer. [It was Joe Yocam, who later had his own radio show on KFWB.] And then Al Jarvis had the first TV, of what I know, the first TV Top 40 rock and roll show, which was a dance show. And [with] that [show], little by little, we got more and more and more into the Top 40s. So we were becoming much more acculturated with the television and the radio.

KD: Now, in your family, did you dance when the shows were on? Or did you just sit and watch?

JG: No, we sat and watched. We didn't do too much dancing. My younger sister, Imelda, she's the one that started really getting into it. She was into all the singers, and especially all the guy singers and all of that. So she was really quite a bit—and even now, she's probably even more into—the oldies, you know, not the new stuff, but a lot of the old ones.

IN: Did she dance at home?

JG: Probably, but they weren't allowed to go to dances. We weren't allowed to go to dances. My dad was very, very strict, [even] where Joe and I didn't go out.

But one of the things that gave me liberty to be able to go out into the street was, at Assumption School every year, they used to have a *jamaica* [church bazaar or charity fair]. So they used to have us go sell [raffle] tickets to raise money for the *jamaica*. And the tickets were raffle tickets to win so much money, or a bike, or whatever. So I always had permission to go out and sell them.

And what was interesting was that at one time, I was approaching a house, and there was a man sitting down in the porch, and I went up to the—I went up the stairs to the—which was a raised yard, the front yard was raised, so I went up the stairs—and about three dogs attacked me, and they all bit me. And that was—ever since then, I've been scared of dogs. I don't trust dogs.

KD: Good reason.

JG: There was another time that I walked into a store, and the minute I opened the door, a dog bit me on my leg, and my whole leg turned purple. So I just never trust dogs.

KD: Were you bloody? Did they break your skin?

JG: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But I don't think I even told my parents about it. [Not about the first three dogs. I worried that if my parents knew, they wouldn't allow me to go out and sell raffle tickets anymore.]

KD: Really?

JG: Yeah, I don't think I told them. When the dog bit me on the leg, my leg turned purple, so my dad did go out and check it out, and they said something about the dog not having rabies, I don't even remember too much about that. But anyway, it really made—left me with the impression of being scared, not trusting any dogs, never.

But anyway, in regards to the raffle tickets, that was one incident. But the other thing is, the place that I would be able to sell a lot of tickets, I'd go stand in front of the First Street Store. And I would be selling tickets [there] like crazy. And this is another thing that was going to become such a meaningful place to me in my future. So anyway, this was some of the things, growing up as a kid.

And little by little, now that we were beginning to start going into high school, in 1955, I was introduced to a word that was going to later in my life probably become one of the most important words that was going to make an impact in my life and that was going to help me so much in my life. And that was the word *Salesian*. My brother graduated from Assumption, and there was a new school opening up, a new Catholic boys' high school, opening up in San Gabriel. And that was Don Bosco high school [Don Bosco Technical Institute], and that was a Salesian high school. And so my brother started going to that school, and so I had—I mean, I saw, and said—I was so excited, it was such a big school, beautiful school, [and it was surrounded by] ranches. They had horses around there and everything, and I just thought it was just wonderful. So I really looked forward to going to Don Bosco. And they used to have a bus that used to come and pick up my brother at a certain point, and eventually, my brother got a car. So that was the first car in the family, when my brother got a car. So my brother was probably sixteen years old, or something like that.

KD: Is that from his paper route still, or . . .

JG: No, no. By this time, he was already working in different places. He worked in Robert's French restaurant, he worked at Mills—they made things out of, I think, stainless steel, things like that. But there was an interesting story in regards to Mr. Mills. You know, I always heard the name Mr. Mills. Now, Mr.—and what Joe did is he used to get my Uncle Pancho, which was my mom's younger brother, who came here first before he brought his family. So his family, all his family was still in Tijuana waiting for him to fix the papers. So my brother got him into Robert's, and then my brother got him to work with Mr. Mills.

And Mr. Mills happened to be a very good friend of Walt Disney. And at that time, Disneyland was just opening. This was '55 [or '56]. And I remember seeing on television, because Disney—*The Wonderful World of Disney* was probably the first image that I remember in our own personal TV. So that was probably the first thing I remember seeing. So we probably got our TV right about the time that Disneyland was opening, because what they were showing was the construction of Disneyland, so they kept on talking about Disneyland being constructed. And I remember seeing it and thinking, you know, "I'm going to go to Disneyland as a special guest." I don't know what made me think that, but [that was something very strong in my mind.] I think I'm going to go there special. And it turned out that because Mr. Mills was a friend of Walt Disney, he got Joe a pass to go to Disneyland. And Joe said, "Well . . ." I think he just got him two passes. So he says, "I'll take my younger brother." But this—now, this was even before Joe was driving.

So there was a family that had moved from Mexico, and they lived in Aguascalientes, and they moved near the neighborhood, and we got to know them pretty well. And they had an older brother [Mario] that was older than Joe who was [already] driving, and he was driving—it was a '57 Chevy. No, no, it couldn't be a '57 Chevy. I don't know. But anyway, I remember he was driving, and he had a younger brother. So what Joe had managed to do is get a pass for Mario, since he was going to be the chauffeur, and since he had a younger brother [Chuy], he got another pass for the younger brother. So we [the four of us] wound up going to Disneyland. And at that time, they had [separate] little tickets for different things, [each ride], but we got on everything free. So that was our first experience going to Disneyland, so it was quite a treat. And it was interesting that in my mind at that age, I was thinking, "I'm going to go there different from everybody else."

KD: And you were able to do it.

JG: And it happened, yeah. It's amazing how, you know, you really think of things, and sometimes you can make them happen.

IN: And you were talking about Don Bosco.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, Joe started Don Bosco, and eventually, then he got his car also. So now there was one new expense of my brother going to high school. And all this time, my dad was now working. Like I mentioned, he first started working with my [Grand]-Uncle Angel, [my dad's uncle], as a gardener. Oh, no, first he started working in construction [then the rains came], and then there was no more work, so he started working with [his] Uncle [Angel] as a gardener, [caring for an entirely privately owned hill in Hollywood which, sitting on top, had a gigantic beautiful three story mansion that, I was told, had an elevator. I was once there with my Dad when I saw the house from the outside. Throughout the years, when I was growing up, I heard three different stories of who lived in the mansion at the time that my dad was working there. One was that the estate was owned by the Wrigley chewing gum family, another was the family were owners of a major soap company, and the third was said to be the May family of the May Company department store chain.]

But since my dad was a cabinetmaker and a carpenter, he wanted to go out and [get side jobs]. So my dad would pack up two shopping bags, and he would triple the shopping bags, he would put three shopping bags [together to reinforce them], and he would load up his tools, carpentry tools [in them]. It's not like most people, they throw their tools in their pickup, and they go out and get odd jobs. He had shopping bags, he'd just get on the bus with his shopping bags and his tools. And he'd go out and do odd jobs in carpentry work. Well, anyway, he went out looking for work that way, and somewhere he got a referral to go out to Gillespie Furniture Company. He went over there and he got a job doing cabinets, working as a cabinetmaker. So now he got a job [his own profession], but still the money wasn't all that much that he was making. So we were barely affording to be able to have four of us now in Catholic school. So now my brother went into high school, which was a bigger expense, so it was getting just a little more difficult now [financially]. And then two years later—no, the year after that—my sister [Rebecca] graduated, and she went to [Bishop Conaty Girls' High School]. So now [their were] two [in] high school and two [in] grammar school. So the expenses were getting quite a bit.

So by the time that I was ready to start going to high school, it was now becoming—going to be a lot, a lot more difficult. So my plan was always to go to Bosco Tech [like my brother Joe]. But just before—I guess registering for school, a priest came into our classroom, and started talking about a new school opening up right in the heart of East LA, which meant that we didn't have to drive real far going. And he made it sound real exciting, and he said—he talked about the Salesian order, and I think he showed slides of the seminary and stuff like that. And I got so excited, I even wanted to become a priest, because I said, "Wow, to be in a place like that. I don't know how anybody could [not] want to become a priest." So it tempted me to become a priest. So I was just looking at the slide show, got excited about becoming a priest. But little by little, after the slide show faded away [in my mind], the priesthood also faded away.

And also the girls that I had a crush on, okay, [erased the priesthood completely from my mind]. My very first phone call, there was a girl by the name of Isabel that I had a crush on. And I don't remember what class it was, but she was the very first girl that I called. She gave me her phone number, and I was very nervous about calling her. I was so scared of calling her. And finally, I got the nerve to call her, and I dialed, and of all things, it's her father that answered the phone. And I said, "Uh, is—is Isabel home?" And he says, "Yeah, just a minute," and I said, "Oh—oh—I'm sorry, wrong number." [laughter]

KD: Oh! [laughter]

JG: And I hung up. [laughter] After he said yes, I hung up, because—I said, "Sorry, wrong number." [laughter] So of course, little by little, I got used to that, and I was able to do it. But anyway, so now that Father Malloy came and talked about [Bishop Mora] Salesian opening up, and having a swimming pool, he said we were going to have a swimming pool, and everybody got excited about a swimming pool.

KD: Why not, right?

JG: So it's like 95 percent of the guys from my classroom went to Salesian. So for the first six months, I was taking a bus to Salesian from City Terrace.

IN: But before Salesian was built, when they started promoting that they were going to have the school, you guys were so excited that—what were you doing, helping them?

JG: Oh, no, well, actually, it was already when we were in school.

IN: Oh, so they had one building.

JG: Yeah, actually, when I started school, Salesian was probably maybe 40 percent built, [compared to what it is now]. They were still building it. So we just had classes in the classrooms that were built. So it's like, Salesian is three stories. The first floor is the offices, and the library, and that was maybe 50 percent built, because the principal's office and then, and it was already set up [on the first floor]. And the second floor was half-built, which meant the third floor was not built yet, and half of the second floor was not built, because we were only one-fourth of the school. [I should say that the structure and outside walls on the main part of the building were completed. It was the inside of the other 60 percent that was incomplete.] So it was only the freshman.

And the field, which was supposed to be where the pool was going to be, and where the field was going to be, were all dilapidated houses that were half torn down and all that. So they used to allow us to go in there and just beat up the houses, because they were trying to tear them down. So even the guys would go in there knocking down things. So anyway, there were still a lot of houses down there.

KD: So you were knocking down the house thinking a swimming pool was going to be there, right?

JG: Yeah. Or our football field, or whatever, because we didn't have a field.

KD: Right.

JG: We had shops, which were open—they had an electronics shop, and it was fully developed, it was printing, cabinet making—and the cabinet-making teacher was Brother Rudy [Bertagnolli], who was actually my brother Joe's teacher at Don Bosco. And he happened to be the very first Salesian that I ever met, because he gave my brother a ride home one time and my brother introduced me to him. And he says, "Johnny, this is Brother Rudy." And he says, "And the way we all know him is because we all sing, do wop bop a loo-la, do wop bam boom, Brother Rudy, tutti-fruity." [laughter] So anyway, I always remember that. And Brother Rudy just recently retired. I think he's like eighty years old now. And I just heard that maybe about five months ago, he retired. He's out at San Pedro at the home for retired priests or brothers, he was a brother.

So anyway, they didn't have art class, they didn't have an art teacher, and that's what I wanted. I wanted to take art. So the closest thing that they had was printing. So I took printing, and my teacher was Brother Pat, who is at Don Bosco right now, still. And—but one of the things that started happening while I was going to school is I started noticing a lot of guys carrying instruments. And when [I] went down to the band room, it looked like half of the school was [in the school] band. And the reason I didn't join the band is because they were already performing.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: I mean, this was the first year of school, and it seemed like they were already performing. [They were playing like advanced students which was just too intimidating for me since I had never formally studied music before.] And I said, "Well, you know, I don't know anything about music." But I did know [a little] about harmony, because Ernie and I were still singing, and we were getting deeper and deeper into our singing, and into the guitar. So but at the same time, my mom and dad, the rent went up in our house, and now we had three in high school. So my mom and dad were just—didn't know what to do. So instead of taking us out of Catholic school, or excluding me from Catholic school, whatever, they decided that we were going to move and find a smaller house to move into. So they told friends and people in the family that if they knew of anybody [who had a house for rent]. And it turns out that I think Lupe—a relative of Lupe Posada's told my mom and dad about a house, and so we found a house.



But right now, even—while [since] I was [still] in Assumption School, [I had to walk about three miles round trip because] I started also working and the work that I used to do [while I was still] at Assumption School is I used to actually go clean the yard once or twice a week, to—her name was Carmelita Gonzalez, it was Gonzalez also, and she happened to be the aunt of Lupe Posada [I think]. And Carmelita, her oldest—her son still lived with her, so it was Carmelita and her son Alfredo, and Alfredo was a professional musician. So he worked during the day, but at night—I remember he worked, and that he'd come home and sleep, and then at night he'd go perform.

And his nephew [I think], Joey Gonzalez, [who played trumpet], was also going to school in Don Bosco with my brother Joe. And Joey played trumpet, and Joe, [my brother], he was very talented in regards to music, because like I said, he first played the guitar. And then his finger broke, and then he stopped playing the guitar. But he played the clarinet, so he got into the drum and bugle corps at Don Bosco. So he played clarinet, and Joey played trumpet, and eventually, Joe stopped playing, I guess once he was getting ready to graduate, he stopped playing. And Joey kept on playing trumpet. Now, Joey [I think] was Carmelita's [grandson] also.

KD: Okay.

JG: And it turns out that Joey then started playing with Pérez Prado. So it's like Joey was the first—probably the first musician that I knew that I saw on TV playing with Pérez Prado band. And that made an impression on me. So now, little by little, music was making more of an impact on me, and the fact that Salesian did not have an art class, art was playing a lesser role in my life, and music more of a prominent role.

And so anyway, in regards to the house that my parents finally found, they happened to find a house just above the hill of Salesian. So it was just up the hill from Salesian. So it took me three minutes to get to the school. So anyway, when we first got to see the new house, I was stubborn, I was protesting, I couldn't understand why we had to move out [of our current house]. I didn't know about that time that it was because we didn't have enough money [because the three of us were now in a private high school and our family could no longer afford our present house]. So I was just protesting, and I was so involved with Assumption School, the Assumption church, the Boys and Girls Club. On Sundays, we would all stick around there and make *raspadas* to help, to sell, make money [for the church]. And of course, it was a Boys and Girls Club, so it was a lot of fun, and I just became very close to [everyone]. So I became very stubborn about [moving].

We actually moved to St. Isabel parish. But when we first saw the house, the house was like Mrs. Stone's [when we first moved in]. It was all dirt. And [when] we drove up, and it was a gigantic block. It was a gigantic block. And in that whole block there were only three houses on each side, and the rest of the entire neighborhood, all that area, looked like Berlin [during World War II]. It looked like they had dropped the bomb. And it seemed like most of the houses were gone, but the foundation was still there. And it just looked mysterious.

KD: Now, was that Hicks Street?

JG: That was Orme Avenue.

KD: That was Orme, okay.

JG: Orme.

IN: So this is the new house in Boyle Heights, where his mother still lives today.

JG: This is new house in Boyle Heights.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: And it was—I mean, it looked terrible. And I said—

KD: It's near Soto and Whittier Boulevard.

JG: I just thought, why are we moving here? This house is—there's no flowers, there's no plants, there's no trees. And on top of that, there's no neighborhood. It's all gone. So I was protesting continuously. But eventually—then we found out, you know, what's happening here. We found out that that was actually going to be the future site of the major junction [of] freeways, of the Pomona, the Santa Monica, the Santa

Ana, the Hollywood, the Golden State. [This would be] where all those freeways meet. And they started digging, and they dug what looked like a gigantic hole, and they moved gigantic pipes.

[The hole was so big that it looked like a mini Grand Canyon. But, since at times I love solitude, I took advantage by going out in the dark and sat at the edge of the hole under the millions of bright stars and sang to my hearts content as loud as I wanted, knowing no one could hear me.] But anyway, what helped me is, I would go out there and I would get my guitar and I'd sing and sing, because there was nobody out there so I could sing loud, and I could just—I had a lot of fun having an open space there. But—even though it wasn't the most beautiful, but when they started digging, I had a view of everything. And of course, they cut off the street from going through, which now left three houses on each side.

KD: So they totally demolished that community.

JG: They demolished everything. So the neighbors on both sides were elderly couples, single couples, that each had a married son. The one on the right side it was the Canos, on the left-hand side it was La Caras. And La Cara was a Mexican married to an Anglo. And on the right-hand side of us, the Canos were very [cultured and] sophisticated. Mr. Cano, [or his father,] I believe, used to play with the symphony, and they were very educated.

So one day, this gigantic blue convertible Cadillac pulled in [the street] to go to the Canos. And it was a beautiful gigantic [car]. And this guy gets off with his [classy looking] wife, and he's wearing Bermuda shorts. And Bermuda shorts were not seen in East LA [much at that time]. In East LA you [didn't] see Bermuda shorts, or even [his] casual huaraches [sandals] and stuff like that. And that was unheard of, as Chicanos, [since most of us were conservative dressers and not exposed to that style of clothing]. I was just sort of shocked. And it turns out that [it was] their son, [who] was a piano player. And obviously, by seeing this big Cadillac, he wasn't a starving artist. So as we got to know [Mr. and] Mrs. Cano. It happened [that their son's] name was Eddie. So then I found out that Eddie was actually a very well known jazz, Latin jazz pianist, who had already—he was a recording artist. And later I found out that he had already made movies. And Mrs. Cano and Mr. Cano were—their cousin [or brother-in-law] was Cris-Pin Martin [the original Pancho of the Cisco Kid movies].

So their whole family was into movies, and I didn't find out until Mrs. Cano came over one day and said, [if I remember correctly], "There's a movie on with my cousin [or brother-in-law]," which was Cris-Pin Martin. And then she also came and told us there was a Western movie on with his wife—I think it was Mrs. Cano's sister, I believe. So Mrs. Cano's sister, I think, was married to Cris-Pin Martin, and Mrs. Cano's sister was in a movie, and they were in a covered station wagon, a covered wagon, a stagecoach, and they were crossing a river, and they got stuck in the mud, and they had to get off, and they carried the women over, and one of the women was Mrs. Cano's sister. So they were all into movies, and Mrs. Cano said that Eddie Cano's first movie was when he was six months old. So, because of Cris-Pin Martin being so involved in movies. So anyway—

IN: What was the movie, do you remember?

JG: I don't remember the movie. I don't remember the movie. I don't remember it. But I remember her coming over, and—so anyway, but I just remember all of a sudden, every—all the showbiz stuff is there [which was impressively new to me]. And so all of a sudden, now Eddie Cano is coming over and becoming very close. And [every year I would stay at their house taking care of it]. Every time she'd, [or Mrs. and Mr. Cano], go to Mexico, she'd [or they'd] go visit my grandmother [or other family members] and come back with all kinds of stuff from Mexico. So we became very, very close. [My parents were first renting, but because of Mrs. Cano's persuasion and support, they eventually bought the house.]

And so now, Eddie's influencing me even more, and I'm seeing, "Wow, you know, there's a Mexican that made it in music." And then I started, of course, hearing around that time, or maybe even before, I started hearing [about the song] "Besame Mucho," which was English and Spanish, by Andy Russell. So all of a sudden, I'm hearing now another Latino. And obviously he was Latino because I started hearing that

he was also from East LA. And so the self-esteem was growing little by little. But still, I had no knowledge about the culture, it was only because of the images that were around me.

So as I started school, I started seeing all these musicians, and the—in my classroom, there was a guy by the name of Benny Lopez who sat in front of me, and there was another guy who was the star athlete, and his name was Charlie Garcia. Benny Lopez was a guitar and bass player, he played electric guitar and electric bass, and he started playing with some of the other musicians that were in the school. So through him, I started getting closer to some of the other musicians. And the school, all of a sudden, we started getting guys performing. So music became [was becoming] more prominent [in my life], and then all of a sudden, there was this one guy, [Benny's close friend], by the name of Johnny Gamboa, who played the guitar, [the trombone], and [sang, and] did certain things. And then he started coordinating a whole band. So [some of these musicians], all these guys from Salesian, started becoming a part of Johnny [Gamboa's] band.

KD: Which was called—

JG: Which was called then Johnny and the Crowns.

IN: Now, I think before you get into this, maybe you should say a little bit about Tony Garcia, and why is it that all these first—all this very first class of Salesian—yeah.

JG: Well, then I started finding—yeah. Then I started . . . The reason I didn't join [the school band], like I said, is because I felt—I never had any music education, I was never exposed to [classes]. In other words, Joe had a music class at Don Bosco, so . . . But when I first started—oh, what it was, is I was intimidated [by] the fact that they were all performing already.

KD: They were advanced.

JG: Yeah. In other words—

KD: And where were they performing? At the school?

JG: No, at the school.

KD: Okay.

JG: The big band was already performing.

KD: But in other words, this was the very first class of Salesian, but yet they were not beginner music students, they were already—they had some training. Where did they get the training, and why—

JG: So what I found out later is that the music teacher to Salesian was actually a music teacher at [Our Lady of] Lourdes elementary Catholic grammar school. And what he did is he went out to all the grammar, Catholic grammar schools, and recruited students to come into Lourdes and study music there.

IN: What I understand is, his named was Taggart—

JG: Taggart, his name.

IN: What was his first name?

JG: Bill Taggart.

IN: Bill Taggart. And that he was actually a teacher at these different elementary schools.

JG: No, no.

IN: Or, no. He taught at Lourdes, but the different Catholic elementary school students would come to him.

JG: Yeah. Because he went to all the different schools.

KD: So he taught them for a few years.

JG: Yeah. And originally, he lived back East. And there was another one by the name of Cronen, who was an original teacher in that area. And then he brought Taggart over, and then Cronen opened a music store, and Taggart then started teaching. [Cronen's Music Center in Montebello—ed.] So Taggart was teaching all these grammar students. So when Salesian opened, all these grammar—all these musicians that were all prepared, started with Taggart. So we had a gigantic orchestra.

KD: And Tony Garcia was his right-hand man, was his assistant, even though he was a student.

JG: Yeah. Now, Tony Garcia, who started at Lourdes with them in '56, was getting into problems with gangs and stuff like that. And the fact that he went to Lourdes and heard the band playing, all of a sudden, he

started getting in there. [He then got into music] and that helped him stay away from all these things. So then Tony was in my grade then, he was in the first Salesian class. He was a—like the right-hand man to Taggart. So Taggart, being white from back east, was only basically playing white music.

KD: Classical music.

IN: No. More American—

KD: Oh, so big band—

IN: Americana, big band music.

JG: Right. And little by little, some of the musicians were beginning to drop out and get bored. And Tony said, “You’ve got to start playing some of the music that we relate to.” So Taggart started playing some great music.

IN: Latin music.

JG: Yeah. Pérez Prado and different things like that. Some really nice stuff. So when our band would go march, they would play . . . [*hums melody*]

IN: Well, talk about Trona. Talk about Trona.

JG: Yeah. There was an incident when we go to football games and basketball games. One time we went to Trona, and Trona’s out in Death Valley, and it’s like all sand out there, and dirt. So we all went in a caravan of buses, and we were playing, and the rival team would make a basket, their band would play [*sings melody of “The Stars and Stripes Forever”*]. And then after our band would make our basket, and our band would play [*sings melody with Spanish rhythms*] real jazzy music. So at the end of the game, all of the cheerleaders and a bunch of the girls and guys ran to Mr. Taggart—

KD: From the rival school.

JG: From the rival team, and said, “Could you please stay here and play for our school dance?” [*laughter*] Because we had some great music.

KD: [*laughs*] Yeah.

JG: So there were a lot of musicians all of a sudden coming out of Salesian.

KD: And so that’s where Johnny Gamboa—

JG: And Johnny Gamboa, whose grandfather, I believe, and also his father, were professional musicians. Johnny Gamboa’s father was a great guitar player, and he used to—he had guitars that I had never seen before. It was like a double or a triple guitar altogether. And he used to play with Mongo Santamaría, and all these other different people. So his father told him, you know—and he wasn’t that well educated in music.

IN: Did his father have a big band of his own, or did he play with other groups?

JG: No, he just sat in with a lot of other different groups, to my knowledge. So anyway, his father said, you know, told Johnny, “I want you to make sure that you’re well educated in music.” So Johnny started taking—Johnny played guitar, but because they didn’t . . . Oh, that was another reason why I didn’t get into the band, because they didn’t have guitar in the band. So Johnny took the trombone, and so out of all these musicians, he rounded up a whole batch of them. And the fact that he was so much into music, he had already performed different [types of music]—you know, when we first started—and solos, and stuff like that. So the fact that he was so much into music, he [was able to] put together a gigantic [band]. It was Carlos Frias, Richard Gallegos, Tony Garcia on the sax, and then Johnny played the trombone, and then there was another Tony Garcia on trumpet, Frank Guzman or Paco on the trumpet, and Romeo Prado on the trumpet. And then there was—Johnny also played guitar, and then he had a singer by the name of [Richard Rodriguez, who we called] Dickie, who was [once] a neighbor of [Johnny and Benny’s]. Now, Johnny [and Benny] was one of the persons that had to move out from—because of—from the area, because they were building the freeway.

KD: Okay.

JG: So the freeway moves them out, and he, [Johnny Gamboa], lived—or he moved [to a new house]. The freeway was right next to him. I mean, there was his house, a driveway, and the freeway was only like

three feet away from the driveway. It was very, very close. So anyway, then he had Danny Dominguez on the drums, and he had Benny Lopez, who was the person that sat in front of me, was playing guitar, and he also played bass.

KD: That was all a part of Johnny and the Crowns.

JG: That was all part of Johnny and the Crowns.

KD: Okay.

JG: And then it was Jimmy Espinoza, who wasn't playing anything yet, he played the trombone—no, he played the tuba. I believe it was the tuba in the [school] band. But he wanted to play with Johnny, so he played the bongos [first] with Johnny, [and later the bass]. [Later on Ronny Figueroa, who we called Fig, joined the band and played congas and piano.] The band, little by little, became very popular. It was a big band, it was the old style where they all sat down with the music up on a podium in the front.

KD: Kind of like a little—

KD: Yeah. Yeah.

JG: So it was the old style. And he crossed into all kinds of music. He played Latin jazz, he played a lot, "Up the Lazy River," he played some of the rock and roll stuff. But "Peter Gunn" was a really great song that I remember him doing a lot. So I started hanging out with the band. And I didn't drive yet, and my dad was very, very strict. So, but—

[break in audio]

JG: Music was just—I was totally engulfed by music now.

IN: And you used to sit in with him sometimes and sing?

JG: Yeah. Well, I used to do "Cerca del Mar" with him, so I'd sing a couple of songs. [Actually, not having studied music, and having stage fright, I never thought of me being on stage performing. I just enjoyed hanging out with the guys and harmonizing with Ernie and sometimes with Johnny, but not on stage. One night when Johnny and the Crowns were playing for a wedding and I was just listening to them, Johnny called me over from the stage. With the surprise of my life, he says, "Let's sing 'Cerca del Mar.'" I froze, then responded, "What? Here? Right now? With all these people? Are you crazy?" Well, Johnny's persuasion was pretty strong, but not strong enough to get me on stage. However we did sing the song, but Johnny had to get off stage to sing it with me from the dance floor. Eventually Johnny was able to get me on stage.]

KD: And you said—when they perform, where are they performing? At the high school, at the local—

JG: They were playing a lot of weddings, a lot of weddings all over the place.

KD: So banquet halls—

JG: High schools and different things like that. They were playing all over the place. And it was a great band, it was really a very nice band. So they were all pretty well educated musicians, to the extent of what they got in education there. And all this time, I was still hanging around with Benny Lopez, and so I became very close with all the musicians.

[Soon a drafting class and a pep club to do graphics were added to the Salesian programs. I quickly signed up into the pep club and soon found myself painting an approximately six by six foot color portrait of the principal on a banner, copied from a one square inch black and white photo. The banner was then hung from the third story of the school's main building for principals' day.] And so at that time [in the pep club], little by little, I started talking—in one of my classes, I had a guy by the name of Sal Padilla sitting next to me. And he started talking about the fact that [at that time] he used to [regularly] get together with two other musicians, one a drummer who went to Cathedral [High School] named Frankie Uballez, and the other one was a guitar player, a young kid, was at that time, he was fifteen, fourteen years old. And we, [Sal and I], were like [seventeen] years old. So anyway, Sal was teaching him the guitar, so they were like a little trio, two guitars and drums.

KD: And his name was—

JG: And his name was Bobby Hernandez. So then Ernie and I, all this time, were still singing. So—

IN: And Cuco?

JG: No, Cuco wasn't around anymore. He was—I was now living at Whittier and Soto, so I wasn't seeing too much of Cuco anymore—Richard, who was still living in City Terrace. So anyway, Ernie and I were still working out even more, learning a lot of songs. And Sal started saying, "Why don't we get together? You guys sing." We played the guitar too, but that wasn't our emphasis, our emphasis was singing. So he says, "Why don't you . . ." We were playing acoustical guitar, where Sal and Bobby were playing electric guitar. He says, "Let's get together for a rehearsal." So [before that] we got together. So we talked about it for a while, but we started talking about it so much that we became a group before we even started rehearsing together. But once we started rehearsing together, we just really hit.

Here we were a duet, a singing duet with a [musical] trio. [We started rehearsing.] And we started playing at State [Street] playground, and State playground had a big megaphone, like the type that—a loudspeaker, like a loudspeaker, where you speak, and it's a gigantic megaphone. So that was like our loudspeaker. We'd plug in the guitars and the amps into it and [get a big sound]. So we were rehearsing there. And some of the first songs that we learned was Santo and Johnny, "Tear Drop." "Sleep Walk." "Sleep Walk," and then "We Belong Together," as singers. So little by little, Bobby started getting better at the guitar, he really started getting good. Now, Sal was teaching him how to play guitar, all of a sudden Bobby started really getting very good. And so we got our first job for a *quinceañera*, which was a neighbor of Bobby's. And the second job that we got, later on, we started rehearsing at Salesian high school band room, so they let us rehearse down there.

KD: How did that happen? How does—the high school is that open and that friendly, or—

JG: No, no. Well, once we started getting—well, I lived right up the hill, so the Salesians became part of the family, and they just opened up the band room for us so we could go and rehearse.

KD: Wow.

IN: And all of the parents knew each other, and knew each other kids, so it was really a family.

JG: Yeah. [That was actually in grammar school, at Assumption.] Well, at Salesian, it was more the high school students. But at grammar school, that was one of the—is that a grammar school boy, I don't think we could walk one block without having a family that we knew there.

IN: But most of the guys from grammar school went to Salesian.

JG: Yeah.

IN: So that same family—

JG: But now I was living in [a new] neighborhood, [a] different neighborhood, so I didn't know a lot of the people in the neighborhood, but there was still some of them [who I knew]. But we did become very close, the fact that Salesian was so close to the house. And the Salesians were like a family. That's just—it was just really great. They [the school] opened up the band room, and we [the students] were able to go down there and rehearse. So when we rehearsed, my parents, my family, would be able to hear us up the hill. Because I would actually—the school was so close to me that I calculated me getting—I would get up [in the morning] to the first bell. The first bell rang at eight o'clock. We would go into school at eight thirty, but there would be a bell that would ring at eight twenty-five, so that everybody could start walking into the classroom [and that's when I left my house].

So by eight thirty, everybody had to be inside the classroom. So at eight o'clock, the first bell would ring—I don't know why, just—I guess people would have to be on the school ground, because a lot of the guys—there was a Cooper's Donuts at that time right by the school, and all the guys who came real early, and Johnny Gamboa was one of them, because his father would drive him, he was living so far, his father would drive him and drop him off, and then go to work. So when they came before eight o'clock, they would all hang out at Cooper's Donuts. At Cooper's Donuts, you could get a doughnut and a coffee for ten cents. The doughnut was five cents. and the coffee was five cents. So it was just full of Salesian guys [in the mornings]. And some of these guys would smoke in there, and when the vice principal, Father Mike, would



sometimes go in there to try to catch them, so, boy, they would hide [those cigarettes fast] under the seats [chairs]. And there were workers that would go there early in the morning, so there were some older people there also. But it was like the hangout for the guys, and they had to be careful not to be caught.

So anyway, by eight o'clock, when the bell rang, everybody had to be inside the school ground. All these guys had to—in other words, they couldn't be hanging out after that. So by eight o'clock they were all in the school ground. By eight twenty-five the bell would ring, everybody would have to go in. By eight twenty-five I was finishing my breakfast, and that bell rang, and then I ran down to the school. And if I didn't make it in time, they would close the doors, because it was at the end of the school [building]. So they would close the door, and the only way to get in [after that] was going in through the center where the office was, so you'd get caught. So I had to hurry up.

And it was interesting, one time there was a bus strike at that time, and so it was difficult [for most of the guys to get to school or] to get around. And there was—we had a teacher called Mr. Brilliant, and all the guys knew where I lived, but Mr. Brilliant was new and he didn't know where I lived. So [that day] I didn't make it in time. I got there late, and Mr. Brilliant says, "Mr. Gonzalez, why are you late?" I said, "There's a bus strike." And all the guys laughed. All the guys laughed, so they gave me away. [laughter] So anyway, in regards to—

IN: You were talking about Johnny and the Crowns.

JG: Johnny used to sit in with a guy called Al Serovian, he was Armenian, and he had a little band, and he used to play in Montebello. And he used to play in a hall, and he used to play in a hall by Cantwell, right on Garfield. And Al used to get Johnny to come in at certain times, and sit in with him, because he'd be losing some of the guys.

IN: So anyway, you were talking about the Leggeriors and how you were forming the band.

JG: Yeah, the Leggeriors. So Al—Johnny wasn't able to play with Al one day, so he told us, "Why don't you guys go over there and take my place?" So we went over there, and we played in San Gabriel Women's Club. So these were all Anglos. And the songs that we knew real well at that time was, "Runaround Sue," "Over the Mountain," and—I don't know which other song. But anyway, "Runaround Sue" was the hot song that we had. And they were all—they just flipped over it, because they were all *gabachos* over there, and they just loved it. So anyway, that was our first job that we had out in the distance.

IN: How big was the band? Because eventually, it became a nine-piece band.

JG: Yeah. The band, at this time, was only three musicians and two singers.

KD: Wow.

JG: So what I wanted. . . Still the two guitars and one drummer. So at that time, I was printing [at school], so I was a promoter. So I printed—I wanted to print the business cards, but we didn't have a name yet. And I thought, you know, I always liked the word . . . There [were two] bands before our times that [were] called the Crescendos and the Arpeggios, and they were musical terms. And I wanted a band to have a musical term. I didn't want, you know, the Astronauts, or anything like that. It was a musical term. So I looked in the dictionary, and I wrote down a whole group of different names. And one of the names that I liked was—it said *leggiro*. And I thought, you know, I liked the way it looks, and I liked the way it sounds, so I can make it plural. So I wrote down that one and I wrote a few other ones, maybe four or five, and I showed them to the girlfriend I had at that time, Mary. And I said, "Which one do you like?" And [she said,] "I like the Leggeriors," and so then she says, "Leggeriors." Okay, it's unanimous [because that was my choice]. [I then presented the name to the band and they all liked it.]

So I printed up all our business cards with the "Leggeriors." So on one of them, I put—since Sal was the one that was teaching Bobby the guitar, and he knew more of the music, I put Sal's name on there, and I put "Sal and the Leggeriors." And then I said—oh, no, no. Before this, before this, when Ernie . . . Johnny Gamboa came to one of our rehearsals and heard Ernie sing. Ernie had a high voice, and I had the deep voice. So Ernie was able to sing a lot of the pop songs, because he had a high voice, and the guys didn't want to work to try to transfer that to—

KD: Transpose.

JG: Transpose the music. They wanted to learn it [the songs] just like the record. So the fact that Ernie had the high voice, he got to sing a lot of the lead songs. *[laughter]* So anyway, Johnny Gamboa came and heard Ernie sing. And he liked Ernie's voice, so he said, "Why don't you join my band?" So Ernie joined Johnny Gamboa, so now I was all alone with the Leggeriors, and now Johnny Gamboa had two singers, Dickie and Ernie, and they both had high voices. Dickie had a very high voice. So now they had two high voices, and Johnny also sang too, but he left the other guys to do more of the singing. So now, Johnny had three singers, but they never sang all in harmony. I don't remember them ever—so I figure, we need another singer.

So I tried to think, who could we get? Then I thought of Cuco, who I hadn't gotten together with for a long time. So I went and I asked, and I thought, you know, "If Cuco didn't want to join the Bob Mitchell Boys Choir, so why would he want to join a band like ours?" And he was still a little kid, you know. I mean, we were [seventeen], so Cuco was probably fifteen or fourteen years old by now. So I went over and I told Cuco, you know, "We have this band, do you want to sing [with] us?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" He got real excited about singing with us. And I said, "Well, you know what?" In my mind, Cuco, Refugio, and these names that are very Mexican, I felt the guys would make fun of [them], if I went over there saying, "This is Cuco." "He's Cuco, he's Cuco." So I told Cuco, "You know, I think you're going to have to select a name that you want to be called, because if we start calling you Cuco . . ." I wasn't accustomed to hearing people called Cuco or Paco or any of those names. I never heard names like that with the guys that I hung around, they were all Anglo names.

KD: Okay.

JG: So anyway, I told Cuco, "Think of a name that you want, and I'll introduce you by that name. So forget about Cuco. We're not going to use Cuco anymore." And he says, "Oh, well, I like Richard." "Okay." So I went over, took Richard [or Cuco], and introduced him to the guys as Richard. So everybody knew him as Richard, everybody called him Richard after that.

So Cuco and I started singing, and Cuco had a great voice. I remember Cuco had a beautiful voice. Ernie had a nice rock and roll voice, but Cuco had a beautiful voice. So when Ernie came and heard us sing, he quit Johnny Gamboa and came back to us. So now we had three singers, and now these three singers were the best friends of my life. Cuco, since I was a little kid, Ernie, from grammar school, and now Sal from high school. So now we had three singers, and three musicians. So when I printed up the [business] cards, I put "Sal and the Leggeriors, featuring Johnny, Richard, and Ernie on vocals." So Frank and Bobby were complaining, because they were saying, "Everybody's on the card except ourselves. We're the Leggeriors." So the Leggeriors were the drummer and the guitar player.

So another—one of the big jobs . . . The first poster that we had, we had a poster—the first job that we had, it was called—it was a car club from Pico Rivera [called the Road Rebels] that sponsored a big dance at St. Benedict's Hall up in Montebello. So there was a big—and they made posters and everything, and all the posters had the Leggeriors, selling the Leggeriors, featuring Johnny, Richard, and Ernie, vocalists, so that bugged them even [more]. [But] they were [still] pretty cool about it, you know—

KD: Now, you didn't make that poster, that was made by the—

JG: No, I didn't make the poster. I printed all the business cards, and then not only that is that Sal and my name were on there as contact names to call. So that means Sal's name was on there twice, and my name was on there twice. But they were younger, and they didn't make a big thing of it, but they commented, "Jeez." You know, they weren't complaining, but they—

KD: They would tease you.

JG: Yeah, they would say, "Gee, you know, we're the only ones that don't have our name there, so we're the Leggeriors."

KD: And they still say it, they still laugh about it.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, our band started doing pretty good, we started very well.

KD: Now, how did it grow from six people to nine?

JG: Okay, so then we had—we were six, and then we said, “Gee, we should find a piano player.” So then Frank [Ubaldez] said, “Well, there’s a piano player in . . .” No, no, it was . . . First we said, “We should have a sax player,” so we . . . Then there was Phillip’s music store on Brooklyn [Avenue], which is [now] Cesar Chavez [Avenue], and all musicians used to go there and put pinups—what they needed, stuff like that, [like business cards or advertising musical services]. [Phillip’s Music Co.—ed.] So we’d put a little card saying, “Looking for a sax player,” and we found a sax player by the name of Philip [Ruiz]. Philip [Ruiz] had gone to a military academy school out back east. His dad had owned his own business, sheet-metal business. He had a beautiful Spanish-style house in East LA, around Whittier and Ferris, right around that area, and his sheet-metal company was on Olympic. So he was pretty well—not wealthy, but a lot better off than all of us. And the fact that he went to school back east.

So anyway, he started playing sax, and we started rehearsing, then we started doing “Harlem Nocturne” and a lot of the sax songs. “Sophisticated Lady” and really some nice songs. And he was a good sax player. So I started building up, and then we thought, “Gee, we should get a piano player.” So Frank Ubaldez said, “You know, [I know] about a piano player who plays classical piano at Cathedral [High School].” So it was a young kid. He was only fifteen [or fourteen] years old, and he was the youngest son of an elderly couple who also had—I think he had an older sister and brother. But he was so much younger that he got lessons and everything.

IN: And what was his name?

JG: And his name was Hector Contreras. And he lived right on—by Washington Boulevard right by Washington and Adams, around where the AAA [headquarters] is at. So he went to Cathedral, and so he started coming down to the rehearsals. And all he knew how to play was all this sophisticated, classical music. So, [now with our group] we taught him how to go [*sings “Chopsticks”*], [and we taught him simple three- to four-chord changes]. So he started learning how to play rock and roll with us. But he used to do some really nice stuff. And then when he found out that Eddie [Cano] was my neighbor, one time the musician’s union used to have—Local 47, I think it was—they used to have their picnic out in the park, and they had it out in Legg Lake by Rosemead. And so I took the guys and I took Hector, and he got a chance to meet Eddie [who had invited me].

KD: Eddie Cano.

JG: Eddie Cano. And he says, “Boy, you’ve been my idol.” So anyway, it was really nice, he was fifteen years old, and Eddie was already [very well known]. Meanwhile, Eddie was becoming more and more popular. Eddie was known pretty well for doing—there was a nightclub, called the M Club, right around Whittier and Soto, between—it was on Whittier between Boyle and Soto Streets. And the M Club was very, very popular, they had some really great music. As a matter of fact, I think even Los Hermanos Castro, who became very famous in Mexico, they even performed there. But they had some great music, and at that time, Eddie started becoming more popular, and then he started playing at a nightclub in Hollywood called PJ’s, and he played in a gigantic piano bar. And all the people would sit around the piano bar, and so little by little, he was getting more known—

IN: Then he did [recorded] “Taste of Honey.”

JG: Yeah. I guess it was. I must have been twenty-one already. No, maybe I wasn’t twenty-one yet, because—then he recorded “Taste of Honey” while he was at PJ’s, so it was Eddie Cano at PJ’s.

IN: And he was under contract with who?

JG: And he was under contract with Frank Sinatra, Reprise Records. And so “Taste of Honey” became a hit, it was a major hit.

IN: And so who were the stars that used to sit in with him at PJ’s?

JG: Ella Fitzgerald, Sammy Davis Jr. A lot of the big stars used to sit in. And I used to hear that they used to close at two o’clock, they wouldn’t serve drinks or anything because he was jamming so much that everybody just wanted to go [on and stay all night]. And PJ’s became big. Eddie made it really big. And meanwhile he became a big recording star, and he was traveling [a lot], coming out in all kinds of TV

shows. So it was really nice, me seeing my neighbor coming on in all the popular TV shows, including the *Tonight Show*.

IN: And then PJ's got so big that—

JG: PJ's became so big that they opened up another big room in the back for people to dance, and they brought in another band, a dance band, to play. And that dance band then became famous because of PJ's, and that was Trini Lopez band. So then Trini Lopez became real big. So it became bigger, PJ's became bigger, and they bought out more, they built a gigantic theater after that. And the theater, they bought in the Parisian nutty puppets, or something, [Les Poupées de Paris] show from Paris. So they had this big show at the theater, and then they had the dance in the other room, and Eddie Cano was still playing at the bar. But now, Eddie Cano had moved into the big theater also. And—

IN: And what was it? Was it when you turned twenty-one? Was it when you turned twenty-one that you took a date—

JG: No, it was actually much later. It was actually much later. But much later, there was—with our bands, all of a sudden, more bands were popping [up], we were connecting with more people.

IN: But tell—since you're at PJ's, tell them about what happened.

JG: Okay. Well, since I'm at PJ's, there was this group of sisters, and they were called the Sisters, that sang. And so they were probably the only female group that was around with all of the other guys. And they lived right next to where Lalo Guerrero's nightclub used to be at. And they had a brother that would play the guitar, but there were three sisters, and I think another sister later came in. But anyway, one of—the oldest sister, I think her name was Mary—one time we went, as a date, we went to PJ's. And I introduced her to Eddie and all that, and Eddie says, "Okay, I've got—excuse me, I've got to go play." So he goes up to the stage, and it's a big theater, and he goes [announces to the audience], "So now, I'd like to do a little song called 'Tacos con Guacamole,'" and he says, "a little piece written by Johnny Gonzalez." [singing] [laughter] And I got impressed, and she got even more impressed. [laughter] But anyway, that relationship—

KD: Quick break, and we're going to come back to the story.

KD: So you were talking about the date—

JG: Yeah. That's—let me think what I was about to say.

KD: She was impressed and you were impressed, and then you started talking more about—

JG: Yeah, I guess I was going to talk about the development of how the different groups started coming up. I guess I could get into that.

KD: Okay. Well, we'll take a break now for lunch.

JG: Okay.

[break in audio]

KD: Before we take a break for lunch, I wanted just to clarify a few things with you. Johnny, you graduated from high school in what year? Is that—

JG: Nineteen sixty-two. [I was in the first graduating class from Salesian High School.]

KD: So you're developing these groups in the late '50s [and mostly early '60s] before you leave high school, because you're practicing at the school.

JG: Uh-huh. Oh, yeah.

KD: And it sounds like a lot of your school experience is through music.

JG: Yeah.

KD: Because the arts doesn't take—you just go that route because it takes off?

JG: Well, it'll come in actually the second—the third year of high school, we got an art teacher. And that's when—I believe David [Botello] came into the picture also. So that's when I tried to get back into my art.

KD: Okay. But these bands that you're with, Johnny and the Crowns, and then your own, the one that becomes—

JG: The Leggeriors.

- KD: The Leggeriors. That's in high school.
- JG: Yeah, that's in high school. Yeah, all that stuff was booming with music.
- KD: And you guys were making money playing, or—
- JG: Oh, yeah.
- KD: Could you remember how much, like what you got paid? Like for a *quinceañera*? Like was it like ten dollars?
- JG: Probably. *[laughter]*
- KD: But it's allowing you—what are you doing with this money? That's what I'm curious about.
- JG: We probably buy records—well, I would do whatever I possibly . . . I mean, it wasn't tons of money, but that was one of the things that I was excited when I used to go with Johnny. I started seeing that all of the guys performing would come on the weekend with money, and all the other people dancing were broke. *[laughter]* So we were having more fun performing and making money, and not only that, is that we were getting the attention from all the girls. *[laughter]*
- KD: And—so you're not giving this money to your parents, though. Like in the past, it sounded like you—
- JG: No, but my work—I worked in a glove factory, that's one thing I didn't mention. I worked in a glove factory on weekends, and I would give all the money—
- KD: So that money would go to—
- JG: I gave all the checks, yeah. No, the ten dollars, fifteen dollars, it wasn't enough, I think, to—
- KD: Hold on. *[pause]* We're just finishing up some like—trying to get a sense of the time period. He was telling me when he graduated and these bands were forming, and talking about like how much money the band actually made.
- IN: Oh, okay. Were you recording?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: No, not yet.
- KD: Yeah, now—it's on now. So you're not making a lot of money, but that's not the funds that you're sharing with your parents. It's the other job that you have on the weekend.
- JG: Yeah, it's the checks that I got from—I worked in a glove factory on weekends. And in summer I worked every day in that glove factory. Oh, and also, when I worked with Carmelita—and so I would walk from City Terrace all the way down to Whittier Boulevard to go work with Carmelita. And Carmelita, next-door neighbor, an elderly lady, used to—said that she was the mother of Art Aragon, the boxer. And it was interesting, because I had mentioned on the last interview that I met Art Aragon when I was a little kid going to the Main Street Gym. And also recently, when I had my accident, I bumped into him because of—I was trying—my nephew [Artie] took me to get a haircut. But anyway, that's another part of it.
- KD: So when you're in school and doing all this music, are you able to keep up with your schooling? I mean, Salesian is known as a rigorous Catholic school.
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: I mean, you mentioned before, one of your friends was able to avoid getting drawn into risky behavior because of the music. Was that the same for you and your friends? Everybody's—
- JG: Well, I never had a problem of being drawn in. My dad wouldn't let me out of the house. *[laughter]*
- KD: But you're going out of the house to play. So your dad was—
- JG: Well, now the fact that it was—because of the band, my dad gave me permission to go out on weekends.
- IN: Because he saw that as a career.
- JG: Yeah. He saw that as possibly—
- IN: Bringing in money.
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: Because there's so many people living, literally, on your block. Eddie Cano. You can make a career as a musician. That's not an unknown idea—
- JG: Yeah, but I think more, I felt that it was a positive experience going out there because he, [my dad], would always say, you know, “Yo no se lo que buscan en la calle en la noche. ¿Que trayen en la noche?” I don't

know what you're looking for at night, there's nothing but bad things out at night. But yet when it came to the music, he allowed me to go out there. And it's because he saw that I had interest in something that was positive.

IN: But also, anyway, money you made, you had to give him the check, right?

JG: Yeah, but they never gave us checks, not with the band.

IN: Well, cash.

JG: Any of the other work, I just gave them the whole check, and he would give me an allowance or whatever I needed. But with the band, that was my money. And because I was—it wasn't that much. I mean, we weren't making a lot of money.

KD: Yeah, because you're splitting it with all the band members.

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: Did you get into who the ninth member was?

JG: And also Carmelita's money, you know, ten dollars.

KD: I think we were going to do that after lunch. I was just checking in with a few things to try to understand the schooling process, and how it related to his experience in music.

IN: Okay.

KD: So that sounds good. Let's break for lunch.

JG: Okay.

KD: Really, this time. We are all hungry now. *[laughter]*

*[break in audio]*

KD: We're back from lunch. This is Karen Mary Davalos on [November] 4, 2007. We're at UCLA, and I'm talking with Johnny Gonzalez, and Irma Núñez is here to help as archivist. The last time we were talking, you were going to start telling me about the bands taking off. Leggeriors gets going, and—

IN: Well, you were actually finishing saying who were the members of the group.

JG: Yeah. That was probably—Danny's name was one of the last ones that I threw out.

KD: Yeah, Danny Dominguez.

JG: Danny Dominguez.

KD: He was an uncle of mine. *[laughter]*

JG: Yeah. So he was one of the last names that I threw out.

KD: And what instrument did he play?

JG: He played the drums.

IN: So, name all the nine members.

JG: It was Romeo Prado, who just recently passed away, he was the music director for Thee Midniters. It was Paco. We used to call him Candy Man—Paco Guzman. Tony Garcia, trumpet—

IN: Who later became—

JG: We called him Tony Trumpet, because there was another Tony Garcia, sax. And Tony Garcia grew up right down the street from my house, who was the next-door neighbor to Joe's best friend.

IN: And he later performed with what groups?

JG: Tony Trumpet, it seemed like after Johnny Gamboa he didn't perform much anymore. So those were the three trumpets, there were three saxes. Carlos Frias, who actually managed the Mardi Gras nightclub that was very popular back at that time, across the street from the Fonda.

IN: And he was what instrument?

JG: He played sax. Willie—Richard Gallegos played saxophone, Tony Garcia played saxophone, and then Johnny Gamboa played—

IN: Johnny Gamboa.

JG: He played the trombone.

IN: But he wasn't in your group. We're talking about the Leggeriors.



JG: Oh, oh, my group. I'm sorry.

IN: Let's go back again. The Leggeriors—name the members, what instrument they played.

JG: Frankie Uballez played drums—okay, the first one. Frankie Uballez played drums, [Bobby Hernandez played guitar], and Sal [Padilla] played guitar. And then it was Ernie and myself, Ernie Castillo and myself [and] Johnny Gonzalez, singers. So that was the first part of the group. And then we brought in Philip Ruiz, as a sax player. And after Philip Ruiz, we brought in Hector Contreras as a piano player. [Then there was Frank Quemada on bass. And later, when he left, Jimmie Espinoza, who is now the leader of Thee Midnitters, replaced him.]

IN: And then Cuco.

JG: Yeah, Cuco [Richard] came in, [but actually before Philip, Hector, and Frank Quemada].

IN: As a singer.

JG: Richard [Cuco], yeah. Then later we called Cuco, Richard. So his name was Refugio Bernal. And then after Johnny [and the Crowns] broke up, then Danny Dominguez started playing with us also. And the fact that Sal and Danny were so close, that's why whether we had a drummer or not, Danny still came in, and we had two drummers.

IN: And Danny Dominguez was Karen's uncle. Just a coincidence that we just found out. Incredible.

JG: And having two drummers really made it interesting because having two drummers really helped spear off our group. Because while—what started happened with I would say the renaissance, or the explosion of the rock and roll groups in East LA is, first of all, when we first started, each guy, certain guys had neighbors that were also musicians and they started forming other groups. But one of the key things that helped is that there was this one guy that came in whose name was—he called himself Johnny Jay. And he was going to start—he was a promoter. He was beginning to put dances on. And when I saw him, I go, "What?" [laughter] This is Johnny Jimenez [Johnny Jay], who went to Assumption School with me. And Johnny was disabled from one arm, so he wasn't able to use one. But in spite of that, I mean, boy, he was a go-getter. I mean, you figure he was nineteen years old or so, and he was already producing dances all over the place.

So he started producing dances in different halls around the area, and one of the key places was the Paramount Ballroom on Brooklyn. So Johnny worked out some partnership with the owner of the Paramount Ballroom, to what I recall, and so they got together and they started putting on these dances. But Johnny became so successful that then Johnny started bring in other groups that were forming, and other groups that happened to be forming happened to be with guys that were from Salesian, or they were neighbors of some of the other guys from our band. So we started becoming tight. And one of the other bands that became an in-house band with us, we became real close with, was the Royal Jesters. And the Royal Jesters was made up—one of the guitar players was Johnny Diaz, who lived right up the hill from Bobby Hernandez. And the sax player, who was the baritone sax player, was Joe Urzúa, who was the son of my dad's co-warden in Aguascalientes, in the jail. So when he came, all of a sudden, he was playing sax too.

And so the group started to become very, very close, so the Royal Jesters and the Leggeriors really became an in-house band for Johnny Jay. And then he started bringing some of the other groups in, and one of the other . . . So the Royal Jesters had Cannibal as a singer, and so that's when we started becoming pretty close, because all of the groups were working. But Cannibal always liked to sing as a group, so he would come over, and join—

KD: That's his stage name, Cannibal?

JG: Yeah, his name—well, no, it was a gang name.

KD: Oh, okay.

IN: What's his real name?

JG: His name is [Frankie] Garcia, later on known as Cannibal and the Headhunters.

KD: That's what I was trying to figure out, yeah.

- JG: Yeah. So anyway, Cannibal used to love to sing with us and to harmonize, and so he used to come over, so the singing group
- IN: He loved to sing with you guys.
- IN: He used to come over to your house?
- JG: Yeah. The singing group, which now we were three, we would get together at my house, and once in awhile, Cannibal would come over, so we'd be doing four-part harmony, and Cannibal always wanted to sing the lead to whatever we were doing. And more recently, what I had heard is that the Headhunters—it's a group—is that Cannibal, they [didn't] know how to harmonize. So that's probably why he wanted to sing the lead, but I never knew that. So anyway, because of Johnny Jay, now a lot of groups had jobs.
- IN: So the fact that Cannibal used to sing at home with you, what do you have?
- JG: I have home recordings with Cannibal, as a matter of fact. To show you how long [ago] it [was], my little brother is probably fifty-two years old, fifty-one years old. And when we were recording—I bought this big cabinet recorders, I guess it was a radio combined with a recorder, and not many—nobody else in the band had one, so I had—I bought it at White Front. And so I have some home recordings. And we were singing—Cannibal was singing, and what I found out is it's the song of Cleve Duncan and the Penguins, and it's "Hey Señorita," or maybe—I forgot. But anyway, the song was "Hey Señorita," and Cannibal's singing, [sings] "Hey, señorita, hey señorita, call me on the line, call me on the . . ." So anyway, he's singing the lead, and we're singing the background, and in the background, you hear my little brother going, "Nyah-yah-yah!" and my mother yells from the kitchen, "Callate, muchacho! Que no ves que estan gravando!" [laughter]
- KD: Can I ask, why are you recording yourselves?
- JG: Why are we recording ourselves?
- KD: Yeah. Is that so you can hear and see how you sound, or—
- JG: Oh, yeah. Just—
- KD: Part of the rehearsal process, or—
- JG: No, no, just a kick to be able to see what we sound like. We were in three-part harmony, four-part harmony.
- IN: Reel-to-reel recordings were like a new thing, or they had been around a long time, or . . .
- JG: Well, they were smaller, but that was the only thing that existed.
- IN: So it's like people nowadays who use digital cameras to record everything that's going on. But—
- JG: Yeah, and very few had them.
- KD: We actually had one in the house, and I think we got it from my Uncle Danny. [laughter]
- JG: Oh, really? [laughter]
- KD: Yeah, and we recorded the kids telling stories.
- IN: Yeah.
- KD: I was just trying to get a sense, was it part of the rehearsal process, or you get the kick out of hearing—
- JG: No, because we didn't have the whole band—couldn't get the band into the house. Yeah, no, it was just the singers. The singers were—yeah, first of all, we don't have to bring in instruments or anything. So we'd get together and just try and get the harmony perfect. But it was just a lot of fun hearing ourselves. We hadn't gone to a recording studio yet. No, we had no idea about going to any recording studio at that time.
- KD: But you're getting promoted by Johnny Jay.
- JG: Yeah. So Johnny Jay is actually producing some of these dances. And then there was also St. Alphonsus Boys and Girls Club, who started putting on dances. And they started bringing in some of the big names. And even Johnny started bringing in some of the big names in rhythm and blues and stuff like that.
- KD: Johnny Jay.
- JG: Johnny Jay. So we were performing with—you figure, what is Self Help Graphics right now used to be the CYO [Catholic Youth Organization], and so that was another hall where they put dances on. And in that hall we backed up Cleve Duncan and the Penguins. Actually, Cleve Duncan came alone, and when he sings "Earth Angel." "Oh-h-h, ah-h." So Cleve Duncan came alone, and he didn't bring the Penguins. So

Ernie, Cuco, and I became the Penguins. So we were going, “Whoa-oh-oh,” so then he sang the lead. And I reminded him just recently, I saw him, and—

IN: At the Ford Amphitheatre.

JG: Yeah. And he remembered, he remembered. So we took pictures, and it was fun. And also with the Olympics, with the Olympics we backed them up at St. Alphonsus. And St. Alphonsus was becoming really big, they were really putting us in some good dances.

And so one day, they called us. And they had heard about us, and they said, you know, “We want you to perform for a half hour.” And we said, “For a half hour?” [*laughter*] “One half-hour, to set up and everything?” So what we did is we sang the song “Shout.” You know, [*sings*] “You make me want shout!” and throw my hands up. And we decided, “Let’s not do anything but ‘Shout.’” So we did “Shout” for a whole half-hour, and everybody made it a challenge to see who could [last dancing throughout the whole song]. So the fact that we had Danny and Frank, they rotated on the drums, and we became a major hit, just a big hit, because everybody wanted to outdo us in regards to the dancing and stuff like that. So because we were such a big hit at St. Alphonsus, we became backup to a lot of the groups. The big-name groups. Like we backed . . . Well, we performed with the Champs. “Tequila” [*sings “Tequila” melody*]. And we backed up the Rivingtons. [*sings*] “A papa-oom-mow-mow, a papa-oom-mow-mow.” We backed up the Righteous Brothers there, we—

IN: Cleve Duncan and the Penguins, the Olympics, Don and Dewey—

JG: Yeah. The Champs. I can’t remember all the different names.

IN: But what was interesting is there were these superstar European Americans and African American groups that were coming into East LA to perform with all these Chicano bands.

JG: Yeah. So that gave us a venue to be able to perform in. And Johnny started producing dances also at the—what they called the Big Union Hall. And the Big Union Hall had a gigantic stage, and I mean, it was gigantic. It was really big, really a gigantic space to perform in. So those were the big dances.

KD: So how did you—

JG: And Al Perez, who I think was a teacher at Roosevelt, was the one that was producing normally, the big dances at the Union. So it was called Al Perez Dances. So we were getting booked over there too. And suddenly, there was Al Perez and Johnny Jay, and there was also the St. Alphonsus club.

KD: Now, is it getting sophisticated, like you only have one booking agent, or is it—

JG: No, no, no. They weren’t our booking agents. They were promoters of dances. They’d put on the dances and they’d hire us. But because we were the popular groups, they—I mean, they started hiring a lot of other groups. The Emeralds . . . I can’t even remember all the other different names. But they started hiring a lot of the groups.

There was another one, that was the Gentones, and they were known more for Latin and some of the popular music. Actually, they used to do the Platters. It was this guy by the name of Victor, who sang the songs of the Platters, and it was Fred Ramirez playing the piano. And I don’t know the—but it was more Latin jazz. But they were very, very good. So there were a certain number of groups that were real popular that were getting hired by all these different places.

And then what happened is that this other new guy came in that started working under Johnny Jay. And his name was Tony—Billy, Billy Cardenas. And Billy Cardenas had already been producing other groups himself. And one of the guys that he was trying to really bring up was Max Uballez, who happens to be Frank, our drummer’s, cousin. And Max, Billy always felt that Max was going to be the next Ritchie Valens. As a matter of fact, Billy was already hooking up with—I forgot his name. But anyway, the guy who was producing Ritchie Valens [was Bob Keane of Del-Fi Records]. So meanwhile, Billy was putting some of his groups together and bringing them in to the whole—the whole chain of locations.

And he was also getting together with Eddie Davis, who was a *gabacho* who tried to go into singing. And I think he had a restaurant, too, and eventually he sold it and put his own recording company together. And he was recording a lot of Anglos at that time, so he hooked up with Billy. And meanwhile,

Billy, little by little, started taking over Johnny Jay's locations. [I don't know how or why this happened, they each have their own story.] And Billy started bringing in a lot of his people. And some of the people that he had at that time were Steve and Rudy and the Royal—the Jaguars, Steve and Rudy who are now the Salas Brothers—

IN: Who later became Tierra.

JG: And Max, at that time, had the group called the Romancers. And then Billy was also working, I think, with the Mixtures. Well, anyway, he started bringing a whole group of people. And so then, one of the other groups that he put together was—or that he started representing—was the Blendells. Now, the Blendells, all of a sudden, Mike Rincon, who went to Assumption School also and was in my sister's [Imelda's] class, so now he was the leader of the Blendells. And at the same time, he [Billy] was producing another group from San Gabriel called the Premiers. So it became a major . . . By this time, Johnny Gamboa's group had already died out, and all the guys had gone into different things.

KD: Johnny and the Crowns.

JG: Johnny and the Crowns. And a lot of them just went their own directions, and actually quit music.

IN: And Little Willie G, he used to—

JG: Well, let me—

IN: Okay.

JG: So, okay, in regards to—now, Charlie Garcia. I had mentioned that the two guys in my class was Benny Lopez, who was sitting in front of me, and Charlie Garcia, who was the all-star athlete at the school. So they were two of the people in my class who I've continually had a relationship with and who had an impact, in a sense, through family.

So anyway, Benny. At that time there was another group starting off that was the Ceballoses, they were cousins. There was—Raulie Ceballos was on guitar, and I think it was Benny Ceballos who was the bass player. And I think they had a group—I don't know if it was called the Playboys—but anyway, they were starting a group, and so they were looking for a singer. [Benny Ceballos led Benny and the Midnighters; Benny played congas—ed.] Now, these guys lived around Brooklyn and Soto, it was the Flats [gang] area. And so Flats was very strong in that area. So fortunately, the fact that their uncles, I think, had a trio, and stuff like that, they were able to get influenced in doing music. But if you weren't into the arts or something, you could get taken in real easy into the gangs. That became your family, as opposed to the musicians, the musicians became your family.

So anyway, they were looking for a singer, so this was probably now possibly the third or fourth year in high school, and Charlie Garcia's little brother started school, and his name was Willie Garcia. And so Willie started hanging out a lot with some of the guys [in music], you know. I'd always see him on the playground. And the fact that Charlie and Willie lived in the South Central area, they had like black accents. So Willie would always approach me and say, "Hey, Johnny, how's every little thing?" And I'd say, "Every little thing is just fine." [Or vice versa.] So to this day, we still have that, [we greet each other that way]. So anyway, Willie started talking to [me] and he said, "You know, I sing. I sing." "Oh, great, well, you sing," [I responded. After that, while walking in the school grounds, we would often talk about singing. As a matter of fact I was very flattered and complemented when he recently demonstrated how I taught him to listen to himself sing by holding the palms of his hands behind his ears. And he even said I taught him how to harmonize.] So anyway, little—

KD: He wanted to join your group?

JG: I assume he wanted to join, or just sit in and sing. [It would have been great for Willie to be part of our group, but we already had three singers. One of the times Willie sat in was during a big dance at Queen of Angels High School. We were all like a family, together in school and outside of school performing.] Anyway, he was [also, I believe], able to sit in with Johnny and sing.

KD: Johnny Gamboa?

JG: Johnny Gamboa. But what happened is he went to an audition with the Ceballos cousins, he went to an audition, and it turns out that Charlie, [Willie's older brother, who was in my class] . . . What it was, was that Willie's father was very, very strict. So Charlie started dating some girl that had a relationship—[was friends]—with the Ceballos [cousins]. And so that's how they told Charlie, you know, "We need a singer." So Charlie told Willie, and Willie came over. And some of the girls there then took Willie to the house where they were auditioning one of the singers—some of the singers.

So as Willie was going in to audition, one of the other guys was coming out, and he was all proud because he thought, you know, "Don't even bother going in there, because I got the job." So anyway, it turns out that Willie went in there and sang, and they said, "Well, you know, it's good." But one of the uncles said, "Do you sing Spanish?" And he says, "Yeah, yeah, I sing Spanish." So Willie sang some songs in Spanish also, and that got him the job. So this group then, Benny Ceballos was the bass player. Some way he left, then Benny Lopez, who sat in front of me, then became the leader of that group. And then at that time—

KD: It was called what?

JG: I think it was the Playboys, or something like that. I don't remember the original name. [Benny and the Midnitters—ed.]

KD: Rhythm Playboys?

JG: I'm not sure, because later on, I think they became—I think another group became the Rhythm Playboys. But anyway, as they were driving to some location, they said, you know, "We need a name, because we're going over there without a name." So then they came up with a name. They said, "Thee Midnitters." So that's how the name Thee Midnitters came up, as they were driving. So that was the original Midnitters group.

IN: And Willie was Little Willie G, for Garcia.

JG: Yeah, but he didn't start [using that name] until later. But that . . . And then I thought also, well, because he was so small and tiny, and Charlie [his brother] was tall, you know. He was the athlete. He was a basketball athlete, football and everything.

KD: He was a star athlete.

JG: Yeah, he was a star athlete. [But Willie made up for it up with his singing talent. So his brother was a star in school and Willie became a star out of school.]

KD: Now, can you help me understand. The groups literally auditioned people when—

JG: Not that much.

KD: Oh, okay. But this particular—

JG: No, not that much. Yeah, they—I mean, to me, that seemed sort of unusual. But they auditioned—they were auditioning for a singer. But no, normally we'd find somebody. Oh, yeah, the ninth person that we brought in actually, we played without a bass for quite a while.

IN: The Leggeriors.

JG: Yeah, the Leggeriors played without a bass. And then we started thinking, you know, why don't we get one of those big guitars? [*laughter*] Like some of the other groups. And so at Phillip's music store we put a little card saying that we wanted a bass player. And interestingly enough, the response that we got was a bass, original bass player of the Gentones, which we admired, with Fred Ramirez. They were a very, very good group. So his name was Frank Quemada. So Frank Quemada became our first bass player, and Frank Quemada was a real pro. He was very, very good.

IN: Now, at what point did you get hooked up with Bob Eubanks and the Lettermen?

JG: It was later, when we recorded.

KD: Okay.

JG: So anyway, Frank Quemada then started performing with us. And Frank was real easygoing. Very professional, but very, very easygoing. And one day, we had a recording—we had a recording session. There was somebody invited us to go record at a recording studio, and we were very excited about that. So we were

going to a recording studio, and so we were preparing the day before that, and we worked on one particular song for quite awhile so that we could record that one. And when we got there—and Ernie was singing the lead to that. And when we got there, Ernie was saying, “Ow, my throat hurts, I don’t know if I’m going to be able to do it.” And we go, “What? What do you mean we can’t do it?” He was like—so I don’t know. And he says, “No, I don’t know if I could do it.” And Frank got so mad that he called a taxi—because he came with us—he called a taxi, he packed his amp and his guitar, and he quit the group at that time.

KD: That was Frank Quemada?

JG: Frank Quemada. Later on, he changed his name to Frank Burns, and he started performing with the Ink Spots, which was a famous black group of the ’40s, early ’50s. And they had split up, so there were two Ink Spots. So he traveled all over the country with the Ink Spots. He backed up Tony Bennett, and he was doing very, very well.

So the person that came in to take his place was Jimmy Espinoza. Now, Jimmy Espinoza, who was originally started with Johnny Gamboa playing the bongos, was working his way towards learning the bass, because he played the tuba, which is the bass for the big band. So now he wanted to learn the bass to be able to play with Johnny. So [later] he started playing bass with Johnny, and Benny [originally] started playing guitar [and some bass with Johnny before Jimmy]. And then Benny came in and started playing with the original Midneters. So when Frank Quemada left us, then Jimmy came in and started playing bass with us. So eventually, Benny Lopez left Thee Midneters. And then Jimmy [took his place].

And what happened was, with our groups, as all these things were formulating with Billy Cardenas and Eddie Davis, some way or another, Billy wasn’t including us in a lot of this. He was beginning to record all the Chicano groups, but we weren’t included with all those other groups. And at that time—I never thought about it, because we were just so busy doing things, and I think the fact that we were also . . . We hooked up with a famous group called the Lettermen, who were very, very famous. And Tony [Butala], who was the leader of the Lettermen, and Bob [Todd], his partner, they recorded us. They called us in to do a recording, and we recorded our record called “Justine” and “Flame of Love.” And so they booked us on—first in the Bob Eubanks Cinnamon Cinder nightclubs, and we played at the Cinnamon Cinder. Bob Eubanks at that time had a radio show, so he was probably after Al Jarvis. Bob Eubanks then became very popular with the radio show. And in his radio show, he was playing all this rock and roll. And then what he brought—

[break in audio]

KD: This is tape 3 and side B, and Johnny Gonzalez was telling me about Bob Eubanks bringing in the Beatles, and of the other groups that were working with Bob Eubanks.

JG: So Bob Eubanks started the teenage nightclubs. So he had a nightclub in Long Beach, one in Pasadena, another one in Hollywood. So anyway, we played at the one in Hollywood, and then he booked us on his TV show, [*The Cinnamon Cinder Show*], to perform our song.

IN: And this was the Leggeriors.

JG: The Leggeriors.

KD: And about what year was that?

JG: Oh, wow, it was maybe [’63]? Maybe around [’63], possibly around [’63]. But anyway, to know for a fact, it was on the same show that the Righteous Brothers introduced their song “My Babe,” which was released in 1963. [*sings*] “Talking about my baby, not your baby.” So anyway, we were on the same show with the Righteous Brothers. And that same day, we were getting tons of radio publicity, and they were [announcing us as the all-Mexican band], saying—because we were going to be performing at El Monte Legion Stadium. And El Monte Legion Stadium was the biggest, probably the biggest dances. [Their announcements would say, “Saturday night, El Monte Legion Stadium. Be there or be square.”] So Billy was hooked up with them also. So Billy was hooking up with a lot of people.



- IN: So on the Bob Eubanks *Cinnamon Cinder* TV show, he [Bob Eubanks] was the forerunner to Dick Clark in LA? Bob Eubanks?
- JG: Yeah, [to a certain extent].
- IN: The TV was before—
- JG: Yeah, he had—he was before Dick Clark started [airing] *American Bandstand* [from LA but, long before that, *American Bandstand* was airing in LA from Philadelphia].
- IN: And did you back up the Righteous Brothers on that TV show?
- JG: No, we just sang to the records. Each one of us sang to our records.
- IN: And what song did you sing that the Righteous Brothers—
- JG: The song that we did was “Justine,” and it was by, I think, written by Don and Dewey. And the Righteous Brothers did “My Baby.” But interestingly enough, I don’t know how much later, but maybe a year later, the Righteous Brothers then recorded “Justine” also, and they had a hit on it. [laughter]
- IN: So it’s possible that the Leggeriors may have been the first Chicano rock—East LA rock and roll group on TV [and introducing their record]. Do you know of any—
- JG: I don’t remember anybody else.
- IN: Before you.
- JG: Of the Chicano East LA groups, yeah. I don’t know if any of them were on TV, yeah, [performing their own record on a major show with big name recording stars yet].
- IN: Before that time—
- JG: That’s a good point. Yeah, I’m not sure. But anyway, meanwhile, Billy and Eddie Davis were building up all these groups, and then Cannibal left also, so the Royal Jesters then started becoming . . . Then I think it was the Rhythm Playboys. They started getting together as the Rhythm Playboys, and they were booked at Lake Arrowhead. And Bobby, who was our guitar player, they wanted him to play guitar because they were missing some guitar. Bobby—
- IN: Hernandez.
- JG: Bobby Hernandez and myself, and Joe Perrino, who is a very close friend to Danny—
- KD: Danny who?
- JG: Your uncle, Danny Dominguez. Joe Perrino and Danny were inseparable, they were very, very close. They lived very close to each other also, on State Street, right around where the State playground, where we used to practice at. So anyway, Joe Perrino, Bobby, and I had plans to take off on a trip throughout California. Just to go on an outing, you know?
- KD: Okay. So like a vacation.
- JG: Yeah, like a vacation. We were going to drive up north. So we were planning this outing. And all of a sudden, Bobby said, “Well, you know what? I can’t go because I’ve got to perform, I’m going to be performing with the guys.” He says, “Why don’t you guys come down. Why don’t we all go together, and then from there we’ll take off?” I said, “Okay.” So we all went to Lake Arrowhead. And Donnie Brooks, who had his hit record, “Mission [Bell]”—“My love is higher than a mission bell, deeper”—he was going to be the star performer there, and we were going to be backing him up, and spending . . . I don’t know if it was a weekend or a whole week that we were going to be spending up at Lake Arrowhead. So Cannibal was the singer, Johnny Diaz was playing guitar, Roy Marquez, who was a guitar player with Thee Midnitters, was playing guitar. Billy Watson was the bass player. Bobby was the guitar player. Bob Martinez, who was the sax player to the Royal Jesters was playing sax, and Joe Urzúa was playing sax, and the drummer, I believe, was Marshal.

So anyway, we were all up there, and they put us in a country club. And the country club was just being built at that time, so there was nobody in the country club but ourselves. So we had the whole—it was one building, actually, so we had the whole place to ourselves. And something very interesting happened that—over there, is that there was this young blonde, cute little girl. Not little, she was of age. [laughter] And she went crazy over Cannibal, because he was the singer. She went crazy over Cannibal. So

anyway, Cannibal and her took off and whatever. And it turned out that her boyfriend was a big white guy, and he was mad. He got really mad. So what he did is when we were all down [by the lake] performing . . .

And I'll tell you another thing that happened there, is that as we were down [by the lake], we were performing on a platform, on a stage that was right on the lake. And it was interesting. When it was too loud, the people on the other side of the lake used to complain that the music was too loud. So we used to try and balance it out. So anyway, Cannibal was testing the mic, was going, "Testing, one, two. Testing, one two three four, one two. Nah-nah-nah. Testing one, two. Testing, testing." So he used "nah-nah-nah-nah-nah" on "Land of a Thousand Dances." Before that, "Land of a Thousand Dances" didn't have "nah-nah-nah-nah-nah." [To explain more clearly, while the group was performing, Cannibal asked Bobby Hernandez to play "Land of a Thousand Dances." Bobby felt it was a boring song because, at the time, it didn't have "nah-nah-nah-nah-nah" in it yet. While Cannibal was singing the song, the microphone went off. As the music continued to play, Cannibal began checking the microphone to see if it was on by talking into it and saying what most of us say when we test a microphone. "Testing one, two, nah-nah. Testing one, two, three, nah-nah-nah. Testing nah-nah-nah-nah-nah." Then the microphone went back on and they continued the song without the "nah-nah."]

[The next day, when we all went back to the lakeside stage-dance area, and the band began to play, the audience that was there from the day before began asking for the "nah-nah-nah" song. Cannibal and Bobby couldn't figure out what the heck these kids were talking about. Then Cannibal thought for a second and told Bobby, "Play 'Land of a Thousand Dances.'" Cannibal began singing the song and added "nah-nah-nah-nah-nah" into it. This was possibly about a few months before Cannibal teamed up with the Headhunters.] So Bobby, who was playing guitar, is really, really—

IN: Bobby Hernandez.

JG: Bobby Hernandez, the guitar player, is just saying that everybody is wacky, because they all keep on saying that he [Cannibal] forgot the words. And Willie, who sang with Cannibal later and also Little Ray, Willie was saying, you know, "Cannibal never forgot the words to 'Land of a Thousand Dances.'" So the story doesn't make sense to certain people [who knew Cannibal well, especially Bobby and myself].

IN: So books have been written saying that he forgot the words.

JG: Yeah, everybody says that he—a lot of books say that he forgot the words [and even documentaries and television shows]. But Bobby's very strong that that day, the fact that he was going, "Testing, one, two, nah-nah-nah-nah-nah," [and the Arrowhead audience was excited about it,] that he included that "nah-nah-nah-nah-nah" into "Land of a Thousand Dances" [intentionally on stage the next]. And if you ask Bobby, he says they're all crazy about what they're talking about [as they continue to spread this myth]. [laughter] So anyway, that's when he was supposed to have created "nah-nah-nah-nah-nah."

So anyway, this big white guy was so mad over the fact that his girlfriend was hot over Cannibal that one day after we finished performing, we got word that he had rounded up all the white guys in Lake Arrowhead to come up and beat us up. So they were all waiting up above, where we walk up the stairs to go up to where the parking lot is. They were all waiting up there to jump us. And we were small Chicanos, you know? [laughter] These guys were big, and he had a lot of them up there. So we just held off from leaving down there, we were just staying down there killing time, and we started saying, you know, some way or another, we're going to have to leave. So we started getting the mic stands and everything, everything we could to try and protect ourselves. So we were scared. And suddenly, before you know it, tons of cop cars came in, and they stopped the whole thing. So they escorted us to the country club. So they saved us from that. [laughter]

But what was very interesting is that many years later, a few—maybe not many years, but maybe the summer after—Bobby and I used to go bodysurfing in the summers, and of all things, we ran across the guy who wanted to beat us up, and he noticed us, and he started talking, and we became friends. I mean, we had a nice conversation. We didn't see each other after that. But it was very—it's ironic that we saw him there. So anyway, we recorded our record, and they were pushing it, the Lettermen, and Bob Eubanks.

Not much happened with it. But meanwhile, Billy was recording all these other guys. And the other—and we all used to get together, we all used to get together for a lot of different things, so we were real tight. All these different groups became very tight.

**KD:** Could you help me understand? With all of this fluidity between the band—you know, members going here, going there—if one group breaks up, the members go to other groups existing, and yet they're not all playing the same kind of music, right? Was there cross-influences, then, of the music?

**JG:** Pretty close.

**KD:** Oh, okay.

**JG:** It was pretty close. There was just some things that some of the groups . . . Like for instance, what happened with us is that we—it was very interesting. The fact that we had two drummers, it really worked out real good sometimes. We had a section that just loved Latin music. Our piano—

**KD:** That's what I was wondering.

**JG:** Frankie Uballez, the drummer, [Hector Contreras, the pianist], and Jimmy—

**KD:** Espinoza.

**JG:** Jimmy Espinoza. Loved to play Latin, they just really enjoyed playing Latin. And so one time, we got booked at the Old Dixie, and the Old Dixie had a big hall and a small hall. And so we got booked at the Old Dixie, and we went to perform there. We were setting up to perform at the big hall. And so some of the people came over and said, "Oh, you guys are in the wrong hall. It's the small hall that you're supposed to be performing at." "Oh." So then we started packing up to take—and then the other people said, "What are you guys doing? You're supposed to be performing here." "Wait, wait."

So it turned out that we were booked at both halls, the big hall and the small hall. So, oh, my gosh. But fortunately, we had two drummers. So we thought, well, you know, some way or another, we could rotate. We could split up part of the band and be able . . . And then we started saying, "Oh, you know what, we're not going to be able to do that." So what we did is we—there was a group at Salesian that was always rehearsing too, because there were a lot of Salesian guys, and this was a younger group. And they were called the Blue Satins. And we thought, you know, the Blue Satins are always rehearsing. They're not playing yet. So let's just call them up and see if they could come over and perform at the small hall. So we called them over, and fortunately, they were available. They came over—well, anyway, they made a big hit. And the Blue Satins became very, very popular after that.

**KD:** And who was the leader of the Blue Satins?

**JG:** Well, it was—I forgot who. But anyway, it was a father and the son. [Pete Ventura and his father, of what I recall.] And Johnny Betencourt wasn't the leader.

**IN:** Oh, so John Betencourt was a drummer.

**JG:** Yeah, he was a drummer, but he wasn't the leader.

**KD:** Oh, okay.

**JG:** So anyway—

**IN:** So when—like what Karen was asking about the groups breaking up. When the Leggeriors eventually broke up, half of them became Thee Midnitters. So did Thee Midnitters already exist before the Leggeriors broke up?

**JG:** Yeah. [Actually, Danny LaMont, the drummer, and George Dominguez, the guitar player, sat in with us before they became part of Thee Midnitters. It was Jimmy Espinoza, the bass player and now leader of Thee Midnitters, who was actually part of our band before Thee Midnitters.]

**IN:** Okay. And then when your group—

**JG:** Well, like I said, Benny was first [with Thee Midnitters]. Now, Danny LaMont was another drummer who used to come in and sit in with us a lot. And sometimes he played . . . And I don't know if Danny left, or . . . But anyway, I know that Danny LaMont was playing with us [a lot] also. Danny LaMont and Bobby were real, real tight. And Danny LaMont played with us, and what happened was that Danny LaMont, Jimmy, and Bobby started really liking surf music, because Bobby was very good at surf guitar.

KD: Bobby Hernandez.

JG: Bobby Hernandez. He became very good at surf guitar. And so they enjoyed playing surf music. And so they decided to have their own group, and they brought in another guitarist, who was Bobby Cochran, who was Eddie Cochran's cousin, who was—Eddie Cochran was a famous name at that time. So they became the Vesuvians, and they started playing surf music. So we said, "Well, you know, how are you guys going to be doing your music when we have the group? "No, no, no. We won't book our group if the Leggeriors is booked." But little by little, they started getting more and more bookings, and it was beginning to develop some conflict there. So we decided, you know, we're just going to get another guitar player—and this is like after four years of performing together. So it was devastating. It's like, you know, when you go up there and you perform, and you know each other [so well], you could do something, [anything]. Just one thing, one sign, and everybody just comes in automatically.

KD: And I think what was unique about your group was the three-part harmony.

JG: Yeah. We were the only group that had a three-part harmony, as a group, as a band. The Sisters did three-part harmony, but they weren't a band, they were just a singing group.

So anyway, they started doing their surf music, and we thought, well, we'd just have to face it that we're going to need to get a new drummer and a new guitar player. So who we brought in was George Dominguez. And George Dominguez played for us. And then, you know, he played for a little while, and all of a sudden, we started seeing [and feeling that the dynamics of the group was changing]. It was that and a combination of the Beatles. When [their] music [first] came out, we used to go to Dolphins of Hollywood [Records], I think it was. We used to go there, and Huggy Boy, [Dick Hugg], used to have a radio show out of there. So we used to go there, and we used to ask, you know, what are the up and coming songs? So we used to try to learn songs before they even became hits. And one of those was a song called "What's Your Name?" [sings] "What's your name . . ." So anyway, we learned that one probably before it even became a hit.

But the Beatles were then coming out, and the Beatles had like five hits on the charts, so we started learning the songs of the Beatles. And we said, "Well, we're going to blow everybody away at the . . ." We had a big booking at the Union Hall, the Big Union Hall. So we started singing the Beatles songs at the Big Union Hall. Nobody could dance to them. [sings] "Listen, do you want to know a secret." They're trying to think, "How do you dance to a lot of these different songs?" So we thought we were going to be a big hit, and all of a sudden, it flopped, and we weren't doing very good. So that, in combination with Bobby and Jimmy taking off and doing the Vesuvians, that's when it started dying out. And then we just said, "Well, we might as well just close up the band." So the different guys . . . Hector, the piano player, went off and started playing Latin jazz with Al Mesa, I think. And Frank—I don't know if Frank continued playing drums, but—

IN: And George?

JG: And George then went with Thee Midnitters, and Danny LaMont went with Thee Midnitters. And then Jimmy, after the Vesuvians, then he went, after Benny Lopez left Thee Midnitters—and then Jimmy went with Thee Midnitters. And then he took over Thee Midnitters.

IN: So he's the head of Thee Midnitters.

JG: He's still the head of Thee Midnitters.

IN: Still today, right. Jimmy Espinoza.

JG: Yeah. So meanwhile, Billy, in between that—well, before that, Richard got married. Cuco got married, and he went to live in Chino. And we said, "Oh, my gosh." So we lost a good singer. And this is before any of the Chicano groups had any hits. So I thought, "Well, since we lost Cuco, Cannibal's been wanting to join us." So I called Cannibal, and it turned out that he was recording. He wasn't in because he was recording. So that's probably when they were recording "Land of a Thousand Dances." So anyway, that's when we just decided, we've just got to call it quits in regards to the band. But what was interesting is that Cuco still wanted to be a part, and even though the band was breaking up, Cuco still wanted to sing with us. And

that's where—the band broke up and we became the Four Js. We were all juniors. So Sal, the guitar player, and—

KD: Junior in school.

JG: He was my best friend in school, who was Danny's *compadre*. Sal, Ernie, Cuco, and myself.

IN: Juniors meaning named after your fathers?

JG: Yeah. We're all juniors.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: So I figured, if we're all juniors, I'll just call the group the Four Js. So I named the Four Js and I did the logo and everything again, and we started rehearsing. And this—now we were just basically a singing group. But since Ernie and myself and Sal knew how to play guitar, Ernie thought, "Well, I'll play bass." And Sal was going to play guitar, and I'd play guitar, too. And Richard would play drums. So we were going to become a musical singing group. But the emphasis was singing, just basic music. Sal's the one that knew most of the chords and everything. So anyway, we focus on becoming a singing group.

But meanwhile, Billy [Cardenas] was recording all his groups, and the groups that he was recording was—the first one, I think the first one was—I don't even know which one was first. But anyway, out of Billy's group came Cannibal and the Headhunters, with "Land of a Thousand Dances," the Blendells with "Na-Na-Na-Na," the Premiers, who were actually from San Gabriel, with "Farmer John," and . . . I guess those were the three groups. [Actually after those groups, Billie Cardenas and Eddie Davis produced El Chicano, who had a big national hit called "Viva Tirado," composed by Gerald Wilson, whose daughter went to high school with one of my sisters. Bobby Loya said that he and his brother Tony Garcia introduced "Viva Tirado" to the group when they were once playing with them. El Chicano's drummer turned out to be Johnny De Luna, who had worked with me at Standard Engraving.] And Max Uballez, [who originally formed the Romancers], then put Macondo together with [musicians from] the Romancers. And Bobby [Hernandez] was with the Romancers. After the Vesuvians, Bobby went with the Romancers, and they recorded a few albums.

And then [the Romancers] became Macondo. And then Fred Ramirez and a conga player and drummer became part of Macondo. So then Macondo was produced by Sergio Mendes. I think he produced them. But they never really got a hit. They got some airplay and stuff like that, but they never had a hit record. And at that same time, Eddie Torres was in—putting together—promoting Thee Midnites. So then Eddie Torres took off with Thee Midnites. And this is later now, and so . . . Who was the other one? I'm missing—oh, oh, Tierra.

IN: Oh, you performed with the Salas brothers, Steve and Rudy Salas, at the El Monte Legion Stadium.

JG: Yeah. The same day that we performed with the Righteous Brothers on TV, we went to El Monte Legion Stadium, and that's when they were promoting the Leggeriors, the all-Mexican band. And I remember Ernie going up to the stage saying, "By the way, we're not a Mexican band," he says, "we're an American band." So at that time, there was nothing about Chicano, stuff like that. So anyway, Rudy and Steve performed that day, and they were little kids. I mean, God, they looked like they must have been twelve and fourteen years old. Little kids. That was the first time I ever met them. But I know that Billy just had a lot of groups, he had the Heartbreakers, they were another two brothers that used to sing.

KD: And at this point, when you say "groups," is this when they're actually the booking agent more than—

JG: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah. Well, actually, he became a manager.

KD: Right. He's like the manager.

JG: Yeah, he became a manager to these guys.

KD: But not to the Leggeriors.

JG: No, not to the Leggeriors. And later on, I found out that the reason Billy didn't include us is because Johnny Jay said, "Look, you can take anybody, but the Leggeriors are mine." So Billy seemed to live up to that.



KD: So you were living—in practice, it was like they were—

JG: Yeah. We never had a contract.

KD: You didn't have a contract.

JG: No, we didn't have a contract.

KD: You didn't make any money out of that relationship.

JG: Yeah. But Johnny Jay and Sal later told me that the reason Billy never did anything with us is because he wanted to honor Johnny Jay's agreement, because Billy started taking over Johnny Jay's dances, the locations and stuff like that. So that's why he never . . . And I was always curious. It was later on, when they all started having hits, why we were never a part of that. And that's why we weren't a part.

IN: Now, with the Four Js, you worked for a long time and then eventually talked to Eddie Cano about something—

JG: Yeah, well, with the Four Js—so all this time that things were beginning to hit off with the different groups, we had the Four Js. And I was real happy, because my passion is the singing and the harmony, and we harmonize really good. Because there weren't very many groups that had three singers that did three-part harmony. And we were rearranging our songs to go in all three-part harmony, and it wasn't—

IN: It was actually four now, you had four.

JG: Yeah. It's not so much like . . . You see, at the beginning we did what a lot of the rock and roll groups did, is one person sang the lead and the other ones would go, [*singing*] "Wah, wah, wah, whoa." So we'd sing background, you know, we'd rotate, sing background. But now we were rearranging our songs where we did our songs in three-part harmony. And "We Belonged Together"—it was a beautiful arrangement. We'd go, [*singing*] "You're mine." We did all four-part harmony. So we were doing some really nice stuff.

And at one time, I was talking to Eddie Cano, telling him about how we were arranging a lot of these songs. And he says, "Well, you know what?"—at that time, there was a group called the Four Freshmen, who were very, very famous—and he says, "You know, there's no reason why we can't have a Mexican Four Freshmen." Because at that time I don't know if we were even calling—saying Chicano, the word *Chicano* or *Latino*. So he says, "I don't know why we can't have another group." So he says, "You know, what you guys [should] do [is] get a few of your favorite songs worked out, and I will set up an audition [with] my manager. So you've got an audition with my manager," he said. And his manager at that time was managing—it was a jazz singer called Damita Jo who had a hit song, "Yellow Days," that Armando Manzanero wrote, which originally was "La Mentira." But it was translated into "Yellow Days." So, that Damita Jo. He had Frankie Randall, who was a jazz pop singer. He had, I think, the Astronauts, or something like that. It was a rock and roll group that had a big hit record. And then it was Eddie Cano. So he had four major stars that he was managing.

And he [Eddie Cano] says, "Get your favorite songs together, and then I'll arrange an audition." And I was just floored. [This was much better than just getting a record contract. This was getting an honest, credible, experienced manager that could negotiate a good recording contract and bookings.] I mean, I was really excited, I was . . . Because to me, our singing was really key. To me, "Justine" didn't showcase our singing, because it was, "Justine, Justine, Justine, Justine." It wasn't really showcasing what we really did. And especially Richard's voice, for the ballads, sort of . . . So anyway, I was really excited about it, [especially that this would happen with the three best friends of my entire life, starting with Cuco—Richard—when he was practically still in diapers. What a dream come true.]

And so I went and told the guys. And at this time—by this time, they were all married. Sal, Ernie, and Richard were all married. And Richard and Ernie started getting into motorcycles, they had some motorcycles too. And so anyway, that's—I was very devoted to [our singing], and the guys had things to do because they were married. And I even got a call from one of the guys' mother-in-law, saying, "I think it's best if you just broke up the group, because this is causing problems for the family. He wants to just work on the music, and he's got responsibilities over here." First the wife called me and then the mother-in-law called me, and I said, "Oh, my gosh." And then when I told the guys about Eddie Cano, Richard said, "You



know what? I don't want to do that." He says, "If we start traveling, I'm going to be leaving my family," and he already had like two kids. And Ernie didn't have any kids yet, but he was married.

And so anyway, it turned out that we had to just call it quits. And we had rehearsed for two years, we had some great harmony, beautiful singing. It's just unfortunate that we didn't record a lot of that, but it was some beautiful singing. And so I was devastated. I said, "Well, I've learned my lesson. I can't depend on anybody," because I knew parts of songs, my part. And I said, "From now on, I'm going to go out there and I'm just going to focus on myself." So I started taking classes in music, first at East LA College, and then I took some art classes at East LA College. But I was focusing on music. So I started taking classes in music, and then after I finished East LA, they all started talking about LA City College being the real place to [go]. So I went and started taking classes on harmony and different things in LA City College.

IN: You were going to change your name.

JG: Yeah.

KD: And what year was that about? So, Leggeriors lasts from—

JG: They went from maybe 1960, from 1960 to '65, somewhere, maybe '64 or '65. And then the Four Js, we lasted two years, and we performed for the East LA rock and roll . . . That's another place that I never brought up. The Salesian rock and roll shows—the Salesian rock and roll shows were a major contribution to all this. Taggart, all this time that Taggart had the band, he broke up the band into the dance band, and Tony was encouraging him to get into some more of the pop.

IN: Tony Garcia.

JG: Yeah, Tony Garcia.

IN: Sax.

JG: But because so many bands were coming out of Salesian, Taggart then put a dance concert, a concert at Lourdes auditorium. And Lourdes was very famous for its dances.

As a matter of fact, we used to play for a lot of Lourdes dances, and as a matter of fact, we played for one New Year's—one New Year's, we played for Lourdes, and as they were singing, "Should all acquaintance be . . ." Of course the band was all playing, and everybody was down there kissing, getting their New Year kisses, and the band's all singing, and little by little, some of the guys are jumping off the band to go down there and get their kiss too. And I feel—I'm winding up being the only one up there. I said, "Forget it." So all of a sudden, we had no music. [laughter] And everybody's down there trying to get their New Year kiss.

But there was another incident—we have some funny ones. Another thing that happened at the Old Dixie, the same hall where . . . It was very popular at that time, too. We—Bobby used to go with Sal—

KD: Bobby Hernandez.

JG: Bobby Hernandez. In other words, Danny, [Ernie], Sal, myself, and Philip were—

KD: So Danny Dominguez—

JG: We were the oldest, and like I said, Danny was actually [a little] younger [than the four of us].

IN: Danny Dominguez?

JG: Yeah, Danny Dominguez.

IN: Sal Padilla.

JG: Sal Padilla, [Ernie Castillo, myself,] and Philip Ruiz. We were the eldest, and we had the cars. [Danny also had a car.] One of the days—well, way at the beginning, we had, I guess, Philip—I don't think Danny took a car, but it was Philip, Sal, and myself took a car, and we performed at Huntington Park. At a hall over there. And when we came out of the hall, we couldn't find my car. So we never found it. They stole my car. And we had to pack everything into two cars. And then we went to the police station in Huntington Park in the middle of the night. And we told them what happened, and they said, "Well, that's not our area." So we were just in the other side of Huntington Park, whatever it is. But anyway, they said, you know, "That's not our jurisdiction." So anyway, we all had to pile into two cars. So maybe a month later, we found my car totally stripped and everything.

But another incident, when we played at the Old Dixie, we were off performing and we were all packed up, and we left. And what we didn't realize was that one of the guys was missing, and it was Bobby Hernandez. Bobby Hernandez later—we left him in the bathroom. He was in the—Bobby used to focus on trying to get a real nice *chongo*, pompadour in the front, and he was in their combing it, trying to fix it. And he lasted so long in there we forgot about him and drove [away without him and] went home. And he had to call a taxi. And his mom was really mad, because he was [fifteen or] sixteen years old, probably, at that time. We were the eldest, we were eighteen, nineteen, whatever, and he was just a little kid. So anyway, we had forgotten him there.

IN: And the Frosty's?

JG: Oh, and another thing that happened, Frosty—now, this is a famous story. I think one of the guys was saying they even wrote a song, "Meet Me at the Frosty's." Billy Cardenas and Max Uballez and a lot of the guys were having a party, or after they performed they all got together. And we probably didn't perform that day, so I was at home. And so anyway, they were all having a party. And that night, about eleven o'clock at night, I got a phone call from a girl. And she says, "You know, I . . ." She started saying all kinds of sweet things, you know. She says, "Oh, I've seen your picture, and oh, I really like the way you look." She says, "And I'm close to your house. I know where you live. So could you meet me at the Frosty's? Frosty's Freeze is right down the street." "Oh, yeah." Boom, boom, I combed myself, perfuming myself, I was all excited. So I drove down to Frosty's Freeze, and I'm looking for this girl, and all of a sudden, "Ah-ha-ha," everybody's cracking up. It was Max Uballez and a lot of the guys who came to pick me up to go to the party.

IN: So to this day, I've been going to musician reunions for [over forty] years, and they all talk about these stories as if they were yesterday, they just have so much fun reminiscing.

KD: "Come down to Frosty's," yeah.

JG: Yeah, I think it was actually Max's girlfriend, who later became his wife.

KD: Now, you have a car, and that's because you're making money from the—I mean, I'm trying to figure out how you bought this car.

JG: Yeah, yeah, later. In other words, when I lost the car, that was years earlier. And then later on, I—yeah, okay.

KD: Your first car—

JG: Now, this is after—this is after I graduated. This is after I graduated. This is the dying days of the Leggeriors.

IN : Now, Mrs. Cano had something to do with your car.

JG: Oh, yeah. Now, the other thing is when I had—I first had—I inherit the Chevy of my brother's, which is the first car that my brother ever bought. So I inherit that. And when it was stolen, I lost it. So then by this time, I bought a '58 Ford, I believe. And I bought it—I was now working. I got—right after—so this is right after Standard Engraving.

IN: So from when you graduated from Salesian, you went to—

JG: Yeah, when I graduated from Salesian, my art teacher, Father Illio, got me a job at Standard Engraving. Standard Engraving was an engraving company that did engravings for newspapers. At that time they didn't have all this technology, they used to have to actually do zinc plates, which was [with] raised [images to be printed]. And the place that I worked, the artwork—they did the plates for artwork.

So my job, what I did is, I used to pick up the artwork from the department stores, and the big account was Broadway. So I go into the art department at Broadway and pick up all the—I would pick up the artwork about—after school. So it was about four or five o'clock, five o'clock or so. Five o'clock, after everybody—the art department from the Broadway was all going home. They finished their artwork, so they would leave the artwork. So then I'd pick it up, and I'd take it down to my job. My job was on Soto and Eighth Street, which was right down the street from the house, just right down from Salesian. And what they did first, they put—now, this was all black and white artwork. What they did first was they photographed the artwork twice. What they did first is that—it was my job was to mask. What I would do, they would have artwork that was grey tones, different tones—

IN: And it's usually fashion designs?

JG: Yeah, it was normally fashion. Furniture and stuff like that also, but mostly fashion. So what they would do is they would have—it would be done in washes, different grey washes, and ink. So ink was solid black, and the greys were grey. So what I would do is the greys. I had to cover it. Every little detail I had to cover. And if a hair was coming out, I had to trace that hair. So I was very, very good with the brush. I was very good with the brush. So I used to trace the hair, because if I didn't put that—if I didn't mask that hair, it disappeared. Anything that I didn't mask would disappear. So I had to mask all of—now this was the greys. And I would mask it in red opaque, so that was masked—that was one mask. When it came to the black, I just had to open the window [in a separate mask]. In other words, I'd just get the black, and I'd just cover any area with black, and this way, it opened the window on the negative. And that means the black line would show through [in solid black]. So it was a—they called it combination of grey and black.

So the photographer then would photograph the artwork first, and then he'd photograph it with one mask, and then photograph it with another one, so then the artwork would come out complete. [This was done with a very large camera, approximately four feet by five feet that was mounted to a wall that went into a dark room. The viewer of the camera was inside the dark room and the zoom lens would run on tracks about ten feet long. Connected to the end of the tracks was a flat copy board about four feet by four feet, where the original artwork would be placed to be photographed about three different ways, with a screen and without.] So once he got that negative—then they would get the negative and they would burn it into a zinc plate with some arc lights and stuff like that. And so they would burn it in there. And they'd put some type of coating, where anywhere that it wasn't burnt, it would just—after they burnt it, then they would stick it in a drum, a tin of acid, and the acid would eat up anything that wasn't burnt yet. So the burnt areas are what would stay there, and that would be raised type. [Wherever the light went through the negative, it would protect the zinc plate from being eaten up by the acid. That area, which was the artwork, would stay in tack.]

So then they'd get the plate, and then they'd go to the finisher. And the finisher would make sure that everything, any raised area that wasn't supposed to be there, was totally out. So then I'd get those zincs, and by this time it was maybe two, three, four [in the morning], depending on how much [work we had]. If there was a lot of work, I'd be there until five, six in the morning. Most of the time they finished about one o'clock at night, so then I'd deliver it. But because my job was the first part and the last part. In between I had nothing to do. So about four o'clock, five o'clock, I'd pick up the zinc plates. I mean, I'd pick up the artwork, and I'd mask it all and give it to the photographer. After that, I had nothing to do. And so on Fridays the boss [and owner] worked. He was just really cool. There were meetings, and he just was really nice. He allowed me, on Friday nights after I finished masking, to go perform [with the band]. So I'd go perform, and then I'd come back after I finished performing, and by that time they had all the plates and everything ready for me to take off and start delivering it.

KD: So you're on the clock while you're performing.

JG: Yeah.

KD: That is pretty generous.

JG: Yeah. So I get paid. I get paid for it. And if I worked way after hours, because the more—the later, the more work there was, the later . . . And I had to deliver—I had to deliver to—all around. I mean, I'd go from East LA, I'd go into the Valley, I'd go into Redondo Beach, I'd go to Long Beach, I'd go to San Gabriel—I knew all the newspapers. All the newspaper. So I delivered . . . There were times—there was a little plate this small that I'd have to drive all the way to Long Beach just to deliver this.

KD: The size of a quarter.

JG: Yeah. And then we'd ship everything, a lot of stuff to San Diego. So the plates—so then the last stop, or the first stop, was actually at the Greyhound downtown. And then all that stuff that was packaged, I'd ship it to San Diego. Then I'd start dropping off all over the place.

KD: So if you worked over hours, that was just your time.

JG: [No, actually I got paid.] So that happened to be . . .

So while all this stuff was going with the music, in my third year of high school. Then we had our first art teacher, and his name was Father Illio.

IN: Well, before you get into the art, what about the car and Mrs. Cano?

JG: Oh, okay. So after the Ford that I had, it just went kaput. I don't know exactly what happened to that one. But I needed a new car. So I was going to buy another used car, you know, they were about—I didn't have money to buy [a new one]. So my mom was telling Mrs. Cano that, I guess, you know, that the car was no good anymore. And I was the driver for the family. Nobody else had a car. My brother had already gotten married, and so I was the one that always drove everyone. Nobody else drove. So my dad didn't drive. Anyway, so Mrs. Cano came to me and says, you know, "Instead of buying a used car, why don't you buy a new one?" "I don't have the money to buy a new one." She says, "I'll loan you the down payment." So she loaned me the down payment to buy a brand-new car, and that was—what was it? [A] 1965 Le Mans. So it was a 1965 Pontiac La Mans, when I bought my first new car. And it was again thanks to Mrs. Cano.

IN: Again, in regards to the music, Eddie Cano took you to a recording session.

JG: Oh, yeah. No, Eddie used to invite me to recording sessions, and it was quite an experience because—it was interesting, because here we had just done two sides recording on our record, and I don't know how many hours it took us. And then all of a sudden, I go to a recording session with Eddie. And he's got like twenty musicians and some pretty famous—he had Dave Brubeck's bass player. I remember this girl coming in all saggy pants and real sloppy looking *gabacha*, and she gets on the guitar. And I go, "Wow!" Real pro, man, she was really good. So anyway, he had like a twenty-piece band recording session, and he's doing this thing, it sounds beautiful. And he says—*[gestures for cut]*

KD: No good.

JG: "Let's do it over again. No good." [Then they would get it perfect.] I go, "Wow." Just like that he was knocking them out. He had all the charts and everything.

IN: And there was one special session with—

JG: Well, that was later, when I was ready to go to Europe.

IN: Yeah. Well, talk about it now, since you're talking about Eddie Cano.

JG: Okay. So anyway, just before I was ready to go to Europe, Eddie invited me to a recording session at Capital Records. And it was a recording session with Andy Russell and Trio Copacabana, who did "Cuando Calienta el Sol," and Eddie. So three famous groups. So I spent—this was about three days before I left to Europe. I spent like the whole day there—they were recording the whole album—and had a wonderful conversation with Andy Russell. Because I told him I was going to Spain, and he says, "Oh." He lived in Spain. He was a big star in South America and Spain and all over the place. And I think he was married in each country. In Mexico, he was married to a bullfighter's daughter, and I don't know what happened. But anyway, then he went to Spain, and he said . . . Anyway, he was talking about all his great experiences all over the world. And it was wonderful.

IN: And then years later we met him in Encino when we [Irma and I] went to Ralph's market, it turns out he lived in Encino. And when Eddie Cano—

JG: Passed away.

IN: Passed away. We sat with Andy Russell at the funeral. [This was in '88, and Johnny was a pallbearer. Andy Russell was alone and looked healthy.] And—

JG: [When we saw Andy Russell at Ralph's market a couple of years earlier, he said he was sixty-seven and that] he was excited, because he had just remarried, and he married a nurse. He says, "So I have someone to take care of me." And before you know it, he passed away, [four years after Eddie, in '92]. He was probably [about seventy-three]. Eddie might have passed away about [1988]. Well, that's the other thing, is that—well, this was later [when Andy passed away].

But Eddie passed away about the age of sixty-three years old. He was pretty young. [Come to think of it, I believe he was only sixty.] And actually, it was my mom [and] the neighbor that found him dead, [lying

in bed]. He had moved back. He had gotten a divorce, and he had moved back to where his parents lived. His parents had already passed away. And they built a whole house in the back. And because we gave them permission to use part of our area, they were able to build the house in the back.

IN: Part of your land.

JG: Part of our land. So we gave back in that way. Of course, we paid our loans, [so I had already paid back the money they loaned me for my car]. But she, [Mrs. Cano], wanted to build a house so that Eddie could come back. [Actually, the larger house in the back was built for Mr. and Mrs. Cano to live and so they could rent out the smaller front house.]

So by that time, I think we first heard that his, [Eddie's], dad passed away. And then Eddie was living with his mom there [in the back house], [after] they built the two-story house in the back. And with us giving permission [for them] to have an [additional] driveway, another way out, about four feet of our land to be used as a driveway for them, they were able to build the back house. So Eddie lived there for—I think it was like a year. And she passed away in her eighties, and maybe—God, just a year or two after she, [Eddie's mom], passed away, then he passed away. He had the flu, and he was performing at the—he was performing at—up in the hills—

IN: Oh, Industry Hills [Expo Center].

JG: Industry Hills.

IN: There's a nightclub, a banquet hall.

JG: And he got sick, he had the flu, and his . . . Torres, David Torres, who was original piano player with Tierra, who was . . . I got to know him because Tierra developed in the '70s. Before [that] it was the Jaguars, and Steve and Rudy. So when they came out with their first album, I did all the—I was the art director and creative director for the album. So what I wanted to do on the album was educate.

KD: Well, you can talk about that when we get into the art.

JG: Okay, so we'll talk about that later. But anyway, the fact that David Torres sat in for Eddie Cano, he—when he passed away.

IN: Well, actually, when he played—David Torres came to Encino to play at a restaurant. He was taking Eddie Cano's place, or that was—

JG: No, I don't think that was—

IN: Oh, it just happened to be [that] he was in the neighborhood.

JG: Yeah. Uh-huh. So—

IN: But you were saying that you have this day job, which is actually very much in the late afternoon and early morning hours, working with Standard—

JG: Engraving. Yeah. Well, actually, Standard Engraving was, I think, after I graduated.

KD: Right. You were saying after you graduated.

IN: Did you have to give money to your dad?

JG: Oh, yeah. [laughter] I just gave him the whole check, I gave him all the money. He's the one that would give me whatever I—

KD: While you're living at home—

JG: Yeah.

KD: Yeah. And then the—help me understand, you said when you were growing up, you're much younger, when you're still in elementary school, you know, you're not seeing Mexicans in TV and radio and music. But then you end up playing—is your self-esteem changing at that time? Are you starting to see, hey, we have talent, because every single member you've mentioned—I can't think of one that—maybe one doesn't have a Latino last name, but it sounds like pretty much these are all Mexican-origin kids—

JG: You know, I didn't think about it. I didn't see them as celebrities. They were just like me. [laughter] Eddie Cano's the one that gave me self-esteem, because he was a celebrity.

IN: Well, years later, when I started archiving Juan's history, starting twenty-five years ago, he was telling me everything he had done in the arts. But then we had a series of conversations, very lengthy conversations,

and then all of a sudden one day he casually mentioned something about the music. And all of a sudden, I'm hearing these incredible stories, and I'm saying, "My God, you have to document this history, and tell her what you said to me."

JG: I said, "Ah, we were just kids then."

IN: He says, "We were just kids." I mean—that's not important, that's nothing. To him, what they did as kids in high school and right after high school was just fun. He didn't realize what important history this was to the Chicano community.

KD: But even at the time, it's not the kind of thing that's helping you build that self-esteem that you were saying had been—

JG: No.

IN: Well, Johnny Jimenez was Johnny Jay, right?

JG: Yeah.

IN: Willie Garcia was Willie G.

JG: Willie G.

IN: And you wanted to change your name. At what point—

JG: Well, I wanted to have the "Johnny Alez Quintet," and "Johnny Alez" was the last part of Gonzalez, A-L-E-Z, Alez. Johnny Alez.

KD: Okay, so even though these were all incredible talents that were Mexican Americans, Chicanos, it still didn't change your identity.

JG: No. Because I didn't think—I didn't think that we were doing anything exceptional. I didn't think any of us were stars. So I still wasn't knowing anything [historical and positive about our history]. The only recognizable names, Latinos that I knew, or Mexicanos that I knew, [that] had type of, some type of recognition, was Eddie, Andy Russell, and I had started hearing "Roybal." I heard—when we started Salesian, there was a guy by the name of Roybal that was there, that was in school. And I had heard the name Roybal. But this guy started saying, "I'm a nephew, I'm a nephew." He said he was related. And it seemed like he got some type of recognition because of that. And so this was now a new name that was becoming—obviously had some type of recognition because this guy was using it. And he was gone the first year. Ernie [our other singer] also went into school the first year at Salesian, and then he left and went to Roosevelt. Yeah, but none of these guys—you know, I never . . . They were another me, you know. *[laughter]*

IN: And you even mentioned that your dad was telling you about Camarena, who invented a color TV, and about great things that Mexicans had done. And what was your feeling about it?

JG: As far as I was concerned, how could it be true if nobody was talking about it? Schools never talk about it. I never hear anything about Latinos. [One of the big problems we had as Chicano bands was that the industry, recording companies and radio stations, didn't know how to market us. Even though we played American rock and roll in English they assumed we just played Latin or Mexican music. And since they figured that there weren't enough Latinos in the country at the time, it wasn't worth them putting time and money into Chicano groups because they didn't know what to do with us. For that reason, I always spent much of my time searching and cutting out any little article on Latinos in English to show that there was public interest in Latino products. Sadly, positive stories on Latinos or on East LA, were very rare, making me feel more desperate for anything positive on Latinos in the media.]

You know, I think there was a group called the Carlos Brothers, and of course Ritchie Valens, [who were exceptions]. The Carlos Brothers, who recorded. But I don't remember anybody else at that time having any [recordings, compared to blacks or whites]. And Ritchie Valens was quite a while back. As a matter of fact, there was a guy by the name of Frank Ruiz, who was actually Ritchie Valens's cousin. When he, [Ritchie], passed away he, [Frank], went to his funeral. And just recently, somebody was saying that they had run into him, [Frank]. [Frank was with me at Salesian. He drew beautiful women with wild hairdos and also sang with a lot of bands later.] But anyway.

KD: So you were telling me, the Four Js end up dissolving. It sounds like pressures of—



JG: Yeah.

JG: Marriage.

KD: Marriage. And then what happens? Where do you go from there?

JG: Oh, okay. So when the Four Js broke up, that's when I started saying, "I'm not going to depend on anybody else. It's going to be me." And then I started going to school, and I started studying music, and what I thought is, you know, "I'm just going to learn as much music and perform on my own. If anything, I'll bring in people, but not as a group, I'll just hire them." But anyway, I love music, and I wanted to stay [in it]. The big disappointment at school is Father [Illio], who was my art teacher.

KD: When did he become your art teacher? Because you said in the beginning, there were no art classes.

JG: It was the third year of school. And that's when I met David Botello, because he took art school class there. So the first painting I remember of David was a painting of—a watercolor of ducks. Ducks flying. And the first one that—well, the artwork—the very first award given at Salesian for art, Father [Illio] gave it to me. It was a gold medal, a really nice big gold medal. And the reason he gave it to me is because I had—I did one of the four Evangelists. And I still have it. As a matter of fact, that was one of the pictures that we opened up the gallery with. So each one of us came in. Joe and I had—we had one painting each. So it was one of the four Evangelists, one of the old men with a big beard, and it was a charcoal.

KD: White on black?

JG: Yeah. But anyway, it's really nice, and I still have it. And it's interesting, I see the signature and it looks like a little kid's signature. But then you see the artwork, and you say, "Wow." [laughter]

So anyway, I got a gold medal for the first year of school. And then the other thing that was memorable is, we had Principal Day, and they wanted—I don't know who suggested it or what, but I was in the Pep Club, and Sal [Padilla] was in the Pep Club with me, and it might have been before we had art class, or else Father [Illio] might have been involved in it. But what I did is, I did—in the newspaper, in the school paper, we used to have a little picture of the principal in black and white. Maybe it was not even one inch by one inch. And I got that little paper, that little picture, and without projection—because I didn't know about projection—I drew him probably as big as the room, about eight feet. I just laid it down on the floor and did his portrait in color. And—

KD: Did you grid it, or did you just freehand?

JG: I don't know how I did it.

JG: I don't know if I knew about grid. I think it was just freehand.

KD: Yeah, that would be—yeah.

JG: I just—I didn't know about grid, I just sketched it out. And they hung it from the top of the third floor. And that was a big day, Principal Day, and we all celebrate it. And I don't know why I didn't take a picture of it, but one of the brothers just loved the portrait. He says, "Could you do one of me?" His name was Brother Warren. And so I did one in black and white and he says, "No, no, I wanted it in color," and I said . . . So after that, I started coloring it in. And I wasn't very enthused, and I screwed it up. [laughter]

KD: No, you can't color in a black and white. [laughter]

JG: No. And that was the same thing that I did one time with—I did the whole Last Supper, the whole Last Supper in color. And I did it probably with colored pencil, and it started fading. I said, "Oh, my gosh." So I started getting ink and trying to trace it, and I ruined it. [laughter]

KD: I understand you did some unusual drawings that drew your fellow students to you.

JG: Oh, yeah.

KD: I heard that you were drawing things that they weren't drawing.

JG: Yeah. Well, let's see. In grammar school, I drew portraits—I still have them—portraits of some of the guys that were in my class. In—

KD: You don't remember in Salesian, drawing unusual things that nobody else was drawing?

JG: No, I don't remember.

KD: Well, from somebody else's perspective, it was unusual.

IN: Give us a hint.

KD: I think it was cool monsters, or spacemen, or—

JG: Oh, well—

[*break in audio*]

KD: Unusual, and felt like they had to keep up with you. You were the measure, you were the standard. You probably don't have that memory of being the one that they were all clinging to you to ride on those coattails.

JG: Yeah. No, I remember doing weird faces [mostly in grammar school. Ernie and I used to compete to see who could draw the ugliest and weirdest human faces, with long slobbering tongues and eyeballs hanging out]. But anyway, [back to Salesian] that's where I first met David, David Botello. And then when I went to work at Standard, then David Botello went to Standard Engraving also.

IN: Were you the one who referred him, or how did—

JG: No, [I'm not sure if it was] Father Illio [or myself that] got him the job at Standard Engraving. But at Standard, while working at Standard, David was drafted. But anyway, way before that—you know, I should talk about my draft days.

IN: Well, did you want to say any—

KD: Were you drafted?

JG: Yeah. Yeah, I was drafted, but I went up to—that's an interesting story.

IN: Did you want to say anything about your relationship with David Botello in high school, and about the art that you did?

JG: Well, basically we—I don't know if it was very . . . The fact that we had art class together—you know, we had a nice relationship. But we were probably the both best artists there. There was one guy—one Asian, I think his name was Paul Motoyoshi, and it's interesting that there were a lot of . . . Well, don't know if a lot of, but there were Asians that were Buddhist, and they went to Salesian. So they wouldn't go into the church with us, but I guess they liked the education. But anyway, Paul Motoyoshi was like one of the best trumpet players, and he was my competition. But what I found out, his father was an actual commercial artist. So he had help.

KD: So about your monster drawings, did you—

JG: Well, it was weird faces.

KD: Weird faces. You talked about that before.

JG: Yeah. I just tried to—

IN: You and Ernie were drawing faces together.

JG: Yeah. And I guess I just continued. I enjoyed it.

IN: So when you—

JG: Well, the other thing, when I graduated from Assumption, one of the things that I signed—I used to draw Alfred E. Newman, which is, "What, me worry?" from *Mad* [magazine]. So I had the face memorized, I used to sketch out the face. Tiny. Every time I used to sign, I used to draw, "What, me worry?"

IN: So when Father [Illio] got you into Standard Engraving, after that, you worked at the Broadway, I. Magnin. Tell us a little bit about your advertising, being involved with the fashion world.

JG: Well, the fact that I was working at Standard Engraving, when I was with the music, you know, that was—it was great that the owner was able to do that. [Go perform and still stay on the clock.] And while I was delivering the [engraved] plates at Broadway, there was one Mexicano, in all of the advertising everywhere, there was one Mexicano. And his name was Leo Martinez. Leo Martinez was—he looked Filipino Mexican. He was short, *moreno* [olive-tan complexioned], and, boy, he had a personality and confidence that you can't imagine. He drove a gigantic Lincoln Continental. Beautiful, big Continental. And, boy, I mean, that's where I learned the word "gift of gab." I mean, he was a good talker, really good talker, and just confidence. And he was like the only Mexicano working in advertising. And he—I remember him

telling this story about him being in the war, World War II, that they had shot down most of his company, the people he was with. And that they came over to check on them, they were shooting them in the head to make sure they were [dead], and Leo was alive. And he was praying, just praying, and playing dead. And they came up to him, and they kicked him or something, and they just moved on, and they didn't shoot him. And that's why he was still around.

But Leo was a great, great guy. He kept on telling me, "You've got to leave Standard and come work for Broadway. You've got to do your artwork, you've got to do your artwork." He knew I was an artist, so he says, "You've got to do your artwork." So anyway, one day he calls me, and he says, "There's an opening." He says, "Come on over and . . ." So I went over and found out that they weren't going to pay me as much as Standard was paying me, so I said, "Nah, forget it." So then I called Ernie, because Ernie was a good artist, too. I called Ernie to try it out, and Ernie didn't get the job. And I don't know why he didn't get the job. He was an artist. Then I called Sal, and Sal got the job. And Sal wasn't an artist, but he got the job. And it had to do with production—production and cutting out and pasting up and stuff like that. So anyway, Sal got the job.

And meanwhile, around that time is when David got drafted. [Before the Broadway, I had also gotten Sal a job working at Standard Engraving with me, but only as a driver delivering. So four musicians and artist friends of mine worked at Standard with me at different times. Sal, Johnny De Luna, David, and Ernie.] Oh, but in regards to me being drafted. First, I was being drafted when I—

KD: Before you went to I. Magnin, or after?

JG: No, it was before. I was about twenty-one, I think, somewhere. I was—well, we were in the band. It was when we were in the band. When we were in the band, we were—like I said, there was Danny Dominguez, Sal Padilla, Philip Ruiz, [Ernie], and myself, who were probably in our twenties already, early twenties. And then all the other guys were in their—like, three, four years younger. So we were all called to take a physical. I don't know if Danny was called. I know Ernie, Philip—Danny was younger.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Danny was younger, and Sal's older than me, so Danny's quite a bit younger [about a year]. So it was Sal, Ernie, myself, and Philip. And I had—all this time I had been struggling with asthma. Asthma and sinus. I used to—when I was at Standard Engraving, I always would carry my Dristan to spray my nose, so I could clear my nose. And eventually, Dristan was coming out to be too expensive. So the guy at Standard Engraving that lived in San Gabriel, he says, "There's a pharmacist in San Gabriel that does his own nose spray," and he says, "I use it." So I went to go get it, and I bought quarts of nose drops.

So I started using it, and I just started getting worse and worse and worse. [*in nasal voice*] You could not talk to me without me talking like that as I sprayed my nose. So that means when I sang, I carried little tiny—I'd load up. A big one I had in my car, and load up with little tiny ones, and I sprayed my nose just before singing. And then, you know, within minutes or so, it was clogged up again. And meanwhile, my asthma too, I was struggling with my asthma.

As a matter of fact, one day that we were performing at Queen of Angels, I had a real bad asthma attack. And I couldn't go. So Willie and Little Ray sat in for me. So they went in and they sat in. But I couldn't take it. I couldn't take not going. And I don't know, some way or another, I just made myself get well. And I still—I went later on, and I finally went back over there. So we were like five singers now. [*laughter*] With Willie and the three of us, and Little Ray.

But anyway, in regards to my asthma, as time went on, my asthma started getting worse and worse. And when we got drafted, when they called us, the fact that I had asthma, I said, "Well, the three guys will probably be leaving, and I'll probably be the only one to stay behind," because I never heard any problems with the other guys, physically. So we went and took our physical, and it turned out that all of them passed—no, all three of them flunked, flunked the physical, and I passed.

KD: You?

JG: I passed my physical with asthma. And I said—you know, I didn't expect that. And I said, "Oh, my gosh, I don't want to go in the Army." Go out and start fighting in hand-to-hand combat. *[laughter]*

KD: This is about 1964, if you're twenty-one?

JG: Yeah, probably around there, yeah. And I thought, "Oh, I don't want to go." And I always thought, "Join the Navy and see the world." The Navy men are the guys that get all the girls and everything. So I said, "Nah." I went. But the key thing was "Join the Navy and see the world." You're always in a ship traveling. And then they said—and then I thought, "Gee, somebody said about special—USO or something like that, you could . . . Since you sing, maybe you could join the band and stuff like that." And I said, "Oh, man, it'd be . . ." I just had dreams of being on the ship singing and playing the guitar, just like . . . This is before. Okay, so anyway, I was thinking of how nice it would be, finally to be able to travel and have the government pay for it. So I thought, "Well, I don't want to go in the Army." But I was drafted, and since they said, "Okay, you passed, on this day, within a month from now, you come here, take care of all your business and you come here with only your shaving kits, your little bag with shaving lotion, whatever you need. But all you're going to come back with is a little bag, we're going to give you the rest." So anyway, I said, "No, I . . ."

So, I researched, and I found out about the Naval Reserves. And the Naval Reserves were at Chavez Ravine. And so I went to the Naval Reserves, and I walk into this gigantic place. It looks like a big basketball court—but it was really gigantic. It must have been, I don't know how many—ten times bigger than a basketball court. And the whole Navy and Marine station was there. So I went into the Navy, and I said, "I'm interested in joining the Navy Reserves." Boy, these guys. *[laughter]* Their eyes just lit up. "Oh, well, yeah, sure, sure, sure." And right away, they accommodated me real quick. And they said, "Okay, so here's the sheet, start filling it out." So I started filling out all the information and everything, and they said, "Oh, great, okay." So right away they said, "Okay, raise your right hand. Do you swear to do this and that and . . ." "I swear, yes, yes, yes, yes." And I wasn't a citizen, I was still a Mexican citizen. I still wasn't an American citizen, so I said, "Yeah." So—but it didn't make any difference. They got me, and they were happy. They said, "Okay, you're now part of the Naval Reserves. Okay, this is what you're going to do, this and this and that."

And meanwhile, I'm feeling real guilty, because as I said, the Army drafted me. I said, "Oh, my gosh. Are they going to split me up in half? One part goes to the Army, one part goes to the Navy. [Or they're going to put me in jail.]" And I said, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to have to confess." I said, "Actually, I took my physical and they drafted me into the Army, I was supposed to be going in." They said, "We swore you in. You're ours." "Oh, okay." I said, "Great." So now I have a year to prepare, so I started researching on how I could join the band.

KD: The naval band.

JG: The naval band. And they said, "You have to play two instruments." And so, oh my gosh, I'm barely making it on the guitar. So singing didn't count, you had to play two. So I think that's about the time that I really started also focusing also on taking music at East LA College, because I really wanted to learn the music. I said, "By the time my active duty comes up, then hopefully I'll be prepared." So I started working on my music.

And within this time, I went to boot camp. And in boot camp, I started getting really sick with asthma. I mean, they had me swimming, they had me marching. And I'm wheezing and they weren't paying attention to me. I guess just the fact that I was in there. And I'd tell people, and they just didn't pay attention. And one of the things that happened at boot camp, because I was so good at spit shine, [which I learned in grammar school when Ernie and I starched our pants], that the captain that was in charge of our barracks knew how good . . . Oh, what happened is I started doing my shoes, and I could knock them out quick. And some of these guys were struggling, and nothing would happen. So they started asking me.

So I started charging to shine the shoes. So I would shine so that it was a French toe, hard toe, and then the hard heel. And so I'd do the heels. I think I was charging fifty cents a [toe] and seventy-five cents for the back and stuff. So I started charging money to do it, and I'd knock them out fast. But they looked

like patent leather, you know. So every time they came for inspection, you know, "Very good, very good." So more and more guys were coming to me. And then the captain started coming to me, who was in charge of our barracks, and he says, "Would it be possible that you could do my shoes?" And then he says, "You could stay up with me and look at TV." So I'd stay up while everybody was asleep, shining shoes looking at TV with the captain there. So anyway, that was an experience at boot camp.

KD: So with your asthma, and you found out you couldn't join the band—

JG: But my asthma. I really suffered with asthma at boot camp. So then came the time—

KD: Now, boot camp for [the] naval reserve, is that all—

JG: It's not the same.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, no, it's not, to us—we'd be marching, and we'd be going all wacky. In other words, nothing was as precise.

KD: But it's like a two- or three-week period or what?

JG: Yeah, it's like a two- or three-week period. They said—they called it . . . I forgot, they had a name for us.

KD: Weekend warriors.

JG: Weekend warriors, I think. So it was just a short boot camp. So the fact that it was short, we didn't march as good as the other people. We didn't do a lot of things as good as the other people. So they'd yell at us, and they'd say, "Oh, they're reserves." "Oh, okay."

KD: But you look good. Or at least your shoes do. *[laughter]*

JG: Oh, yeah. The shoes look really good. *[laughter]* So—

KD: You want to develop a record.

JG: Yeah. So the fact that I got—the minute that I got drafted, they asked, "Do you have a doctor's report on your asthma?" I never went to doctors. I never went to doctors. And so this first time, I said, "No, I've got to start going to a doctor." So I started going to the doctor's. And I went—one time I got very sick, and I went to a doctor, and they gave me a shot. And the doctor was—his name was Dr. Bravo. I don't know if you've heard of the Bravo medical clinic.

IN: It's the medical magnet school.

JG: Magnet school, okay. So he was my doctor. But actually, there were different doctors. There was Dr. Flores, and so I didn't know him by really talking much about . . . So they gave me a shot and then they closed the clinic. And I got really sick. I couldn't breathe. They had to rush me to the emergency at the general hospital. And then the general hospital gave me another shot, and I got worse. I got so bad that they had to put me on oxygen, all kinds of oxygen, and I had to stay there overnight. The first time I ever went to the hospital. So I learned, no more shots for me. I was afraid of shots. But that, all of a sudden, I had a report. I had a report that confirmed how bad my asthma could get. So every time I got asthma I'd go to the doctor, but I said, "No shot. Just give me pills or whatever, but no shots." So I started developing a record of the fact that I had asthma.

And so when Vietnam started . . . Now, Vietnam was already going, but when it really broke out strong, they started calling in the Reserves, and they called in my company. So all the guys in my company were going to Vietnam. And so at that time I went into the office and I told the people in the office, "Uh, what am I going to do if I get sick when I'm on active duty?" And they said, "What do you mean, sick?" And I said, "Yeah, I have asthma." "What do you mean, you have asthma?" He says, "We don't see anything in your report that you have asthma or anything. Do you have any confirmation?" Did I? *[laughter]* I had been going to the doctor all this time. So I brought the records, and Dr. Bravo was a very reputable military doctor at one time. So with his letter, I just got a medical discharge. So I got a medical discharge just before going into Vietnam. And I heard a lot of the guys that I was with got killed over there. So that kept me out of Vietnam.

So all this time, then, I was working at—I was working first at Standard Engraving. And then I didn't go to Broadway, and then Leo, he was a production artist, and Leo Martinez was the one that had the

connections with everyone. So he—then he referred me [to I. Magnin]. He said, “Why don’t you go get the job, and just tell them you get paid this much? And don’t negotiate or anything, just tell them you want this much.” I said, “Leo, I never did production work. I’ve never done any of this. I don’t know any of that stuff. I’m a masker.” David Botello was a masker too. And so I went to I. Magnin, and—

IN: What did he tell you to say?

JG: He says, “Look . . .” Because I said, “I don’t know how to do—I’ve never done it.” He says, “Look, just tell them, ‘I’ll take the job but I’ve got to see the way you guys work, because we have our way of doing it and I just want to see how.’ Just tell them you just want to see how they do it their way, so that you can make sure that you’re doing it the way they do it.” And I said, “Okay.” So I went over there, and I. Magnin was a very prestigious store. And there were nothing, nothing but *gabachos* there, nothing but Anglos. And it was real classy. Real class. They had classy fashion shows there. And there was one woman who was Chicana who worked in the publicity department—oh, yeah. So anyway, I went over and I said that, and I got the job, and I got exactly what I asked for.

So I was now making pretty good money at I. Magnin. And the job was easy, it was production work, but there were certain things that were pretty ridiculous. But anyway, I thought I’d do it anyway, because they were doing it that way. This was before they had type machines and stuff like that to set [type]. We used to have to send out to a type company, and in order to not pay them to do it again, to do a correction, we used to have to cut each little word and paste it up, and it was a real pain. Literally, it’s a cut and paste. So anyway, I got the job. And there was one older woman who was working in the publicity department, and there was one Chicano kid that actually went to Assumption who was working as a box boy down in the bottom, working in shipping and stuff like that. And I was in advertising—advertising is a prestigious department—with the suit and everything, dressed. So I was working in advertising. And there was this one girl that signed me, and she was in the department that hires—

KD: HR? Like human resources?

IN: Personnel?

KD: Personnel?

JG: Personnel, she was in personnel. So she signed me in and everything, and she said, “Looking for lunch? We all get together up in the lunchroom.” She says, “Why don’t you come up and join us?” And I thought it was very nice. So anyway, I went up, and it turned out that they were all guys except for her, and they were all *gabachos*, and it was a big table. And they were all talking to each other, and then I’d say something, and they’d all . . . [turns away]. I mean, as if I didn’t even exist. They totally ignored me. And she’d notice it, and then she’d repeat what I said, in order so that they could respond. And it just went on like that for a few times, and I said, “Forget it, I don’t want to eat with them anyway, I’m going to go on my own.” And they had a real . . . Balloons, I think it was called, real swanky restaurant up in the top. In other words, where we ate with the group was mostly the cafeteria, but there was a real swanky restaurant that I used to love the hot fudge. And they used to serve me the hot fudge in a silver cup with a silver spoon. I mean, you could see—beautiful silver—

IN: Like a goblet?

JG: Like a goblet, yeah. Beautiful. It was very expensive. But anyway, I thought, well, I’m making some money, I could afford a little hot fudge. [laughter] But I couldn’t afford to buy anything there, even though I got like 35 percent.

KD: Right, the discount?

JG: Discount. I couldn’t even afford a tie. The ties were like thirty-five dollars, I remember, at that time. A tie, thirty-five dollars.

KD: So about what year is that when you’re working at—

JG: That was about ‘66, about ‘66. Somewhere around there. Because then, then after I. Magnin, Leo called me. Oh, they—Gold’s Furniture called, was looking for somebody. So Leo went to Gold’s Furniture and left



Broadway. And then Leo called me, and then I went to the Broadway. No, no—I went to Gold’s Furniture with Leo. So we were now, instead of fashion, we were now in the furniture business.

IN: At I. Magnin you saw some swanky fashion shows?

JG: Oh, every month I. Magnin had fashion shows. They had the ramp, and they had all these models—I mean, models that were taller than I was. There were two models, a blonde and brunette, who were short, they were beautiful, both of them. They were, I guess, exceptional. But most of them were gigantic, and they used to walk like a bouncing—sometimes they’d even trip, I’d feel bad for them. But people would come in from the industry, fashion industry, and they’d all sit around there. And it was only by invite to be able to go into the fashion show.

KD: But you were able to—

JG: But because we were in advertising, we went to all of them. And they had some really great artists, fashion artists.

KD: Did you change your style while working there?

JG: In regards to the artwork?

KD: The clothes.

JG: Yeah, well, I wore a suit. I had to wear a suit—I don’t know if I wore a suit, I wasn’t ever too much into suits. Sports coat and a tie. Yeah, but I had to wear it. I think even at Gold’s I still had to wear a coat and tie. But it wasn’t until Gold’s Furniture that . . . When I went to Gold’s Furniture, the boss, his name was Pierfoy, Jerry Pierfoy. And Jerry Pierfoy seemed to be—what do you call it—people who think they’re always sick?

KD: Kleptomaniac? No, not a kleptomaniac. *[laughter]* Hypochondriac. *[laughter]*

JG: Yeah, yeah. *[laughter]* So you’d walk into his office and he had a thermometer in his mouth.

KD: Oh, my goodness.

JG: He was a real cool guy, though. He was really, really good. So then he left Gold’s, and he went to Barker Brothers. He became advertising manager at the Barker Brothers. And the guy that became advertising manager at Gold’s was a young *gabacho* who was actually the son-in-law of McMahan’s [Furniture]. It’s funny that he was actually from [a family of] another furniture company, but yet he was working at Gold’s. And he used to talk about the Arabian horses and all these different things. But anyway, he was a really nice guy. Real nice guy. Very young, tall, good-looking guy. He was really nice. And so by this time, David was coming out of the service, so David needed a job.

KD: Botello.

JG: Yeah. David Botello needed a job. And we didn’t have any there at Gold’s, so I told David, “Go to Barker Brothers and see Jerry Pierfoy, and tell him I sent you there.” And I think I even called Jerry and told him I was sending David, he’s a great artist, and all this other stuff. So David went over there and started working with Barker Brothers, doing production. And little by little, it was the same thing that I would do. But we would do production, but we would—the illustrations would come in from our professional illustrators, and we would touch up, and sometimes if they needed something, we would do it. So then David started doing the same thing over there. So he started doing a lot of illustration, and he got very strong into furniture illustration. So he developed practice on his perspective, so he got a lot of practice on illustration.

So, meanwhile—I forgot what his name was—[Tom] . . . But anyway, my boss at Gold’s Furniture, they were—this is when—about this time, KMEX that had started. Oh, no, but actually, it started in high school, but still it wasn’t very developed. But anyway, there’s a story, before I forget, remind me about Gold’s Furniture. When KMEX first started, since I lived right up the hill from school, I would come up. And the minute I would open the door, my mom would say—I’d say, “Ya vine,” and my mom would say, the first words [she] would say, “Tienes hambre?” And I’d say yes or no. And if I say yes, she says, “Okay, well, sit down and I’ll serve you,” and everything. So all I did was sit down and she started heating up the food, warming the tortillas, getting everything, and I’d just sit down, and all of a sudden, she’d do everything for me. And suddenly, KMEX started, and the novella started, and one day I walked in, and I opened the door,

and I hear from a distance—I say, “Ya vine,” and my mom from a distance says, “Tienes hambre?” and I said, “Si.” And then she yells out, she goes, “En la estufa esta la comida, y no mas calientas las tortillas ayi.” And I went—oh, I was devastated. I went through such confusion that you can’t imagine. I wanted to cuss my mom out.

KD: You never cooked.

JG: I was devastated. I felt hurt, I got mad. I said, “She doesn’t love me anymore, she doesn’t care about me.” And at the same time, I’m mad. “How dare her not do this for me?” And I went through trauma. I started thinking carefully, “Johnny, calm down, you know, think.” And I started thinking real carefully. I started saying, you know, “I can’t cuss her out. The food is there, so why can’t you just serve it?” So I really started thinking very rationally, and I accepted it. From there on, I started fixing everything for myself. I mean, the food was cooked, all I had to do was warm up the tortilla. *[laughter]* But anyway, that was a major shock in my life.

KD: TV and radio changes the family household dynamics.

JG: The novellas. *[laughter]*

IN: The novellas. But for twenty-five years, every time I’ve gone there, Juan always right away jumps in the kitchen, serves himself, washes the dishes. He’ll wash everybody else’s dishes. And so that was a real transforming experience for him, even though he always—

JG: But you know, my mom always had us wash the dishes.

IN: But you go out of your way, beyond—

JG: Yeah. And I always ironed my clothes, because I wanted it great, I wanted it to be perfect. But I hadn’t gone into that area yet. So anyway, in regards to—what was I talking about?

KD: You were talking about Gold’s Furniture, that David—that you referred David to Barker Brothers.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, David then started working at Barker Brothers, and one thing that happened at Gold’s Furniture is that José Feliciano came out with “Light My Fire.” And my boss, he called me in, and he says, “Johnny,” he says, “have you ever heard of José Feliciano?” I say, “Yeah, yeah.” He says, “What do you think? Should we sponsor his show that KMEX is having, a show with José Feliciano performing?” He says, “He’s going to be sitting in a chair just playing his guitar alone with whatever, and they want us to sponsor it.” He says, “Well, what do you think? Do you think he’s good enough?” I said, “Yeah, do it!” So I had some influence in sponsoring José Feliciano’s first TV show. And the TV show was basically just him sitting—and I think he had a dog, a seeing eye dog right next to him, but that was all. Just—so it was a simple show, it wasn’t a very expensive show. But anyway, we became the first sponsors of that TV show.

KD: And are you starting to see that Mexicanos are—

JG: Well, now, he was a Latino that made it. And but still, it wasn’t—it still wasn’t hitting me that much. I wasn’t seeing enough of it.

IN: Was that where you ran into the guy who—

JG: Yeah. So then it was—since it was a furniture company, we had this illustrator. He was French, his name was Jacques.

KD: Jacques.

JG: Jacques. And he used to come in once a week, or once a month, and bring in illustrations. Double spread, color illustrations of living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, whatever it is. He used to get paid a lot. He used to get paid real well. And so he’d come in all the time. And at this time, also what I was doing, what had happened, my dad had also expanded the house, the house that we had was originally two bedrooms and a bathroom. And when we moved in, I used to sleep on the back porch on the foldout bed. And so now, my dad was adding another—a back porch, a garage, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. He was a carpenter, so he was going to build the whole thing. He had a friend of the family, Joe Urzúa’s brother-in-law, [Victor. He] helped with the blueprints and stuff like that.

IN: And Joe Urzúa’s father was the co-warden [to a women’s prison] in Aguascalientes [with your father].

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, he helped with the blueprints. And my dad [designed the plans]. You know, by this time my brother was a great cabinetmaker, he took cabinet making at Don Bosco. But Don Bosco was almost like a junior college. They started at eight o'clock and got out at four o'clock. Half of the school day was all shop, and the other half was all academics and things like that. I mean, he was coming over with trigonometry and all these different—like, wow. So he [had gotten]—it was a great, great education. So he became a really great cabinet-maker.

So between my brother and I, we did the cabinets for the bathroom. So we didn't buy them, we did them custom made. But of course, my brother was the lead on it. I didn't know that much about cabinets. So we had—we added to the house. So the house was now really much larger. And so I was now going to have a bedroom. So in regards to the bedroom, I was laying out a plan of how to make my bedroom into a recording studio. And my younger brother also had to sleep in the bedroom, so I had to have . . . So my dad was giving me an area of about nine by twelve to have. He says, "You can do whatever you want in there. This is your space." And then my mom said, "But I want a window, because I want the air to come in to the kitchen." Because before it was a whole door that would open into the kitchen [from the back porch and laundry room]. But now they were blocking off the kitchen from the hall to build my bedroom. And I said, "Mom, how could I have a window looking into my bedroom?" [laughter] She says, "Well, I want air, I want ventilation."

So anyway, I strategized in building this James Bond room, with sliding mirrors that went up and enclosed the whole window, and panels that would shoot out of the closet, folding beds, speakers out of the walls. Seats that would come out of walls, bunk beds that were like with cabinets all inside to put away the microphone, the amplifiers, I had wiring for microphones, to plug in microphones into the wall. I had cabinets for all the recording equipment. Insulation, I insulated the whole [room to be sound proof]. And so the problem now is that my dad insisted on having the door into my bedroom in the center. And I said, "No, no, no. My plans, it's got to be in the side, because I've got to put the piano right there." He says, "No, no, no. It has to be in the center." So he insisted on the center, and I said, "No, it can't be in the center." So when he went to work, I moved the door. [laughter] I moved the door so that the wall, you know, it would just—the form.

So I moved the door [frame] exactly to where I wanted it. And when he came back, he panicked, but he said, "Well, okay." Because I think just before that, I had built [a fire place]. I wanted to make the living room into real custom—with certain cabinets and built-in chairs and stuff like that, and he said, "No, no, no. We don't want all this stuff." But I had a beautiful fireplace that I had designed, too, and they said, "Well, if you want to built it, you can build the fireplace." And I said, "Oh, okay. Great." So I went to the building supply store to find out how I could mix cement, and how I could . . . I never did anything with—

KD: This is all new to you.

JG: So I went and bought all this white rock, all white rock, beautiful white rock. It almost looked like flint, you know, with the white. So this gigantic. I piled that into the trunk of the car and bought loads of white rock. And I asked them how I could mix the cement, so they told me how I could mix cement. So I built a beautiful—and it's still there. It's still there. But our neighbor, La Cara, was a mason, and worked on masonry, and my uncle was a tile setter and also worked on masonry, and they both started telling my dad, "You're crazy to let him do that. The house is going to collapse, it's too much weight." My dad says, "Well, if the house collapses, I'll put it up again." He was real cool about it. So I built this fireplace, this beautiful white stone with black. [Black cement was holding everything together in between all the white rocks.]

IN: It's still there.

KD: And this is at the time where you're working—

JG: Yeah, working at probably—maybe Standard Engraving first, I think I did that first.

KD: So right after high school, that period.

JG: Yeah, uh-huh.

- KD: And help me understand, just chronologically. You work with the bands, and that's during high school, a little bit after high school. And you get the engraving—you get into the advertising business, basically—
- JG: At the same time that I had the band.
- KD: At the same time.
- JG: Yeah, at the same time.
- KD: Okay.
- JG: Because they let me go on Friday nights to go perform, yeah.
- KD: And how much overlap? I mean, that's a pretty busy schedule you're running. *[laughter]* You're working days and nights, pretty much.
- JG: Yeah, and I would be building. So anyway, I managed to design this bedroom where it was all insulated. I had a little light out in the hallway that I could turn on and off if I'm recording. I had these drapes that were—it was felt insulated with rubber, and it was blue velvet. So the blue velvet drapes were really nice—
- IN: Well, silk, wasn't it silk on one—
- JG: Oh, silk. Yeah. Silk, silk, silk, yeah.
- IN: Silk and velvet.
- JG: And then the backing of the—I built cabinets for the closet, and to put gigantic speakers up on top. And then I had switches in the walls, and I just—
- IN: And when you go in bed, you had all the switches right—
- JG: Yeah, I had switches right—
- IN: Convenient.
- JG: So the speakers were right—I'd go into the cabinet, my head would go into the cabinets, part of the cabinets, and the speakers were right by me. There were smaller speakers right by me, and I had all the switches right on the wall here. And if I wanted the big speakers, they were going to be put on the wall, in the other side of the wall. So if I wanted to hear full music, it would be the big speakers and the small speakers. So I had switches for all kinds of speakers, I just went wild.
- IN: We have the original drawing.
- KD: Was this—I mean, did you really see yourself going into music for like rest of your life? That was your—or this was a young man's kind of like, fantasy. Because you said "James Bond" at one point.
- JG: Yeah, well, it was like a James Bond room. I love architecture. I love building. I really enjoy building a lot. And what it is, is when there's a need. When there's a need, it becomes a challenge, and I really want to make it happen. Every time I see a need.
- KD: And how does your family respond? Not—I mean, you told me about your dad and the door. *[laughter]* But they were encouraging of this, or . . .
- JG: Oh, yeah. They all loved it.
- KD: Really?
- JG: Oh, they all had a ball with me just coming up all these bright ideas. *[laughter]* And my dad got a kick out of it too, because he said I'm just like his dad. He says his dad—he used to call it *ideando*, just coming up with ideas. But he got a kick out of it.
- IN: I mean, his sisters still talk about that room, that it was just this awesome thing to see this exciting environment being created in their home.
- JG: Yeah. So it was all insulated. So I could sing, I could play my music full blast while everybody was asleep, sound asleep because I was on the opposite side of the hall. So [my bedroom] was the only thing [on one side of the house]. In other words, it was [once] the back porch, my bedroom, and the kitchen was on this side [the same side] of the hall, and the three bedrooms were on the other side of the hall.
- KD: Wow.
- IN: And the door was insulated.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: What did you stuff the door with, fiberglass?

JG: Fiberglass. They had those doors with wood on both sides. It was—and I drilled, and I stuffed fiberglass in there. And the door was getting fatter and fatter. So I started pulling it, [the fiberglass], out a little bit so I could get it, [the door], a little skinnier [again, as it originally was supposed to be]. Because I was shoving [the fiberglass] in so much. *[laughter]* And I had cork all over the walls [as wall paneling] on one side, and the other side of the wall is the—the drape. I would pull this drape all the way across the door, too. So it would just really insulate it so I could play my music.

KD: And you contributed to that, those materials, I would imagine?

JG: Oh, I bought everything. Oh, yeah. No, I bought everything. I bought everything.

KD: And did the room get used as a studio? Did you have rehearsals in there as well?

JG: No, I never had the musicians. No, what it is, and I was going to tell you that, I was building the bedroom, and I was building it to look like a ship, rustic like a ship, because I used—

IN: With portholes—

KD: Okay.

JG: Yeah, I don't know if you remember, there was—at one time, there was some clocks that were real famous that were ships with metal, and so we had one of those and I took out the clock [that looked like a ship steering wheel], and I put it right on the cabinet, and then I cut out holes for it, switches, I don't know, I had all kinds of different things. And the amplifier was up there, and in the bottom was to put away all the records and stuff like that. Now, those cabinets I built myself, and they were built right into the walls. As a matter of fact, my sister was just telling me, just this week, I think, she says, "We're going to be taking out that cabinet at the top," because my little brother—my little brother has Down syndrome, and so anyway, he loads it up with all kinds of stuff, he really got into music too. So anyway, they're saying it's just too cluttered, so we want to be able to remove some of that stuff."

IN: This is how many years later? *[laughter]*

JG: Oh, tons of years.

IN: Forty years later.

JG: Yeah. As a matter of fact, my dad eventually took out the bunk beds that I had built, so my brother could have a regular bed.

IN: But while you were building, you met Jacques.

JG: While I was building it, I was working at Standard Engraving—I mean, at Gold's Furniture. And I was in heaven. Building—I loved to build. I really enjoyed building a lot. And so I was in heaven building, and Saturdays, I'd just run around looking for things to be able to do [to add to my room]. The seats that came out of the wall, I'd build it so that the hole was inside the wall, and it would just be wood that was flushed against the wall. When you pulled it [the seat] out [of the wall], it was red velvet cushion here [on the seat] and in the back, and the backrest would move forward, because it had some gears, something that would move—in other words, if it was like this, it would go like this. So the backing where I sat would sit like that.

IN: So it had a backrest—

JG: Yeah, so it had a backrest.

KD: Right, not just a piece of wood flopping out of the wall, but a full chair, a full seat with a backrest.

JG: Yeah. [And red velvet cushioning.] And it was going to be black chains sort of holding it, but it was actually the gear that was pulling everything out. And the bed was going to have black wrought iron chain, and—in other words, it was going to give a feeling of being inside a ship.

So while I was building all of this, Jacques was bringing in the artwork. And one day, he comes in, and he says, "Adios," he says, "I'm off. I won't be seeing you guys anymore." "What, what, what, what?" He says, "My ship is built." He—because he had told us that he was having a boat built in China, because . . . And you know, I guess we just didn't pay a lot of attention. He's having a boat built in China, you know. So anyway, and he had a daughter, his wife and a little daughter. And he says, "So I'm going to sell my house, I'm going to be living on my boat and just traveling the world." I said, "What?" I said, "So how do you know

how to sail this ship?" He says, "I was a Merchant Marine for many years." And I said, "Gee-e-e." I was so jealous. I said, "Boy, I'd sure love to be able to do that." He says, "So why don't you do it? You're not married." "Oh, but I can't do it, because . . ." I said, "I'm working on my room right now, and I want to be able to build it." He says, "Well, it's an excuse, so that means you don't want to go." I said, "Yeah, but I'm doing this." "But that's an excuse." So everything I said was an excuse. And I started thinking, "Gee, maybe it is an excuse." [laughter] Because he started saying, "If you really want to go, you'd go. You can't use these things as an excuse." And I said, "Wow." So I started thinking, I want to go. [laughter]

So the first thing I did, I didn't know anybody who had ever traveled to Europe. I didn't know anybody, but I knew one of the brothers [at Salesian] who was a Chicano, and he was from San Pedro, and he was a redhead, and *güero, güero, güero* [light-complexioned]. And he was a young kid, his name was Marcus, Victor Marcus. And he—and when he got mad, his face would turn red, red, red, red. His face would match his hair when he got mad. And I knew that he had gone to Europe to Italy to become a priest. He had been a brother for so many years, and then he went to Europe to become a priest, and he came back to Salesian. I said, "I'll go talk to him." I needed to talk to somebody that went to Europe.

So he says, "Oh, yeah, you've got to go over there. It's beautiful in Italy," and this and that and that and this. He says, "Just get your passport," and all of this. I think he knew that I wasn't an American citizen, so I couldn't get a passport. I said, "Oh, my gosh." I said to him, "Well, I guess I'll just get a Mexican passport." So I tried to get a Mexican passport, and they said you have to serve in the military for a certain amount of time. And I said, "To go to Mexico to serve in the military so I can get my passport?" I said, "No, forget it." I said, "Well, I guess I have to become an American citizen." And I never thought of becoming an American citizen, because I never saw anything that I could vote for. There was no Latinos, there was nothing that I knew about that was going to help me, there was nothing encouraging to vote for.

And so I thought, "Well . . ." And he says, "No, you have to become an American citizen. You have to become . . ." He says, "If you go as a Mexican citizen, you're going to be struggling, it's going to be very confusing." He says, "You've got to go as an American citizen. A lot of things will open up for you."

KD: I'm sorry to interrupt. So you weren't involved in the Viva Kennedy clubs then, electing John F. Kennedy to the presidency?

JG: No.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: No. No, no, I wasn't.

KD: No canvassing, no—

JG: I wasn't much into politics. When I was driving at Standard—well, Kennedy was killed, what, in '63?

KD: Sixty-three.

JG: Sixty-three. Okay, I remember that. But the other thing was when the Watts Riots, they were in—about '65?

KD: Yeah.

JG: Somewhere in '65. Well, when I was driving, I remember seeing everything on fire. [I was still working at Standard Engraving at that time and so was Johnny De Luna who later became El Chicano's drummer. But Johnny had to make a delivery into the riot area and I was lucky to just see the fire from the freeway.] But Frank Quemada, our bass player, lived right on Central, and his dad had a print shop. And he was a great mechanic. Frank was a real good mechanic, he was building his own car, a really nice Model T truck that he was going to call the Pink Panther. And I remember him being on the phone with me [that night], describing everything. He says, "You know, the soldiers are coming down the street, there's these guys shooting." So he was looking out the window [from the second floor], describing all the scenes to me. And he wasn't about to walk out. But you were asking about—

KD: Kennedy, because a lot of the Catholics—a lot of the Catholics were mostly—and especially Latinos, Mexicans were involved, because he was Catholic.

IN: But you were in high school, you would have been in high school.



- JG: Yeah, politically, I knew nothing, unfortunately.
- IN: And your parents and your brothers and sisters—
- JG: And the other thing—no, they didn't talk much about it. We weren't—you know, I knew about Kennedy. I knew that Kennedy came to East LA College, and it was exciting, but I never thought of voting, or—
- KD: Yeah, that's okay. I was just curious, when you said you had no reason to vote, I was—if that was a part of your experience.
- JG: Yeah, I wasn't very much exposed to the community. It was like, the most prominent people I knew were the priests. I knew very little about the community at that time. It was the bands, that's how I knew all—the bands was the key thing for me.
- KD: So—I'm sorry, I interrupted your story about the priest that was giving you advice to get your passport, get your citizenship together, so you can be an American traveling.
- JG: Yeah, so he was saying, "You've got to become an American citizen." So I decided, "Okay, well, I'll become an American citizen," so this way I could travel. So then I went and registered and took my test and everything. And when—one of the things they asked me is about the Constitution and all that, and they said, "Do you know anything about the preamble?" And I said, from grammar school, I remembered, "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our prosperity, do ordain in this Constitution . . ." *[laughter]*
- KD: Bravo. *[laughter]* Oh, you have the whole thing memorized, my goodness. *[laughter]*
- JG: That was from grammar school. *[laughter]*
- IN: Yeah, wow.
- JG: So all of them said, "Wow. Okay, okay. Well, you passed."
- KD: Passed that part. *[laughter]*
- JG: He says, "Now, you just have to wait nine months to be able to get sworn in with everybody else." I said, "Nine months?" I said, "Well, I'll get to save more money." So all this time that I was thinking of traveling, there was this other guy from Salesian who I used to travel with every so often. We used to go on vacation. We'd drive up north, and we'd drive to Lake Tahoe, and we drove to Utah, and the grand canyons. And his name was Charlie Barcelata.
- KD: These camping trips, then, these aren't—when you said—
- JG: No, no. Well—
- KD: Okay.
- JG: Yeah, I guess it was a combination. You know, we'd stay in motels, we'd stay in the car, we'd camp out. As a matter of fact, I've got a picture of one of the days that we camped out, and I put a can of spaghetti and meatballs in the fire and it blew up, and it hit me. And Charlie took a picture of the meatballs on me, the spaghetti. *[laughter]* So anyway, we'd travel, and we'd go . . . It was another guy named Paul, who was Sal's brother-in-law, which Danny and Susan know very well. But anyway, every so often, we'd take a trip, like the one that we were going to take with Bobby when we went to Lake Arrowhead. So—I forgot, what was the point of that?
- IN: You were saving your money . . . Oh, okay, you had to wait nine months.
- JG: Yeah, okay.
- IN: So were you working on your bedroom all this time, or were you just focusing now on getting ready to leave?
- JG: Oh, no, no. I kept on working. I wanted to try and finish it. Yeah, no, I was having a ball building it. As a matter of fact, when I was in Gold's Furniture, Dustin Hoffman's father used to come in and sell furniture to Gold's. He used to represent a manufacturer, and he used to come every so often, Dustin Hoffman's father.
- IN: Oh, Barcelata. Barcelata.
- JG: Yeah. But the other thing about Gold's Furniture . . . What was I going to say? Oh, oh yeah. But I was talking to one of the—I don't know if he's in charge of publicity or one of the department of Gold's that had—was

able to get some other exotic furniture and stuff into the home magazine. Home magazine had—it was *LA Times* home magazine. And they said—and I showed them a drawing of what I had and told them about my bedroom and what I was doing. And he says, “Well, look at—finish it up.” And he says, “Give it to me, and I’ll try and get it into home magazine.” So that’s why I was real excited about also trying to finish it. He got very impressed with the whole gadgets and everything, and the color. So I was excited about still finishing it. But—

IN: But in the meantime, your friend Barcelata—

JG: I was still saving money. But also, Charlie Barcelata had gone, he was in Germany. I think he was in [Vietnam or] Germany. He had been drafted, and he went to [Vietnam or] Germany. And he was my traveling partner that I used to travel a lot with. So while I was waiting for the ninth month [and] I was saving money, Charlie wrote me, and he says, “Look, I’m going to be finishing my military duty in so-and-so month.” He says, “Why don’t we meet in Europe? I’ll meet you there, and then we’ll just travel throughout Europe.” I said, “Great.” He says, “So you find a way how you can be able to get down there. And then, you know, we’ll just travel throughout Europe.” So it was great, because now I got my traveling partner again, and it was becoming a reality.

So I started doing research on it, and then I found that—a deal about a Greek ship that was going to go from New York to South Hampton, England, for a hundred seventy-five dollars. A nine-day cruise for a hundred seventy-five dollars. And I said, “Wow!” So all I had to do was try and figure out how to get to New York. So then I did some more research, and I found out that there was this company that delivered your car back east if you didn’t want to drive it. You leave it with them, and they have somebody drive it over there. So—which meant that I didn’t have to pay anything, so I got that car, and it happened to be a professor in [Princeton University].

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen Davalos, and we’re on side B of tape 4, and today is the [November] 4, and Johnny Gonzalez was talking about his method of transportation to New York, in a company that just has people drive their cars.

JG: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KD: Go ahead. So it was a Princeton University—

JG: Yeah, it was Princeton University. And so anyway, we got his car. Our job was to deliver it to Princeton University.

IN: Now, very quickly, before I forget, Charlie Barcelata met your dad—

JG: Oh, yeah, so anyway—

IN: And your dad asked him—

JG: Charlie came over—well, no, actually, it wasn’t yet. I was just figuring out how to be able to do it, [travel]. So anyway, I found out about this place [that could help us get to New York at no cost], and I said, “Gee, so now to eat.” In other words, all I have to do is pay for gas. And at that time, gas was like twenty-some cents a gallon, because I remember them saying that in France, it was like forty cents. And I said, “Wow, it’s really expensive in France.” So I figured out exactly how to be able to travel. And I thought, “Gee, I could by V8 juice, and—”

IN: Beef jerky.

JG: And beef jerky. And I could live on that, I could just eat that all the way. Because I was reading all these books. And there was Frommer’s travel “on five dollars a day” [series] and *Europe on \$5 a Day*. I said, “Well, I’ve got to beat them.” [laughter] So anyway, I figured out how to do all this. And then Charlie writes to me, and he says, “Guess what? They’re sending me home. So I’m going to come home, and then we’ll leave together.” So then he comes home. And he comes over and meets the family, because we’re discussing how to travel and all that. And my dad says, “Barcelata.” He says, “So are you any relation to Lorenzo Barcelata?” He says, “Yeah, he’s my uncle.”

IN: Who wrote what song?

JG: Who wrote “Maria Elena” [“El Cascabel”], and “Allá en el Rancho Grande.”

And Charlie was always at our dances. He'd be the first one there. He was always an early bird, he was always a very early bird. As a matter of fact, when we traveled, when we went to Las Vegas and things like that, he'd leave where we were at early to go to sleep. But he'd get up real early. And I remember one day when we were in Las Vegas he left early and I stayed behind, and I was in one of the lounges with a black comedian, a very famous black comedian. I forget his name [Nipsey Russell], but he got into health and stuff like that too. And we were listening in to Los Hermanos Castro.

And after we finished—and I was drinking those margaritas, whatever it was—and after we both left, we said goodbye. And he walked one direction and I walked the other direction. And I'm looking, and I said, "The parking lot's gone [and so is Las Vegas]. There's nothing but desert." I happened to walk through the back of the casino, and I lost everything. [laughter] But anyway, it was funny. When I got home I turned on the TV, and all of a sudden I hear Charlie going "Ah-h-h," [while stretching his arms as if the morning sun was coming out and it was time to get up, just like the roosters], and I quickly turned it off. [laughter] In other words, the minute he saw light, he started waking up. [laughter]

IN: But your trip, when you guys started driving, you went together. There was actually one other story about a famous black singer who came to your house—

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: Before you get into—

JG: Billy Ward. When the group had already—when the Four Js had already broken up, and I was taking classes, a friend of mine, a friend of mine that was a songwriter . . . He was a gardener trying to become a songwriter, but he knew a lot of famous people. He used to do Johnny Mathis's yard, and all kinds of famous people. And he had a lot of songs. So, you know, he used to show it to them, and they used to like them. And so he referred me to a famous singer by the name of Billy Ward. Billy Ward was famous for his group, Billy Ward and [His] Dominoes. And they made "Stardust," the—a hip version of "Stardust," and it became a big hit.

So Billy Ward, one time I got this call, and he says, you know, "My name's Billy Ward. I'm putting a whole show together to go to the Orient. And they told me that you're a singer, and that you're able to do some Mexican songs." And he said, "So do you know how to sing 'Cucurrucucu'?" And I said, "Yeah, yeah, I know how to sing it." "Okay, but you need to play the guitar, too." And I never played the huapango. I was doing basically American songs. I didn't do the huapango. It was just an awkward rhythm for me to play and sing at the same time. And it was interesting, because I didn't want . . . I started working on the huapango like crazy, but I didn't want to miss out on cruising Whittier Boulevard. Because at that time we were all cruising Whittier Boulevard. And so I'd park out there by where Target is, or Unimart was, and I'd get my guitar and just sit in the car working at my huapango while everybody was cruising back and forth.

IN: But back to Billy Ward.

JG: Yeah, this has to do with Billy Ward. So anyway, I was working real hard to try to get myself ready for Billy Ward. And I said, "Wow, this would be a great experience." But I was concerned because I hadn't done the guitar and sang at the same time. And I said, "But I'm going to try to take it on anyway." So anyway, we had the appointments set up for something like seven o'clock in the evening. Something like that, he would be coming. So I gave him instructions. East LA—he'd never even heard of East LA. So he says, "Okay, I'll be down about seven o'clock." So anyway, seven o'clock came and I said . . . I was all nervous, you know, I'm going to be singing. Billy Ward is coming to my house, so I'm all nervous. And all of a sudden, eight o'clock comes, and nine o'clock comes, and there's no Billy Ward.

And all of a sudden, I get a call, and he says, "Johnny?" He says, "I got off on Seventh Street, and I turned a right and everything like you said," he says, "but I can't find [your street]." I said, "Well . . ." Why, you know, I couldn't understand. He says, "Well . . ." "It's just right past downtown, you know. It's only five minutes away, and you get off on this . . ." He says, "What do you mean, five minutes away?" He says, "I drove a half hour and I got off on Seventh Street." "You did?" He says, "Well, isn't it Seventh Street in Santa Ana?" I said, "No, it's just right off downtown." [laughter] So he went all the way to Santa Ana, Seventh Street in Santa Ana.

KD: You probably said the Santa Ana Freeway.

JG: Oh, maybe, yeah, maybe the Santa Ana—I don't know, maybe. Yeah, maybe. So he came all the way. So, eleven o'clock at night, he got to the house. So I'm singing "Cucurrucucu," and playing the guitar, and he had an Asian girlfriend with him. And so anyway. And I'm anxious to hear. And he says—later on he calls and says, "I'm sorry, but you're—it just wasn't the quality that we want, because of the guitar and all that." And then I thought, "Oh." So he says—and all of a sudden, it hit me. I said, "I lost out on going to the Orient because I didn't know how to play Mexican music? A black is telling me that I lost out because I can't—to go to the Orient." And after that, then I started getting more into my Mexican music, too.

So by the time—I'll continue on the ship. So anyway, that was the first time that I experienced really feeling that I was losing out from not knowing more about my culture, being a part . . . I enjoyed singing it, but I never really got into the guitar. And so anyway, that was the first experience. So anyway, back to Jacques, when—

KD: Well, when you took the car to New York.

JG: Okay, so then we finally drove to New York and lived on beef jerky. But what's his name, Charlie, couldn't take it at times, you know. I guess both of us wanted to stop in at a restaurant and eat. And we'd sleep in the car. So we finally got to Princeton. And we were so excited, being in a university, you know. I didn't know anything about universities. I didn't know anything. And as a matter of fact, when . . . I don't know if—I recall that I had gone to Burdick, a little creek, and I went swimming with Ernie. We went—and it was right by Cal State, and this is in '50.

KD: Cal State LA.

JG: Cal State LA. And this is the early '50s, which means that Cal State was a little tiny school at that time. I knew nothing about Cal State or anything like that. But anyway, I don't know if I recall mentioning Burdick—

KD: I don't think so.

JG: I had just gotten my social security [card]. I went with Ernie to go get my social security, and because I was out in the street, I decided to take advantage and go exploring. And so we went walking down Burdick, and we got into this big swimming hole that was right underneath the bridge that went towards—right around the area of Cal State. And there was a big board, maybe it was—

KD: Like a raft.

JG: Like a raft, made of doors and stuff like that. And I said, "Wow, this is exciting!" And so I got on the raft alone, with all my clothes, and I went towards the middle of Burdick. And all of [a] sudden it started sinking, and I said, "Uh oh." I started trying to balance, and the more I tried to balance it, the more it would . . . So boom, it sunk, and I went down with all my clothes. So my brand-new social security card, my name that I signed was all smeared. And I still have it smeared. I still have that social security card.

IN: But Cal State LA was right there, and—

JG: But Cal—

KD: You had no—

JG: I never heard anything about college. I never knew anything about colleges.

KD: They weren't talking about it at Salesian.

JG: Nah, in regards to—no, in Salesian they had college prep, but I had really no idea what . . . I thought you had to be real, real smart, because the people that were in college prep from Assumption were the two smartest guys. And I thought you had to be really exceptionally smart to go to college. And I had really no idea what it was. And the other thing is, they gave me tests. One time some outside company came in to test the kids to see what potential they had and stuff like that. So after they interviewed me they said, "Well, you know what, you have the possibility, the type of job you could get is with a telephone company climbing the telephone poles." So that's what they advised me that I could do.

There wasn't much direction. When I was graduating from high school, I didn't know about any careers, no careers. And that's why Irma Núñez and I had focused now so much on being able to go to school and talk to kids about different careers and different things. I knew nothing about any careers. Man,

*what I've learned now. I just say, "Gosh." I look back—I would have been so confused about so many different things that I could take. There's so many great opportunities.*

KD: So at Princeton, this was your first time that you were on a university campus.

JG: Yes. So it was the first time I was in a university. No, but I was going to talk about going back to getting—leaving high school. That the only thing I thought about was becoming an artist. It's the only thing that was on my mind.

So I took a test. I went to Trade Tech to take a test in art. And when I went in to Trade Tech, I was the only Mexicano in there. The only Latino, Mexicano, whatever you want to call it. And all the rest were Anglos. And this is the first time I left East LA to go out into that area. And they told us, "Draw bottles from different angles." That was one part of the test. And all of [a] sudden, I see all of these people taking out bottles [secretly out of their pockets] and passing them around. They've got little tiny bottles, miniature, they look like soda bottles, and they'd be looking at them [secretly] and drawing them at different angles. And I was so depressed. I said, "Gee, a bunch of cheaters and Anglos." I didn't know anything about it. So they probably knew what the test was going to be about. I didn't know anything about that. First of all, I was intimidated, going to Trade Tech to take a test. And then on top of that, they're all passing these bottles. They had bottles, and some were passing them around [underneath the desks]. And that devastated me.

I felt—so later on, I was waiting for the results of my test. They never sent it. They never sent it. And I wasn't assertive enough, and I never followed up. Or I guess I was just so bugged at it that I never went to school [to check if I passed, since I didn't know how long I had to wait].

IN: And I think it was just this year that your older sister found out that you had tried to go to college.

JG: Yeah, no, I don't know if they—if any of them knew about it.

IN: Well, I remember you talking to Rebecca and Licha, and Rebecca said she never knew you had gone to Trade Tech to try to go to school.

JG: Yeah, I don't think I—probably if I would have communicated it, maybe they would have said something. But we weren't—you know, we didn't have . . . My dad worked for I don't know how many years, almost twenty years or something like that, at Gillespie Furniture Company, and they let him go. They let him go. And they said, "Your machine broke, so we have no need for you anymore." And my dad was devastated. All of [a] sudden, he couldn't find a job doing quality furniture. And he had to go out and start doing—what do you call it?—spools to roll up cable wire.

IN: For telephone lines?

JG: Yeah. I mean, real cheap stuff.

KD: Right. Putting together those large spools—

JG: Yeah.

IN: So they never gave him retirement.

KD: Right.

JG: Yeah. And so we didn't know a lot about . . . I think my older brother tried—

IN: But I think you said your parents wanted you to have the best education possible, and in their mind, it was Catholic school.

JG: Yeah, Catholic school.

IN: That—that was the best education.

JG: Yeah. To go to college, we had nobody that—I don't think we knew anybody that had never gone to college.

KD: Is the next adventure going to Europe?

IN: Yeah.

JG: Yeah.

KD: So I think this is a perfect—

IN: Pause here?

KD: Okay. Thank you. You've been talking so long today, I think [it is time for a break].

## NOVEMBER 11, 2007

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez, his archivist. Today is November 11, 2007, and we're at UCLA. And Johnny had some comments he wanted to begin with. We had been talking about the musical work he had done in Los Angeles. And before we go on to his travels to Europe, he wanted to make some clarifications. Go ahead.

JG: Yeah. There's only one thing about Assumption, when I was thirteen years old. There's only one point that I think was interesting, is that when I was about thirteen or fourteen, there was one of my schoolmates, Charles Canales, and he was getting into horseback riding. And he had invited me, and I said, "Oh, that's great." But I didn't get to go a few times. Finally I decided I was going to go, and I was getting all excited about being a cowboy just like Hopalong Cassidy, and I was really prepared to become a great rider. So anyway, I went with him. And this was out around Pico Rivera, between Montebello and Pico Rivera, by the river. They had a lot of stables there. So anyway, I went with him. We got on the horse. I jumped on the horse and felt great, and before you know it, the horse took off running, a runaway horse. It ran out into the dirt and then into the street, and it started fast into the street. I was struggling to try to stay on. I was scared to death I was going to fall into the street.

IN: About how old were you at that time?

JG: About thirteen or fourteen years old. So one of the persons from the stables [on his horse] ran out there and caught the horse. And that was the end of my cowboy days. *[laughter]* So anyway, in regards to the music, I had mentioned Tony Garcia, who was so influential in getting Bill Taggart, the music teacher, to start doing music that related to the community and to the musicians there.

And actually, Tony Garcia also had his own band. Right after he quit Johnny Gamboa and the Crowns he started his own band called the Mystics. And later on he became one of Thee Midnites also, and then started performing . . . Now he performs with the—the last time we saw him performing he was backing up Frankie Lane, the famous singer that just passed away recently. But [now he plays] any place with the big bands. Tommy Dorsey and all those other ones. And his younger brother, Bobby Loya, who he strongly influenced to get into [music], is a trumpet player. And he played with us a few times. We were preparing, I think, summertime—

IN: He played with you, meaning the Leggeriors?

JG: The Leggeriors. And then the Blue Satins was formulating, and then he went with the Blue Satins for a long time. So he was a standard with the Blue Satins. When the Blue Satins broke up, then he went with Thee Midnites. And he played also for a long time with Tierra.

IN: And so Bobby Loya and Tony Garcia are—

JG: Are brothers, yeah. Bobby Loya's his younger brother. And they both are now very respected musicians who play with major bands. He [Bobby] played with Poncho Sanchez also. And one of the musicians that I miss from Johnny and the Crowns was Ronny Figueroa. Ronny Figueroa played piano and congas with Johnny and the Crowns. And actually, after Johnny broke up, [Ronny] became one of Thee Midnites. And actually, Ronnie was also at Salesian with us. And he used to have a high, squeaky laugh and yell which he used to do, which turned out to be the introduction to the song "Whittier Boulevard." Which he became a member of also. And I had left him out last time.

And so there's a funny story in regards to Johnny Gamboa and myself. Johnny Gamboa one time came to me and said, "You want to go in fifty-fifty in a car that I want to buy?" The car was fifty dollars, so it was going to be twenty-five dollars [each]. And it was an old Packard-like car, but it was beautiful. It was a metallic-green car. And it was one of those that I see on Humphrey Bogart movies all the time. Real old, but it was very nice, and so I said, "Sure." And at that time, I had lost my driver's license because I had an accident without having a driver's license. I had a permit, and I was driving with somebody else that had a permit. I was actually driving with Ernie, the singer, who had a permit. So I lost my driver's license. So I said, "Great! We could go cruising." At that time, Whittier Boulevard was very popular, so we'd cruise



Whittier. So I said, “Yeah, sure.” So the fact that he had the license, he took it [the car] home. And so one day he came, and I said, “So where’s the car?” He said, “I had to sell it.” I said, “Oh.”

IN: How much did you pay him for it?

JG: No, we both pitched in twenty-five dollars each.

IN: And that bought a car. *[laughter]*

JG: Yeah. So anyway, he said he had to sell it, and he just “se quedo muy calladito”—never said anything. So anyway, I just let it go.

IN: And you were waiting for your 50 percent.

JG: Yeah. But anyway, I just let it go. [It was no big deal.] And it turned out that about, what is it, forty years later, when we were doing—[going to perform for] the first Salesian concert—

IN: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Reunion.

JG: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Reunion [that I was supposed to perform in]. But I had an accident. I was in the hospital. Irma went over there to talk to the musicians and tell them that I had had an accident. And so anyway, she talked to Johnny [Gamboa]. Or that’s when you [Irma] first met Johnny, one of the times that you met Johnny.

IN: Yeah. Gamboa.

JG: After a lot of years—she actually met him many years before, but I think she didn’t remember him. But when she met him, she says, “Oh, yes, so you’re Johnny [Gamboa], the one that bought the green car with Johnny.” And he says, “So he’s still with that? He still has that hang-up on that?”

KD: Because you never got your cut?

JG: Yeah. And it turned out.

IN: Well, I told him that you had never said anything negative about it. [But] because [Johnny Gamboa] always wears sunglasses, so I said [jokingly], “Underneath those shades, I see some guilt.” *[laughter]*

JG: And I said that every time I saw that Humphrey Bogart movie—I think it’s *To Have or Have Not*—they always have that car in there, so I always mention it to Irma. So anyway, he then confessed. And he told her, “You know, actually . . .” He was real quiet for awhile, and he said, “Actually, you know what it is, is that what happened is I had bought the car without my father’s permission. And I used to take it and park it away from the house, so he never knew I had it.”

KD: So Johnny Gamboa’s father never knew that he had it.

JG: Yeah. And I don’t know if you remember that I said at Cooper’s Donuts, they always used to go early. And Johnny was one that always used to ride with his father. So now he told his father, “It’s all right, I’m going to be taking the bus.” So for a few weeks . . . His father got suspicious after a few times that he wasn’t going with him. So he followed Johnny one day, and he saw it and he caught him, and he made him sell it.

IN: But he actually said, I think it was, he, [Johnny Gamboa’s father, who] locked it behind the gates for a while, before he finally sold it.

JG: Yeah. And later I found out that it was actually Charlie Garcia, Little Willie G’s brother, that [originally] sold it to Johnny Gamboa. *[laughter]*

KD: But you guys are—if this is your permit stage, that means you’re between the ages of sixteen and—

JG: Yeah. Sixteen, seventeen.

KD: You’re not yet eighteen. No wonder the—I had a suspicion that something was up. You had lost your permit to drive, wasn’t yet a license, and you’re buying a car. Something’s not going to go right in this picture. *[laughter]* The adult eventually is going to step in.

IN: I think the fact that they were performing all over the city, that they felt like adults. But they were still young kids, young men.

JG: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I had mentioned that Mrs. Cano used to go to Mexico quite a bit, and she started visiting my grandmother over there all the time, so she’d bring things from there. And every time Mrs. Cano and Mr. Cano went to Mexico, I used to stay at their house. So I had a ball, because he had a major collection of albums. And to my surprise, Eddie Cano had tons of albums that he had already recorded.

He had one, I remember, “Eddie Cano meets Duke Ellington.” I don’t know if he was performing just Duke Ellington songs. But anyway, Eddie Cano also, which I recently found out, is that Eddie Cano was in the very first movie that was done on rock and roll, which was *Rock Around the Clock*, where Bill Haley and the Comets were introduced, and the Platters were introduced, which were the first black group that I recall, the first black group to go into the crossover. And he was in that movie. So he was very young.

KD: So you would like house-sit for Mr. and Mrs. Cano?

JG: Yeah, I would stay there.

KD: And would you listen to these records, or were you just—what did you listen to?

JG: No, I think—I don’t know, I don’t remember. But I remember I used to go through them and just—

KD: So you just looked at the album covers.

JG: Yeah, you know, I’m not—but I do remember a Caruso record, and it was really, really old. But I remember his father, he was a real collector. But they had quite a nice collection of albums. And as a matter of fact, the fact that I used to go with Johnny and the Crowns, there was a few times—I don’t know if it was once or a few times that after we finished performing—Johnny [Gamboa] came over and he stood over with me, and I started showing him all this stuff. *[laughter]*

IN: But it was right next door to his mom and dad.

JG: But it was right next door, yeah. And Eddie was a great cook. I used to see him when he cooked, and he’d get his—I don’t know if he was doing—yeah, maybe the omelets, eggs. He’d get them and he’d toss them up in the air and catch them again. He’d flip them that way, and flip high. So he was a pretty good cook. So anyway, those were two of the stories. Oh, and the other one is—

IN: You should check off as you—

JG: One of the other musicians that was with the Blue Satins, which was Charlie Lueras, was actually one of the musicians that lived close to my house. He actually later became a priest, so now we call him Father Charles. Which is still a little awkward, for me to call him Father Charles. But anyway, he was one of the priests that became—one of the brothers that became a priest, or one of the musicians. He played sax.

And the other thing I had mentioned about Billy Cardenas, who was managing all the groups. Actually, when I met Billy, Billy was not a stranger to me. I actually used to see Billy quite a bit when I used to go to school, to Assumption School, on [Evergreen]. And it turned out that—I thought Billy was—lived there. And after I asked him, he said actually his cousin lived there, which he lived around the corner. So he was very familiar to me. So it was interesting that both Johnny Jay and Billy Cardenas, who became promoters, major promoters, were actually people that I had already been with.

KD: From the community, yeah.

JG: Yeah. Johnny Jay was from Assumption School, and Billy was from right there in the street.

And in regards to Standard Engraving. Eventually in Standard Engraving the people that worked with me there was David Botello, Ernie Castillo, who was a singer in our band, Sal Padilla was the guitarist, and Johnny De Luna, who was El Chicano’s drummer, also worked there [with me, about six years before El Chicano was ever heard of]. So that’s where I actually met Johnny De Luna first.

And one of the things I wanted to mention is that the ’60s was really, really an exciting time for musicians, and it was thanks to Johnny Jay, Billy Cardenas, Al Perez, who used to put on regular big dances at the Union Hall. And then there was Chico Sesma, who was a disc jockey, had a popular show on [KALI], and it was in English [and Spanish, a bilingual radio show]. And he’d play the music that we related to, all the music that he—and he played Eddie Cano like crazy. But anyway, Chico Sesma used to have the biggest dances at the Palladium, and that was Latin Night. He’d have the most popular and the biggest Latin bands in the entire country, Tito Puente, Sonora Santanera. And then he had Eddie Cano with a big band. So Eddie Cano would put together a big band for that night, and that was the biggest of all of them.

Then of course, in regards to managing [rock and roll], well, the other thing is that, in regards to the dances, there was also the Paramount Ballroom, there were [dances at] the CYO, [which I believe Johnny Jay started], there was the Saint Alphonsus dances put on by the Boys and Girls Club. At that time was

also—Huggy Boy and Art Laboe were doing a lot of dances, and dances at the El Monte Legion Stadium. So they were booking Latino [Chicano] groups, and these were real popular with Latinos [Chicanos]. And of course, Eddie Davis, and Eddie Torres, who managed Thee Midnitters. And Eddie Davis, who became partners with Billy Cardenas. They were major contributors to producing all the Latino groups.

And then a little later on came the Bachelors Club. This is towards the time that I was—the band had already broken up. But the Bachelors Club became very popular, and they started having a lot of dances also. But this was still in the later '60s. And then there was—in regards to Latin, there was a Virginia's Nightclub that was right, I believe, around Eighth Street, it was close to where MacArthur Park is at, and Virginia's nightclub [Club Virginia] was very, very popular with Latin groups, very popular with Latin groups. And it was about that time, I think, the Zenda Ballroom was slowing down, but still things were happening. But anyway, and then of course the Salesian—Bill Taggart and the Salesian rock and roll shows. This was an annual thing, but that was a major, major event.

So as musicians, we had tons of support. So we were very fortunate at that time. And that's why I think a lot of bands were booming and developing and a lot of things was going on in regards to the music. Yeah, so I covered—

IN: Okay. Later on—is there still more about the musicians?

JG: No, that's it.

IN: Okay. Well, I think it would be interesting to talk about forty years later at the Greek [Theatre], what happened at the Greek?

JG: Oh, yeah. Okay. About forty years later, they had the Latino all-star concert. They called it the '60s Chicano-Latino all-star revue. And it was the Blendelles, Cannibal and the Headhunters—I remember just Cannibal. But anyway, it was Cannibal, it was Thee Midnitters —

IN: Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs.

JG: Yeah, Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs. It was Chris Montez, it was Rosie and the Originals. I don't remember a lot of the other groups, but anyway, at that—

IN: Did you say Midnitters?

JG: Yeah, Thee Midnitters.

IN: Tierra?

JG: Tierra, yeah. Maybe El Chicano. But anyway, they had a major revue.

KD: So that was like 2000? When you say “forty years later”?

IN: Yeah, something or other.

JG: No, no, no, maybe it was about thirty-some years. It might have been 1991. It was when Gloria Molina just became supervisor. I think, 1991. She had just—either supervisor or in the city council, because she wanted to go backstage, and they wouldn't allow her because they didn't know who she was. So I got her in, she was with—

IN: Antonia Hernández.

JG: Antonia Hernández.

IN: So there was this big line of people trying to get backstage, and Gloria Molina and Antonia Hernández were there, and they kept saying, “We want to go in.” And the security people didn't know who they were, and they kept pushing them out. And so Gloria knew Juan from the gallery days, when she was field deputy for Art Torres. And so this was years later, but they always recognized each other at events, and so she latched onto him saying, “Hi, hi, hi, I'm trying to get backstage.” And so Juan was just amazed that the people didn't know who she was. And immediately, very graciously, he just—

KD: This must have been like '95, '96?

JG: Yeah, yeah. [It was in '91, when Gloria was just elected as supervisor.]

IN: Yeah, probably around that time. It was the first Latino all-star show at the Greek. I think they had another one after that.

- JG: Yeah. And it could be almost close to fifteen years. Recently they had another one, because Bobby played. We were getting together for one of the holidays, and Bobby wasn't there. He invited us. It was his party, he invited us, but he said, "But I've got to go play, but I'll be back as soon as possible." [laughter]
- IN: And Cannibal was still alive, because he passed away after that.
- JG: Yeah. Cannibal was alive—
- IN: At the Greek [Theatre].
- JG: At the Greek, yeah. And we took a historical photograph that day, which I'm trying to figure out where it could be at. But anyway, there were members—it was Sal, Bobby, and I from the Leggeriors. It was Steve and Rudy [Salas] from Tierra, it was Mike [Rincon] from the Blendelles, [Jimmy Espinoza from Thee Midnitters], and Cannibal [from Cannibal and the Headhunters] was in the picture. And—I don't know who else. But anyway, we were all represented in that photograph, and that was probably the last photograph that we took as a group picture with Cannibal.
- IN: And when Gloria first got backstage, we were alone with Cannibal and Gloria. And she was just in awe of the musicians, because they were celebrities to her. And so she got to personally meet Cannibal, and she was so excited about it. [laughter]
- JG: The thing about it is they were very young, so . . . [laughter]
- IN: So here, you know, Gloria's so highly respected and admired for all the work that she's done, and yet she still saw these musicians as celebrities, because they were stars when she grew up.
- JG: Well, it was the same as when we were at the Salesian rock and roll show. What's her name that was on the board of the school, the school board?
- IN: Leticia?
- JG: No, no, no.
- IN: Oh, Vickie Castro.
- JG: Vickie Castro.
- KD: Vickie Castro.
- JG: Yeah. She went to the dance, and she says, "Could you introduce me to Willie?" [laughter] And then I realized, you know, they were young kids. So anyway, now we're going into the—
- IN: One thing I wanted to mention that actually Karen had brought up last week, I think—back to the '60s—
- JG: One thing about—in regards to the bands, I forgot to mention that Johnny and the Crowns had participated in a battle of the bands that KRLA put on. And KRLA was like the number one rock and roll show in LA. And they put on a battle of the bands, and they were going to be having it at—some way or another, they had some type of a finalist thing, list. They had the big show at the Los Angeles Theatre downtown, a beautiful theatre. And Johnny and the Crowns were the only Chicanos participating. All the rest were all white groups. And Johnny won, Johnny and the Crowns won.
- KD: Whoa.
- IN: You said that they blew them away.
- JG: They just blew everybody away. Well, anyway, that was a pretty exciting moment. And then after that—something in relation to that is that Wink Martindale, who was a very popular disc jockey at that time, was hosting, or putting on, a big dance show at Warner high school in Downey. So some way or another, they had Johnny as a guest, and there was—I think the group was called the Duels. They were guitar players, and they were actually two guys, but they played with a band. And they had a hit record, something—well, I don't remember exactly what it was. But anyway, we drove to Warner high school in one car, which was the Duels, Johnny Gamboa, myself. And probably the person that had something to do with the show drove us down there.
- IN: And you mentioned the Diamonds.
- JG: The Diamonds were always performing, the ones that did "Little Darlin'." [singing] "Oh, little darling, bop-bop . . ." So anyway, they were performing, and a few other groups. So this was like the beginning of really meeting the recording celebrities and stuff like that.

- IN: Okay. So back to something Karen had mentioned about the LA County Museum and the exhibit in 1963.
- KD: In 1963.
- IN: And you mentioned that you heard of it, or—
- JG: No, I went to it.
- IN: Okay. Well, tell us about that experience.
- JG: Yeah. I went to the exhibit that they had at the LA County Museum. And the reason I remember it very clearly is because of the Olmeca, that's what stays very strongly in my mind. When you mentioned the Olmeca, then I said, "Yeah, I remember going to it."
- IN: Now, this was an exhibit that was brought from Mexico? Is that correct, Karen?
- KD: Yes. It was an exhibition that traveled to fifteen different countries. And it wasn't going to come to Los Angeles, but at the last minute, before it ended its international tour, it came to LA.
- JG: Yeah. What year was that?
- KD: It was '63, in October 1963. [*Masterworks of Mexican Art: From Pre-Columbian Times to the Present* opened at LACMA in October 1963 and closed in January 1964 —ed.]
- JG: Yeah. Okay. So that was my reawakening, or awakening period time. But I had already learned a lot about—
- KD: Now, did you go with the family, or did you go with the school, or . . .
- JG: No, no. I doubt with the school. No, I probably went alone. I don't think I went with the family. It's possible, it's possible, but probably not. I don't remember.
- KD: Did you have a sense of, "Wow, there's a lot of history, Mexican history"?
- JG: Well, you know, actually, '63, I had already learned a lot about it. Not only that, I had already seen the Olmeca in—what is it—Villahermosa, or—
- IN: Well, you went—
- JG: At the museum, it's an outdoor museum.
- IN: No, we're saying '63.
- JG: Oh, '63.
- IN: You graduated from high school in '62.
- JG: Oh, that's right, '63.
- IN: So it was before you went to Europe, it was before you went to Mexico. It was before your awakening.
- JG: Yeah, that's true.
- IN: And so you were exposed to all this Mexican art and culture at the LA County Museum right out of high school.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: So what was your experience then?
- JG: You know, I don't remember. The thing about it is that I probably, to a great extent, was very closed-minded to certain things. Because I recently found a Salesian newspaper, school paper, and it had the Tula warriors in there. And I think in my mind, I just don't remember a lot of things about Mexico. And I think to a great extent, I was probably very closed-minded to a lot of things.
- IN: Well, you mentioned that your sisters would visit relatives in Mexico, and—
- JG: Yeah, almost everybody in the family would go back and forth to Mexico.
- KD: And you didn't.
- JG: But I didn't go.
- KD: Was that a choice? You were—you had the option?
- JG: Yeah, it was, I think, to a great extent, a choice. My two sisters and the one girlfriend of my sister also, they went to an extensive trip to Mexico. And I just—I wasn't anxious to go to Mexico, because I didn't hear a lot of great things about Mexico.
- KD: Right, you had talked about that.

JG: Yeah. And I think—I always kept on thinking, “Well, if I’m going to go anywhere, I’m going to go to Europe first, because if I have a family—if I get married and have a family and all that, I’ll never be able to travel to Europe again.” So I wanted to make sure I saw the world first. I mean, I really wanted to travel the world. I was very anxious to go see the Great Wall of China, because [of] growing up looking at it through my hand scope. So I was anxious to just travel the world. I said, you know, “If my parents are going back and forth to Mexico, it’s not that expensive. I’ll go when I don’t have money. I’ll save it for later.”

IN: Yeah, so now, we’re going back to the story of when you were working—when you met Jacques, the French illustrator—

JG: Yeah, so that was covered, yeah.

IN: And he bought his ship—had his ship built, and was going to Europe, and he inspired you to go to Europe.

JG: Yeah. So a little before I was planning to go to Europe, Sal and myself actually—

IN: Sal who?

JG: Sal Padilla and myself actually started a small business called Advertising Production Services. And what it is, is that Sal from the Broadway later went on to work at May Company, and the advertising director from the Broadway went to May Company, so he took Sal with him. And he was getting a lot of books, to put together books, and he’d give the work to Sal. So Sal and I started putting together the book. So I was putting the whole production thing, you know, laying—not laying them out—

IN: So setting the type, or laying them, or—

JG: No. Basically, we had the type. It was a production, you know, just pasting them all up. So we were doing that for a while. And we did that, actually, until I left to Europe.

But also, just before I went to Europe, my brother had been working at a place called Fusek’s studio. And [Adolph] Fusek was actually a religious art importer. He used to import statues and whatever type of artwork that would go into churches. Most of the time, a lot of them were from Italy, but he’d import from all over the world. And so he hired Joe at the beginning, right after getting out of high school, because Joe became a master cabinetmaker working and learning at school. So he hired Joe as a cabinetmaker to build cabinets or bases or different things for the statues. And little by little, Joe started learning how to restore the statues, because they had there some master sculptors, especially wood sculptors, and painters, that really knew the business in order to restore. And little by little, Joe started learning all those things. So he started learning how to restore, and—

KD: Were these older sculptures, or ones that got maybe damaged when they were coming?

JG: Yeah, when they got damaged, yeah. They were mostly new commissions. So they were commissioned by Fusek’s. [But he also restored old works of art.]

KD: So in the transfer, they needed to be somehow restored.

JG: Yeah.

KD: Okay, I got it.

JG: So the church would maybe request something from Fusek’s and Fusek’s would commission it and bring them in. And so Joe started learning how to restore and paint and sculpt and stuff like that.

KD: So wood or marble or just—

JG: Yeah, everything, he started learning everything. He started learning how to—anything.

IN: And also paintings as well.

JG: Yeah. Paintings, marble, wood, stone. Everything. So he learned that pretty well. He became a very, very good restorer. So he had a friend who actually was in his wedding, [who] went to Assumption School with him, whose name was Leon Garcia. And now Leon was a manager of the Pan-American Bank. So Leon told Joe, you know, “I think it’s time . . .” This was quite a few years later, you figure this was in 1969, and Joe graduated from Don Bosco about ’59, so there’s maybe ten years that he had been working there. So Leon told him, you know, “I think it’s time that you open your own business. You know the business well.” And so Joe was convinced, yeah, he should open his own business. So he [Joe] started working at putting a proposal together to get an SBA loan [to import, manufacture, and restore furnisher and art].



KD: Mm-hmm. Small Business—

JG: Small Business Administration loan.

KD: Yeah.

JG: And Leon says, you know, being the manager, “I’ll help you. It could go through the Pan-American Bank, and I’ll help in any way that I could.” And so Joe started putting time into that, and it was taking so much time that he quit his job in order to hurry it up. And so at this time, Joe was telling me, he says, “Johnny, I want to put together this art [and furniture] business, so we can manufacture our own custom artistic furniture [and import art from around the world].” He says, “I want to get machinery and everything to produce our own furniture.” And that he was going to be restoring [art] also. And you know, he says, “I want you to [be my partner and] help me in any way possible.” And at that time, I was so much into my music, my mom was disappointed that I had left my art so much, and—

IN: And also a teacher. What was your teacher’s name?

JG: And also Father Illio.

KD: Right.

JG: Father Illio was always telling me, “Johnny, what makes you think you can sing?” He was trying to demoralize [discourage] me in regards to my singing so that I could get back into my art, because I was his number-one student there for a while. So anyway, he was always trying to encourage me to get back into my art.

So Joe says, you know, “What I’d like to do is I’d like to open up a place in Beverly Hills, so that we could be able to sell all this custom artistic furniture.” And I just said, “Wow, that’s great,” never realizing how expensive Beverly Hills was. But anyway, we just said, you know, that’s where they’ll buy this type of expensive furniture. So, you know, the fact that he had a major collection of wood carving chisels, so he did some—any restoration or anything, he’d carve out whatever was needed. So anyway, I just got very excited about it, and I said, “Great, I’m willing to go in there, to have a nice business in regards to that.” So I said, “Great, I’ll do it. The only thing is that I want to travel the world first.” [laughter] So—

KD: Minor detail. [laughter]

JG: Yeah. So Joe, instead of saying “Wait, wait a minute, how could you,” he says, “great. You can start scouting all the artwork, everywhere where you go, try and find places that we could buy the artwork and import it, export it from there, bring it to the United States.” So I said, “Great!” I said, “Wow, gee, imagine to be able to . . .” Because my intention was to just pack my guitar, and I wanted to try and sing my way around the world. So I had so much money, I was able to save extra money. Actually, I think I was able to save, like, two thousand dollars from the time that I was ready to go to the nine months that I had to wait to become a citizen. So that helped me save some money. So I thought, well, you know, “I’ll take this much money, and I just want to travel the world.” I wanted to see if I could just go—if I run out—I’ll try and save as much money as I could, and live as inexpensive as possible. And if I could, I could sing and make some extra money. So I thought, “Well, I’ll try and travel around the world, and if there’s a location that I just fall in love with, I’ll stay there, and there I’ll stay and import stuff to Joe. Or maybe I’ll be living internationally. I’ll go back and forth to that particular place.” So I could perform and I could be able to import stuff. And I said, “Imagine to be able to live with American money in Europe would be really wonderful.” So anyway, I packed my music and I set off. And like I mentioned before—

IN: And you mentioned that—what was Joe going to call this business?

JG: Oh, yeah, what he had mentioned is that he wanted to call the business Goez [Imports and Fine Arts]. And it would be the first two and last two letters of the name Gonzalez. So I said, “Great.” So anyway, I went with the intention of Goez [Imports and Fine Arts].

KD: Now, was there a reason to avoid sounding like Gonzalez?

JG: No, I don’t think so. I think he just—I mean, Joe, I don’t feel, felt the way I did.

KD: Wow.

JG: In fact, as far as I know, nobody in the family felt the way I did. I think I felt it the most, in spite of the fact that in Pio Pico Joe was threatened or even beaten up. Because he was eight years old, so he was bigger. I was only four years old. But I do remember being scared to walk around Pio Pico, because I knew that they always wanted to try and beat up Joe because he was from Mexico. So, but that was very much embedded with me, that developed a fear. And then hearing all these names and negative things, I just grew up more and more feeling that I just didn't want people to know that I was born in Mexico. But the rest of the family, like I said, they used to go back and forth to Mexico. And somehow or another, it just built it up in my mind, this sense of lack of self-esteem, [but also the fear of being called those belittling names they call all those that come from Mexico].

KD: But you don't know why he didn't just say, "Let's call it Gonzalez, instead of Goetz"?

JG: No, to me, I just figured it's because it's a short name, and everybody was doing some type of abbreviation of names, and—

IN: And you were used to, with your music career, catchy—

JG: Yeah, exactly, and being in advertising.

KD: Yeah, right.

JG: Yeah, I knew all about that. So I said, "Wow, that's great. It's catchy and it's fast." So anyway, I packed up my sheet music. And my sister [Rebecca] gave me a beautiful foldout clothes luggage that you put your [clothes in open], then you close it. So she gave me that for—as a traveling gift. [And the other thing she had given me earlier was the guitar I was taking.] And, one thing about my sister Rebecca, she studied piano with Sister Evangelita, who was the one that kept me two years in the third grade—

KD: At Assumption—

JG: At Assumption. And later on she studied—she started studying classical guitar. So she bought a beautiful classical guitar, and she always had her full-time job, and of course—

IN: And growing up, she was the studious one?

JG: Yeah, and she actually—after Joe's guitar—Rebecca went to Mexico and brought me a guitar, so my second guitar was also Rebecca's. [Mrs. Stone had given Joe a guitar for cleaning the yard. Later he gave it to me as my first guitar.] So when Rebecca then bought her guitar, her first guitar, then she [later] gave me her first guitar, [my third, when she bought a new one for herself]. And so I never bought a guitar. All the guitars I had, I think—the last three guitars that I had, Rebecca gave them to me. And the first one, Joe gave it to me. And the second one that Rebecca gave to me, Richard Rueda—well, I'll talk about later. He was an artist and a musician, so I'll talk about him later.

IN: But just to talk a little bit about Rebecca, she was—Joe was the eldest, then Rebecca, and then you. And you mentioned that she was really like your second mom to the whole family, and she was very studious and cultured. Talk a little about her.

JG: Well, Rebecca was very serious. While we were all into rock and roll, Rebecca used to sit—go into the bedroom, listen to classical music while reading. So there were millions of books, it seemed like, that she had read. So Rebecca read like crazy.

IN: And the garage is filled with boxes of her books even today.

JG: Yeah. And she was like a straight-A student, and so she was always very smart.

IN: And with all of Rebecca's seriousness, what about the yo-yos and the juggling?

JG: Yeah, well, Rebecca became a yo-yo champion at Assumption School, citywide champion. So she won a [women's] citywide [or regional] yo-yo championship. And it was interesting, because Joe was great on the yo-yo, so I don't know how —maybe it was women's, I don't remember. But I remember Joe was very good at the yo-yo, but Rebecca did win. And then she inherited the juggling from Mrs. Stone, so she was very good at juggling.

So we each had our talents. I was the drawer. And Joe actually loved airplanes, he loved—his passion was airplanes. So he used to buy models. I mean, you know, I was four years younger, so I used to go along and get my planes too, and we used to make the little tiny balsa wood airplanes. And there was like

a paint that was called Dope, it smelled very strong. I think because it got you high smelling it. *[laughter]* But anyway, he used to make—we used to make the model planes, but of course he'd make a bigger one because he was four years older than me, but he just loved airplanes. And the only thing he ever drew was airplanes and ships. So that's the things that he used to draw. But he wasn't into basic drawing. What he got more into was the music. But after his finger broke, then he stopped.

KD: Right.

JG: So anyway—

KD: So you were talking about all the guitars, and the one you packed up to go to Europe.

JG: Yeah. I bought a leather guitar case, actually it was not leather but—what's the—

IN: Burlap? Or canvas?

JG: Maybe canvas [or vinyl]. But it wasn't solid, it wasn't cushioned. So what I did is I turned it inside out, and I cut out a pattern, and I stuffed it with foam in the inside, and I made a foam shell—I insulated it with foam, so now it was padded.

IN: A lining.

JG: A lining. And then I made a strap so I could just carry it around me [as a zippered lightweight flexible carrying case]. The guitar and the luggage. So I got my guitar and my luggage. And then I wore my pea coat from the—my pea coat and my watch cap from the Navy, so I still had it. So that's what I took with me, and then some other clothes. So anyway, we said goodbye to the entire family. And I'm not sure whether we wrote to Father Malloy, who was the principal that founded Salesian High School. What I hear of that actually, the person that actually began the construction of Salesian High School was Father Penna, who was the principal of Don Bosco, the person that built Don Bosco. And then I heard that Father Malloy then came in and took over. Now, Father Penna then became the provincial of, I think, the West Coast, so he was the head of all the Salesians—

*[break in audio]*

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. Today is the November 11, and Johnny was talking about Father Penna and his work with Salesian. Go ahead.

JG: So now, Father Malloy was a provincial of the East Coast. And what they gave me, and I don't know if it was Father Marcus, he gave me a book on all the schools—all the locations of the Salesians around the world.

KD: My goodness.

JG: Which meant, if I wanted to travel around the world, I could go to them and try and stay there. So anyway, I took the book with me, and we packed the guitar, and packed my beef jerky and cans of—

IN: The V8 juice.

JG: The V8 juice, but with chili. *[laughter]* So we started driving, and we just went sightseeing as much as we could throughout the United States.

IN: Any particular sights that you say that were special?

JG: No, I don't remember any particular sights. It was more when I came back, or I know that we went to—and I don't know if it was at that time that I saw the—

KD: Now, I thought you had—this was a car service, I thought you told that story—

JG: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. [A car transporting service that allowed us to drive cross-country without us having to rent a car.]

KD: To get there.

IN: But I just didn't know if he made any stops on the way.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, we got to Princeton where that professor was. And he was a professor of computers, and he took us in to see his computer room. And it turned out that the computers were as big as the door. He had a whole room of them, maybe fifteen computers that were about seven feet high by maybe four feet. So to me, that was a computer. And I saw two gigantic reels, and I said, "Well, those are computers." But Princeton was probably the first time I ever walked into a university, and that was at the age of

twenty-seven years old. And I was just in awe, it was just beautiful. And I was so excited. And the other thing about it is they were having races on rowboats, where there's the Olympics—like the way they have about twenty people rowing. And I had never seen that in person, and I was just in awe, saying, "Wow, just like the movies, the Olympics." I was just so excited. I had never experienced anything like that. So anyway, he then drove us to the train depot, and we caught a train from Princeton to, I think to New Jersey, and some way or another went to the Penn Station. But anyway, when we arrived, we called Father Malloy—

KD: And where was he at?

JG: And some way or another . . . He was in New Rochelle. New Rochelle is in the outskirts of Manhattan.

KD: Right.

JG: And so he came down and he picked up Charlie and I from the train depot, and then he took us out to dinner in New York. And from there, he took us to Radio City to go see the Rockettes. And so we saw the nice show, and then we went to the Salesian house in New Rochelle. And it was beautiful, really nice.

KD: Do you remember your first glimpse of the New York skyline, what you were thinking of that city?

JG: Oh, yeah, as a matter of fact, we went up to the top of the Empire State Building. Yeah, we went up to the top of the Empire State Building, and I remember thinking, "Wow, imagine, King Kong was up here." [laughter]

KD: Hollywood movie connection, yeah.

JG: My history books. [laughter] So anyway, I don't know what else we saw. But anyway, those are the key things that I remember.

IN: How long did you stay at the Salesian house?

JG: We stayed quite a few days, possibly a week.

IN: And how did they feed you?

JG: Oh, they fed us great. It was wonderful, it was wonderful. We were star celebrities. Not only that, we were Father Malloy's students. Father Malloy was a provincial, so we were his guests, so we were treated royally. And the Salesian house was right—I mean, it's like they have their own boathouse into the ocean. It was a very nice house. Big. And so the ocean was right by there, and it was totally snowed in when we got there. It was all snow. So I took some beautiful pictures of Don Bosco and Saint Dominic's statue with snow on it, and the distance of the snow where they have the boats. And we were staying up in the second or third floor of the house, so we had a great view of—

KD: This is a house where other priests live, who were doing administrative work?

JG: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. There were a lot—quite a few priests living there. And so since Father Malloy was a provincial, every day he had to go to different Salesian houses and he took us with him. So we got to see a lot of the nice Salesian houses. So when we got there, all the other priests that wanted to talk to Father Malloy would cater to us, in order to be able to try to get to him.

KD: And you mentioned when you traveled cross-country with your beef jerky that you lost a lot of weight, and then they fattened you up. [laughter]

JG: Yeah. [laughter] Yeah, I got real skinny—

KD: At the time, were you aware of these interpersonal dynamics of how you were being treated, because you were the guest of the—

JG: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'd never been treated like that. You know, when we had the band, it was nice, but it wasn't like that. Important people weren't treating us really royally. So that was very nice.

But yeah, I lost a lot of weight traveling cross-country, and then when we got to Salesian, boy, we'd just feast, we ate everything we wanted. It was very, very nice. So every time we went to a certain location, we'd have lunch there, or something like that. But I remember one particular place that we went to, I don't know if it was a seminary or what it was. But anyway, it had like a park, and the park was like the rosary. It's like, for every decade of the rosary there was a stop with a beautiful statue, where you could stop and say the whole decade. So anyway, it was very, very nice.

So anyway, we stayed there for maybe—I don't know, possibly close to a week. A few days. And so we were waiting actually for the day that our ship was going to be taking off from New York. So Father Malloy, at the same time, was going to be going on a cruise. He was going to be the chaplain for the cruise, so he was having tons of fun too. So just before we left, Father Malloy said, "Wait a minute. I'm going to give you something that might help you stay at the Salesians." So he wrote a beautiful letter, and I think I still have it, a beautiful letter saying, "As a personal favor, I would appreciate if you treat them with . . ." You know.

KD: Wow.

JG: Whatever. And he says, "They are great Catholics, they were students of mine at Salesian High School." And then he got his seal and stamped the letter with his seal. So—and then signed it, Father Malloy, provincial of East Coast, or whatever it was. So we took that with us, and that was a great pass. He then drove us to the—saw us off onto the ship. We got on the ship. And I remember getting on there, and we're waiting, putting things in our cabin and everything, and finally, we come out to the edge of the ship right by the dock to see the ship take off. And I'm just looking at the water and the dock, and not believing that I was actually going to Europe. After all my life just dreaming of traveling, I'm looking at the dock, and all of a sudden, I see the ship pulling away from the dock, and I said, "My gosh, I am actually on my way to Europe."

KD: Were you scared?

JG: Pardon me?

KD: Were you scared?

JG: Oh, no, I was excited. I was really—I could not believe it. It was like a dream, for me to be leaving. I was actually leaving—it was the first time I'd ever pulled away from the continent of America. *[laughter]* Maybe I swam, maybe when I used to go bodysurfing, I'd pull away from Hermosa Beach, but not in the ship. So this is the first time, and I was just so excited. And since this was the late '60s, it was mostly a lot of the hippies. So most of the guys had long hair. And so all of the music that was being performed there was hippie music, folk music. And here I had, you know, some of the Top 40 songs.

IN: And who were the people that were on the ship?

JG: Oh, most of the people on the ship were Canadians, Australians, and people from back East, and Europeans. I remember they used to look at us like, God, who are those strangers? I remember being in certain parts of the country . . . Actually, it was more as we were traveling, not right actually in New York, but as we were traveling through Louisiana and, what was it, Georgia, [South Carolina], and some of the southern [states]—

KD: You took the southern route across the United States.

JG: Yeah. They'd look at us, I mean, very strange, like as if they were looking at something unusual, and I couldn't figure it out. To me, that was strange, I had never experienced that before. [But also on the ship] most of the people there were, like I said, were from these other countries, and they still weren't used to seeing Mexicanos. So anyway, they had said that no radios could be played, so there was no way of having music. So I remember they weren't allowing something in regards to—

KD: It must have interfered with the—

JG: Yeah, probably. So that meant that any of the musicians who performed were the ones that were in demand. And so they were all performing their folk music. And so, I don't know, some way or another they knew that I performed too. So I performed some of the songs that—I think it was the Young Rascals stuff, the Engelbert Humperdinck. I had some—

IN: Johnny Mathis?

JG: Maybe Johnny Mathis. Yeah, "When Sonny Gets Blue." I guess there's some "When Sonny Gets Blue." But anyway, some of the pop songs of that time, the other one is *[sings]* "Imagine me and you, da-do-da-do." So anyway, some of the Top 40.

And then, thanks to Billy Ward, who made me aware that Mexican music was in demand in other parts of the world, I tried to focus, I started working on "Cucurrucucu" from that time, so I had "Cucurrucucu,"

“La Bamba,” “El Jarabe Loco,” “Malageña,” “Granada.” So those were my songs in Spanish. I think I was working also on “La Mentira,” which is “Yellow Days,” by Manzanero. So those were my songs. “La Mentira” wasn’t really internationally known. So I started doing some of those songs. So I started getting invited to a lot of the cabin parties that they were having. But on one of them, I did one of the Mexican songs—I don’t know if it was “La Bamba” or “Granada”—and all of the sudden, people started wanting to hear the Mexican music more than the American music. And these are people from other parts of the world. And I was shocked.

At first, I didn’t want to do it, because I didn’t want to be criticized. But when I did it, they started getting very excited, and they started asking me—they were requesting more the Mexican music than the American music. And then they started telling me, “Could you translate . . .” Oh, then they said, “Could you translate the lyrics.” Oh, because I did the falsetto, they started calling it a Mexican yodel. And I had never heard that, [so at first I didn’t know what they meant, but I then figured it out]. So then they started saying, “Could you translate what that means in these songs?” Because they said, “I’ve been hearing those songs all my life growing up, and I never knew what they said.” And I was shocked. I said, “What? These people from different parts of the world are telling me they grew up hearing some of these songs?” And I was—oh, man, it’s like they shot me with a needle full of pride. And then they’re telling me to translate, and I’m saying, “Wow, I’m going to be teaching all of these international white people something?” I know two languages, and they’re telling me to translate. And on top of that, and started thinking, “If I did this in LA, they’d start calling me all these names. That’s so-and-so music, that’s . . .” And all of a sudden, they’re praising me on the ship because of this. And that was the first major, major burst of pride that I had for being Mexican.

And I was just so excited, I just couldn’t get over it. I was just so excited. And we continued on the ship, eating like crazy, because all the meals were free, eating like crazy. There was a couple that was in our table, because we always had the same table to eat. There was a couple—and we always had our tea break, we always had a tea break, we had like two or three tea breaks a day. [laughter] And then they’d say, “You want cream in your tea?” And to me that was new, you know, to have cream in my tea. Tea was like a big thing for them. So anyway, on our table, we had a couple there that had traveled all of the Americas, South America and North America, on bikes. So now they were going to travel Europe on a bike. I said, “Wow.”

KD: Now, these are hippie types, or really wealthy types?

JG: No, no, they weren’t hippie. They looked pretty sophisticated. I was somewhat surprised. But anyway, it was interesting. So anyway, when we arrived in—so we went from New York, and then we stopped in—I believe it’s Cobb, Ireland. We stopped in Cobb, but we didn’t get off. All the people that were going to Ireland got off there. And then we went to South Hampton, England, and that’s where we got off. So as we were getting off, we went into customs, and they wanted to see how much money we had. They wanted to make sure we weren’t going to stay there and bum around England, so we had to show them how much money we had.

So we got off, and then there were some girls that were traveling on the ship with us that we got to know, and these two girls were going to be driving up to Yorkshire, or further, I don’t know. But they were driving up north, and they were both from England. They were coming home from the United States. And they asked us if—where we were going. And they said, “We’re going up to . . .” I wanted to go to Oxford. I wanted to go see the maze where Laurel and Hardy got lost at. [laughter] Not only that scene. Oxford in the movies was just so beautiful.

KD: Did you have a plan? Where you were going to go first, second, third? Or were you really just going to—

JG: No, no. But I knew I wanted to see—my knowledge, you know, I wasn’t a major reader at that time, but my knowledge was [sings] “Winchester Cathedral, da-da-da,” and then Laurel and Hardy at Oxford. So anyway, I wanted to see those things. Those were things that I recognized.

IN: But you also—with the church, the Vatican, you wanted to see—



JG: Oh, yeah. But this was in England, so in England first. So we went to Winchester Cathedral, and then we went to . . . Oh, so they said, "Would you like to drive with us?" And they said, "Because we don't feel comfortable driving on the opposite side of the road, and having the steering wheel on the opposite." Now, they were from England, but they didn't feel comfortable. So they said, "Do you feel comfortable doing it?" "Okay, we'll drive." We got a free ride all the way up to wherever we were going, and it was a beautiful country drive. We drove for maybe for a day, and then the evening was coming, so we decided, you know, let's see where we can stay.

So we went into an inn, and the inn was just like the old movies of—what was it—*Treasure Island*, where those signs are waving with the wind in the front, so-and-so inn. And as we walk in, everybody's drinking and singing in this inn, and they have rooms up in the top. So anyway, we said, "We'd like to have a room." And they look at us. "What? Do you have a marriage license?" "No, no, no. We're going separate. The girls are going to sleep in one room, we're going to sleep in another room" [*laughter*] They were very, very strict about that. So anyway, we stayed overnight, and our room was right where the sign was, and I'd look out there and look at this old English street, and that sign just swaying in the wind, thinking, "Wow." Just like *Treasure Island*. [*laughter*] So then we got to Oxford, and saw all of these guys riding bikes with the black gowns flying in the air. And I guess the black gowns means that you're a student there or you're a professor, whatever it is.

KD: Right, they're wearing the gowns, right.

JG: Yeah. And we just went around sightseeing beautiful Oxford. It was just really wonderful. And we were asking around where the maze was where Laurel and Hardy got lost, and they said, "No, we tore that down many years ago." [*laughter*] But Oxford was just really wonderful. So then we—I guess we took a bus, or maybe they drove us. We got someplace. We went to England. I remember chasing the buses, the double-deckers, and you've got to jump on, you know, they don't stop.

KD: Right, right.

JG: So here Charlie and I have our luggage, and one of 'em jumps up, and then the other one's running and throwing the luggage up so we could be able to catch the bus. So we went on the bus, so we probably went in a certain area of England, but then we arrived at a certain area. And before we left, Eddie Cano wrote his European representative that we were going to be going down there, so if he could help us out. So anyway, he picked us up at one of the stations, took us to his house, and we spent the night there just talking about Eddie and different things about England. I think maybe spent a couple of days at his house.

KD: You were able to stay free, it sounds like, a couple of times.

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: And sightseeing, you mentioned?

JG: Yeah, so we went sightseeing. And of course we went to go see the castle where they tortured everybody [the Tower of London], and then we went to go see the Tower Bridge and imagine Peter Pan flew over this. [*laughter*]

KD: So a lot of the memories, or a lot of your relationships, are from the Hollywood movies.

JG: From the movies, yeah. [*laughter*]

KD: And did you go see art?

JG: In England? No, you know, I didn't. Well, I saw the Big Ben. No, I didn't see it. I don't remember going to any museums in England. I don't remember anything in England.

KD: And from what I gather, if the priest is giving you a letter, you weren't a hippie type kid, you were a good Catholic kid.

JG: Oh, yeah, no. Hippie was very foreign to me.

IN: Were you and the other musicians still in the continental era, or was that past?

JG: Yeah. Yeah, that was past. Well, talking about continental, I was always very conservative. I think a lot of Mexicans at that time were very conservative.

IN: Mexican Americans.

- JG: Mexican Americans, whatever you want to call us, yeah. We were very conservative in our dress, and I don't know if I had mentioned that.
- KD: Or, also I meant, you know, women, and drug use. None of that's coming into your—obviously you're getting a letter from this provincial, Eastern provincial—
- JG: Oh, no, no. That was a million miles from me. Drugs. No, actually, when I worked in the glove factory there was somebody there that smoked something, I had no idea what it was. And we were having lunch or something upstairs, on top of the roof of the factory, the glove factory.
- IN: How old were you at that time?
- JG: Probably about sixteen. And they were smoking something and I got a headache from it. *[laughter]* Yeah, so no, that was—
- KD: And not even a lot of alcohol? Or you were—
- JG: We were—
- KD: I was trying to figure out how you got this letter.
- JG: Oh—in regards to our band?
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- JG: In regards to our band, man, we were good Catholic kids. Every Sunday, you know, you perform on Saturdays, we get up and go to Mass every Sunday. And we saw a lot of the other guys drinking. None of us drank. When Philip came from back East, he was the only one that drank. And maybe little by little, some of the others, but none of us drank. As a matter of fact, a lot of the way I documented my trip in Europe was where I went to Mass.
- KD: Really?
- JG: Yeah, because I went to Mass every Sunday.
- IN: So after you left—
- KD: And you say—I'm sorry—
- IN: Go ahead.
- KD: When you say “documented your trip,” you mean the photographs, the . . . You were taking notes, even—
- JG: Well, what it is—and I may still have it—was a whole outline. I got a map from AAA of Europe, and I routed not where we were going, but where we went. I was just going to take it as it came. You figure we were planning on hitchhiking and traveling as poor as possible, so we had no idea how we were going to traveling. We thought about—I had found that they had Eurail passes, but Eurail passes were a little restricted also in regards to not being able to sightsee well. You have to get off a lot, off and on. So I didn't think about wanting to get—
- KD: So you took the map to show where you had been.
- JG: Yeah. I bought a map—
- KD: Did you keep a journal, too?
- JG: No, I didn't. No, I didn't. Yeah, no, I wasn't really focusing too much at that time on documenting where I was going. I was just anxious to go. You figure I was going to travel the world, I wanted to go around the world. That was my intention, to go around the world.
- KD: And did you?
- JG: No. No, I didn't go around the world. I thought, you know, I'll go around the world. My attempt would be to try and go around the world, if I didn't run out of money.
- IN: Well, why don't you touch upon the countries you went to, and then focus on where you were exposed to the art.
- JG: Yeah. So anyway, from England, we caught a train ferry, it was connected to a ferry, so we caught a train that was connected to the ferry, and we went into Amsterdam. And Amsterdam, Charlie, being in the service, had tons of pen pals all over the place, so he had a pen pal in Amsterdam. So when we arrived in Amsterdam, wow. Now that was hippie-land. That place was full of hippies. I mean, I guess they all got off

the boat and went over there, because it was full of hippies, they had tons of hippies. Now, there they had tons of drugs, but we didn't really know anybody, so there was nobody that was influencing us.

So we went sightseeing, but we had heard about a youth hostel, so we went to the youth hostel to go check it out. When we went to the youth hostel, they had all these different notes pinned up there saying, "Leaving from Europe to the United States and have this car for sale," so all these people that were leaving Europe that bought cars were selling their cars in order to be able to go to the United States. So but at that time, we didn't think, "We'll hitchhike." We didn't have intentions of hitchhiking. So we said, "We'll hitchhike" because we heard a lot about people—it being safe to hitchhike in Europe, and then we were two guys. So anyway, we thought, "Well, we'll hitchhike over there."

And then all of a sudden, one of the first things that I started experiencing over there is these people were speaking English, regular English, and then they got into Spanish. I guess they were people that were coming from Spain. And they started speaking Spanish with complete different accents, Spanish accent, and it seemed so strange to talk to somebody in plain English, English just like you and I. And all of a sudden, when they go into Spanish, it seems so foreign, the Spanish that they were talking. But anyway, we did some sightseeing over there, and Charlie's first thought was to try and get in touch with the pen pal. So he met the pen pal, it was a girl pen pal, and she says, "Well, you could come down to our house, but it can only be one of you." *[laughter]*

KD: Only Charlie. *[laughter]*

JG: Yes. So Charlie went stayed with her family, and I stayed in the youth hostel. So we stayed there maybe two, three days, I don't know how many.

IN: Is that where you began scouting art galleries to import?

JG: Yeah, we started—that's where I started scouting art galleries. And there was some beautiful galleries, some great paintings.

KD: What kind of work were you looking at?

JG: Basically classical, classical paintings. I mean, I was looking for anything that was nice, but what they had were basically classical landscape, a lot of landscapes. Beautiful. And we went to go see—it was Anne Frank's house, and I don't know if we went to Rembrandt's, I don't know if—

IN: How about Van Gogh?

JG: Yeah, I don't know if we went to Van Gogh. But anyway, we—after that, we decided that we were going to hitchhike, but it was a burden carrying our luggage. And I saw all of these hippies with knapsacks, and I said, "Wow, I think that's the way to travel." So I gave my luggage and part of my clothes to Charlie's girl, pen pal, and in turn I bought a knapsack. And so I just wanted to make sure my sheet music and my guitar was with me. *[laughter]*

IN: Now, were you going to stay in Amsterdam?

JG: And I had a lot of sheet music.

IN: And were you going to stay in Amsterdam to sing?

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. When I got to Amsterdam, when we were on the train going into Amsterdam, we were sitting down with some people, and I started telling him that—they started asking, "So what do you do," and all this stuff. And I said, "Well, I sing. I live in Los Angeles." And he said . . . Actually, I said I was born in Mexico and all this stuff, and they said, "Wow." He said, "Why don't you stay in Amsterdam and perform here? We could really promote you as a Mexican from the United States. You'll be a real novelty over here." And I was saying "Wow, you know, I think my singing might be able to hit after all." But we had money, so we didn't have to worry. *[laughter]*

IN: So then you went—wanted to go to Germany, and how did you get to Germany?

JG: Yeah, so anyway, we were on our way. We decided, "Okay, we're going to hitchhike, we've got our knapsack." Charlie and I were together, so we decided we were going to hitchhike, we were going to start hitchhiking. So we hitchhike, we started hitchhiking. And so the first car took us to a certain location, and then it started raining, and the second car that picked us up was a salesman for a famous beer in Europe,

it's got a logo that's a round red circle. But anyway, he was a salesman, so he had tons of beer and stuff. We didn't drink it, but anyway, we just talked. And then he dropped us off right in the border of Germany. And it was pouring. It was pouring.

So Charlie and I walked across the border and went into a gas station, and we were just waiting there. And the guy came over from the gas station and he says, "So where are you guys going? Where are you off?" And we said so and so, and so he says, "Are you guys interested in buying a car?" And we said, "A car? What kind of car, how much?" He says, "I have a Volkswagen that I'll give you for a hundred twenty-five dollars." Volkswagen, we couldn't imagine what type of Volkswagen it is. So, "Well, let's see it." So we jumped in his car, and he drove us down a countryside to a big, gigantic German barn. It was a brick barn, a beautiful brick barn, and he took us in, and it was a very nice Volkswagen. It was in perfect shape, it was a real good Volkswagen. Charlie and I said, "Yeah, sure, we'll take it."

IN: And so then you drove through Copenhagen?

JG: Yeah, but wait. First, we said, "Okay, we got the car," and he says . . . Then he directed us to the place down right by the gas station. He says, "You could get European insurance." He said you could get insurance down the street that will cover you. So we went down the street, and it turned out that we got insurance that would cover us for all of Europe for maybe four months for twenty-five dollars. So we got a car, a nice Volkswagen, and insurance, for a hundred and dollars. So from there we started driving.

So then we decided, "First we're going to go all the way up to Finland, we'll go all the way up to Finland." So we decided to drive. So we started driving up—first we went up through Denmark, and then we went into Copenhagen. And they had the—what do they call it?—very famous carnival place, I forget what it is. Anyway, it's a very famous place, it's always related to Copenhagen. So anyway, we drove off and kept on driving, and then we went—

IN: To Sweden?

JG: Went up to Sweden, and I was getting cold. *[laughter]* This was October—no, this—yeah, this was October. And we were going up to Sweden, and it was getting pretty cold. And then we decided, well—and it was interesting. The further up we went, the smaller the Catholic churches looked, and the simpler they looked.

IN: And you ended up in Hamburg?

JG: Yeah. So then we—as we were driving back, we decided to come back down, so we were going to come down through Germany. And as we were coming down, there was some people that their car broke down, and I remember hearing—we didn't understand, I think they were German, they were saying, "Ah, kaput, kaput, kaput." So anyway, it was the first time I started hearing the word *kaput*.

So we drove down, and we drove down through Hamburg, and we went through a big bridge going in around towards Hamburg, and the wind was blowing really strong that it actually moved our car. We were driving, and boy, did we slow down. But anyway, we drove down to Hamburg, and then—so we stayed there for awhile. Not only maybe one day or maybe even hours.

IN: And Charlie had a pen pal?

JG: Not yet. Not yet. So as we were driving down, we went into—we went into a castle, and—I don't even know the name of the place. I forget the name of the place. *[It was Würzburg, Germany.]* But anyway, we went to a castle going down towards southern Germany, and then we went to Ulm. And Ulm has this one cathedral that, if I remember correctly, the tower is five hundred feet high, if I remember correctly. They said, "It's one of the tallest towers in Europe, and it's a small church. Not real small, but the tower—the whole church is made up of the tower."

KD: Exactly.

JG: It's a gigantic tower. You just look—for being in this smaller town, it's a major, major attraction. So anyway, we went down there. And then Charlie had another pen pal in Germany, so we went down. And it was a beautiful, beautiful drive in the countryside into this little town, and it was . . . And you could see the

steeple of this little German church, and it's just like the postcards, you know, when you see the Christmas postcards with snow and all that. And it was a beautiful, beautiful little town.

So we went in there, and they were very excited, the family. And so it was very traditional to have beer, and the beer that they gave us . . . I'm not—wasn't a beer drinker, I don't drink much beer anyway. But I wasn't a beer drinker, and it was real dark beer. And it was supposed to be great, great beer, and it just didn't taste real good for me. But anyway, they were excited about giving us beer. And then I think she had a brother, too, and they took us to a discotheque. And discotheques were not popular here in the United States yet, but that's the first time I ever heard the word *discotheque*. And they were playing a song of Creedence Clearwater [Revival], and that's—every time I hear them singing, I always think of this little discotheque. So anyway, that's the first time I experienced that. So we stayed there for a few days, and then from there we started driving south.

KD: And by now, you'd gotten a jacket at least to ward off the cold winter?

IN: Well, he had his Navy pea coat.

JG: Yeah, I had my Navy pea coat, and my watch cap from the Navy, that knitted watch cap that they have.

KD: But I'm imagining people are wearing a lot more than that.

JG: Well, that Navy coat was—

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: Nah, I was pretty warm. And I don't know, I guess I had some other—but it was a little difficult, in a sense, because the pea coat didn't fit in my knapsack, so I had to wear it as much as possible. And it was lucky that it was cold, because I was wearing it most of the time. So we have a picture of Charlie and I on top of this castle in—it started with an *M*, and it wasn't Munich. Or *W*, maybe. Würzburg, a castle up in Würzburg [Germany]. So we got a picture, you know, with my pea coat, and the way we were up there.

IN: Something happened with the police.

JG: Oh, as we were driving through Germany, we were stopped by the police, and so they were trying to communicate. We had a German license plate—we bought the car in Germany—so they started talking in German. And we didn't understand what they were saying. And they thought we were just not trying to pay attention, so they were getting bugged. And we said, "Don't understand, don't understand." So anyway, they said, "Passport, passport." I don't know what the word was for passport. But anyway, I finally found out that they wanted a passport.

So we give them the passport, and they said, "Oh, American." And then they open it up, and they say, "Mexican." And then we started speaking Spanish to them, and I don't know if they were aware that Mexico speaks Spanish, so now they thought I was Spanish. So they're thinking, "What are you? Are you Spanish, Mexican, American, or German?" So they were really—and they were trying to communicate. And they were real—they were ready to handcuff us and take us in. They were really mad. I don't know what they were trying to say, something about the tires or something. And finally they got frustrated and slapped me with the passport and said, "Get out of here." So they got mad and we just drove off.

KD: And you never had any idea what the—

JG: I never had any idea what they were trying to tell us. They said something about tires, but I don't—I still don't know what it was. But they got very confused at all these different things. So we drove on and we drove through Austria, through Lichtenstein, through Switzerland, and just beautiful.

IN: Turin?

JG: Yeah, then we drove down into Italy—Turin, Italy. And this is—Turin happens to be the place where all of the Salesian was founded with Don Bosco. But anyway, we were just anxious to move on, we were enjoying sightseeing.

IN: Milan?

JG: And then we went to Milan. And in Milan they had the cathedral, they call it, I think, the Cathedral of a Thousand Needles, where it's got points like crazy. And here it is, ancient Italy. And one thing, it's very hard to find parking around there, but we managed to find parking. And then we saw a stairway going down to

the bottom of—right in the front of the Milan—of the cathedral. There was like a little stairway that we went down. And as we're going down, on the bottom, there's a modern mall down there, everything modern down there, stores.

IN: And Charlie had a pen pal in Milan?

JG: No. We drove on, and we went to some other place. And I don't know where—maybe it was in Milan.

KD: Are you doing this while you're traveling, are you doing what your brother had instructed you to do? Are you checking out possible—

JG: Yeah. Well, I wasn't going too far out of my way, because it would take forever. When we wound up staying in a particular place, then I'd keep my eyes open. In Holland, in Amsterdam, is where I got a lot of names of galleries and stuff like that.

KD: So was it strictly galleries, or factories, manufacturers—

JG: Well, at first it was just the galleries. To go look for factories, Charlie wouldn't have the patience. Charlie wanted to move. He's a person that—he used to come to the dances, when we used to perform, and Charlie was there before we were. Charlie was there before us, and then he'd leave early. So he was an early bird.

IN: So it was—later on we'll get into your second trip to Europe, that's when you really started going into manufacturing.

JG: Yeah, but also on the first—I'll talk about that, some of that in the first one. So anyway—

IN: So you then went to Venice?

JG: Yeah, well, we went to—I think it was possibly in Milan, where Charlie had another pen pal. And now that we were in Italy, Charlie was speaking Spanish with an Italian accent with everybody. And I used to laugh, I said, "Charlie, you're just speaking Spanish, they're not going to understand you." So anyway, when we got to—went to the house of his pen pal, and of course all of his pen pals were girls. [laughter] So we got to the house of the pen pal, and the mother starts listening, trying to communicate, and Charlie's speaking Spanish with an Italian accent, and she says, "How did you learn how to speak Italian so well?" [laughter] So the joke was on me. I said, "Wow, I didn't—I guess a lot of words relate."

KD: The same, yeah.

JG: But it was just real funny. So and one of the things that I really learned is that a car is called a *macchina*. So from there, we drove down to Venice, we drove to Venice and did some sightseeing there, from Venice we went to Rome. And in Rome is where we decided we were going to stay and spend some time there. So we made contact with the Salesians, and—because there was no place to stay. At first, we thought we'll just go in quick to go into a place, but we couldn't find any place to stay. And we contacted the Salesians.

KD: Really?

JG: Yeah.

KD: In the wintertime, there wasn't places.

JG: It was pretty full. Yeah. But I remember it was pretty full. Either that or it was very expensive, one of those two. But I know for some reason, we were just very lucky. So we contacted the Salesians, and we were able to stay with the Salesians in Rome, and there we did a lot of sightseeing. There, we really—

IN: Was it in Italy where you started to see more of the art?

JG: Yeah. Yeah, Italy's where all this historical stuff—

KD: Like what types—what historical art did you see in Italy?

JG: Well, of course we went to the—well, it was all ancient Rome. But of course Michelangelo. [In Florence] we went to the Medici, we saw the Medici tomb and Michelangelo's work on it. He had a male and a female nude above the tomb that was—they were just laying there like guards. And went to the Coliseum, went to a lot of—the Appian Way. We went to—I forget everything.

IN: St. Peter's Cathedral.

JG: Oh, St. Peter's, oh, yeah.

IN: The Sistine Chapel.



JG: Oh, the Sistine Chapel. It was a little after that crazy guy broke the *Pietà*. Came with a hammer and broke the *Pietà*, so they had already fixed it. Saw St. Peter's, it was just beautiful. Went into the museum. But my biggest disappointment is that we couldn't go into the Sistine Chapel, because they said the pope was there praying for the dead. And I said, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to miss all this," and I was so disappointed. And we had pretty [much] scheduled of the areas that we were going to go sightseeing throughout Rome. So we spent quite a few days in Rome, and I wasn't able to go back to see the Sistine Chapel. So I was very disappointed that I lost the—

IN: And then you went to Florence?

JG: And it's like the museum, the museum in St. Peter's is gigantic. Really, really big. Yeah, so then from there we went down to Florence.

KD: Were you focusing on particular kinds of art when you go into a museum, or are you just there to take it all in?

JG: No, no. I just wanted to see anything I could see.

KD: And when you're staying at the Salesian, was this another school, or the house that other—

JG: No, I don't think it was a school.

KD: It was a priests' home.

JG: I think it was a priests' home. Yeah, I think it was a priests' home.

IN: And you went to church on Sunday?

JG: Yeah, I went to church every Sunday, Charlie and I.

IN: Even when you were in Europe.

JG: Oh, yeah, I went to church in Sweden. *[laughter]*

KD: I'm just trying to figure out how they might have responded to you, or what they might have—

JG: To me?

KD: Yeah, staying at the—you know, so you come with this important letter, and it obviously works—

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: How did they treat you?

JG: Oh, royally. Oh, they treated me very good. Very good. They were very, very excited. No hesitation whatsoever. They were very, very nice. So from Rome, we went down to Florence. And it was maybe three years, it was a little after the Florence flood, when all these ancient art got ruined. So when we went to Florence, you could see the line of the water still on a lot of the buildings. And Florence is where Father Illio, my art teacher, was at now.

KD: Oh.

JG: So the first thing I was going to do was go see Father Illio. So Charlie and I were both from Salesian, so we both knew him. So we went, we knew exactly, because we had the book. Everything was noted, who was where, and they told us where Father Illio was. So anyway, we went—now Father Illio, I think, was out of school, because when we got there we asked about Father Illio, where he was at or whatever. And they said, "As a matter of fact, he just left here. He's walking down the school grounds." He says, "You could drive over there and catch him." And Father Illio was a little chubby, with the gown, the big gown. So he had an Italian priest's hat, they're like *charro* [hats], but they're flat. So he looked like a walking mushroom, you know?

So he was waddling down [the big school yard], and all of a sudden, we drove up [very close] to him, and he starts yelling and screaming in Italian, practically cussing us out, [scared that he might get hit by our car]. And he's looking, he goes, "Jo-Johnny? Johnny! Johnny!" [Noticing it was me and Charlie.] He got so excited, he got so excited. I got so excited seeing him. It was a ball, it was really nice. So we spent—I mean, he just took us all over Florence. We went to go see, of course, David, Michelangelo's David. [That's when we saw the Medici tomb.] And we went to go see the [Gates of Paradise] bronze doors, [which took Lorenzo Ghiberti twenty-one years to complete in 1424], that are totally sculpted. Just beautiful, beautiful doors. I don't even remember all these different things. But we went to so many different places, and you

could [still] see the water, the [water] line—[the stain on the buildings left from the devastating flood that destroyed so much historical art and archives three years earlier].

IN: And he lived in Pisa?

JG: And he was actually from Pisa, so he says, “Let’s go to Pisa. I’m going to take you to my hometown.” So before we went to Pisa, I told him I wanted to buy a camera. So he says, “Well, I have an ex-student that has a camera shop, owns a camera shop.” So we went to buy the camera, and it was a Zeiss Ikon camera.

KD: Wow.

JG: So he gave me a real good deal. And I was going to say, I don’t have to pay American tax on that or whatever. But anyway, it was a very, very nice camera. So this guy is Italian and he’s trying to teach me—

KD: How to—

JG: Real generous, how to teach me in Italian, he’s saying, “Capiche? Capiche.” [laughter] “Da, da, da, da. Capi-che? Capiche.” I didn’t know what he was saying. [laughter]

IN: You didn’t want to hurt his feelings. [laughter]

JG: Yeah, I didn’t want to hurt his feelings.

IN: For how to operate the camera?

JG: How to operate the camera.

KD: Oh, so you figured it out though, huh?

JG: Yeah, I figured it out how. [laughter]

IN: So you have hundreds of slides of your—

JG: Yeah, so from there on. But before that I had a Brownie, little Brownie camera. And the pictures are pretty bad. But fortunately, there wasn’t a lot of exciting things to take pictures of. It’s like, once you get into Italy . . . And we hadn’t gone into France. So France, you know, it’s like the Latin countries, seemed like that’s where it’s loaded with artwork.

IN: So you said you were overwhelmed by all the ancient art.

JG: Oh, I was just in awe, seeing art, art, art, art. I was just I’ve never experienced that in my life. And it’s just—all this time, I’m thinking, God, what happened to the United States? Where were we left off?

IN: And not only the actual sculptures and paintings, but architecture.

JG: Oh, the architecture. Oh, yeah. The churches we went into—because we were always into going to Mass. As we were driving, I think it was as we were driving down to Rome, we went into this little town, and—to go to Mass. And they said, “Mass just finished here,” and I said, “Oh.” And he said, “But you could drive down the street, one of the other four churches might have it.” And it’s like they had—a little town, and it seemed like they had a church for every week of the month of the year. I mean, they had tons of churches in this little town.

IN: And they were all beautiful.

JG: They were all beautiful. All, all beautiful. And such variety of architecture. It’s not like in France, they’re all Gothic. They all look somewhat alike.

IN: And in Mexico, the same way, right? They’re all colonial.

JG: Yeah, they’re all very colonial. Some are a little more elaborate, some are more indigenous, in a sense. But in Italy, there’s such variety of designs in churches. Some were done with light and dark brick, some were done in—I mean, just tons of variety, and beautiful, beautiful churches. So as we drove away from that little town, we looked back, and that little town was actually on top of a big mountain where you could see the churches real small up there. And [we said,] “Wow, if we were coming on this side, it would have been a much nicer experience.” Because we would have said, “We’re going to be up there.” But now we were on the bottom, we said, “We were just up there.” We didn’t realize it.

IN: So then you drove up the Italian coast?

JG: So I hadn’t seen Father Illio yet, so I didn’t have the camera. And that little Brownie camera, you know, to get distance shots and stuff that like weren’t very good. So yeah, we went—we were now driving to Pisa, and . . . Oh, in Rome, one of the awesome experiences that we have. As you’re driving around Rome, you

can't see St. Peter's because there's so many little streets, and you can't see it. And it opens up to this major cathedral with this major patio, or whatever you want to call it.

KD: The courtyard, yeah.

JG: And then you stand in the center of that courtyard, and you see one pillar all the way around, and the minute you move a little bit, you'd see that there's like four pillars lined up in back of that pillar, so if you're in the very center, you'll just see one pillar holding up this roof. But the minute you move, then you see tons of pillars, so you're able—it was just—that was probably one of the most awesome experiences that I had, going into this one little street that all of a sudden took me into this gigantic court to see this awesome, just awesome looking . . . And then the stone, the stone, it was this white stone, it was just—the stone was just, I don't know, I guess it's marble. But it was just awesome. It was just breathtaking. And that was one of the most exciting experiences that I had, going—being in Rome and seeing this all of a sudden. It's just so big. So anyway, like I said, now we went to Florence. So Father Illio says, "Okay, we'll go to Pisa," and Pisa was the same thing. It was that whole center where the—

KD: The courtyard?

JG: Well, it's a courtyard—

KD: With the plaza in front, what we would call a plaza in front of the church?

JG: Yeah, the plaza where everything is—but it's like the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the cathedral that they have there is all surrounded by buildings. And again you can't see them, and all of the sudden, you go into a little street, and you're in this open space with this Leaning Tower of Pisa and the cathedral, and I'd say, "Wow." Just—now these are things that I recognized not only in movies—probably in movies I saw—but these were things I really saw in history books and stuff like that.

IN: Okay. When you were in Venice, did you ride the gondolas?

JG: No. No, we got—anything that cost money, we didn't do too much of, except maybe going into the museum or something. But just sightseeing Venice, just seeing,—it's quite an experience. It's just so much architecture, beautiful architecture, you'd think you're in a museum already. So that happened, and the same thing happened in Pisa. And fortunately, we were able to go up to the Leaning Tower, where now I think you're not able to—

KD: No, you can't.

JG: Yeah. So we were able to go way up in the top, and they don't have a little balcony, so if you go out, and it's bending this way, so if you go out, you've got to sort of hold on to the inside of the window, because it's pretty dangerous. So anyway, that was really nice. So we'd just spend a day there, then we went back to Florence and spent quite a few days with Father Illio too. And I remember that it's always for dinner they gave you wine, and then they gave you the bubbling water to put in the wine.

KD: Really?

JG: It was something pretty standard over there. So after Pisa, and we left Father Illio, we went off to the coast of Italy towards—now we were going to go off to France and to Spain. So went—I think it's Genova was the coast, and I think . . . And it was raining like crazy, so it was a coastal drive. And I mean it was raining so hard it was hard to drive. It was just really pouring. So from there we went towards the French Riviera, and that was really—just to know that I was in the French Riviera. I knew all about the French Riviera. And Cannes. So anyway, we drove through and we parked and walked around through the French Riviera and through Cannes, and it was a beautiful ocean drive. They had like real red stone, and there were some gigantic rocks, gigantic, gigantic rocks, an island with—

IN: Rock formations?

JG: Yeah, rock formations, and real red stone. But it was really beautiful. And we kept on driving. Drove through Marseilles, and they had this gigantic castle on top of a mountain in Marseilles. And we spent—

KD: And about this time, how long have you been overseas? This is months into the trip?

JG: No, no. I think it was possibly weeks.

KD: Oh, you're traveling quickly.

JG: We were spending days in each area—

KD: Just days, okay.

IN: So this is where you get to Spain.

JG: Yeah. Well, we were in Rome, or in Italy. I wanted to go to Greece, but we had made an arrangement, an agreement, that—

[*break in audio*]

KD: Hold on, let me just say, this is tape 5, and today is November 11, 2007. Go ahead, Johnny.

JG: So anyway, we made an agreement that unless both of us agreed that we would go off to a different direction that we wanted to, then we would do it, or else—because that was extra money that we were going to be spending. So Charlie didn't want to go to Greece. So we decided, "Okay, we'll just keep on going down to France." And it was interesting that when we were in France, that when we'd try to go into a store and buy something . . . When we were in Germany, and if I wanted milk or something like that, I'd go "moo." I'd make gestures of a cow, or something like that, and they'd laugh. But when I was in France, they wouldn't laugh at these things. They took it very serious. And later on I found out that they sort of feel that "If you're in our country, you learn to speak our language."

KD: Their language.

JG: So anyway, I learned that, and I said, "Well, I've got to just talk very serious, I've got to stop making this type of gestures." So at one point—and on this point, we still weren't going into many restaurants.

KD: Really? Wow.

JG: Because one, we were eating a lot. Then we'd take our lunch, whatever we were buying, to keep on eating. And I think I still had beef jerky. [*laughter*] The meeting with Father Illio—

KD: One of your favorite things to eat now, right?

JG: I bought tons of beef jerky. But anyway, Charlie was getting a little fed up with it, too. But he says, "We've got to stop it." I think it was in France, driving down the coast. He says—we stopped actually to rest—I think we were eating, actually, we stopped to eat. And Charlie's looking, and he goes—well, he stopped in front of a restaurant—and he says, "I'm going to go in there. You can have this." And I said, "Well, you go ahead. I'm going to save my money." So then I see him go in, and I followed. [*laughter*]

IN: What did you eat in the restaurant?

JG: Oh, I don't remember.

IN: It was a French restaurant?

JG: Yeah, it was a French restaurant. So anyway, it was some little town in the outskirts, because big cities, it was a lot of trouble to park and drive around. It was a lot of traffic, a lot of traffic. Rome was very hard to drive around. So anyway, we—

KD: In France, was there anything exceptional that you remember of its art or architecture?

JG: It came later, France came later, [because we're now only driving along the coast, basically just seeing water and nature]. Oh, yeah, France was awesome. That was on the way back.

So anyway, we finally went into Spain. We went into—first to Barcelona, and now I felt, "Wow, I'm at home." I could communicate, it was so exciting. I could talk to people. They understood me, I understood them. And the first thing I . . . So now we went into a restaurant, I'm thinking here, now, I'm anxious to have enchiladas and have all these—so I mentioned them. And they said they didn't know what it was. And after that I said, well, *un tortilla*, so they said, "Okay." And they come back with an omelet. I said, "Where's the tortilla?" "That's your tortilla." Well, so then I found out a tortilla is an omelet over there.

And so we stayed in Barcelona, in the La Rambla, and went to go see Gaudí's work, all the architecture, the melting. They said, "You've got to see all the stuff of Gaudí's. It all looked like melted chocolate." And it was beautiful. And we were in one particular hotel or something like that, and there was some girls there also, and I think they were Spanish. So we invited them to go out to eat. And they said no, they said that after a certain hour the women don't go out there. Because they think any women out then is not a

decent woman. That was interesting. Because there was so much . . . La Rambla is a big street with a big center island that has all kinds of different things to look at. So we enjoyed La Rambla.

And then from there we drove down to Valencia. And now in Valencia is where I started seeing some really interesting furniture and things. And so I sort of pursued it to a certain extent. I couldn't spend too much time, because that would be taking Charlie away from what he wanted to do. But anyway, I found some very interesting, beautiful polychrome furniture, which was furniture colored and carved out, and it was beautiful. And I pursued it and found the manufacturer, and started talking to him about importing. The minute I talked about the United States, right away they were really open to helping me out and everything. So that was one of the exceptional things that I found over there in Valencia.

But anyway, we basically sightsee around Valencia and spent a couple of days down there. And then we went down to—we were going to Alicante next. So as we drove down to Alicante, we passed by a little town called Benidorm, and Benidorm was actually an old fishing village, an old Greek—a Roman fishing village at one time. And now it was becoming a resort town, which meant they had some nightclubs there, and tourists were going—tourists would come in from all over Europe to go down to the beaches of Spain. And they would—because there was so many tourists, they started developing some nightclubs and hotels and things. So anyway, we went in there and we stayed there for just a little while. We were anxious to go down to Alicante. So we went down to Alicante, and we went sightseeing a little bit, and we just kept on driving. We were actually anxious to go to Granada to go see the Alhambra.

So we went to . . . As we drove down, we—I'm not sure if we saw Torremolino first, but Torremolino is another town on the coast. And then we went into Granada. And the gypsies live in caves in Granada, so they've got tons of caves all over. And what they do in order to make money is they put on gypsy or flamenco shows in their caves. So we went into some of the caves to look at the shows, and then we went to eat in one of the restaurants. It was a major, big club that we decided to go in there and see the show. And it was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful flamenco show. I'll never forget the experience. It was a dancer. They were dancing flamenco . . . I think it was a couple dancing flamenco. The guy was a singer. I remember the guy being a singer. And it's like as they sang, the guy got on his knees. He sang "Granada," of all songs, and he sang "Granada," which was really out of sight. It was great, great singing, really nice singing. And he sort of got on his knees, and he's going to—or maybe the girl was on her—I don't know which one. But I remember him spreading his arms out intensely with his hands open wide, saying—and really singing to her full blast. The voice was just flying out, and it was a beautiful, beautiful show. That was truly a quality show. The ones in the caves were very, very—

KD: There were more families?

JG: Yeah, there were more family type of things. It was interesting being in the cave and seeing all this pottery hanging and stuff like that. But this one was a truly great show. And then being in the Alhambra was just beautiful. I got a lot of shots of the Alhambra. The Alhambra was just really beautiful, seeing the Sierra Nevadas out in the distance and everything was just really nice. And that was really a nice drive, driving through the Sierra Nevadas and all that. So then we drove down to Malaga, and then Malaga had a lot of the—now, we were now in the Moorish influence.

KD: So now what are some of the prominent art that you remember from Spain?

JG: Well, there wasn't anything that was—it was more the architecture. There wasn't any specific yet.

KD: And you're still feeling a sense of home because of the language?

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. No, I felt great, I felt great being in Spain. And not only that is that they seemed to love Mexicans, and I was so excited, because—

KD: Was that of course another shock?

JG: Well, first of all, they treated me very well. But I—the fact that they—when I sang anywhere, they were just so excited. They said, "Boy, you're—you're what we expect of a Mexican. A Mexican, we expect them to sing like Jorge Negrete." Because they look at all the movies, the Mexican movies.

KD: Right.

IN: So to them a Mexican was a star.

JG: A Mexican is a celebrity, because there's very few Mexicans who go down there who—according to what they said. Mexicans may be in the major attractions, major locations like in Madrid or the big cities, but when you go into little towns, we never seen a Mexican.

IN: Except for the movies.

JG: Except for the movies.

KD: And everybody's identifying you as a Mexican, not an American.

JG: Oh, well, I was speaking Spanish. Yeah, I was speaking Spanish. And right away, they say, "Oh, Mexicano, habla tan dulce, tan dulce." Because we say *chiquita*, *muchachita*, all the *-itas*, and they're rough, you know, *macho*, *macha*, *chico*. It's just real rough language compared to us. "Ay, tan chiquita, tan bonita." *Bonita* compared to *macha*, it's just—it's almost German-type.

IN: You mentioned that when you were in Spain one of the thing that overwhelmed you were the signs.

JG: Yeah, yeah. The other—that was the first time I started seeing gigantic signs and billboards with Mexican names.

KD: Right, right.

IN: You saw Gonzalez, you saw your own name.

JG: Yes, I saw Gonzalez tons of places, and I'm thinking, wow, this is my country, man, this is where I belong. This is where people are like me. I just thought everything was—and they loved me because I was Mexican, and I was just excited about it. I mean, it was great. I had no idea of any political thing that Mexico or Spain had, as far I was concerned, they liked me and I liked them. And the more they liked me, the more I liked them. [laughter]

KD: Yeah. [laughter]

JG: So then I went to Malaga, and Malaga was beautiful. Then we went down to the—we were going to go—now we both agreed to go to Casablanca in Africa. So we went down to the Rock of Gibraltar, and now we had to show our passport because we were in England. So we went to the Rock of Gibraltar. And then we got the ferry, and we took the car, and we went down to Tangiers. And in Tangiers, when we got off and started driving around—I mean, we were swamped with kids, everybody trying to sell us hash, everybody's trying to sell—there's so much hash, everybody's trying to sell us hash.

And as we're driving down, in the air I'm hearing this music of a flute, very indigenous sound of what you'd expect in Tangiers. And I'm thinking, "Are they all trying to get the cobras to dance?" [laughter] So you hear this flute sound, and then we go into this—we go to the marketplace, and they're selling all these leatherworks, tons of beautiful copper and leather and a lot of materials. And really some really beautiful stuff that they were selling. And we got a little hotel there, and it was a little foreign to us, because it was a little—somewhat spooky.

KD: What was making you uncomfortable?

JG: Well, because it was so tiny and the door seemed so . . . And you know, we weren't staying at a luxury hotel, also. And then the thing about it, we turned on a radio or something, or they were listening to a radio, and the radio was the same music that we were hearing outside in the air, you know, like the flute sound, very indigenous sound. And I started getting sick, I started getting real sick. I started perspiring, and I started getting a flu. I started getting pretty sick. And Charlie wanted to keep on traveling, and then we were thinking about going to Casablanca. But some people said it's a lot of desert down there. So in other words, the sights, to go sightseeing, to go down all the way, they said there wasn't enough to look at to merit driving that far down to Casablanca. So we just decided, "Well, it might be too far, it might not be worth it." So Humphrey Bogart, goodbye. [laughter]

IN: So you went back to Spain.

JG: So, yeah. So then I started getting very, very sick. I was really starting—

KD: You had eaten something, probably?



JG: I don't know what it was. I don't know what it was. But anyway, I know that I started getting very, very sick, and I was shaking. I had the shivers really. And it was real bad. So we decided, "Let's go back." I feel much better being in Spain, because we could communicate in Spain.

IN: And it was raining?

JG: Yeah. It was pouring hard, really, really hard. We had to park, because it was late already. It was night, so we had to pull over to the side and go to sleep on the side of the road. And it was pouring, and I mean, thunder, I don't think I ever heard so much strong rain. I thought, "Gee, you know, one of those little tiny cars just going to—"

KD: Wash away.

JG: Blow away. Just wash away. *[laughter]* And I had the shivers so strong that the whole car was shaking. And, but to drive in that rain, we couldn't drive anymore. So the place we felt would be the most comfortable to head towards would be Benidorm, because we got to know Benidorm pretty well. And it's a small—big cities are hard to move around, there's traffic and it's too complicated, so we always liked staying in small towns.

So the next morning when it finished raining, we went down to Benidorm. And now we got my asthma coming, and I was having trouble breathing. I was really getting very sick. So we went to Benidorm, and we got a *pensión* there. And I just stayed in bed. And I wrote to Joe, I said—I don't know when the mail was going to go through, but anyway, I wrote to Joe and said, "Please send me my asthma, some asthma pills. I desperately need them right now." So it turns out that Tony Garcia, trumpet from Johnny Gamboa and the Crowns, was a travel agent—he still is a travel agent. So he was telling me just recently that Joe gave him some brushes, paintbrushes to send to me, along with the medicine. And that he gave it to a pilot that he knew and told him where I was at and all that. He says, "So did you ever get your brushes?" "No, I never got my brushes." So I don't know what happened.

KD: Did you get the medication?

JG: I don't know if I ever got the medication, because what happened is that while I was sick at the *pensión* there was—the manager of the *pensión* was a lady, and she had a young girl that was working there, and she had an elderly lady that was working. So it was like three generations of women, and they all started taking care of me. They were all coming in, feeding me, giving me hot soup and all these different things. And they saw that I wasn't getting well, and my asthma was getting stronger. They called the doctor, and the doctor came over and gave me medicine, gave me some pills and stuff for the asthma, and that started helping me.

IN: Did they pay for it?

JG: Nobody ever billed me for it. So I don't know who paid for it. I don't know if it was free, I don't know what happened. But anyway, they gave me the medication, and it took awhile before I started getting well, maybe almost a week before I felt good enough to be able to leave. So I was pretty sick.

IN: So in the meantime, is that when Joe wrote you about the studio?

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. That's when Joe wrote, I think—yeah, at that time . . . Maybe I did get the medication, and Joe wrote and said, "Johnny, guess what? I found our future studio location." And he said, "It's on First Street in East LA." I go, "First Street in East LA?" And all this time, I'm telling people, "Business is go, business is go, and it's going to be in Beverly Hills." And all of the sudden he says, "It's going to be on First Street in East LA?" I said, "Boy, that sure makes a difference." But he says, "It's got a room for manufacturing the furniture, it's got another studio for the restoration, it's got a showroom for furniture, it's got a room for a gallery, it's got—so anyway, it's five thousand square feet." And after hearing that, I said, "Wow, forget Beverly Hills." If it's something that—this is realistic, and I just got really excited about it. So when I got to Benidorm, and I was able to start walking around. All these stores in Benidorm, because it's a tourist town they were all selling all these artifacts or crafts from throughout Spain. So they were all there for me. The manufacturers weren't there, but I knew what was being manufactured. They had all this beautiful leatherwork, they had beautiful jewelry that was forged—is that what they call it?

KD: Mm-hmm.

JG: They had armor suits, they had tons of swords.

IN: Chandeliers, wrought iron, a lot of wrought iron work, woodwork.

JG: Yeah. Well, not a lot of chandeliers and wrought iron. That was more in Mexico where they had that. But they had all these armor suits. What was real, real popular was La Tizona del Cid, that was just—I guess that sold like crazy. It was El Cid, an exact replica of a El Cid's sword.

IN: Oh, what about the tapestries?

JG: Yeah, that—they had tapestries, but this came also later. So I was in heaven there. I had everything. I wrote Joe, I said, "Now, everything's here. Everything's here." And they had paintings, a lot of paintings. And a lot of these paintings were very inexpensive because they were mass-produced paintings. But they were quality paintings. They're not like here. You see mass-produced paintings and they're landscapes that people could . . . But these were really nice, some really nice paintings. And they were paintings of ancient towns, so they were very, very inexpensive. So I said, you know, "I enjoy—everything's here." And I thought, "Gee, man, I could stay here and live. And this is a town I could come back and forth to." So it was very, very nice. So once I was able to go out, I started seeing—and here I was right on the coast, right on the coast. So the beach was right there, and as we walked along the coastal road, all these sidewalk cafes, outdoor cafes were there, and it was really, really nice.

IN: Is this where you rented your own apartment?

JG: Yeah. It's what you expect to see in the Riviera, but Benidorm was a little town. And later on, I found out that Mireille Mathieu, the French singer, became very famous because she won a singing contest, and also—

IN: And she's from Benidorm, or—

JG: No, no. She's from France, she's a French singer. So she became very famous being there. And later I also found out, which this guy didn't exist at that time, was Julio Iglesias. Won his song contest in Benidorm. But the people that were famous at that time were Rafael and El Cordobés, the bullfighter. Those were two names that everybody in Spain knew. They were like the biggest things in Spain at that time. So anyway, what Charlie and I did, then, we moved out of . . . The *pensión* had meals there, so they had a dining room there, and they had breakfast and everything. So then we moved, but it was more expensive. So then we moved to an apartment right down the street. And the apartment was maybe an eight-story apartment [house], but we got the first floor of rooms, we were in the very first room. And what was interesting is that they had like a skylight in the center of the apartment, was all empty. In other words, every room had a window into that empty hallway, but I was in the bottom, so I could actually walk out the window and stand on the floor.

KD: It was like a little patio area?

JG: Yeah. It was actually a window, so you couldn't walk out there. And the neighbors, you now, who opened the window, it turned out that it was a brother and sister. And their name was César and Mila. And right across the hall was Tony, who was a guitarist-singer, so we hit it off real good. So—and they're—the Spaniards are real confident, real cocky, you know. Real cocky. They're just full of confidence, the pride that they have about Spain gave them all that confidence. So anyway, we rented this hotel—

IN: Or apartment.

JG: Apartment. It had a bathroom and a little tiny kitchen. And the kitchen had a little stove that you use, it was—what is it, the tanks, that you get out of the tanks.

IN: Propane?

KD: Oh, propane tank.

JG: Propane, yeah. Propane. So it had like a little stove. And then it had a curtain into the bedroom. So it was just a very tiny little room. And underneath us was, like, a shopping center. And it had—right underneath us was a nightclub. Right underneath us was a nightclub, and they had a marketplace also down there. So all I had to walk out and down the stairs and I was in the market. So every morning, I'd get up and—

KD: Get your breakfast.

JG: Go buy whatever I had to buy down there. And at night, you could hear all the music. And one of the music that I began hearing a lot that they played was Matt Monro's song—Matt Monro is the one that sang the theme song to *From Russia with Love*, on James Bond.

KD: James Bond.

JG: And he also sang "Born Free," [from] the other movie about a lion. And I always loved his music. I loved his voice, because I remember when my nephew Artie, Joe's youngest one, was born, I was singing "Born Free" to him. And someone had mentioned that when the song came out they thought it was me, because I have a deep voice.

And I told you, that's the problem I had about singing with the band, my voice was deep. And actually when Willie started singing, he started singing some of the songs that I sang. I used to—I used to sing "To Be with You," and "That's All." As a matter of fact, I sang that song the first time for Sal's wedding. I was his best man, and that was the first song that Sal danced to when he got married. So there weren't many that had a deep voice. So when Willie started singing, he had the deep voice too. So we were one of the few that had the deep voice.

So anyway, I always liked [Matt Monro's] voice. And then I was more flattered when somebody said they thought it sounded like me. So I always liked Matt Monro's singing. So anyway, it was just interesting that he was singing in Spanish.

KD: Right.

JG: He was singing all—these was a whole album. And I remember hearing the song "La Montaña" that he used to sing in Spanish, and I just had a ball being able to listen to that.

One of the interesting things is we'd get together and Tony and César and Mila. And César and Mila were maybe the thirteenth and fourteenth, maybe, or fourteenth or fifteenth child of a seventeen-kid family. So they had a few other ones. And they lived in Zamora, where El Cid was from. And so all the family were just spread all over the place, because they were from a little town, so everybody just scatters to go find opportunities. So they were both down there.

And I remember talking about *nopales*. And I said, "What?" And first of all, I mentioned corn, and they said, "Corn? We give corn to the pigs over here." And I was insulted. I said, "Wow, they're sure missing out." And then after I mentioned about *nopales*, and they said, "Nopales? You eat nopales cactus?" And I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." "No, you can't eat that." "Oh, yeah, yeah. I'll prove it to you." So I went out there—and I had never made *nopales* before. So I go out there, and I cut a nice big *nopal*, and I go show them. I peeled off all the thorns and everything, and I start cutting it up, and all this gooey *babas* were just holding it together. I washed it and washed it and washed it, it took forever. I couldn't get those *babas*. I said, "My gosh." I just couldn't clean it.

IN: And what did your mom tell you later?

JG: And later on, I told my mom, you know. And they said, "You see? I don't believe you, nopales." And then I think I wrote to my mom or whatever, and she said, "No, you've got to get those little, little tiny ones." So I failed in regards to that.

IN: So what happened with Charlie at that point?

JG: So as we sightsee different areas, Charlie then started saying, "I want to go back to Amsterdam, to my . . ." To his pen pal. He fell in love with his pen pal in Amsterdam. So he says, "I want to go back." He says, "So if you want to go back with me or you want to stay here." I said, "No, no. I want to stay here, I'm having too much fun now," because now I was performing also. Not in clubs or anything, but I'd get together with people, and they just loved the music, the Mexican music. Now, Tony did—he spoke English, actually, his mother, I think, was born in Florida, or someplace in the United States, and then she came and she married a Spaniard. So actually, he was actually an American citizen, and maybe a Spanish citizen too. But he spoke English, he spoke English very good. And so Charlie said, "I want to go back to Amsterdam." He says, "Do you want to go back? If not, you keep the car." Because we made an agreement, you know, if

somebody wanted to leave somewhere, then the person that's staying behind—the person that's staying on schedule is the one that has the power. So he says, "Okay, you keep the car."

So he went to Amsterdam. He left to Amsterdam and left me there. Boy, I was having a ball. I had my car, and I would drive daily, daily. I mean, I'd get up in the morning, I'd go downstairs and get eggs and—I'd made a lot of omelets with tomatoes and onion. I don't know if they had some chili, but I would always make an omelet with that. So I'd make my omelets and fix my coffee. One of the things that I had to get used to was cooking with olive oil. To me, it just stunk like crazy. I almost wanted to vomit at the beginning, but later on, I got used to it. And now I love the smell, because it reminds me of Spain. But anyway, I cook with olive oil, and so after I finish cooking, I get ready. I jump in my car, take my guitar and my sheet music, and I just go on drives all over different areas. And it was so beautiful. There were little towns—and those were the ones that are real nice, because they're in exotic locations. and there was a town called—I don't know what it was, I forgot the name. Altea, something like that. Well, I went into this little town, and they had this gigantic painting of Picasso's. What's it called? I forgot the name—where all the horses and everything. It's black and white—

IN: Oh, oh, oh—*Guernica*?

KD: No, that's different.

JG: Anyway, I forget the name. But anyway, they had a gigantic [painting] of his. And then they had El Camposanto, which was the cemetery, and the cemetery went way up on top of the hill. And it had walls on it, and it was just—it was very scenic, just to drive up to the cemetery.

But anyway, they were beautiful drives. and one of the drives had a monastery on top of rocks, gigantic mountains. And you could see mountains, and you could see the monastery way up in the top, and it was like one of the—I think it was a James Bond movie where there's something way, way up in the top. And anyway, just beautiful, beautiful monastery on top. And so I drive all over. And I found a place where I could park and be able to go up to some nice rocks, and it was overseeing the Mediterranean and all these little islands that were gigantic stones and rocks. And it was a beautiful view. So every day, I started going—I'd go—I'd sightsee and then come back there, and I'd park there. I'd take out my guitar, and you could see a little ranch down in the distance, and I'd be singing, and I'd just have a ball just looking at the Mediterranean and all these little towns. And then these little . . .

And I'd be doing—I was working on a song that Sammy Davis Jr. sang, "Whether I'm Right or Whether I'm Wrong, I Got To Be Me," and the last part goes real high. So I do it in falsetto, and then come out real loud. And sometimes I'd see people way down there at the bottom looking up, I'd say, "Wow, did they hear me?" So I'd get nervous when they'd hear me, but at the same time, I'd say, "Well, my voice is strong enough to be heard down there." [laughter]

IN: So now when you were there and you found the arts and crafts, you said they even had Mexican sombrero.

JG: Oh, yeah, in Benidorm. In Benidorm. They had tons of sombreros. People—all these Europeans walking around with sombreros. And they said, you know, I used to go into the store, and I said, "How come you're selling sombreros? That's Mexican." They said, "They don't know. They just want them. They think this is Mexico." [laughter]

IN: So now in the nightclubs, what were the most popular groups?

JG: Oh, okay. One of the things that I—is that when Tony's girlfriend from England was there for the holidays. And so, anyway, a lot of the Europeans that used to come down would—I'd be talking about how much the weather is right there in Spain compared with, also with California. I said, "Yeah, our weather is just the same." "Oh." Because they said, "Oh," I said, "So how come so many are coming down?" They said, "Well, because it's so foggy up there." And this was in winter, you know. This was already in November or so. And they said, "It's so foggy up there that it's not fun. We all want to leave the fog and come down." As a matter of fact, all my trip throughout Europe was clouds. I never saw the sun until I came down to Italy, and it's like the clouds just opened up, and I saw sun. So they were all saying, you know, "We come down here to see the sun." And I said, "Gee, well, California's just like this." They said, "So what are you doing

down here if California's the same?" It's like, "There's no reason to come down here if California's the same." Well, there's a lot more to look at over here. So, and one of the things that I started noticing is that, like I said, Benidorm became a little resort where nightclubs were opening up. So they had nightclubs with different music. And the two most popular groups there were Mexican groups. One of them was tropical, with marimbas and stuff like that. It was a big group. They had big gigantic marimba, and maybe four guys were playing the marimba, and they . . . But the stars, the stars of Benidorm were playing at the most luxurious nightclub called the Granada, and it was a Mexican trio called Trio Los Angeles.

KD: Oh.

JG: And they were hot. I went in there to hear them, and as they started one of the songs I threw out a *grito*, and I thought everybody was going to do it.

IN: Yeah, no. [laughter]

JG: And everybody turned around and looked at me. I was like the only one. And I was so excited. And they said—because I said, you know, I do some of that music—and they said, "You go back, you get together a couple of more Mexicans and come over here, and you've got a job for life here." And I got excited. I said, "This is going to be my town, boy!"

IN: So now this when you started thinking about how Spain was different from LA and East LA, the tourism—

JG: Oh, well, actually, it was all throughout Europe, when I started seeing all this beautiful architecture and art and everything. But it was when I really got to Spain that I really started analyzing the fact that I started seeing all of this artwork and crafts and everything. That they're just ancient. There are replicas of old guns and replicas of swords, replicas. and I'm saying, "Spain is making all of this money by promoting their history, their culture, their landmarks." Spain had all these beautiful cathedrals too. And I said, "Wow."

IN: And what was their biggest industry?

JG: Tourism. Tourism was the biggest industry. And I'm thinking, "Wow, imagine, they're making money to bring in tourists by preserving and promoting their history, their culture, their landmarks. And the money that they bring in helps to preserve and create more. So it's a whole cycle." And I'm thinking, "Wow, what a marketing program." Since I was in advertising, I started thinking, "Wow, to be able to do something like that back home, to be able to do something like that back home." And I started thinking, "Well, here I am at the beach, and I know a lot of people are coming to the beach. But we don't have a beach in East LA."

KD: No. [laughter]

JG: And I started thinking, "But we have a lot of culture over there." So then, I'm trying to think—

IN: You started reading about Spain.

JG: Oh, yeah, I got so excited about Spain that I started reading about Spain. And I wanted to learn more about Spain, because Spain was what I was excited about. So I started actually—I read a little bit about Spain. But as I started traveling . . . Oh, so then I thought—at that time, I started thinking also, I was running out of money.

IN: Well, you actually spent your first Christmas and New Year's—

JG: Yeah, it was the first time I spent Christmas away from home. So I spent Christmas with Tony and Mila and César and his girlfriend at his house, and he cooked. He made spaghetti. He was a very good cook. So we spent it together there. And I'm not sure whether I spent New Year's, I can't remember. But it was about this time that I started thinking that I was running out of money. And also I was anxious because I was finding all of these things. I was anxious to go back and start telling Joe.

IN: But one of the last things you did was go to the movies with them, and what movie did you see?

JG: Oh, yeah, I went with Tony and with his girlfriend from England. We went to Alicante to go to the movies, and we went to go a movie of Cantinflas. [laughter]

KD: So Mexico—

JG: And I felt so proud, so proud. And the English girl was real excited, really laughing. I guess she knew a certain amount of Spanish, too.

IN: And the fact that the Spaniards loved Mexicanos so much, what did they start calling you, because you were a singer and a Mexicano?

JG: Well, when I started dealing with people that had to do with business, they called me Don Juan. And I was flattered, I was really flattered, because—

KD: You're a young man.

JG: Yeah, I was twenty-seven years old, and they're calling me Don Juan. And my dad, you know, was always Don Juan. And they always—I saw the name Don Juan as being the name of—somewhat prestige, respect. And they're calling me Don Juan. And what it is, is it's—they either say “Don Juan” or “Señor Gonzalez.” But once they get to know you a little better, they say “Don Juan.” And I started feeling really proud that they were calling me Don Juan. So anyway—and that was a sign of pride, that was—that's where the pride coming into me. I felt really, really proud.

IN: So then you were running out of money.

JG: So then I was running out of money, and I was also anxious to show Joe a lot of the stuff that I was going to be able to import. And not only that, I was anxious to put a trio together to come back *[laughter]* to Spain, because they were really excited about a trio. And I said—

IN: So how did you get home?

JG: So anyway, what I did is first I drove to Portugal. I wanted to go to Fatima, so I drove to Portugal in my little car. And it was cold now so I was always wrapped up, and Tony gave me a big gigantic knitted scarf that I could just wrap around my face. And I was left—with my illness, I was left with somewhat of a whooping cough. The minute I got a little tickle in my throat, I feared—I was paranoid, because my cough just wouldn't stop. My face would turn purple and red, I keep on coughing, coughing, coughing, coughing, and I was just scared to death. So anyway, but I just—and if I laughed, that tickle would come out, so I tried not to laugh.

So anyway, I decided I'm going to drive to Portugal. I want to go see Fatima, so I drove through Portugal. And at first I drove to the town where Don Quixote fought the windmills, and they had quite a few windmills. So I went and I looked at it, took pictures of the windmills, and from there I went to Portugal. And as I was driving to Portugal, I was now driving at night. And I was driving in the woods, so all I could see was dark woods with trees in the side. And I decided, you know, I was falling asleep. So I pulled to the side of the road in the dark woods, and what I did is I got my guitar and I put it in the front seat, and I got my shaving bag, a little bag that had the extra stuff, and I put it on top, and I set it up so it looked like somebody was sleeping there, and I'd jump in the back and I'd sleep. So it looked like two people were sleeping there.

So I'd jump in the back, and as I'm wrapping myself up, because it was really cold, I'd wrap that scarf all around my face, I'd wrap it up completely. And I lay down and I'm ready to go to sleep, and all of a sudden, the tickle, I start coughing and coughing and coughing. And I had to spit phlegm. So I had to lower the window, take off the scarf, lower the window and spit the phlegm, and then raise the window. And as I'm wrapping it up again, I'm seeing like five figures coming out of the woods. And I go, “Oh, my gosh.” So I got the guitar, threw it in the back, jumped in the front seat and I took off again. So I drove—I kept on driving. That woke me up. *[laughter]*

KD: Obviously. *[laughter]*

JG: So I kept on driving right where there was a little town by a street where there was more—where I saw there was some houses and stuff. So I slept there, and then I went to Fatima. And I spent a little time at Fatima. I saw Fatima. I came back through one of the northern routes, and I went up to Madrid. So then I went sightseeing in Madrid. And in Madrid, I—there were from Madrid . . . I went to . . . Oh, I had a ball in Madrid. I was—I went to El Prado. I spent tons of time in El Prado. I think most of the time I was in it. *[laughter]* I went to El Prado, and the room that I just—I love his artwork—was Rubens, Peter Paul Rubens. And I was—I mean, they had a whole gigantic room with Peter Paul Rubens's stuff, and these gigantic paintings. I just sat there and just—I mean, I love his painting. He was my favorite artist at that time, you



know? He was the only artist that I really knew that I really enjoyed. And then they had the gigantic paintings of Velazquez and Goya and all that. So I spent time in Madrid. So from Madrid, I spent maybe two or three days and I kept on going.

IN: Now, what happened with Franco? Was that in Madrid?

JG: Yeah. Yeah. Well, in Madrid, I was—I always remember hearing . . . Like I knew very few people who had traveled, but I had heard, maybe from a brother of one of the guys that was in grammar school with me—his name was Dennis Pilón, and he was one that I used to hang around with a lot. And what I'd always remember of Dennis is that he got his bicycle, he got some motorcycle shocks, so he had motorcycle shocks on his bicycle. And I had heard that Dennis had been to France, and that he saw de Gaulle go underneath the Arc of Triumph. So that was very memorable. I said "Wow," you know, to have seen that and all that.

So anyway, I was in Madrid, and I was—I walked in, parked the car, walked into one of the stores. And I was looking at stuff, maybe it was a gallery of something, and I was looking at it. And then I came out, and as I came out, all of a sudden the street was lined up with soldiers as far as I can see. The soldiers were maybe twenty feet apart, or quite a bit apart. But on both sides of the street. It was just full of soldiers on both sides. I go, "My gosh, what . . .?" And within no time at all, all these soldiers were lined up. And I asked, "So what's happening?" And he says, "Franco's going to be going from one palace to one of the others." And all of a sudden, I see Franco going down in, like, a caravan. I said, "Wow, what an experience to have seen Franco." So then I—

IN: You went to Toledo?

JG: From Madrid I went to Segovia, and I saw the beautiful castle in Segovia. And I went to Avila with all the—surrounded by the wall, the great wall.

IN: And then you saw Goya's paintings?

JG: And then I went to Toledo, I went to Toledo. And as I was driving into Toledo, it was already getting late, and I said, "Well, if I go in at night, it'll be—I just want to stay out here and sleep. I'll sleep on the outskirts."

KD: You wanted that experience of coming into town.

JG: Yeah. I wanted to go into town. But I could see the bridge over the river, and I said, "I want to drive that bridge in the morning." And early in the morning there isn't a lot of traffic. And it's a little—Toledo's very, very ancient, they said. According to what I heard, it was one of the ancient, most ancient cities there in Spain. So it was a little—streets were very tiny. You could hardly move around. And so I said, "I'll wait." So what I did, I slept right outside, right outside. I could see all of Toledo where I was sleeping at. So I slept right outside. Early in the morning, I just got up and started driving around, so I was able to sightsee.

IN: Was that—when you woke up, where was your car?

JG: Oh, no, this was in Portugal. This was actually coming back from Fatima. When I was in Portugal I pulled over to the side of a road and I fell asleep. And when I woke up, I looked down and I was right next to a cliff that went down hundreds of feet down. I go, "Oh, my gosh, if I would have drove a little more, I would have drove off the cliff."

IN: Oh, okay. So that was in Portugal.

JG: Yeah, so that was in Portugal.

IN: So back to Toledo.

JG: So in Toledo I actually slept right inside of the road. So I got up early in the morning and I was able to just sightsee and drive around all over the place.

IN: So what did you discover in Toledo?

JG: But in Toledo were the manufacturers of all the swords, the armor suit, the jewelry. All this forged gold jewelry. Everything was there.

IN: Artifacts, guns?

JG: Everything was there.

IN: Paintings, leatherwork?

JG: Everything was being manufactured in Toledo. They had all the ancient stuff. And the owner of the armor suit was the Félix, or something like that, and I remember that. So I started going around. And some way or another, I managed to get the names—I asked them, you know. Oh, oh, oh, what it was—what it was is that a manufacturer had his own store in a particular place that had a lot of stuff. So I went in there, and I said, you know, “I’m interested in . . .” Because here, I was talking to store owners instead of manufacturers before. So I said I’m interested in importing things into the United States, and I said, “I’d like to buy stuff.” And he said, “Well, we have our factory right in the outskirts of—down so-and-so highway.” And I said, “Great!” And he said, “So we do this and this and that.” So first I went sightseeing—

IN: So did they export?

JG: Yeah. So first I started . . . I wanted to just sightsee. So I found El Greco’s house, and then I went into the cathedral where Greco did his great mural. And I was looking at all this just awesome, awesome . . . It was really, really beautiful.

IN: Was the Greco or Goya?

JG: Oh, Goya. Goya, Goya. Goya. I’m sorry, Goya. Yeah. Yeah, Goya. Yeah, well, Goya. Yeah, Goya. Yeah, it was Goya. [You got me confused. It was El Greco, not Goya.]

IN: So you saw [El Greco’s] paintings at his home.

JG: Yeah.

KD: Yeah, El Greco, that’s—

JG: Yeah, yeah, I’m getting—yeah. But I saw El Greco’s house, but also Goya’s paintings [later].

KD: Goya.

JG: Yeah, but it was El Greco’s [house]. Yeah, it was El Greco. So I—after I went sightseeing throughout Benidorm—I mean, Toledo—then I drove to the outskirts to go talk to the . . . And the manufacturer there said, you know. I mean, he had a gigantic showroom with all this beautiful stuff. I mean, it looked like a museum. And he says, you know, “We’ll do everything for you.” He says, “Anything you buy anywhere in Spain, we’ll pick it up and we’ll bring it up and we’ll package it and we’ll ship it to you, all in one crate. So we’ll export everything.” And he says, you know, “We’d love to be able to have a representative. So if you’re our representative in the United States, we’ll even give you things on consignment.” So—and he had these tapestries with all the names, all the names of—all the Spanish names. And then he gave me the tapestry with the Gonzalez name. So he gave me that one.

IN: And the coat of arms?

JG: Yeah, it had the coat of arms on it, of the Gonzalez name. And so he says, you know, you can—everything you can get here. And he says, “If we don’t have it,” he says, “like the armor suits. The armor suits were manufactured by Don Félix del Valle,” or something like that. And I went to go see the manufacturer. All these beautiful . . . And they’re doing them just like the ancient days, you know.

KD: Hammering them out.

JG: Yeah, with all these beautiful—these patterns and designs. And I said, “This is it, I’ve got it, I’ve got it. I got everything here. The guy will package everything. He’ll ship everything, he’ll do everything.” He was so excited about me. And, “Señor Gonzalez,” you know, he was calling me Señor Gonzalez, but a little later, then he starts on Don Juan, Don Juan, Don Juan. And I think it was El Día de los Reyes when I was there, because he says, “We’re having a celebration at our home, and you’re welcome to come down.” I mean, at this time, I was in a beard and a moustache. I didn’t shave. I started growing it in Spain, especially when I started traveling. And I said I didn’t have clothes appropriate [and was living out of the car]. [laughter] And I said, “No, actually, I have to do this and that.” So I didn’t go to their family party. But he was inviting me, and very gracious, and very exciting. And he started giving me brochures, tons of brochures for everything. And he’s like, he said, you know, “I’ll package anything you want, anywhere, I’ll get it.”

IN: Now, did you go to Segovia after that?

JG: No, actually, I had already gone to Segovia, and—

IN: And the—

JG: And Avila.

IN: And Zamora.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Okay.

JG: So then after that, Mila and César had given me the address to their parents. Actually, their mother had passed away, but their father was still alive. So they gave me the address to their place in Zamora. And they gave me the directions. And they said, “The directions on how to get there—it’s right in the outskirts of Zamora.” He said, “So all you have to do is drive out through this certain road, and our house is in Frente la Peña.” So I’m thinking, *frente de la peña*, so the house is in the outskirts, right in the outskirts of Zamora, in front of a *peña*. And he says, “And you can ask anybody for the . . .” Their name was—well, I forgot their last name. But anyway, “You can ask anybody for Palos.” Palos was their name, Palo. He said, “You can ask anybody for the *familia* Palo, and they all know us, the ones that have seventeen kids.”

So I went there, and I’m driving in different outskirts, and I’m trying to ask people in the road, “It’s a house right in the outskirts of the road, in front of *una peña*, and their name is Palo.” And nobody knows who they are, nobody even knows who they are. So I finally go to the police station, and I ask them. “It’s a house right in front of the *peña*, and they’re the Palos that have seventeen kids.” And they said, “No, we don’t know anybody.” And I said, “They said it’s *frente de la peña*,” and he said, “Oh, that’s the town of Frente de la Peña.” [*laughter*] So it was a little town called Frente de la Peña.

So I went to the town, and I mean, everybody knew them. So I arrived there when they were all still there for Christmas. The whole entire family had gotten together for Christmas. So they were all there, and I told them, you know, that I had been with César and Mila. They greeted me, they were so excited [and asked about Cesar and Mila]. “So how are they doing over there?” And they had ages from like fifty years old to eight years old, so they had all the ages there. And they were so excited. They sat me down, we had a big dinner, and they had—I remember they had all this garlic that was cooked, so everybody just ate garlic just like that. And of course the wine and the big bread that they had to cut up. And then after we finished eating, they all wanted to hear me sing.

KD: Oh!

JG: They all wanted to hear the *musica mexicana*. They all wanted to hear me sing, except the three little kids, the youngest ones. They said, “No, we want”—they wanted to see—

KD: Some Top 40 thing?

JG: [*sings rhythm*]

IN: Oh. [*sings melody from Mission: Impossible*] That one?

JG: Yeah.

IN: What was that TV show? *Mission: Impossible*.

JG: *Mission: Impossible*. They wanted to see *Mission: Impossible*. It was on a Sunday, they wanted to see *Mission: Impossible*. And they were upset. And then, so as we were talking about me singing, they turned on the TV and they looked at it. So the parents said, all the parents, “Turn off that TV! He’s going to sing, he’s going to sing.” [*laughter*]

KD: Well, I don’t mean to interrupt, but we have to eat before we continue, so let’s take a break.

[*break in audio*]

KD: We took a quick break and we’re back. This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez, and we were talking about your brief trip to Frente de la Peña, and the family there, and the Mexican music.

JG: So first I sang to the entire family, and oh, they loved it. I mean, like I said, they never saw Mexicans in that little town, so I was really a novelty, and the only ones they had—the only Mexicans they know was Cantinflas, Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, and all these superstars. And they’d say, “Gosh, you’re a typical Mexican, mexicano tipico, no mas necesita tu pistola, sombrero, tu caballo, tu eres mexicano—you’ve got

it all.” [laughter] So then they invited me to their town pub, or bar, they called it a bar. And a bar is really a hangout for the town, the town’s men. [laughter] And everybody was there, including the mayor and everybody from the little town.

So anyway, they were introducing me to everybody, and they made me sing over there. So I sang over there. And I happened to know one flamenco song all this time also, so I did the flamenco. And they’re all moving with the flamenco. And then I did the Mexican—some of the Mexican songs. And, oh, they just loved it. “Oh, mexicano!” Wow, I was feeling like a celebrity, everybody loving the *mexicano*. [laughter] So anyway, I spent a few days there. So from there I drove up to . . . Oh, no, actually, with two of the brothers, the younger brothers, I think, we went sightseeing around the area. So they took me to areas where El Cid was actually knighted and stuff like that, and sightseeing more around Zamora. And then we also went to Valladolid, I think, and it was this beautiful, beautiful, awesome cathedral with—I mean, very elaborate. And we went into [Christopher] Columbus’s house. And so this is where Columbus lived. And so we go in there, and there’s an ancient—and they had a picture of the Virgen de Guadalupe in there.

KD: The Virgen that we know?

JG: Yeah. Our Virgen de Guadalupe.

KD: Wow.

JG: And I didn’t understand it. But anyway, they had it in there. And so that was interesting. So anyway, we went back home, and spent maybe a couple of more days there. So then I drove—

IN: So they said goodbye, and you said goodbye to everyone?

JG: Yeah. So packed up, said goodbye to everybody, and Father Javier, who was the priest at St. Isabel, a Spaniard—

[break in audio]

KD: This is tape 6 on November 11, 2007, with Johnny Gonzalez. Go ahead.

JG: Father Javier’s parents were the second generation who were the keepers—

IN: Caretakers.

JG: Caretakers of Franco’s summer palace, and they had their house there. And it was a nice house, I think it was a two-story house. So I was able to stay with them a few days there.

KD: My goodness.

JG: Yeah, so I was there in—I mean, he wasn’t in town at that time. [laughter] Because I had seen him in . . . [laughter] But it was—that was in San Sebastián. But it was beautiful there in San Sebastián. So anyway, I drove—I was on my way to France now. And I drove through the Pyrenees, and the Pyrenees was totally snowed in. I didn’t have any chains, and I was driving this little Volkswagen, and I was cold, cold. And I had to sleep—I mean, I took a picture of it, and nothing but white, everything was white, including the road. And as I’m driving, I had to be very—I drove very slow. The minute I put brakes, I’d start skidding. And I had to sleep in that area. So here I go again. I wrap my scarf, that gigantic knitted scarf, so I could breathe through the scarf because it was knitted. So I would just wrap it around my head, set up my guitar in front so it looked like somebody else was there, so it looked like we were two people. So then I’d wake up early in the morning, I’d continue driving. I’m going through France, and then I’d start driving through this beautiful road with trees on each side. I mean, they looked—the trees were exactly the same distance apart, in other words, it was—

KD: Planted.

JG: Set up, planted that way. It was just really, really beautiful, and I’ve seen that lately in some movies in France. But that was very memorable, because it was so beautiful.

So now I was on my way to Lourdes. I wanted to see Lourdes. So I went to Lourdes, and I walked into this bank to get some money, to cash a traveler’s check. And now I’m typical French, I had my beard and my moustache, and a watch cap. I looked very French. And I felt real good, because I walked in, and some of the girls turned around to look at me. I said, “Well, I’ve got to leave my beard.” [laughter] So anyway,

I got my money. I went into Lourdes, and one of my goals was seeing if Lourdes water really worked, my asthma and my sinus. [laughter] So I went in there and I went to the grotto, and I found it and I swallowed that water through my nose and through my mouth and everything. I just said, "I just hope it works, so . . ." And I see all these crutches and all these different things that are sitting there. And it was really beautiful. And it was a rainy day, and it was really, really nice. So I stayed there for a while. And I continued driving, and then it started getting really cloudy, because I was on my way to Orléans. And this is where Joan of Arc was supposed to have spent a lot of time.

IN: So you saw a statue of her?

JG: Yeah. So anyway, I was driving—

KD: It's a very Catholic trip. [laughter]

JG: [laughs] Yeah.

IN: So Father Malloy was right, you're a good Catholic. [laughter]

KD: Fatima, Joan of Arc. [laughter]

JG: So I drove into Orléans. And actually, maybe on the way to Orléans, it was just little—it's like they don't have—they have a major highway at certain points, and then all of the sudden it starts going to winding roads, and you go into little tiny towns. And I decided . . . It got really foggy, so I was following this gigantic gas truck. It was—because I was going for such a long ways in back of [the truck], that once it got off and started going into winding roads, I wanted to make sure . . . If a gas truck is going—because going through little towns, you could get lost real quick and lose the road. So I just said, "I'm going to follow this truck." So I started going into little winding roads, and this gigantic gas truck. That was the main highway. So I just stood behind it, and the minute it parked to go to sleep, also, I parked there. And I said, "Well, I've got a companion here." So I just slept there also. And then in the morning, it was gone already, I think. It got up before me. So I kept on driving, and I'm really a—I was really a sound sleeper, and I was always afraid that by the time I woke up, they were already strangling me. So anyway, that's why I wanted to be around where somebody was at.

So I got to Orléans, and it was—the cathedral was just—wow. That was the first cathedral I think I saw, the Gothic. And it was—wow, just . . . I had never seen anything so big, except for St. Peter's. St. Peter's was gigantic. It was so different from the Italian cathedrals, and this was much more elaborate. A lot of artwork and sculpture pieces and all that. And then they had a beautiful statue of Joan of Arc on a horse in the plaza. Really, really nice. So I continued. I went to—finally got to Paris. And in Paris I said, "I've got a lot of things to see here, but it's so hard to drive around." So hard. And I just didn't, I . . . Actually, I, again, I slept just before, the night before, and I went early in the morning, because early in the morning there's not that much traffic. So I could see and I could know a little bit about it.

So I started driving around Paris. I went to the Louvre, and it was pretty exhausting, because it was me being in the car. I wasn't eating real good, and so . . . But the Louvre was gigantic, man. I mean, it is a big, big, big museum. I saw the art. Of course I had to go see the *Mona Lisa* and the big crowd around the *Mona Lisa*. So I went to see the *Mona Lisa*, and the *Venus*, and all these other things. And it was just beautiful, beautiful. So it was probably the largest museum I had ever been into. The one in—in Rome, from the—St. Peter's was really big, but the Louvre was just really, really gigantic. I mean, I don't know if you could—you can't possibly see that in even a couple of days. It's just really big.

KD: Tell me about how you experience a museum. Would you just go through and look, or do you read the—some kind of—

JG: Well, I would read certain ones, but I knew that there's no way that I could read everything.

KD: Yeah, the Louvre's huge, so—

JG: I wanted to see it all. I wanted to see it all. And what interests me, then I really would focus on and read it. And of course, the ones that are really famous, I would read. But most of the time I just wanted to see it. I just wanted—and I was pretty tired. And I was not sleeping great, not eating real good. I was really exhausted. But I said, "I've got to see it, I've got to see all this stuff." So I went through the entire Louvre.

And then I went to the Eiffel Tower, and I went to—and just going way up there and being able to see all the way around, just really fantastic experience. I really enjoyed it. Then I went to Notre Dame, and I went to the top, where the—what do you call it, the little statues that they have of all those—I don't know what they call them. They have a certain name. I almost want to say the gremlins. *[laughter]* They have a name—I forget their name. *[Oh, the gargoyles.]*

IN: Where the Hunchback of Notre Dame was.

JG: Yeah. *[laughter]* But I was surprised that they actually had, like, chairs, you know. In other words, the bleachers weren't really modern. They had, like, chairs up on this gigantic cathedral. But it was so, so beautiful. And then it was a very interesting experience I had. I was walking on the other side of the river that runs on the opposite side of Notre Dame. Nostra Dame. I always remember in Spain, or in Europe, they say the Americans are so lazy or don't have respect, because they say "No-ter Dame." Why can't they say "Notre Dame"? But anyway, they stress that very strongly over there. But anyway, I was in the opposite side of the river, where there's tons of artists painting and showcasing all of their artwork and everything. And as I was looking at it, I saw this black guy walking that looked just like Sammy Davis Jr. Just like Sammy Davis Jr. And as I'm looking at him, the guy's looking at me, and looking like he got a little nervous, started walking faster—I mean, he was—I could have sworn that was Sammy Davis Jr. And to this day, I'd still like to find out whether Sammy Davis Jr. was in Paris.

KD: In that year? *[laughter]*

JG: At that particular time, yeah. So anyway, I saw that, and I went sightseeing, all the—what is it, the opera—the palace of the opera, whatever it's called.

IN: The opera house. *[Opéra de Paris.]*

JG: Opera house. It's just awesome also. I don't remember what other things. But you know, just looking at it and just thinking, God, I'm looking at all these things. I'm saying, "Wow, to live here? To live in any of these places where you're just surrounded by all this artwork and beauty—I mean, what an experience, to live here!" I'm going to go back home and there's nothing around me to look at. Nothing to look at. And growing up and learning that the minute there's a building that's twenty, fifty years old, they want to tear it down, and who cares if it's anybody's culture? You know, we can make money by building something here, and it's like, no respect for history or culture whatsoever in this country. And it's just demoralizing. I said, you know, "What do they have against art?" And I'm just thinking, "Wow, to be in this situation, just—how could you ever want to leave these places?" And I said, all this time I'm thinking, "I'm going to be back and I'm going to be spending a lot of my life *[here]*, and when I come back, I'll *[start]* focusing on learning French, because I'm going to spending a lot of time in France."

So anyway, I saw all these beautiful things, and I thought, "Well, it's time to leave France." What it is, was that I found a bargain, another bargain, to be able to go to the United States. And it was actually Icelandic Airlines, that would leave from Luxembourg to New York. And it was a small plane, very inexpensive. I don't remember how much it was, but it was very, very inexpensive. So anyway, I said, "I'm going to fly." So my goal was to go to Luxembourg to get Icelandic Airline.

So anyway, I decided, "Okay, I'll just—I'll leave Paris. And the way to do it is, I'll just go on the Champs-Élysées, down the biggest road, and that is definitely to get me out." So I get on it, and I drive all the way, and all of a sudden, this big gigantic street turns into a little street, one way, and then it turns into another road, and I said, "Wait a minute . . ." So they had this gigantic ball full of lights up on top of a gigantic, gigantic building. It was like a major landmark. So I drive out, and all of a sudden, I'm in a one way, and I'm driving, I'm driving, I'm driving, and I'm trying to figure out how to get out. And I come back, and I find myself back on the Champs-Élysées. And I find myself back at the big ball of lights. And it happened like four times. And I was so exhausted, I felt like crying. I couldn't get out of France, I couldn't get out of Paris. I couldn't get out of Paris. And then I'd ask instructions, and they would say it in French, and it was terrible, it was terrible. I just wanted to get out and go to sleep on the side of the road.



So anyway, I eventually got out, managed to get out of Paris, and drove down to . . . Slept in the outskirts, got up early in the morning, drove into Belgium. And Belgium was all snowed in and everything. It was very pretty. And then from Belgium I went into Luxembourg. And one of the experiences that I had that was memorable is actually on the border of Germany, when I was crossing the border in Germany. It was a small border, and there were two German guards in a little cabin there, and they lifted up the thing. And man, when they came out, I go—man, they were great dressers. They had beautiful—it was maybe an olive green or lighter, a little lighter than an olive green. But those hats that they had were—I mean, it's like the Nazis. I mean, I look at it and I say, "Wow." I thought the LA—because the New York police, I can't say much for their dress, but the LA Police really dress—motorcycle cops and all that, they dress—they dress really good. And I thought, man, nobody beats the LA police. But when I saw those Germans, man, I said, "Wow." I mean, immaculate, and, man, they were just beautiful, [in] beautiful dress.

IN: Now, you saw a bridge?

JG: So anyway, going into Luxembourg, I saw this gigantic, beautiful, what looked like an aqueduct, but that was a bridge for the train to go by. So I went into Luxembourg. And actually I arrived sometime during the day, and the plane was going to leave the next day. So the trick now is, where am I going to sleep, and I'm practically broke.

KD: What are you going to do about the car?

JG: Yeah. So I've got to sleep. And here I have a car, what am I going to do with the car?

KD: Can't sell the car if you need it to sleep in.

JG: Yeah, yeah. So I said, "Huh. I'll make an exchange. I'll find somebody that will . . . Where I could be able to sleep. Feed me, and rest, and whatever, and I'll just give them the car." So I said, "Well, might as well look for a pretty girl." [laughter] So I walked down, and I saw one, and one didn't understand me, so I couldn't talk to her. So she lost out. So then I found another one, and she was very nice. And she says, "Well, let me call my parents and see what they think about it," and all that. So she called her parents, and she says, "Yeah, okay. So they'll be coming down, and they said okay."

KD: What language were you speaking in?

JG: English.

KD: English, okay.

JG: English, yeah, in Luxembourg. So they took me down to their house, I had dinner, and I soaked in the tub—I mean, it has been awhile since I had had a nice hot bath and soaked in the tub, and got ready for the next day. And the next morning, they drove me off to the airport, so I had a whole family saying goodbye to me. [laughter] So I got on the plane, and when the plane—it's a little plane, man, the wind. It looked like it was going to drop. I said, "Oh, my God." Boom. [laughter] I mean, it almost felt like we were driving on a bumpy road. Here's the air, and all these things happening—so we went to Iceland first, it was Icelandic Airlines, so we flew to Iceland, and here I was expecting it to be all ice, but there was a lot of greenery, a lot—it was pretty. And so from Iceland, then we got on, and then we went into New York. And I don't remember a lot, I don't think I called Father or anything at that time, I'm not sure. But anyway, I was anxious now to get home—

KD: To get home.

JG: Because I was getting tired. So what it is, is I got the Greyhound instead of getting a train or another plane. Greyhound was the best deal. So I got a Greyhound. Not only that, I wanted to sightsee the country. I didn't want to just fly over the United States. So I took the northern route.

KD: Yeah.

JG: So then, as we were going out through Idaho or Iowa, I don't know, and I saw my first major snowstorm. And we couldn't even drive because there was—you know, you couldn't see anything in front of you. It was so . . . So as I was driving, as we were—as we were in the bus—the guy that was sitting next to me was a French fashion designer. He was afraid to fly. He was an elderly guy who was going to open up a fashion store in Beverly Hills. So we became very good friends. I forgot his name, what his name was. [Oh,

his name was Jay.] But that was—but anyway, we became pretty good friends. And I actually told him I was going to go open up a gallery in East LA. And he says, “Oh, isn’t that where they burn down houses?” So he was confusing the Watts Riots with East LA.

KD: With East LA.

JG: But it just goes to show that East LA had such a bad reputation that they even imagined that East LA was there. And I said, “No, no, no. That was in Watts.” But so anyway, that was more present in my mind. And while I worked at Standard Engraving, there was some of the guys that were there that—one particular one that says, you know, “You’ve got to get out of East LA. You’re never going to get anywhere in life living in this community.” He says, “You’ve got to leave.” And I was bugged, you know. I was bugged. But anyway, you know, it’s just things. And you know, [to] the media and everybody, East LA, East LA is terrible, East LA—the negative image of East LA. And it just bugged me, it really bugged me. So anyway, we became good friends, and on the way back, we stopped off in Las Vegas. So he had never seen Las Vegas. So he wanted to see Las Vegas, so I said, “Sure.” You know. So we stopped off in Las Vegas, we got a room, and then we went sightseeing. And the next day, we came back, and then we went into LA.

IN: So when you were traveling cross-country, what did you notice about the United States?

JG: Oh, yeah. So as I was traveling, I was noticing, there’s no art. There’s no art. There’s nothing to look at. Nature’s beautiful, but everything looks the same. Every time they had a McDonald’s, a Shell Gas, everything looked exactly the same. Everything looked the same. There was no—nature was the only thing that was different. And I was just saying, “Boy, the United States is really a cultural desert.” I said, “There’s nothing to look at out here.” No history, no monuments, no public art. Basically it’s—compared to Europe, it’s nothing to look at. And you know, you go to Las Vegas, and that wasn’t culture.

KD: No.

JG: And it was just—it’s terrible.

KD: That’s one place that people wanted to see, or at least this French—

JG: Yeah, it was terrible. And it was just really growing stronger on me, the difference in the major loss that we have here for not having these things.

IN: So there were no historical landmarks—

JG: No. Nothing.

IN: Compared to Europe.

JG: Yeah.

IN: So how were you feeling, coming from Europe—

JG: Well, I was still in a trance. I was still in a trance with all this beauty. That was strong in my mind, just seeing so much. So automatically, I was comparing it.

IN: And how about Spain? Were you thinking about Spain?

JG: Well, Spain is just all the culture and everything that they had there. But anyway, I just compared it to Europe. And so anyway, arriving, as we arrived into LA, I arrived at the Greyhound. And he took off in his direction. I had his number, but I don’t know if we ever talked again. But he took off, and then as I’m driving into East LA, and LA, I’m saying, “Wow.” And then I go into East LA, and it’s even worse, because we lack trees, we lack a lot of the—

IN: So not even the nature that you were seeing across the country.

JG: Yeah, yeah. So it just was really becoming a major thing in my mind that we have so little. [It was troubling me.] And then also, seeing all these things, I started thinking that, you know, we’re trying to be accepted as Americans by trying to hide our culture. As Mexicans, we have a lot of culture, but it’s all at our house. It’s all at our house. All our food and everything else is in our house.

IN: Now at that time, because you were so in love with Spain, you started reading about Spain.

JG: Yeah. Yeah.

IN: And where did that take you?

- JG: So anyway, the focus was to—because I was so excited about Spain, my focus was to read about Spain. I wanted to read about Spain. And Mexico wasn't anything in my mind at that time. I wanted to read about Spain. So the first thing I did is I just started reading about Spain. And I'm not sure whether the first book was Iberia, or I don't know what it was, but anyway, I really got into—
- KD: And this is when you're back in Los Angeles?
- JG: This is when I got back to LA. So one of the first things I did was just began reading. And all of a sudden, I'm reading about Spain, and I'm reading about Cortés coming [to Mexico].
- IN: Which book?
- JG: I don't know if it was—
- IN: The chronicles—
- JG: I don't know if it was Iberia. I don't know exactly what it is. But anyway, Bernal Díaz, it was that Bernal Díaz was with Cortés.
- IN: It wasn't the chronicles of Bernal Díaz?
- JG: I don't know. I don't know what it was. It was just some history about Spain. All I wanted to learn was just read all about Spain, I was just so excited about Spain. So I'm reading about Spain, and all of a sudden, Spain takes me with Cortés into Mexico. And I remember reading that Bernal Díaz was with him, documenting it. And they go over this gigantic mountain, and they go into . . . They see the valley of Mexico, and Bernal Díaz describes it, saying it was the most . . . Here the Spaniards were the explorers of the world at that time, and Bernal Díaz was one who had been with all of these explorers. And he was saying that he had seen most of the existing world, but yet he said it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his entire life. And him saying that—
- IN: This was when he marched into Mexico City?
- JG: No, this is when they were on top of the mountain looking down, he said that there's these aqueducts, floating gardens, and gigantic marketplaces, beautiful birds, and these pyramids and stuff like that. And mostly, he was describing a lot of the other stuff. I don't remember a lot yet. The pyramids. I was, "What? What?" And all of a sudden, more pride. I said, "Wow." I dropped Spain and started getting books on Mexico. And I looked for books in the house, because we had books on Mexico. And I remember one book that we had, the cover was red, white, and green. And I started reading it, and most of that book was really focusing on more of the 1800s Mexico.
- KD: Right.
- JG: And I started reading. There was one particular person that I started reading about that was an architect and an artist, and it was saying that he wanted to really build architecture that was relevant to the community and stuff like that. And I said, "Wow." I was just really excited reading about it. Then, so still, I didn't know a lot about the indigenous culture. More—I was reading more about the 1800s, 1700s.
- KD: Independent learning
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: When the Spaniards came in, actually. And then there was one book, there was one book that my family had. It was almost like a monthly book that Mexico put out or something, because there was a few of them. It was pretty thick, almost three-quarters of an inch thick. It was pretty big, and it was basically about Mexico. And this one happened to be about Mexico City. But it was more modern Mexico City. So as I looked at it, I saw the anthropology museum in there, and I talked about having the largest ceiling held by one pillar. And then the architect was [Pedro] Ramírez [Vázquez]. And then it had a painting of a mural, and this was the first mural that I saw in a book by Jorge González Camarena. And it was all women of different cultures, beautiful. It wasn't in color. And I was just, wow. Now this was just more design, it wasn't traditional like Europe. This was more design. And to top it off, his name was González. I said, "Wow." Oh, man, I was—you can't imagine the pride that was just in me.
- KD: Now, where do you think your family got those books? You said they were always in the house.

- JG: From Mexico. Well, maybe my dad—
- KD: From the trips they made?
- JG: Well, they either brought them from Mexico, or they bought stuff even here in—
- KD: But you didn't look at them as a child or a young man.
- JG: Not a lot.
- IN: You mentioned that your father used to always talk to you about the great things that Mexicans did—
- JG: Oh, yeah, my dad always—
- IN: But you never paid attention.
- JG: No.
- KD: You were talking about that on the first session.
- JG: Yeah. No, I didn't pay attention.
- KD: So this was stuff that was in the home—
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: But it wasn't in your awareness, or you didn't see it that way at the time.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: Because they didn't teach it in school, it wasn't in—
- JG: Yeah. But you know, it's amazing. And this what I believe, this is what's so strong right now in my belief that I want to be able—that I'm working on, that I work on—is that if you're closed-minded to something, no matter how much it's in front of you or no matter how much it is present—and the more they push it on you, the more you sort of put it away and don't pay attention, and that's how I feel. I feel I was just very closed-minded to a lot of the things about Mexico. I mean, everybody seemed to feel very good about it. I mean, I wasn't ashamed about it—
- KD: Everybody meaning—who?
- JG: In the family. I mean, I wasn't ashamed of being Mexican, but I just didn't want to let people outside knowing that I was born in Mexico. Because then they'd start calling me all these different names. [I always heard words like *wetback*, *beaner*, *greaser*, and *TJ* being used to describe those that came from Mexico like me. I was scared to death to be found out and called those names.] And I had preferred that they didn't know that I was born in Mexico, because I was around a lot of what we call Chicanos now, at that time we weren't using the word Chicano much.
- KD: So it was Chicanos that were calling you names, the Mexican Americans.
- JG: Yeah. But also, I'd hear certain things from white people. There weren't a lot of them that I was around, but I'd hear things, and the fact that I never saw anything positive about them, [Mexicans], I was totally [lacking in Mexican pride and was close minded to anything about Mexico.]—
- IN: Outside of the home.
- KD: So reading these books really—
- JG: Oh, now [after coming back from Spain] I was open-minded, and I was looking. And then, as soon as I got back, I somehow or other called Leo [Martinez], the one who worked at—first at Broadway, and then he worked at Gold's [Furniture store advertising department]. I called Leo, and Leo—
- IN: Oh, he's the one who got you all those jobs.
- JG: Yeah. And Leo, boom, right away got me a job at Timely Advertising in Eagle Rock. And it was a night job, and I think it wasn't every night, it was just certain nights, but I got very good pay, because they put me in charge of a weekly market newspaper, the type of papers that the markets put out, so that I was in charge of that. And then they said they needed some people. I said, "I need some help." So I brought in David Botello and also Sal.
- IN: Padilla.
- JG: Sal Padilla. So then they were both coming in on certain nights to help out. So there was this young kid who—white kid, who . . . I mean, I was the evangelist of Chicano, boy, I was preaching. Everything I learned, man, I was—

KD: What do you mean? You were preaching Spain, Mexico—

JG: No, Mexico. Mexico. I was just really proud of Mexico. I mean, Spain, I was proud, I wasn't, you know, ashamed of it. I mean, I was excited about both of them. But Mexico was what was really new to me, and that was me. So I was really, really excited, Mexico. But I was like an evangelist. I felt a real awakening. I was talking to everybody. "Oh, Mexico this, Mexico that, Mexico that." So there wasn't one person that I'd stop to talk to that I wouldn't talk about the great things about Mexico. As I was reading them, I was talking about all these great things. And then this young kid, white kid, because I was talking to him about it so much, he came over one day, he says, "Look at—here, you can have this book." And I open it up, and all these pre-Columbian pyramids, and all this ancient art. And I go, "Wow." I said, "Where'd you get this?" He says, "I had it from high school." "High school?" And I'm thinking, "Why didn't I ever get this in high school. High school?" And he gave me the book. And I just started reading and reading—

KD: Do you remember the title?

JG: So I just started—pardon me?

KD: Do you remember the title?

JG: No, I don't remember. It was red, it was a red cover, hardcover, and it wasn't a real big one. No, I don't remember the title.

IN: So this was the first time you heard there were pyramids in Mexico?

JG: Yeah, so then I . . . "Pyramids?" I said, "Pyramids?" So obviously, I didn't pay attention before, but I'm saying, "Pyramids, there's pyramids in Mexico?" I'm seeing all this, I'm saying—oh, you just can't imagine. I mean, I was ready to stand on top of the building and say, "I'm a Mexican! Yo soy mexicano!" Oh, man, I was ready to preach to the world. I was really excited. And I was thinking, "Wow, if only our community knew all this, if only everybody in our community knew what I knew, and we all felt like this, boy. I'll tell you, we'll go conquer the world, man."

KD: And what about your brother? What was he doing?

JG: He was working on the proposal to try and get the loan, [and looking for furniture manufacturers and other suppliers in Tijuana, and getting involved with the East LA Jaycees]. So—

IN: And this was to do the importing and exporting of furniture and art.

JG: Yeah. [And to also manufacture them and do art restoration.] So [Joe] was into his proposal, and he was getting frustrated because they were saying, "Well, how many things, how many of this and that?" And he was saying, "God, you know, it's like they want to know every screw that I'm going to be using, literally." He said, you know, "They want me to put down—everything down." And so he wanted to buy some machinery to be able to build the furniture, and then we'd carve out certain things. So he was getting frustrated with the fact that it was taking so long, because he had quit his job too. So I guess he saved a certain amount of money. So he was still working on trying to get the proposal together [to import, manufacture, and restore furniture and art]. And meanwhile, I was—I was in a high, I was just—oh, you can't imagine. You cannot imagine. I mean, talk about a change in life. I mean, this was truly a change in life. I mean, this was truly a change in life.

IN: So you want to get your message out.

JG: And the more I was reading, the more excited I was becoming. And the more I read . . . And I started writing, I started writing. I started writing and writing and writing. I started analyzing everything, and I started thinking, "God, you know, why don't we have artwork here. If we could only have monuments." I started thinking monuments, public artwork, and public artwork. I think of monuments because in Europe they don't have a lot of public murals.

IN: Now did you know about murals yet?

JG: No, it wasn't very present. Murals weren't that much present. I knew because I saw Jorge González Camarena, but it looked like a big painting indoors. And the murals that I had seen . . . I saw a lot of murals in Spain, but indoors.

KD: And the writing you were doing, is that like a journal, or were you—

JG: No, I was writing, analyzing everything. I started thinking—first of all, I was writing, analyzing emotions. I was writing and analyzing. “Why can’t we be doing this, why . . .” I was writing down a philosophy of life, I was writing that down—

KD: Do you have some of those notes? Oh, this is the original [“East LA to Tourist Attraction” project] proposal that [Johnny] wrote.

JG: So what it is, I started writing some philosophy, and I started driving around East LA. I said, “If we only had a monument, if we only had something that—to be able to make East LA a tourist attraction. We have the culture, all we have to do is package it and market it. If we only could do that, we could create a tourist attraction out of East LA.”

KD: And become a major force—

JG: Yeah. So all this time, I’m thinking of our culture. And at the same time, the location that Joe found was on First Street, and on First Street was the Pan-American Bank, which had these gigantic murals by José Reyes Meza.

KD: What kind of murals were they?

JG: And they were mosaic murals, mosaic murals. They were five mosaics—beautiful. And they were designs. So in other words, they weren’t traditional, they were designed. And there were a lot of design elements to it, which were—

IN: And what were the images?

JG: They were indigenous cultures, Indians doing different things.

IN: They were Aztec, Mayan—

JG: Well, different—I didn’t even analyze that particular culture. But it was a design, it was the indigenous culture. They were indigenous Indians.

KD: Okay.

JG: And then the [East Los Angeles] Doctors Hospital had also murals, and they had . . . Now this was done, I think, by [John] Bene, who was a German [American] artist, [I was told].

KD: Were those also by mosaic?

JG: I think those are tile. I think those are tile. And those were also indigenous. And I’m thinking, “Wow. This is beautiful.” And I was so proud, because they had so much design to it. It was different from all the European art.

And so here I’m driving to go see the location. so Joe took me to go see the location, which his brother-in-law—little kid, Danny was a little kid—found and said, “Joe, why don’t you just buy [or rent] this place?” So Joe had given a deposit on the building [while I was in Europe and wrote to me to tell me about it]. So anyway, I went down and saw the building, saw all . . . Gigantic place, but it was totally beat up. I mean, it was [in] terrible condition. It was an old abandoned meat market. But anyway, it was big, [five thousand square feet]. It was big and there was room. That’s all I was thinking about.

So as I was driving around First Street, I’m looking at the murals, and I’m looking at the architecture of . . . El Mercado was opening at that time, and also Glendale Federal Savings [and Loan]. The Mercado was Mexican-style. Glendale Federal Savings looked indigenous, with some Mexican and combination of American Indian, but it was arty. And then it was—so the Mercado, Pan-American, and [the] Glendale [Federal Savings and Loan building], and all in this one street. And I’m thinking, “Gee.” I was so proud, you know. At least these buildings [already have a Mexican look to them].

And at the same time, I was—I kept on driving down. Five Points, where Brooklyn, Indiana, and Lorena meet. So I’m looking, I’m seeing this monument that I remember that was one of the first things that I remember [while] driving into East LA from Pio Pico, when we were [first moving] into East LA. And I’m looking at the monument. I said, “Now why can’t we have more of these? Why can’t we have . . .?” And as I’m looking at, I’m studying. “Why can’t we have more?” I’m looking up the hill. I said, you know, “Where do we have room?” And then I look up the hill, the dead-end hill where Indiana—where it continues on Indiana? And I said, “Wow. That’s a lot of land there that’s not being used.”



So I started designing a whole monument on that location. I got down and I started drawing. I started doing measurements and everything. I started designing it. So I started designing “El Monumento de la Raza.” And I designed it so that the very top, there’s a pyramid where water gushes out the center of it. At night it’s lit up with red, so it looks like flame. And this water dribbles down the pyramid. There’s a fountain in the bottom where it’s full of water, and then there’s an opening that has the water dripping down towards the bottom of the hill. And as it drips down, that section is divided in three gigantic sections. So the first section is in red—at night it would be lit up in red, white, and green, [then rotate with red, white, and blue]. And so in the very center would be the Aztec calendar. The very top would be the Aztec calendar, so that means the water would be dribbling down the side. And then the next one would be Cuauhtemoc, and the next one, still being naïve, but still being very Spanish, in a sense, was Father Serra.

So, and then in the side was a stairway—two long stairways in the side of this, and which would—you’d walk and there’s one level, and you walk and there’s another level. So all along the stairway, the rail on both sides of the stairway was designed to be like a serpent. And in each stop was a head of Quetzalcoatl. So you had like eight Quetzalcoatl as you’re going down.

IN: And so this staircase would take you to the top of the hill?

JG: To the top of Folsom.

IN: Which is Folsom, which was called—what was that area called? Was that Flats?

KD: Flats?

JG: No. Flats, wasn’t that—

IN: No, no, that’s Folsom.

JG: That’s just Folsom. I used to call it the ridge of East LA.

IN: And is that the area where you lived, where you said there was no way to get to?

JG: Yeah.

IN: So you were actually creating now a gateway to get to that area.

JG: Yeah. To be able to walk up there, but to make it exciting. So from the top there, you can see all of East LA. It’s the most scenic area to be able to see all of East LA.

IN: Was that the area that connected to Assumption?

JG: No, no, no. Assumption was way down in the other end.

IN: Okay. So you were saying at the time—at the time, you felt that those were the three great, like, moments of Mexican past, right?

JG: Yeah.

KD: The Aztec calendar—

JG: Cuauhtemoc—

KD: Cuauhtemoc, and then Serra. Father Serra to represent, like, the Spanish—

JG: Yeah, the California.

KD: Catholic, California—

IN: In the United States.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, that was my thinking at that particular time.

IN: And at that time, you felt—did you feel other Mexicanos knew about this history, or not?

JG: No, no. Well, that’s what I’m saying. I felt—I felt I was the only one that knew any of this stuff. Obviously—

IN: Now, is this after you’ve written this—this is written in 1970. “Project: East LA to Tourist Attraction,” that you signed “ya basta.” And this is your idea, how to create—

JG: Yeah, this is the proposal that came out as the results of all my thinking, [which started in Europe when I saw all the beautiful cultural and historical public art and buildings that brought such great pride to the people while benefiting the country financially through tourism. But it was when I got back home, in January 1970, that I began reading and learning about Mexico’s history and, for the first time in my life, I became proud of my culture. Now, I wanted the whole world to know I’m a Mexican. While driving around East LA and comparing it to Europe I thought, “If only we could have something like that in East LA, so that

my community could feel the same pride that I now feel while benefiting financially through tourism.” This triggered my brain and inspired me to first create my idea for “El Monumento de la Raza” (Monument to the Race), and then to write my proposal for the “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project, which described my plan to turn East LA into an international cultural arts tourist attraction through the creation of Chicano murals, public art, and the marketing of our Mexican culture.]

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: So first I was designing this great monument—[“El Monumento de la Raza”]—and I thought, “In advertisement,” I thought, “what we can do is put a gigantic plaque there, and get all the businesses to sponsor it. And we’ll put their name there, and we’ll give out—hand out brochures in different locations of everybody that sponsored it. And it’ll help promote them to bring in business.” So my idea is to create a beautiful monument, just an awesome monument that would bring people [from] outside. I was thinking [from] around the world, you know. I wanted such a beautiful thing that it would attract people to come into East LA. So I’m thinking, at this time, how to build it, how to be able to round up the people to sponsor it.

KD: So what were—so your theme was beautification?

JG: Yeah. The theme was beautification, education, and economic development through the arts. But that came up later. [Sometime in February, since David Botello was working nights with me at Timely Advertising. He was one of the persons I was strongly expressing my feelings and ideas to. Others would always listen enthusiastically, but David didn’t just listen. When I told him what I was doing with “El Monumento de la Raza,” he got so excited he wanted to see my drawings and go to the site where I wanted my monument built. From that moment on, David started working with me on my “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project. While seeing me working on my monument sketches, David got inspired to work on ideas of his own and begin documenting some of my ideas with drawings.] Then I started—as I kept on driving by the Pan-American Bank and the Doctors Hospital, I started thinking, “Gee, why don’t we instead put murals in front of buildings [all over East LA, just like these two buildings]? Instead of building one gigantic monument and trying to direct people to the businesses [that sponsored it], why don’t we just [create] murals, mosaic murals, or tile murals, in front of the top [façade] of all of these businesses? And then we just have a brochure—we create a brochure and a map and everything to bring [tourists to the] businesses in these particular locations.” [My mind went wild thinking about the potential that murals could bring to our community. “This is it! This is it! This is it!” I thought. From that moment on, every second of my life was consumed with making all of my ideas happen. I continued to write every thought that came into my mind. My conversations were one track. I woke up every morning excited about developing my ideas and went to bed the same.]

IN: So you would be using marketing to—

JG: Yeah, marketing and promotion.

IN: So you were promoting and selling the culture.

JG: Yeah. I was marketing, I was working on how to sell and market the culture. But basically, I was working on how to package it, how to create . . . First of all, I was working on how to create the attraction. So my focus right now was how to create the attraction. So I thought, “So we have the murals, then we can—the businesses themselves can sponsor it. It’s their own building.” So when people come in, the business is right there already, so it’s going to help them. So—

IN: And then when it would bring in the people to generate the economic development, they would sell cultural products.

JG: Yeah. So first it’s creating these particular landmarks, and then the trick after that was how do I bring them in? So—and would people really be interested in this? So I started doing a survey on that. And I started—I called Tanner Grey Lines, which still exists. I just saw one recently. It’s not Tanner anymore. I think it’s just Grey Lines. But Tanner Grey Lines was just very famous in giving tours throughout the country. I called Tanner Grey Lines and I asked them, “Would you be interested in bringing your buses to look at murals?” And they said, “What are murals?” And I said, “Murals are gigantic paintings on walls.” And they said, “Oh, oh,

sure. Sure. So where are they?" And I said, "Well, they're not up yet." [laughter] And they said, "Oh, well, just let us know the minute you have them."

And then I called Channel 34, and I called the news department, and I said—they answered. A guy gave a name, "I'm so-and-so." He says, "So-and-so news department," in Spanish. And I told him what I wanted to do, and would he be interested? And he says, "The minute you have the first mural, give us a call, and we'll do a major story on it." I'm getting all—I never had anything to do with the media, you know, I never—except the time that I sang with the Righteous Brothers [on the same—the Bob Eubank's *Cinnamon Cinder* television show]. That was the only media contact I ever had. So I'm thinking—and all this time, I'm thinking advertising. I really didn't know much about publicity. I worked in advertising. So I knew—but something told me, you know, it's Channel 34, they might be interested in something Mexican. So anyway, I called. And so that was the first publicity thing I ever—I ever did, without even realizing that I was doing publicity.

And the fact that he got so excited, I said, "Wow. This thing is going to work, it's going to work!" So I started writing. I started writing. I said, "Okay, so I have the location now. So if I have a location, how am I going to bring the people in?" So I thought, "Well, we can create brochures and maps and everything to—and give them out." So I called Avis [car rental], and I said, "Could we put—could I put brochures . . .?" And I think I called some other hotel and said, "Could I put brochures of locations that people could come in and see?" "Sure, sure, sure." Everybody said yeah, so I said, ["Great this is going to work."]

IN: And then you read about Santa Barbara.

JG: So I was working—so then *Time* or *Look* magazine had a major article on the Santa Barbara Festival.

KD: Right.

JG: And it had this guy on a silver saddle dressed all in Mexican, and it said, "Señor Haskell." And I started thinking, "Wow." You know—and I knew about the Santa Barbara Festival—and I said, you know, "All the white people are making money with our culture. We're trying to become Americanized, [to be excepted], by doing everything they're doing, and they're making all the money." All of a sudden, I thought of Fritos—they're making money with our tortillas. Then there was a very popular Mexican furniture manufacturer, store, which was called Pancho's Villa. And I said, "Here . . ." You know, our culture. It was Santa Barbara. Our food, Fritos, Taco Bell, and then with the furniture, Pancho's Villa. And I said, "So how many of these are Mexicans? We're losing out on all the [potential of making money with our culture]." And I started thinking, "Wow. We really ought to package . . ." So I thought, "Now how do we advertise, where do I get the money to advertise?" I said, "Well, maybe I could collect a fee from everyone who's got a mural."

And then I started hearing that—complaints about the fact that a lot of the merchants were going out of the community, and taking the money out, and they didn't do a lot in the community. And then I also started hearing about the fact that the city—the government, we had no Chicano politicians. Roybal was in there, but he wasn't very present in my mind. I just thought of whites controlling everything that we do. So that means that all our taxes were going into the city, and—or the county, and we weren't—we had no control over it. So I was hearing [all this] at that particular [time]. Yeah, so then I started thinking, "Gee," because I knew that East . . . Oh, then I started hearing also that East LA College—Monterey Park wanted to take East LA College and all that area of nice houses to Monterey Park. They wanted to be able to incorporate it into Monterey Park. So that made me aware now that East LA was unincorporated, and that everybody else had money, power over the money. And we had no power over our own money. So I started thinking, "Why not incorporate East LA to be our own city?"

IN: Is that also in your ["East LA to Tourist Attraction" project] proposal?

JG: Yeah. Why not incorporate East LA to be our own city? And once we incorporate it, then East LA—we will have control over our money. So by controlling our money, now we can actually spend money on marketing the community from the taxes from the city. So we can now as a city, we can all get together and market the community, and spend the money that the tourists are bringing in into developing more of our community artistically and culturally.

So the other thing I started thinking of is, I got to promote the idea of doing everything culture, cultural architecture. So I had heard that Saint—[Our Lady of] Talpa was going to be building a new church. So I went to the priest, the pastor of the church, and I told him all about my ideas. So, “Try and make it as Mexican as possible.” So we just went—I mean, he just got really excited and started talking to me more and more about it. And he says, he looks at me and he says, “Wow. This is wonderful, these ideas you have.” He says [as he looked at Evergreen Park and playground], “I don’t doubt if someday we’re going to see a monument to you across the street.” [laughter] I had to say it because he said it, but anyway.

So now, I was writing these ideas, and I was trying to get them out. And I said, you know, “I really don’t know a lot of people.” So I went to the most prominent people that I knew. First of all, the principal of Salesian was Father Luna, and I went to him and I started talking to him about the whole thing. And I had already written a lot of the [“East LA to Tourist Attraction” project] proposal. Now, a lot of this was happening day by day. I was working at night, and I was writing, writing. And while I was doing my work, I was—my brain was totally into all of this, making East LA a tourist attraction, and bringing pride to the community. So as I was working on the artwork for my [advertising] job, I had paper here, and I was just writing. My brain was totally into this. It was—this was visual, [my job], so it was easy to do. I knew it already. I was totally writing. And you know, I don’t know where I have a lot of—every little paper, I was writing and writing, writing, writing, writing. And then during the day I was running around, just trying to talk to people. I talked to Father Luna first, and I told him—

IN: And you spent hours talking with Father Luna.

JG: Oh, everybody—

KD: And this is the [“East LA to Tourist Attraction” project] proposal that you shared with me, you get a response from Francisco Bravo, the doctor who runs the Bravo Clinic.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Well, now—

JG: But this came later.

KD: Okay.

JG: What it is first is I first went to Father Luna. And Father Luna, as I was talking to him about it, Father Luna says, “Oh, this is wonderful.” He says, “Someday, I’m going to see a mural here on the side of my building, of the building, that’s a dream that I have.” He says, “Another dream that I have is someday to be able to have the original *pobladores* with Father Serra, reproducing the march of Father Serra down Whittier Boulevard, the original Camino Real,” and he says, “and to name East LA ‘Villa Serra.’” So I went home and I changed [the name of] that proposal from [“East LA to Tourist Attraction” project] to “East LA to Villa Serra Project. [But, because Villa Serra was not really communicating my vision and ideas for East LA that were described in my proposal, I then decided to go back to my original title].

IN: Which is a different one from that, right.

JG: Which is a different—so I changed it.

And so he got real excited, and he told me of key people to talk to. And then I went to Father Norm. It was Father Norm Supancheck who was one of the priests at St. Isabel [next door to Salesian], and I talked to him about it [my proposal], and he got real excited. And he was very involved with the community. I mean, he just really knew everything that was going on in the community. So first when I talked about it, he got very excited, and between Father Norman and Father Luna, they told me about Esteban Torres at TELACU, and Tony Rios at the CSO [Community Service Organization].

KD: What is TELACU?

JG: So—pardon me?

KD: TELACU?

JG: Yeah, TELACU. So it’s Esteban Torres who was the director [and founder].

KD: That stands for—

JG: The East Los Angeles Community Union.

KD: That's right.

JG: Yeah. The East Los Angeles Community Union.

KD: So Esteban Torres was a founder.

JG: He was the founder, and he was the director at that time. And the location of TELACU at that time was on Atlantic between Beverly and—between Beverly and Pomona, Pomona Boulevard. So anyway, I first went to Tony Rios, and Tony Rios had [the CSO. He was director], so on Whittier Boulevard at that time. And we sat down and we talked. And Tony was so excited that we probably spent the whole day—I think everybody left, and Tony and I were just still talking. And he was saying, you know, "This is great. We are working on these things."

Oh, the other thing I started thinking about is that, "Okay, if we bring . . ." Oh, because I started thinking that we have to—in order to be able to have our own city, we have to have our civic center, so we have to have our city hall, our auditorium. So I started thinking, "So our city hall will be a pyramid. There'll be three pyramids, all designed really artistic. And we'll have a great wall of concrete around it, indigenous, and that'll be our city hall, and our cultural museum, and auditorium for special events." [Which is described in detail in my proposal, "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project. David Botello later illustrated this entire civic center the way I envisioned it.]

And as I was thinking about it, "So [what if] we start bringing in people to see the [murals and cultural attractions]?" And I said, "But we've got to have something where they're going to stay and spend the money." And I started thinking, "Well, you know, I'm a musician, entertainer, so if they come and look at the murals, and go into the store and buy something, we could have places—we need places so that they could be entertained and eat." And I was thinking, you know, here at that time, in order to have some great entertainment, we had to go out to Hollywood. And I said, you know, "My parents aren't going to go to Hollywood. These are all the pop nightclubs and all that, so we need something here to have some great entertainment. All our entertainers have to leave the community to go work. So why not have it here? Why not create our own nightclubs here?" And I started thinking—

IN: And you were thinking of an investment company also.

JG: So why not create hotels here? Because then they're going to come here and they're going to leave and stay in hotels in other places, and then they're going to go somewhere else. We've got to keep them in here to spend their money. But where do we get the money to do all this? And I said . . .

Oh, then what hit me is when they were building the Mercado, they sent out a notice to the community that as little as a hundred dollars would buy you an investment into the Mercado. So I thought about that. I said, "Well, we'll create the Mexican American Investment Company, and we'll get everybody to invest in that. And then with that, we'll have our own nightclubs. We'll have our own nightclubs and restaurants that we'll own with our investment company, which means that we'll be able to give jobs to more of our people. And we will know that it's our own investment, which means that we're not about to go somewhere else. We're going to come in and do that, [spend our money at our own businesses]." So I started thinking, "We could do that with a recording company, we could do that with everything. So the investment company could own everything that we enjoy so that we could spend money in it." So I started thinking of the investment company in order to be able to buy a lot of these things. So—

IN: And where you thinking of the civic being?

JG: So the civic—so I started thinking, "We need land." But I remembered the old brickyard that was on Floral Drive.

IN: Floral and Eastern.

JG: Floral and Eastern. It was—that's where the [Floral movie] drive-in was at. And there was a gigantic brickyard, I mean, just acres and acres of land. And I said, "That's where we could build everything. The land is there, the land is there." But now there's office buildings that were built up.

KD: So now, years later, somebody actually took that land and created corporate offices.

- JG: Yeah. So anyway, I was thinking about it. So meanwhile, I was thinking—so I met with Tony Rios, he was very excited. I went to—
- IN: Well, before you go to Tony Rios. When you called Channel 34 and talked to the news director there, when you were ready to hang up, he mentioned his name. You didn't recognize the name—
- JG: No, I didn't—
- IN: But what was his name?
- JG: To me, it sounded like Salazar, you know.
- IN: Rubén Salazar.
- KD: Rubén Salazar. *[laughter]*
- JG: I didn't pay a lot of attention, you know. And I probably wrote it down, but I didn't pay a lot of attention. It was until later that it hit me, and I was devastated. But anyway, I was just excited [about the responses I was getting]. I mean, I was—oh, you can't imagine the way I was. I mean, this . . . I said, "East LA is going to be world known, man, we're going to have the most beautiful city in this country. Everybody's going to want to come in and just spend time here." And the mall that I wanted to do for the nightclubs was going to be an old, old Mexican style with cobblestones, and *serenatas*, and you can't—no parking inside. It would be like Disneyland.
- IN: Just pedestrian.
- JG: It's like Disneyland. Just going to be like an old Mexican village with cobblestones, everything. Old architecture, Mexican architecture. [Only horse-drawn buggies for transportation would be allowed inside this small Mexican village.] So anyway, it was just going to be a real tourist attraction with the hotels, [nightclubs, restaurants,] and everything. So [this would create jobs for many in the community, including musicians and their groups].
- IN: So now you've talked to Father Luna for hours, and then Tony Rios of the CSO. And of course, the CSO was where—
- JG: Yeah, so Tony Rios was talking about the fact that they [had CSO centers throughout California, which meant that we could book musical groups on a tour to perform at all their centers, creating more jobs for them].
- [break in audio]*
- JG: The next one was to go to Esteban Torres. So I went to TELACU. And they had a mattress company [as one of their many programs] at that time they were just starting. So I went to talk to Esteban Torres. I didn't know who the heck he was. But anyway, I went over there. And it turned out that he was out of town, and I wound up talking to somebody else there. And I left the whole ["East LA to Tourist Attraction" project] proposal there with her. [Years later, when I talked to Congressman Estaban Torres, he told me that if everyone knew of my proposal when they tried to incorporate East LA in the early '70s they might have succeeded.] And another person that I went to talk to was Joseph Kovner.
- IN: Well, Tony Rios referred you to Joseph Kovner.
- JG: Yeah, probably he referred me. But anyway, I went to Joseph Kovner, who was a publisher of [most of] all the community newspapers in the area, [Boyle Heights and East LA]. He was probably the largest publisher of all the local papers. And Joseph [Kovner] was *judío*, so I was a little bit nervous, because in my ["East LA to Tourist Attraction" project] proposal I was so gung-ho Mexicano.
- KD: It's very clear, yeah.
- JG: Yeah. So gung-ho Mexicano.
- KD: It's going to be Mexican Americans who do this.
- JG: And I say "Mexican this and Mexican this and Mexican that." I said, "Oh, my gosh."
- IN: And nobody else will take our work, yeah.
- JG: To go to a *judío* right now, Jewish person, and start talking about . . . I got nervous. You know, "How am I going to present this?" [I was worried that he might think I'm prejudiced. I never thought anyone else



but Mexicanos or Chicanos would get excited over this very Mexican project. Also I really wanted to make sure that we as Mexicans or Chicanos got credit for making all this happen.] But anyway, I went—because I called him first, and he was excited. [And an important Chicano community leader felt Kovner should be aware of my plans.] He says, “Sure, come on down.” So I went down there, and as I walked—and he was an elderly man already, and as I walked in, he gives me a handshake. And he’s doing all this kind of stuff with his handshake, and I said, “What the heck is this?” And he says, “That’s a Chicano handshake.” So it was a Jewish publisher, an elderly Jewish publisher—

KD: Who knew the Chicano—

JG: Who taught me the Chicano handshake. So he says, “Okay, come on in.” So we came, I went into his office, and we talked and talked and talked. And the hour passed, people left, and he was so—he got so excited. He says, you know, “Anything I can do,” he says.

So one of the first things I want to do is, I’m going to set up—because he talked about different ideas also, he says, you know, “Maybe you can do some mosaics around the trees, throughout the street, do mosaics around the trees.” And so he was thinking of things also now. And then he says, “But what I want to do is, I’m going to set up a luncheon appointment with [Yosh Inadomi], so the three of us can get together.

KD: And Yosh Inadomi was—

JG: And Yosh Inadomi was Japanese the owner of the Jonson’s chain of Jonson’s Markets. And now I’m going to meeting with probably the two most powerful and largest merchants in the community, and they’re both not Mexicanos. And I’m talking about a Mexicano project. [This really taught me the importance of being open to working with everyone to accomplish something big.] So he says, you know, “I’ll call you, or you call me at a certain point, and I’ll tell you the date that we’re going to be getting together.” So meanwhile, I was reading, reading and learning and learning and learning. And I’m looking at Channel 34. And Channel 34—Pan-American Bank was sponsoring a profile on successful Latinos. And they had a profile on an artist by the name of Armando Campero, and he was a Mexican muralist—and they said he was a muralist. So I—we started, “Wow, you know, I’ve got to round up muralists.” But I never knew there were muralists in the United States. All I thought about—José Reyes Meza was the only one I knew about.

IN: So he had done an indoor mural.

JG: Yeah, he had done an indoor mural. Yeah, his murals were indoor.

KD: Okay.

JG: So anyway, I called up—I guess I called the Pan-American Bank, or KMEX, to get [Campero’s] number. And I called him up, and I told him what I was doing. [And I invited him to meet with me, my brother and other artists.] And my gosh, [it seemed like] he said [to himself], “There’s jobs here.” So, boy, that night he came down to the house, my mom’s house, and he met my brother. He brought down another artist. [And also met] my brother-in-law, Ignacio Gomez, and myself, and my sisters. And I think David was there also. [To my knowledge, this was the second meeting of Chicano muralists, after David and I started working together on my “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project.]

KD: David Botello.

JG: David Botello. Now, David worked days, so it was hard for him to get together during the day a lot of times. But the minute he got out of a job, he was there all the time. Anyway, so since this was an evening one, David was probably was at the meeting. So we talked, and [Campero] just got real excited, and he says, “Sure. Anything I could possibly do.” So anyway, I was rounding up support of key people. And so within this time, he also—

KD: “He” meaning—

JG: Armando Campero.

KD: Okay.

JG: I had a car. So I picked him up at—we met at a restaurant in Hollywood. And then he took me to different sites [where he had already painted indoor murals]. He had a mural in the gym at the City Terrace—the City

Terrace playground. And it was on the ceiling of the gym. And then he had another mural at the East LA Library on Third Street and, I guess, Mednik. And then he also had—and these were all indoor murals. And he had another mural at a soap company owned by Russ Salazar, who was in the Jaycees at that time. East LA Jaycee's. And then he took me to [City Councilman] Art Snyder's office, and he introduced me to Art Snyder, and he had a mural inside Art Snyder's office also. Now, these were all indoor murals, and Campero always signed Mexican muralist. So one day, he invited me to a meeting that—a big meeting that people of the art world—entrepreneurs, gallery owners, architects. People that had an influence in trying to get public art.

IN: So Campero invited you.

JG: Campero invited me to a big meeting. I think it was on the rotunda as a matter of fact.

IN: Of city hall.

JG: Of city hall. So it was a big meeting, and they were all meeting to discuss the frustration of trying to have public artwork. And they said they had been struggling to try and have public artwork. So as I was sitting there in the meeting—

KD: In Los Angeles in general, or East LA?

JG: No, in Los Angeles.

KD: Okay.

JG: These were all LA people. They were all Anglos, there were no Latinos. Armando Campero and myself were the only Latinos there. And they were all discussing this. And in my mind, I was thinking, "Well, they're all struggling, but I'm going to do it." I had all the confidence that I was going to do it. I said, "The reason I'm going to do it is because I got a white community that's going to want it, that is showing that they want it [in addition to Chicanos in the community, who are already excited]. I have reasons for having artwork that's going to be economically feasible for the community. Culturally, it's going to do wonders for the community."

So, and he . . . So then what I started thinking in regards to the murals, also, I said, "Now, the murals." Now at that time, I was thinking about mosaic murals, or tile murals—permanent murals in front of all these stores. And I think—and every mural that goes up had to be an educational mural talking about our culture. So that was the key thing that I wanted to stress is that. And [that] they would all be done by Mexican muralists, or Mexican American muralists. *Chicano* wasn't used a lot, so I wasn't using it a lot. So it would be Mexican American, to create jobs.

IN: Now, before you go into that, finish your story about Campero. That you, Joe, Campero—

JG: No, it wasn't yet—

IN: And David went to the meat market?

JG: No, that wasn't yet.

IN: Not yet. Okay.

JG: So first, I had told Campero about the meeting with Yosh Inadomi.

KD: Yeah, you never finished how that meeting went.

JG: Oh, yeah. No, I said that it went on until even after hours.

IN: But then, what did Yosh Inadomi tell you he wanted?

JG: No, no, this was first with Kovner. I'm sorry, with—the meeting with Kovner.

IN: And Yosh Inadomi.

JG: No, no, not yet with Yosh. The meeting with Kovner—oh, I said that in regards to the designs for the [street] trees . . . And I told Campero, and the next day Campero came with all kinds of drawings. *[laughter]*

KD: Wow.

JG: Pastel drawings, great drawings on—I think on [large white] butcher paper, [about three feet by three feet, with Mexican indigenous images].

IN: Oh, because you told him that Kovner had said you can do something around the trees.

JG: Yeah. Yeah, so he was so excited that he was going to be able to do it.

IN: But when you had the meeting with Kovner, which you discussed, and you mentioned that you met with Yosh Inadomi—

JG: I hadn't met with Yosh Inadomi yet.

IN: You hadn't met. So Kovner had just said that he wanted to set up the meeting.

JG: Yeah. He was setting up the meeting.

KD: Okay. But it hadn't happened yet.

JG: Yeah, it hadn't happened. Meanwhile, I was meeting with Campero on all these different things.

IN: And so then you were talking about mosaics.

JG: So then after we saw—we went to this big meeting at the city hall. I got Kovner—I called Kovner, and he had already said that the meeting would be at a particular lunchtime at a particular place. And when it got close to that day, I called him up and I said, I told him, "Oh, I was just calling to make sure that our meeting was still on." And he says . . . I guess he saw me a little naïve in regards to business, and—I mean, I had never met with these prominent people like this. [Before this, the most prominent people I knew in the community were the priests.] So he says, "Just so you know that unless I call you to cancel it, it's always still on." I said, "Oh, okay. Okay." So anyway, I was just excited.

So I got together with—here I had the meeting, I was having lunch with Joseph Kovner and Yosh Inadomi, [two of the most powerful and largest businessmen in East LA to talk about my Chicano project, and neither of them were Chicanos. This was an experience that wasn't even in my dreams, only weeks earlier while I was in Europe]. And Yosh was really excited, and he was just saying how much he loved the Mexican culture, and says, "My dad speaks Spanish." And my dad always told me that he used to talk to Yosh—Yosh's father, [who] was the founder of Johnson's Market, and he was an elderly man now. And my dad said that when he used to go to Johnson's Market, he used to see him there, and they used to have conversations. So my dad used to talk to him a lot, and even I was talking to people. And so he used to some way or another speak Spanish. I don't know if he was fluent, you know, but anyway—

KD: He had enough, yeah.

JG: Yeah, so Yosh told me about that. Not about my father, just the fact that his dad spoke some Spanish, and he says, you know—just crazy about the whole thing. And he was just so excited, he says, "What I want you to do is start designing murals for my stores." I said, "Wow."

KD: Did you have artists lined up, other than—

JG: I said, "Wow." Well, no, not—you know, the thought wasn't even there yet. I'm thinking—because all this time, I'm thinking of mosaics.

KD: Right.

JG: I'm thinking of mosaics. And, oh, so all this time, when I was thinking about that, I got excited, I went to Joe, and I told Joe, "Okay, we're in, Joe, we're in." "Okay, well, okay." So we're thinking, first of all, we've got to start designing something, but we don't even have the building, the building's still an old dilapidated—he's still trying to get a loan, he's still trying to get the—

KD: Oh, you still don't even have the—

JG: No, we don't even have the building confirmed. [No restoration had not been done, so we couldn't move in.]

IN: Now, is this where Joe, Campero, you, and David go to the [building]?

JG: [No, we took Campero to the building before I met with Yosh. But sometime just before that, I began to design a thumbnail sketch, which I still have, of a map to the three existing non-Chicano murals in East LA at that time. Also included in the map was my "Monumento de la Raza," David's Chicano War Veterans monument, and Kovner's idea of mosaics around the base of the Brooklyn Street trees.] So at this time we're thinking, well, you know, "Campero says he knows how to do mosaics, and he knows how to do murals, so we'll—let's see if he'll come in, and we'll work out something with him." So we bring him to the studio, and he looks at this—he's drooling over this gigantic place. And he goes to the back room where it's supposed to be the workshop studio, and boy, he's . . . I mean, everything is just a lot of room, which looks like, originally, if you walked in, you would think it was just going to be a gigantic studio. But the back room was the one that we were planning on making a studio, [where we would set up machinery to make custom furniture and do art restoration].

So when he walks in and he looks at it, he goes, “Wow.” He gets real excited, and he says, “Well, I’ll work out a deal with you.” He says, “I’ll do the front, the mural. I’ll design it, I’ll do the mural. and I’ll teach you guys how to do mosaics, in exchange for you guys giving me this back room.” So then at that moment, I asked him, “So what do you have in mind for the mural?” He says, “Perfect.” He says, “I’m going to do an eagle, a three-headed eagle with his arms [wings] spread over the windows of the building,” because the window was like a flat T. And so it was very challenging to create something flat on the top and wide on the bottom, in the center T part. And he says, “I’ll create an eagle with wings spread out and three heads, and the three heads will represent the indigenous culture, the Mexican—the indigenous culture, the Spanish, and the—”

KD: The Mexican—

JG: The mestizo [in the center].

KD: Mestizo, right.

JG: So I’m listening and I’m saying, “Gee, that’s not quite what I want to communicate. I’ve got a lot of things to communicate. I’ve got a lot of things to communicate.” And then Joe was saying . . . Well, you know, what he offered in regards to doing a mosaic is something very simple that I already know about. So we decline his offer.

IN: Now, in the meantime, Rebecca, your older sister, was typing out your [“East LA to Tourist Attraction” project] proposal.

JG: Yeah. So Rebecca was typing out this, and David . . . So we’d be getting together at night at the house, and Rebecca would be typing the proposal, and David would be doing sketches of everything that I was talking about. So David [did a sketch of a brochure titled “On the Beautification of Our Community, by John D. Gonzalez” with El Monumento de la Raza and his Veterans Monument on the cover. Also, because I jumped on my mural ideas and left my Monumento de la Raza sketches unfinished, David took it upon himself to do a more complete rough color sketch of it]. So when we talked about doing brochures, David [also] did a design of a brochure [titled “The Arts of East Los Angeles”] with [a panel of] the Pan-American Bank mural on [the cover of] it, because that was the only one.

Actually, at that time, there were four murals. There were the Pan-American Bank—no, it was just three. The Pan-American Bank, the Doctors Hospital, and Fusek’s had gotten a commission to do a mural and put up a [marble] statue [of the Virgin de Guadalupe] at the Santuario de Guadalupe church on Third Street, right across the street from the cemetery, which Joe—that was Joe’s job. Joe studied engineering and all that, so he knew how to mount the statue. He did a special mount and everything, and he [said he] had to design the mural, which was Juan Diego and all that, it was a religious mural. So that means there were these three murals now, and that was actually done—

IN: That was through Fusek’s, and it was a religious mural [outside] of another church.

JG: Yeah. Which was done maybe two years earlier, maybe in ‘68 or something like that, or even maybe much earlier. So we had these three murals, and meanwhile, like I said, David was doing sketches of [some of my ideas and] anything [else] that he could think of. And then he also got excited, and when I talked about the . . . As a matter of fact, when I was designing “El Monumento de la Raza” [as I mentioned before], I started thinking of doing murals throughout the city or throughout East LA, I just dropped the drawing. And I [do] still have [all] of the [original] sketches on tissue paper. So it’s still partly drawn. And so I just dropped that. I said, “It’s going to take too long to do this. We’ll do murals all over the community, faster, it’ll be more exciting, we’ll have much more to say.” And I’d say, “Wow, we could really put all our message.” And I was just dying to educate the community. So when Campero said “three-headed eagle,” you know, I said, “Oh, I’ve got a lot of things to say.”

IN: So now you and David went to Mexico to find someone who can do mosaics.

JG: I think we’ll have to pause for today.

IN: Pause here.

JG: Pause here.

KD: So thank you so much.

## NOVEMBER 18, 2007

- KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. Today is November 18, 2007. We're continuing on our fourth session, and this is tape six. Go ahead, Johnny. You had some—
- JG:** Okay. So when I just got back from Spain [in January 1970], and I got together with Joe, Joe had said that he had gotten together with a few of the artists, which were Ignacio Gomez, my brother-in-law, Robert Arenivar, and, I think, Eddie Martinez. And he said that they had talked, and they decided—he decided that they were going to change the name from Goetz [Import and Fine Arts] to Don Quixote [Import and Fine Arts]. Because we were going to be importing all these things from Spain and from Mexico, especially from Mexico now. [And a Mexican artist had left to sell five- to six-inch wooden carved reproductions of Don Quixote.] And I said, "No, no, you can't do that, because I already promoted the name of Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] all over Spain, so we've got to keep the name Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts]." So anyway, we kept the name of Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts].
- IN:** And how did Joe, your brother, meet Eddie Martinez and Robert Arenivar?
- JG:** Yeah. Well, I'll get into that, but they were schoolmates at East LA College. They all studied art together. So anyway, Joe had also mentioned that one of the reasons—besides the fact that the building was a great building—that one of the key reasons why he also wanted to stay [in East LA], he had discussed it with . . . Rudy Vargas was an elderly man who at that time was probably in his late seventies. I mean, he—Rudy Vargas was a scenic artist, and an artist for the motion picture industry. And Rudy Vargas was, at that time, the only American artist who had a work of art in the Vatican Rome collection. He had a wood sculpture in the Vatican in Rome. And Rudy Vargas was really specifically a wood sculptor, and he was a little guy—
- IN:** And what collection of the pope's was it in?
- JG:** It was in the private collection of the pope's.
- KD:** Oh, in the private collection.
- JG:** In the private collection of the pope's.
- IN:** And every other item in that collection was made out of what?
- JG:** Out of stone marble, something—
- IN:** I thought it was the gold collection.
- JG:** Yeah, well I don't remember specifically. Your right. [According to Joe, it was in the private gold collection of the pope.] But it was the only one that was a woodcarving. And Rudy Vargas did a lot of the original sculpture pieces for the Pirates of the Caribbean [ride at Disneyland], of what I remember.
- IN:** And the presidents, for Disneyland?
- JG:** Yeah, for Disneyland, the presidents. He also had worked in the motion picture industry. Well, he was still doing a lot of stuff in the motion picture, and he had a studio in Whittier Boulevard in Indiana. So he told Joe, "It's not where you're at, it's the quality of your work that's going to be able to determine the success of your studio." Because he used to have Rolls Royces and everything coming into East LA to go talk to him about commissions. So he was doing a lot of work for the studios. Great, great sculptor. He had his fine arts pieces, which were all religious, in Santa Teresita Hospital in Duarte.
- IN:** They're still there?
- JG:** As far as I know, they're still there. And that's the biggest collection of his works. And he also has a—
- KD:** I'm sorry, Duarte—
- JG:** In Duarte, California. Santa Teresita Hospital. And they're gigantic, they're bigger than life. I think he's got the crucifixion, like, I don't know, eighteen feet. But he's got a lot of beautiful, big scenes. And he also has a work of art—he's honored in the Madonna Inn up in—driving up to Northern California along [Interstate] 5, I think. If you go into the inn, as you're going in, there's a case, a glass case, and there's a sculpture piece of his, and it has some information on him. So they really honored him, because the owner of the Madonna Inn was a real connoisseur of woodcarving. So if you see pillars and all that, they're [his work].

Rudy's honored there. So anyway, Rudy had told him [Joe] that it's good for him to be able to stay there in East LA.

So the other thing also is that Armando Campero also took me to Danny Villanueva, to meet Danny Villanueva. And this is the general manager of KMEX television. And at that time they were broadcasting the World Cup, and I believe it was in English, because I remember Mario Machado only spoke English. And I remember him being there also that day. So now going back to the fact that we had mentioned that Campero had said that he would train us on how to do mosaic. And actually what he explained was very, very minute, compared to what we wanted to learn, and that's why we determined that it wouldn't be worth it. And another person that I remember meeting with, and I don't remember—obviously he was somebody prominent, because I was referred to him. And I think I remember his name was Alvarado. And his place of business was right across the street from the old brickyard on Floral, right by Floral and Mednik. And then I was also going to say that in regards to the CSO—

IN: Well, before you get to that, in regards to KMEX and Danny Villanueva, what was Mario Machado doing there?

JG: Well, he was broadcasting the World Cup, soccer tournament.

IN: So you had mentioned, when you walked in to meet with Danny Villanueva, that—did you meet Mario Machado at that time, or—

JG: No, he was just there. But the fact that I had seen him on TV—just a memory of the fact that it was at the time of the World Cup. So that gives me a—

KD: Historical marker of where you were developing.

JG: Yeah, exactly.

IN: And in regards to Campero, you mentioned something about the mosaics, that he wanted to—he was offering to teach you mosaics, but actually, it wasn't really very extensive?

JG: Yeah. Well, I had just mentioned that what he was teaching was very, very minute. And then the thing about it also, the CSO, in case people don't know, that was [formed] in the '40s. It was the first group to organize, and it was founded by [Edward] Roybal and Tony Rios. And as a matter of fact, they were the ones that organized to be able to get Roybal into office [in 1949 as LA city councilmember]. And the fact that they [the CSO] had already—they were so established, Tony Rios was excited about being able to do—be able to have a network of [locations to book] musical groups and stuff like that we could take on [tour].

IN: So that was part of your ["East LA to Tourist Attraction" project] proposal, because your proposal wasn't just talking about murals.

JG: No.

IN: Your proposal was turning East LA into a cultural and entertainment center.

JG: Yeah. Exactly. To be able to have and create jobs for musicians. And the fact that I brought that up to Tony Rios, he says, "Great. We could have a network going throughout all the barrios in California."

IN: Because he had satellite offices throughout California, as far as CSO branches. So he was saying that was where musicians could perform as part of your campaign.

JG: Yeah. Actually, Saul Alinsky was the one that trained [Edward] Roybal, and then Fred Ross followed up. And at that time [1970], UNO [United Neighborhoods Organization] was very prominent, very strong in East LA. And my sister was involved in UNO. And as a matter of fact, UNO sent my sister to Chicago to train with Fred Ross.

KD: You're kidding.

JG: No.

KD: Wow.

JG: My older sister.

IN: Rebecca.

JG: Rebecca.

KD: Wow.



IN: Now, also, that was where César Chávez had gotten his training.

JG: Yeah. Exactly.

IN: And you mentioned that some of your family was working at the CSO.

JG: Yeah. As a matter of fact, a lot of my cousins, the Duartes, the kids of my Uncle Pancho—

IN: Your mom's brother.

JG: My Uncle Pancho, yeah, who finally came—they were originally waiting in Tijuana for a while, and they finally came [to LA after he fixed their papers]. And then they started working there. And the other thing that I never mentioned is that, actually, the place where the CSO was at this time, I believe—MAOF, Mexican American Opportunities Foundation, was there before, because I remember—and that's only right down the street from my house, my parents' house on Whittier Boulevard. Right by Whittier and Euclid.

And I remember passing by there and seeing the two [circle] logo. It was like a logo of—it was actually a logo with the Aztec calendar, and then like a circle—two circles. One had the Aztec calendar, the other circle had—it had stars and stripes on it. And I remember it saying “Mexican American.” And that's like the first time I saw “Mexican American” written up on a building. And I was just very impressed, I was excited. Now, this was when I was in high school. And I remember, I was so excited. I said, “Gee, they need a better logo.” [laughter] Being a graphic artist, you know, you're always thinking that. “They need something more significant.” So I started designing two eagles meeting each other, in color, with the Mexican colors on one eagle, and the other color—

IN: The American—

JG: The American. And the eagles are sharing the serpent, the Mexican eagle is sharing with the American eagle, so it's like they're sharing with each other.

IN: And we still have that illustration.

JG: Yeah, I still have that.

IN: And so when Father Luna, who was the principal of Salesian [High School], and Father Norm Supancheck, who was the priest at St. Isabel's—when they referred you to Tony Rios at the CSO, you were aware that the CSO was a community activist organization.

JG: Yeah, at that time—I didn't know a lot about it, but I knew that it was very active, because my cousins were working there, at least three of them were there, I think I remember, and it was real close to their [and our] house. The other thing is that when I created the monument, or when I designed the monument, El Monumento de la Raza, which was at Five Points, [actually, it was for a hillside up the street from Five Points,] that got David motivated to design—

IN: David Botello?

JG: David Botello. To also design a monument [for Five Points]. And he designed one for the veterans, the Vietnam Latino veterans, our veterans from the community. And it was a beautiful design of an Aztec warrior holding a dead soldier in his arms with a tear in his eye. It was really, really nice. And of course that got me excited, because I said, “Now, we're building up all our collection of monuments [for my ‘East LA to Tourist Attraction’ project].”

Another person, as a result of an idea that—another idea that I came up with . . . I had thought—my mind was just really spinning on how to make East LA exciting through art. And then I also thought of Whittier, the Sixth Street bridge that goes into Whittier Boulevard. There's two gigantic pillars in the side, concrete pillars. I mean, really tall pillars. They must be maybe fifteen feet high, and they're gigantic. They're maybe twenty feet in circumference, something like that. They're really big. And I thought, “Gee, this is the entrance to the Chicano or Mexican [community].” [That's] what I kept on saying. In my mind I was able to say “Chicano,” but when I had to talk to other people, I had to say “Mexican American,” because I thought they were going to rebel, or—at that time, it was bridging the crossover.

KD: And about what year is this?

JG: This is 1969. [No, it was] '70.

KD: Oh, okay. Because the moratorium's already taken place.

- JG: [No. This was months before the East LA Chicano moratorium and before we started fixing the building.] But it depends on where you were at [psychologically], and who you were with. And you've got to remember that my focus was the business community. I had to get the business community to support me, because it was the business community that I was selling murals to. And if I started using the word *Chicano*, they'd say, "These are militants. I don't want to deal with militants." So I had to be very careful. And like I said, to myself or to close people we could use the word *Chicano*, but when it came to talking to the community, then it was something else.
- IN: Now you—
- JG: As a matter of fact—
- IN: Go ahead.
- JG: As a matter of fact, there was—and this came a little later, but I'll say it right now since I'm talking about that—is that there was this lady Josie who owned a drug store close to our building. And I remember going over there and talking to her, because she was a businessperson who I was trying to influence also, and telling them about my ideas. When I said the word *Mexican American*—and she was what I consider Mexican American—but she said, "No, no. We are not Mexican Americans. We are Americans of Mexican descent." So I said, "Oh, my gosh. It's like everybody's got a different definition of what we are." As a result of that, I, [a year or more later,] when we were putting up the sign of Goez [Imports and Fine Arts] for the studio, we were debating. What are we going to call it? So I figure, well, let's just call it Barrio Art. So we just put Barrio Art, instead of putting [Chicano Art]. Everybody had a debate. [laughter] As a matter of fact, after we started fixing the building, [months before we put up the sign,] there were people complaining because it looked too Spanish. But anyway—
- IN: But then others loved it.
- JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. There were—oh, the majority loved it. That's why it became such a big hit.
- IN: So you were talking about the eagles that you were designing [in early 1970, for your "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project].
- JG: Yeah, the eagles. So anyway, I designed—on one side would be gigantic bronze eagles, and it would remind me of the bridge that's in Paris. It's got some beautiful sculpture pieces and stuff, and I said, "Wow." To have on one side the American eagle and on the other side the Mexican eagle, which meant you are now coming into the Mexican American community. And it's right at the entrance from downtown LA coming in—
- KD: The Sixth Street Bridge.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: The Sixth Street Bridge?
- JG: The Sixth Street Bridge, which is the biggest bridge.
- IN: So it would be the gateway to East LA.
- JG: Yeah. Exactly, exactly. So I managed to get an appointment with Al Ortega. Al Ortega was commissioner of public works at that time.
- IN: For the city of Los Angeles.
- JG: For the city of Los Angeles. And I was impressed that there was somebody that was Latino in representing us in the city of LA. So anyway, I went to Al Ortega's office, and I started talking about the ideas, and he was very excited. And it was interesting that he gave me his business card, it was a foldout card, and as you fold it out . . . He says, "Well, look at—I'm thinking exactly the way you are." And you open it, and the foldout card had a scale on it, a little chart. And I remember it was—I don't remember all the details, but I think it went almost from one to five or from one to ten. And it said, "Number one, the way you think is the way you're going to succeed." So it's, like, number one said, "I am going to do it," which meant you're going to succeed. If you say, "I think I'm going to do it," then you're going to succeed maybe, a certain less percentage. And "I don't know if I'm going to do it," then you're going to succeed that much less. And if you say, "Oh, I can't do it," then you're not going to succeed. And it was very interesting. But there was

much more to it, but it was basically—I'm cutting it down, narrowing it down to that. But anyway, he said, you know, "Unfortunately, here, we think of it being a hazard to the drivers. If they're driving and they look at it, they might have accidents." So I said, "Well, I guess—"

KD: That was the prevailing thought in the city of LA in terms of commissioned work?

JG: Yeah. There was no public artwork. I mean, I didn't know. There was one public artwork that—I drove by and I looked at it, and I was shocked. And it really got me mad. Here was a—and I just stared at it, because it was a beautiful work of art. I said, "Wow. We have something beautiful." And I'm reading it and I'm studying it, and I'm saying, "Wow. They're taking all our credit away." All the Latinos'—Mexicanos'—credit away from us. And what it was, it's a relief on Hill Street, I believe. [It was once Fort Moore], right next to the Hollywood Freeway. I think it might be Hill Street. [Yes, it is on Hill.] And it's a relief that had, like, a little waterfall coming down into a pond. But the whole relief was talking about how the white man cultivated the land, and how they discovered gold, and how they discovered . . . I mean, as I'm reading and reading, and I'm saying, "Wow." And there's nothing, no—no credit in there about the Latino.

IN: Or the Mexican American.

JG: Or the Mexican American, yeah. And so then I told the guys about it, and we all went up to see it. We were really mad. It's like, here, we read books and we're never credited for anything. And now this beautiful work of art—and I was just excited about it—is really taking away all our credit.

IN: So that motivated you?

JG: Well, I was motivated already, but I was just—and now I was bugged. And I remember, I remember those specific points, I am going to clarify those points some way or another, publicly, somewhere. And so when we come back to the map, I'll tell you about it. So anyway—

IN: So you do do it later.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Okay.

JG: So now, Joe had become a member of the East LA Jaycees while I was in Spain. So when I came back he introduced me to Louie Moret. And Louie Moret was very, very much involved in the community, and he was a key person—I don't know if he was president at that time of the East LA Jaycees. But anyway, he was very involved, very involved in political campaigns. And I think he was a—he was involved in getting Richard Alatorre into the [California] Assembly. And as a matter of fact, John Casas, who was in grammar school with me, became the manager of—I think it was Pacific Bell, the telephone office on First Street, which was across the street from the First Street Store. He became manager, and he was saying that Louie [Louis] Moret got him involved in Richard Alatorre's campaign. And Richard Alatorre was very, very young at that time.

So anyway, Louie—when I went, when Joe introduced me to him, and I started talking to him about my idea, and Louie got very excited. And he started saying, you know, "What would be very good is that instead of just doing it all over East LA, you should try and focus first on one street." And he said, "If you focus on a small street, a business street, then you could concentrate it first in one area." And I thought that was a great idea. And of all streets, First Street Store—First Street is a small, probably the smallest business area. And it already had five murals there, which were the Pan-American Bank—

KD: Oh, right, the Pan-American Bank.

IN: The mosaic murals.

JG: Yeah, the mosaics. And it had Glendale Federal Savings, which was a beautiful little building, very cultural.

IN: It was designed in Mexican architecture.

JG: Yeah, it was like Mexican indigenous, American Indian, a combination. And then there was the Mercado [Mexican-style indoor marketplace] also there on First Street. And now we were on First Street also. I said, "Wow, that's great." So what I did is, then I started working on a design, and I did an illustration of First Street, of how First Street could look in the future with murals all the way down the street. And the other thing about it, also, is that it's interesting, First Street had above the entrance to the stores, there's a lot

of buildings that have a big gigantic spot that's clear, and it's almost framed with a border, which—I mean, First Street could become a, still become major. So anyway, Louie Moret was excited, and he invited me to make a presentation to the East LA [Junior] Chamber of Commerce.

IN: Now, just so that we follow your notes—

JG: Jaycees, I'm sorry. Through the Jaycees.

IN: Just so that we follow your notes, does that come up later in your notes, or did you not write that down?

JG: About what?

IN: About the Jaycees.

JG: Oh, it's right here. I'm talking about it.

IN: Oh, okay. So this is part of it.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, I go make a presentation. He invited me to make a presentation, and I went down there. It was at Rusty's Hacienda, by Sears at that time. And what I remember, the people that I remember being there were, of course, Louie [Moret], Russ Salazar, who owned the soap factory that Armando Campero did a mural at, who I had met before, Gil Moret, which was Louie's brother, [and John Casas, who said Bobby Hudson and Ed Avila were also there]. And then my brother was there also, and I don't remember how many other people were there.

But years later—years, years later—I was at an Assumption reunion which was organized by Albert Barrios, my third-grade schoolmate, who now is on the Fortune 400 of the Latino [Hispanic] businesses, [along with John Casas]. We were talking, and Bobby Hudson, who lived up on Folsom, who was one of the few African American kids in the neighborhood, who at that time—at that time, when we did the—when I did the presentation, [Bobby] was a young attorney. And as a matter of fact, when I was thinking of putting together the Mexican American Investment Company, I couldn't think of a lot of Latinos who were attorneys at that time. But I remember that Bobby was, and the fact that he's African American, and then I started becoming more open-minded. Little by little, of course. Kovner. And then I started learning that we've really got to learn to work together. But anyway, [Bobby] had mentioned so many years later that after, a little after my meeting—

IN: You made a presentation at the East LA Jaycees?

JG: Yeah. A little after that meeting, [Bobby said] that Ed Avila had seen Bobby Hudson, and Bobby Hudson now is a judge in Santa Ana.

IN: And who was Ed Avila?

JG: And Ed Avila was [Edward Roybal's LA chief of staff or] field rep for many, many years. Then he was the head [of] Project Restore, to restore—

IN: LA City Hall.

JG: LA City Hall. And also the—what is it, the CRA?

IN: The Community Development—

JG: Yeah, Community Redevelopment Program.

IN: Agency.

JG: Yeah. So anyway—

IN: [Ed Avila] was the director.

JG: [Bobby] had mentioned that Ed Avila had talked to Bobby Hudson about the presentation, so I assumed that [Ed] was probably there also.

IN: And I think I was there when Bobby said that Ed was very excited, saying big things were going to be happening in East LA. [I was there.]

JG: Yeah, uh-huh.

KD: Now, you presented them with this illustration of First Street?

JG: Yeah, actually I did the whole presentation.

KD: Oh, okay. All of these different—

IN: From your ["East LA to Tourist Attraction" project] proposal.

JG: All the ideas. All the ideas from my proposal, yeah. And I probably took my drawings, too, because I had the drawings probably by then already. So then—

IN: So by then—

JG: Oh, yeah, by that time I had already read all about the Mexican muralists. So before this, I really didn't know a lot about the Mexican muralists. So I—yeah, like I had mentioned, I knew about José Reyes Meza, I knew about Jorge González Camarena, but I didn't know a lot about the Mexican muralists. But as I started reading more and more and more then I got into it. And thanks to the East LA Library—they had books, very nice books on the Mexican muralists. But of course, I researched them all over, anywhere I could find them.

So then I started thinking about how we can be able to do our murals, by having a master artist and then having an apprenticeship program. So the idea was to have one master artist, and then have four, three or four apprentices working with them. And the way the school would be supported, it would be supported by getting actual contracts. So that means the apprentices themselves would also get paid, which would be a great way for kids to be—but I'm not talking about just little kids. I mean, I was talking about bringing José Reyes Meza to East LA, and Joe, myself, David, and Robert would be the apprentice. [Actually David and myself hadn't met Robert yet.] So, then, once we learned, then we would become master artists, [with East LA's young aspiring artists to be apprentices under us]. And hopefully the murals would be booming by then, which would create more and more jobs and build up more and more [the] school, so it could just snowball.

IN: And at this time, you were just thinking of mosaic murals.

JG: Yeah. At this time, it was still strictly mosaic. All I was thinking about was just like the Pan-American Bank, putting mosaics [murals] on top of the front of the stores, to really make it an attraction [with] mosaics [murals]. So the idea is that we needed to find a master mosaic artist. And of course Campero was paintings, and they were interior paintings. At this point I hadn't seen any outdoor murals painted. It never even occurred to me to have a painted outdoor mural, because they'd just fade. So the idea was to be able to do them in mosaic or in tile. So after reading all these books, I started thinking, "Gee, it'd be great to take a trip to Mexico." So then I started talking to David Botello about it, and then he got excited, and he says, "Yeah." So we planned on a nice long trip [in September 1970, after the moratorium,] to go see all the murals, go see all the monuments, see all the—whatever archeological sites we could be able to see. [And to ask José Reyes Meza to be our master mural teacher.] So we made our plans to go, and my youngest sister, Alicia [Licha], bought a brand-new Volkswagen. Brand-new Volkswagen. And she bought it, and she just handed it over to us. She says, "Take your trip." I don't think she even drove it. She might have driven it. [It had only sixty miles on it.]

KD: You're kidding.

JG: She might have driven it home. But I was shocked! It was wonderful of her. So we both went on this nice, long trip on a brand-new Volkswagen. We packed our cameras and everything, and we just had a ball. We were such a good team. The minute we saw a nice, really nice shot to photograph, we were very—David is extremely well organized, and so we organized on exactly what to do. So the minute we'd get off, one of us held the tripod and everything, the other was setting up the tripod while the other one was loading the camera. And we took some really, really nice shots. But we both took our cameras, so we both took shots of whatever we wanted to see, and boy, you talk about self-esteem, you know, Mexico was nothing like what I had expected. All I ever heard of were negatives about Mexico, and it was just so beautiful, and all these beautiful murals all over the place.

We went all the way down to Pátzcuaro, so it was a beautiful drive down there. But of course, on the way—I can't even remember all the different places that we went to see murals. We went down to Tula, where the Tula warriors are. And—and at that time, it was so nice, because it was almost—I'm saying this because years later that I went, it was already—they were already building tourist attractions. Housing or, you know. And when I went, when David and I went, I mean, it was like a little ranch town, you know. You

go into the little ranch town, and it was like, so, where is it? *[laughter]* It was like so insignificant. And we went to this little ranch town, and they said, *[giving us directions,]* “Oh, para allá, para allá, está allá, da la vuelta en la calle.” So we drive all the way over this little road, and all of a sudden, you know, you drive and you see these gigantic Tula warriors. And, oh man, I mean, I got chills, you know, because I was seeing them in books. These are things that I was learning about. And so we got some really nice shots of David and I, you can see how big they are.

KD: Was that the intention, to go down and photograph all these things that you had only seen in books?

JG: Oh, yeah.

KD: Okay.

JG: To go see them and learn about them, but that one of the key reasons we wanted to go down there was to bring José Reyes Meza back.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: And the Pan-American Bank had given us the name of José Reyes Meza. So we went—

IN: So you had gone to, like, the Anthropological Museum.

JG: Oh, yeah, we went to that. So we saw the mural that I saw in the book.

IN: Of Camarena’s.

JG: Of Jorge González Camarena. Now, Jorge González—for David and I, he was our hero. He was our hero. I mean, he’s the first one that we saw, and we loved his art. So he really inspired us. So anyway—

IN: You went to the Museum of Fine Arts—

JG: We went to the museum, and of course, we saw—I mean, just everything was there. The Museum of Anthropology. And at the Museum of Fine Arts, of all things, they were featuring an exhibit of Jorge González Camarena’s paintings. So it was such a thrill for us to go into this museum full of Camarena’s paintings, which was really nice.

IN: And then you went to the University of Mexico.

JG: Oh, and the University of Mexico to go see the murals. *[Francisco] Eppens* *[Helguera’s]* gigantic mural, or *[Juan] O’Gorman’s* mural, it was just really wonderful.

IN: And in Palacio de Bellas Artes?

JG: And then we went to the Palacio de Bellas Artes, that had another mural of Camarena’s inside. And then we went to the building of social security, and that had—that had the star mural that we had seen all the time. That was the mural that had—it had a figure of, I think, a Spaniard and an Eagle warrior laying down as if they had just had a battle, but I think it was a skeleton. And then you see, it’s like you’re looking at it from a worm’s eye view at the big heads and the figure, and then up in the distance, you see this gigantic mountain, and it’s a formation of the Mexican eagle. And in the style that Camarena did it, it was just awesome.

IN: And then you also went to the castle of Chapultepec?

JG: Yeah, and the castle of Chapultepec, he had a beautiful mural there also. So then—

IN: And the Polyforum?

JG: Oh, the Polyforum. Yeah, the Polyforum, *[David Alfaro] Siqueiros* was working on it at that time, Siqueiros was working on it. So we just looked by the gate, we couldn’t go in. But he was working on it at that time, and we were just dying to go in and meet him. But we couldn’t go in. But you could see all these guys working on it *[at a distance]*. And I think we were actually able to go inside of that—I’m not sure if that was then or later. *[It was my second trip with David Lopez.]* But inside, we went in and saw all of Siqueiros’s work in this rotating floor, that you just see this beautiful mural. And all of a sudden, I started being more influenced by Siqueiros’s mural. As a matter of fact, my mural—I’ve got to figure out where I’m at in the story.

IN: Oh, okay. Right now, you’re going to go to José Reyes Meza’s.

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. So anyway—

KD: Go ahead.



JG: I heard that José Reyes Meza, I think, was in La Zona Rosa in Mexico City, and—well, another building, before that, is that there was an outside sculpture piece, beautiful sculpture piece that I’ve seen in books also of Jorge González Camarena. And that was really, really nice, it was a great experience, seeing all this beautiful artwork.

IN: So now your focus was to meet—

JG: To bring José Reyes Meza to LA. So we went to the Zona Rosa, and we knocked. We knocked on this door, and all of a sudden, this guy answers. And we said, “We’re so-and-so.” And you know what, I’m not sure whether we wrote to him in advance, but he [José Reyes Meza] greeted us very well. And I remember going upstairs—

IN: And you mentioned Dr. [Francisco] Bravo?

JG: Yeah, well, we started talking about the mural, and Pan-American Bank. And he [José Reyes Meza] got excited and says . . . And then I started telling him all the ideas that I had, and that we wanted to see if there was a possibility that he could come to LA and be our master artist that could train us in doing mosaics and everything—

IN: Now, to—

JG: And he [José Reyes Meza] started talking about Dr. Bravo—

IN: Yeah, to clarify, Dr. Bravo. Who was Dr. Bravo?

KD: Oh, no, you’ve covered that.

IN: You’ve covered that already.

KD: Yeah. I have a good memory of all these names now. I’ve been carrying my notes.

JG: So he [José Reyes Meza] started talking about Dr. Bravo and said, “You know Dr. Bravo and I talked about some of these things. About being able to do more in LA.” And “I think it’s wonderful, this idea that you have.” He said, “Unfortunately, I am very, very busy. I have a lot of work here, and I will not be able to go to LA.” And then when he started showing us stuff, we were just shocked, because this guy’s a famous artist in Mexico. He showed us a picture of a relief that he did in the side of a stone mountain. And the relief must have been four hundred or five hundred feet long, and it was a figure of an arm, a figure—it was just like the bust, and the arm was the one that was stretched out. And it had lightning, and things were bursting. It was just awesome, really beautiful.

And then he showed us some of his work. Then he says, you know, “You can see some of my artwork in the Palacio de Bellas Artes,” and we go over there, and it’s right there with Siqueiros and Orozco and all. And I said, “Wow.” You know, “No wonder we can’t bring him.” I think if we knew how famous he was, we might have been more intimidated going up there and talking to him. *[laughter]* But it was a great thrill going up there and talking to him. But he did say, “Look, I love what you’re doing.” He says, “I will do anything I could possibly do from here in Mexico.” He says, “So just keep in contact, and whatever you want, I’ll do.” He says, “But what I will do is that I will set you up with the studio that did the mosaic in Cuernavaca,” the mosaic. And all of a sudden, it hit us. “Oh, he doesn’t do the mosaic. It’s somebody else that does the mosaic.” So I said, “So it’s a specialty in itself.”

KD: The fabricated—yeah.

JG: So I was thinking at that time, so anyway—

IN: So he was the designer.

JG: Yeah, he was the designer.

IN: And then he would commission a studio to do the technical work.

JG: Cuernavaca had the main studio to do mosaics. So David and I got back to LA. And we started still planning on how to be able to get this thing done in mosaic, because we still wanted to do it in mosaic. But we started thinking, “Gee, to have it done in Mexico and shipped over here and all that . . . We don’t even have money to pay the rent for the building right now.” *[laughter]* So—

IN: I’m checking them off [your notes] as you talk, so you’re right here now.

JG: Oh, so when I got back [or before], Joe had submitted his proposal [for furniture and art imports, manufacturing, and restoration]. TELACU had a department, a division of TELACU at that time, was called the business development, and they assisted with proposals and different things. They had classes at Cal State [Los Angeles], I believe. They had classes in business development. And so they had different teachers that could teach, say, the legal part of the business, teach the PR [public relations]. Percy Duran, who was in the third grade with me also, and later became [LA city] commissioner of public works, was a teacher teaching the legal part of that class. And John Hernandez, who was in the JCs [junior colleges], he was teaching public relations. And I remember [in] one of the classes there, I was with José Luis Ruiz's wife. [He was] the producer who produced one of the—El Chicano, the series [titled] Chicano. His wife was taking a class there with me on the business part. I forgot [her name. I believe it was Donna.]

But anyway, so TELACU was involved. This was after . . . [I took the class much later, after we were established in the building.] TELACU was involved at helping small businesses develop proposals and stuff like that. So anyway, Joe submitted the proposal to TELACU, and then Joe called me. I was talking to Joe, and [he] said that TELACU—that I had TELACU really confused. And he says, "You've got them all confused. They don't know what's happening, because they have—they have your ['East LA to Tourist Attraction' project] proposal, and they have my proposal. And they said, 'How. . . ?' They're saying . . ." So they told Joe, "How could Johnny have one proposal about doing one thing that has nothing to do with what your proposal is saying?" Joe's proposal was saying to manufacture custom furniture, handcrafted custom furniture—

KD: Right, right.

JG: An art gallery, he did say an art studio, but the art studio didn't say anything about murals to what I know, because they [TELACU] were confused, because there was no crossover there. So [Joe's] saying [that] he's importing art, and all these things [art restoration]. And my mural [proposal is] talking about making East LA a tourist attraction through murals and monuments and all that. In other words, my mural [proposal] wasn't talking about details of how—where we were going to build it and how much money it was going to take.

IN: Your proposal—

KD: Okay.

JG: My proposal was talking about promoting East LA and having these things done. And in my mind, my proposal [for the "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project], I really didn't know how it was going to get done. I didn't know how to do it. I just had an idea that if everybody knew about it, they'd all start thinking about it, in this particular way.

KD: Yeah, you're going concept—yeah.

JG: Yeah. And everyone, in their own way, would be aware of what we were going to be doing. And this way, it would take off some way or another. But I didn't know, you know—I didn't consider myself a businessman, so I just submitted it, because I felt . . . And I told him [at TELACU] that I submitted it, because I'm giving this proposal to anybody who has power in the community, influence. And they told me Esteban Torres, who later became congressman, that he's got some influence. So I just brought it here and left it here. But I never knew that it was going to be channeled into the business development part of it [TELACU]. So some way or another, they got their hands on it. And all of a sudden they're reading that these two brothers have two different proposals, but yet I'm supposed to be a partner with Joe. So they were really confused. So when I went over there and told them about it, it got straightened out.

IN: So your focus was to motivate people.

JG: And to make them [excited about making East LA a phenomenal place to live and visit].

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. Today is November 18, 2007. This is tape 7. Go ahead.

JG: So as I was—being at the office, they mentioned . . . Or, this particular architect was there. And they said that—and I think his name was Ramirez or Fernandez—and they said that he had already built a small playground in Lincoln Park that had pre-Columbian images on it. It had slides and stuff like that. And I go, “Wow, that’s great, that’s great.” We’ve got it going. People are becoming aware. So I was really excited. And also, I had now heard that there was a guy by the name of—a man by the name of Frank Lopez who was working on a project to clean up the lake, and make it—the boathouse into a cultural center.

IN: At Lincoln Park.

JG: At Lincoln Park. So I got excited about that, so I said, “Wow,” you know. “I’m going to go to Lincoln Park and see if I could see him and talk to him, and also go see the little playground.” So I went down there. I set up an appointment with Frank, but to set up an appointment, it’s not like he was a real prominent businessman. There was nothing—I mean, we were talking outside [by the dry lake, if I remember correctly]. But I remember he was a chain-smoker. He was . . . But anyway, we talked for quite a while. We were both excited, being supportive about each other’s idea. I just felt, “Gee, this thing’s moving along. This thing is moving along.”

IN: So he was the co-founder of Plaza de la Raza?

JG: [I was told Esteban Torres had the idea. He appointed Frank as director. Ed Bonilla was a key person from the beginning, and Frank brought in Margo Albert.] So that same day, as I was leaving, this guy came up to me, an older guy who had long hair, and I guess—I don’t know if Frank introduced me to him or what. But I remember it was at Lincoln Park, and it was that same day. And he introduced himself as being Bob Ramirez. I think I remember the name Bob Ramirez. And I think he had like a nickname. Afterwards I found out, they called him El Indio. And Bob Ramirez gave me two sheets of paper, and he says—because after I told him everything that I was doing—he gave me two sheets of paper, and he says, “Look, here’s a list of artists that you could get in touch with.” [There were about seventy or more Chicano artists.] He gave me a whole list of artists that he had already, I guess, made contact or managed to put together or whatever. So anyway, I have that whole list. And I don’t remember much about him anymore after that, but the fact that it seemed like he had already organized stuff. And I just said, “It’s moving along.”

Within that time Joe had been going, making trips to Tijuana. And the reason he had been going to Tijuana was to try and find art, or furniture, or artifacts. But it was basically in Tijuana. But most of all he was talking to furniture manufacturers, so that they could manufacture furniture—hand-crafted furniture—and bring it—so he could import it into LA. He had found one who he felt the quality was very, very good, of the furniture. And so he then took me—then we went on a trip together to go see the furniture company. And it was interesting, because the place where they were working at was like a little tent. It wasn’t this major place. [It was a makeshift building, with much of it a dirt floor.] But the furniture that was coming out of there was beautiful. Beautiful.

KD: Really?

JG: Beautiful quality Mexican furniture. All hand-carved. And you could just see all these guys carving. It was really, really nice stuff. I was just so impressed. So proud.

KD: All wood, or wood and leather?

JG: All wood. All wood.

KD: Okay.

JG: No, they combined leather, even upholstery. But the majority of it was wood. The ones that they had upholstered with some of those benches that they used in—or chairs that they used in the—in Spain in the 1600s that were—that were sort of round, and sort of crossed in the bottom.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, so they had them. Beautiful, I mean, really artistic stuff. Stuff that looked like it was built three hundred years ago, but really nice hand-carved stuff. And the guy was willing to give us furniture on consignment. So Joe had talked to him and said, you know, “We’re opening up this place,” and so and so. And he was willing to do it. I’m trying to see what else was . . .

So yeah, now we had the building. And there was a guy by the name of Art Chayra who was also in the Jaycees, that Joe had met in the Jaycees, and Art Chayra and his brother, Dr. [Ben] Chayra, were actually the developers of the Mercado. Art Chayra was the contractor, and so he's the one that put the Mercado together. He's the one that was building it. So Joe and I wanted to start working on being able to plan out what we were going to do with the building, and so we talked to Art Chayra about seeing if we could contract him to do it. And so anyway, he says, "Yeah, you know, just come up with a design or whatever." And so I started working on the design that Art Chayra could construct. And of course the fact that I was so influenced by Spain, I thought, "I'm going to do a design that looked like a castle." So I started—I did a design that looked like a castle, and we took it to him, and he's—gave a little idea of how much it would cost. I go, "Mm-m." I said, "Boy, I think we're dreaming." So then I thought that was cancelled out.

So then I started working on a realistic design. I started working on something that was already appropriate to the design that we had there. And in my mind, of course, all this time, I was thinking of—it had to be some type of Mexican style, but I didn't want to start adding arches and stuff like that, so I thought maybe early California with a little bit of *teja* [Mexican tile roof] on it, because the design actually that I did for First Street would be sort of like a Santa Barbara shopping area where they have *teja* and they have the arches, so people are walking, and if it's raining, they're still not getting wet.

KD: They're covered, yeah.

JG: But they're able to look at the murals across the street. And so they can enjoy it. So anyway, I started designing it with that, then I started thinking—

IN: So how were you designing it? What were you going to be adding to it?

JG: It was going to Mexican style, and with the *teja* and the pillars. And I wanted to make sure—what I wanted to do was create First Street to be like a plaza, to be able to have benches so people could sit down and everything, and be able to enjoy the murals. And I thought of even having some street merchants with beautiful carts and stuff like that. And so I said I wanted greenery. We had no greenery.

IN: And planters.

JG: And planters. So anyway, I designed it to have planters in the front, and the planters were also little benches, concrete and brick benches, so people could sit down, and the greenery would be there, and with wrought iron so that the ivy could grow around the wrought iron. But the interesting thing is that the building, and of course with the mural, and still at this time, I had no idea what I was going to be able to do in regards to a mural, but I knew that I had to throw in everything that I ever learned. It's like I just wanted people, when they see this mural, they're just going to feel so proud, because they're going to say, "What?" That's all our contributions. So I wanted to throw in everything I could possibly put in there.

IN: So first you were focusing on the building—

JG: So then I put—

IN: So how was—what was the structure of the building?

JG: Yeah, so the structure of the building, it was . . . Which created quite a challenge for me in regards to the mural, because all the other store [fronts] that I mentioned had really nice gigantic walls that were empty with the frame and everything, and our building was actually low, one story, and it had two doors on the entrance, which looked almost like a duplex, it had two doors, and the center had a little tiny wall to divide the two doors, and in the side of the two doors, there were two gigantic windows. So it was like two sets, two entrances that were exactly the same, with a center panel. And in the top there was a strip of small windows, and above the small windows was a long, skinny strip that was maybe three feet high and about thirty feet long. And so it looked like somebody smashed the T, and the top part spread, which wasn't very exciting for a mural. [laughter] It's like, you know, what in the heck could I do? And the thing about it is that the—the most logical thing somebody would do in a little area like that is put a lot of little things up there.

KD: Right.

JG: And I thought, I don't want to put a lot of little things up there. I want something that's going to be really big and meaningful. So anyway, when I started working, thinking about it, I thought, what could be big up there? And I started thinking of the Medici tomb. I thought of the Medici tomb [by Michelangelo], and I thought of the two nudes that were up on top, and I said, "Gee." The other thing that I thought about, I said, "I want to be able to have nudes, because I want it to be like Italy." I want people to—kids to grow up thinking nothing about nudes, that it's just beautiful art. And I said, "I really want to be able to do that."

KD: In other words, you knew it would be a struggle. You knew it would be a challenge to have—

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. I felt, you know, there's going to be some type of problem, but I said, "Michelangelo did it. So if he did it, I'm going to do it." And I insisted. I said, "I'm going to have nudes here." So I thought, "A nude. A male and a female. So that's the logical thing to be able . . . And since it's a flat area, I'll have them laying down. So what are they doing laying down?" And then I thought of all the Mexican muralists, that they worked with the architecture. So if there was windows, they'd have people sitting on windows, and they'd . . . In other words . . . So I said, "What I'll do is I'll have them laying on the window, looking towards each other, with their arm extended towards the center."

So I said, "Okay, well, I got that, but what does that mean culturally?" So I started thinking culturally. I said, "The birth of the *mestizo*. Cortez, and La Malinche." So then I thought, "Okay, well, I'll add Cortez on one side, and on the other side, it'll be La Malinche. Okay, now that I have Cortez and Malinche. What's next?" And I said, "Well, everything that is on Cortez's side would be Spanish. And I'll just try and add in whatever contributions [came from Spain]. So American, the United States, will know these are our contributions. And then on the Mexican side, I'll add all the cultural elements in there [from Mexico]." And of course, I thought of architecture, so I thought, "Pyramids on one side for the indigenous side, and the cathedrals in the side of the Spanish." So then I started thinking, "Well, we brought—the Spaniards brought the horses, they brought the wheel to this new world, they brought . . ." So whatever I could think of. And I said, "Well, religion isn't something very popular, but it's here, and it's major. So they brought the religion." And so then I started thinking [that] at that time *The Mulatto*, by Velazquez, I had heard at that time was the highest priced painting. They had just sold it for I don't know how many millions. [I think five million.] So I said, "I'll put *The Mulatto* in there." So I started working on the *Mulatto*. And I don't even remember what else I was putting in there. And so I started thinking, in regards to—

IN: Well, in the portfolio, later, we can show Karen the actual design.

JG: Yeah. So then on the indigenous side, of course I started putting things of all the different cultures. I started to include the Mayan, the Aztec, the Toltec, the Mixtec, all the different elements of our culture. So I said, "Okay, so now I've got all these cultural elements in there, and Cortez and La Malinche are sitting on these windows, laying on these windows, looking at a blank wall." I said, "And this is the focus." [laughter] "So what in the heck am I going to do in the center? What could I have? Well, we have Spain, we have Mexico, but I don't have the United States yet. So what could I put that's American? The most logical thing is a map, but what's a map going to be doing there? It doesn't make any sense." And so I started thinking about it and thinking about it, and then I thought, "Well, maybe the map in perspective—maybe the map in deep perspective could look nice." So I started adding the map in deep perspective. And I started thinking, "The map, what is happening with the map, and how does all this tie in?" And I thought and thought and thought, and then I said, "Plant. A plant, a vine, a vine growing, tying everything—"

KD: Mm, the unifying—yeah.

JG: A vine, a vine will work. So then I started drawing, designing a vine going into perspective. I wanted it big and small. And this is where the Mexican muralists—Siqueiros was very inspiring because he did so many things in perspective, deep perspective. And so I said, "And a vine in deep perspective would create a lot of movement." So I wanted a lot of movement. And I said—so I started working. So then I figured, I did the vine going—coming from the past cultural elements. One vine coming [from each side]. And I thought, "I'll create a flower. And out of that flower, Cortez and La Malinche will be coming out of it, so they're like seeds coming, representing the culture of the past." So—

KD: Is this the line drawing?

JG: Yeah. Well, this was [drawn] afterwards. [I have my original concept design sketches.] So then—oh, and at that time . . . Okay, so I created the—both Cortez and Malinche. So I thought of them being—representing them like a seed, so they’re coming out of the flower. Now, what they’re doing is they will be throwing seeds into the map of the United States. So now they’re both throwing seeds into the map of the United States, and it’s landing, they’re landing in East LA. And out of those seeds, this plant of public art is growing out of East LA, and it’s spreading throughout the United States. And I wanted everybody to know that it’s—we did, we’re going to do it, we’re going to do it, and it’s going to be coming from East LA.

KD: Yeah, that’s really clever.

JG: Yeah, it’s—

KD: So you have it dated 1970, “Johnny D. Gonzalez, *The Birth of Our Art, El Nacimiento de Nuestro Arte*.” A clever solution for the naked bodies. You have the conquistador’s helmet over his genitals, and she’s holding . . . I was wondering how you were going to resolve that for the community. [laughter]

IN: Pottery, beautiful pottery.

KD: Pottery over hers.

JG: Well, we actually, we had it sort of covered up, but actually, what—I’ll tell you a little process of the way that—

IN: Well, finish this, describing the design—

KD: Yeah, the creative process here—

IN: You have the claw of eagle—

JG: So—

IN: And actually, the seeds were going into the whole Southwest.

JG: Yeah, the seeds were going into the Southwest, but it’s really growing out of East LA.

KD: Yeah, you can see the roots of the plant come right out.

JG: Yeah, it’s really growing out of East LA.

IN: So the roots of the plant are like a claw?

JG: And then what happened is, I was bugged. I was mad, because, I said, “This country is nothing but commercialism. They do nothing for the sake of art and history. And the minute that we have a cultural landmark—historical landmark, they tear it down to build a new building.” And I was really mad at that, I was really mad. So what I did originally, I—now, this is before I started even meeting with some of the other businesses. I was so mad that I had a hand coming out of a dollar bill, but originally, I had a knife in it. And I said, you know, “This commercialism is killing this plant from wanting to grow.”

But then when I started getting support from the businesses. Then I said, “It’s the businesses that can make it grow.” So then I took that knife out, and I put it grabbing the plant. And I said, “They’re grabbing onto it and they’re assisting it, they’re going to be helping this plant to grow.” So then, in the center I drew this flower, represented by the head of Quetzalcoatl. And I said, “Out of this flower is our studio. So this will be the first flower that will be blossoming out of this plant.” So now I had this original drawing—this isn’t the original drawing, this was revised. [So, in my final original concept design sketches, *The Birth of Our Art* mural is shown as the image of my apprenticeship school, with its full name, first, written in the center flower and, later, the mouth of Quetzalcoatl. It’s also the logo on the school stationary.]

KD: Yeah.

IN: Now, one thing you had explained to me before was that the claw—

JG: Yeah, but this came later.

IN: Oh, that came later. Okay.

JG: Yeah, I’ll talk about that. [The claw represents the strong grip our Mexican culture has on East LA and the entire USA Southwest.] This was later.

IN: But what was this whole mural representing? The future movement—



- JG: The future movement. The future movement of public arts of our culture. So the idea was to predict or to show what my intentions were, that once we had art all over the country, public art, that everybody's going to say it came from East LA. It started in East LA, and it was a Mexican American art movement that created all this. So now I had the drawing, and [the name of my mural, *The Birth of Our Art*].
- IN: And you did a finished illustration.
- JG: I [first] did a finished [preliminary concept/design] illustration, with [my mural] on the building. So I did this finished illustration of the building and the mural all together. And it was probably—the illustration was probably about this big, about maybe twenty inches, twenty by sixteen, something like that. So I finished that, and like I said, I had partial—I never finished the monument, because I got into murals. And so now I had the proposal, and I had the finished mural [preliminary concept/design illustration].
- IN: And the reason you decided to focus on murals rather than the monument was—
- JG: Because it would take too long to be able to do the monument.
- IN: And it would cost more, getting all the—
- JG: Oh, yeah. And not only that is that . . . I explained it already—
- KD: The focus on one street.
- JG: Yeah. Originally, before Louie [Moret] said [to] focus on one street, I had just thought, "Anybody who wants a mural, anybody who gets excited, we'll just go over there and start working on it." The idea was just to get anybody to start doing it. Because right now, the Doctors Hospital was on Whittier [Boulevard], Pan-American was First Street, and then the Guadalupe mural that Joe did of the Virgen de Guadalupe with Juan Diego—which was a religious mural, but it was still a mural—and it was facing Third Street, and it was pretty big. So we had those three public works of art right now in the community. So wherever it's popping up, what we'll do is just create a map that will direct people to all these places, and the brochure, there'll be a brochure with a map.
- IN: But then you started focusing on First Street?
- JG: Yeah. So then I started focusing, and then I illustrate it, First Street, just the way Louie had mentioned. So now I had the illustration of First Street and the [preliminary concept/design] illustration of my mural [*The Birth of Our Art*].
- IN: And the gallery, and the building—
- JG: Oh, the building.
- IN: How the building would be renovated.
- JG: How the building would be renovated. And also at that time, because David and I were—every day, we're talking. And so David was working nights with me still at Timely Advertising. So while I was going to work, I was telling him all about it [my monument and ideas]. And then we'd get together at certain times during the day, and David [started] working on sketches, too, while I was communicating [my ideas]. And so, like I said, when I did my sketches for the monument, for El Monumento de la Raza, David also [started] designing another one. And then once I started talking about having a brochure and a map, David started also doing a brochure, designing a brochure, and with the Pan-American Bank on it. So now we had a brochure, and so it was developing. So at this time, Joe was still struggling with his SBA loan. So actually what it is, it's that they gave them back to him to make some adjustments and things like that [on his proposal].
- KD: Right, revision.
- JG: And I remember him being real bugged, because he says, "Guy, you know . . ." Because his proposal was saying about buying some machinery and stuff to do the furniture in the back. And he was saying, "Man, it seems like they want to know how much I'm going to spend on every nail and every screw and everything." So he was really mad because it was taking so long to be able to get his money. But you've got to remember that all this is just weeks, all this was happening within weeks.
- KD: Oh, okay.

- JG: So it wasn't that long. But when you're waiting for money, it seems like forever. *[laughter]* But there was no money to pay the rent. He put a deposit on the building, and he wasn't—and then he quit his job to start—
- KD: Do you remember what the rent was?
- JG: Yeah, it was a hundred seventy-five dollars, which was a great, great deal.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: So anyway, he put a deposit on it. And then he quit his job to start working on the proposal, and the loan wasn't coming through, so he was getting nervous. So all of a sudden, Joe receives a notice of eviction. The guy wants the building back. He says, "I want my keys and the building back." He says, you know, "I haven't been getting any rent on it, and I can't wait anymore."
- IN: How many months did you have the building?
- JG: I'm not sure. It could have been three, four. I'm not sure. It was probably more than three months though. *[It was six to seven months.]*
- IN: Because you had—when you went to Europe—
- JG: He got the building before I got back, he got it actually in December or *[maybe even before that]*, I'm not sure.
- IN: While you were in Europe.
- JG: But he got it the last months of the year, of '69. So anyway, Joe was very disappointed. And I was disappointed because I had already done the drawing too and everything *[custom designed for the building]*. But I was so gung-ho, I was on a high. I was on a high. I mean, I became a born-again—I mean, you could really say it—but I became a minister. *[laughter]* I wasn't just born-again, I became a minister. I was preaching—
- KD: You were preaching the word. *[laughter]*
- JG: The Chicano Gospel, you know. *[laughter]* And not only that, I was talking about my ideas, and everybody was excited about them. And I started talking about the investment company to anybody. I mean, anybody I saw on the street, I'd stop them and talk *[to mostly Chicanos]*. And they'd get excited and say, "Gee, when it's ready, tell me, I'll invest, I'll invest." Everybody was excited about beautifying the community, investing in it for your own self. So anybody, I was just—it's like I had 100 percent support. Nobody, nobody had said anything *[negative about it]*. The only time I got a no was from Al Ortega, who says, you know, "We can't do it because the city won't allow it," stuff like that.
- KD: Right.
- JG: But everybody else was saying "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah," including the business community, and key people in the business community. So I told Joe, "Don't worry about it, we'll get another building. We'll get another building." And Joe was just feeling down about it, and *[his]* proposal *[for imports, manufacturing, and restoration]* was taking long. And not only that, he was struggling also to keep the family going. But I'm saying, "Don't worry. We'll get another building." Then there was an artist by the name of Manuel Cruz, who was doing small sculpture pieces of mariachis. I remember him doing little mariachis, and they were real nice little pieces. Commercial pieces. And so we went to his studio. So Joe said, "Let's go see his studio." We went to his studio, and his studio was probably one-fourth the size of our building, and he was probably paying three times the amount of rent that we were. I mean, he was paying a lot of rent. Maybe I'm exaggerating. Three . . . But he was paying more rent for his little building than we would be paying for this giant building. And I said, "Oh, my gosh. I guess we really do have a good deal." I said, "So I'm going to get that building back."
- IN: And why do you think it was such a good deal?
- JG: Well, the big building was totally dilapidated. The stucco was collapsing, falling, inside the building. The stucco was collapsing, and you could see the concrete blocks.
- KD: At Manuel Cruz's?
- JG: In my building.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: Our building.

KD: On First.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Yeah, the reason the Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] building was so inexpensive—

JG: So inexpensive, is because it was—

IN: It was falling apart.

JG: The doors, it had screen doors in the front that were collapsing, and the second door was a glass door, a wooden door with a little glass window, but there were weeds—weeds actually were growing out of the sidewalk, there was gum—I mean, tons of gum—you know, when gum falls, there's spots all over the sidewalk. The paint was chipping all over . . . I mean, it looked like a ghost town. It looked like nobody had touched that place in years. And they said that this was like fifty years ago that the building was being used. And I don't know how long ago it hadn't been in use, but I know that the plaster inside was all peeling off.

KD: Wow.

JG: It was terrible. It had a gigantic compressor, gigantic, big, big compressor. Maybe the compressor must have been about five feet long by about three feet high. It was [a refrigerator] compressor, and it had pipes connected to it, going all over the inside of the building, which were going into the refrigerator unit. So it had two gigantic refrigerators, walk-in freezers. One of them was probably maybe about twenty-five, twenty feet long by fifteen feet wide, and the other one was maybe about ten feet long by about seven feet [wide]. But they were beautiful, they were all built of wood.

KD: Of wood, yeah.

JG: The insulation was all wood. So they were beautiful, and the building was—there were fifteen rooms in our building, and two of them were about twenty-five by thirty-five feet, which were gigantic. One of them was the front room, which would have been the showroom, the showroom and the gallery, and the other one was a way back room which would have been the studio. And then it had a skylight, which is perfect for artists. And then we had an outside patio, a gigantic outside patio that was actually—it took you out to the front in a driveway. It was a driveway, enclosed driveway. So it had a roof on it. It had a chain-link fence, gate, right now, that was collapsing also, but you could see all the way in. So if you drove in, it was all enclosed with a roof. And then it took you into a patio area that didn't have a roof, which was a patio area. It must have been about—gee, about twenty by twenty-five. It was pretty nice, a large area, where we could build things outside that were dirty, messy, sculpting, whatever it is.

Then we had two small rooms that were perfect for graphics, that we kept real clean. And then we also had two bathrooms. One of them had a shower. And then we had another room that we thought of also using as a gallery, that must have been about seventeen feet by maybe fifteen feet. Then there were two gigantic ovens, really big ovens. The ovens were maybe ten by eight. Two of them, with steel doors that had tracks going out, which was for the meat, to be able to rail in the track to smoke the meat. And so the building was gigantic. And I just thought, "Gee, we really do have a good deal. I'm going to get that building back." So Joe had to take the keys back, so I said, "Joe, I'm going with you, I'm going with you. I'm going to get that building back." So I loaded up with my drawings and my proposal, and the attitude that I had, I said I could do anything, I could do anything.

So we went over there, and I started talking to the landlord, and his name was .. Oh, and at that time, since I had already thought of doing the apprenticeship program, I thought [my project] could be put together through a school. And now that we were going over there, I thought, "I have to have something to negotiate with." In other words, Joe's proposal, the Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] proposal for the furniture and for the gallery [the imports] and all that, was already taken up with the SBA, so I couldn't exactly negotiate Joe's proposal. So I said, "I have to have my own proposal." Which—I had my ["East LA to Tourist Attraction" project] proposal, but now I said, "I'll [continue] it as a school." So I decided [that my project's

first business] would be a school in the community, to be able to beautify—the purpose of the school was to create this tourist attraction. And I thought, “Now I want everybody to know that this school is a Mexican American school, and I want them to all know that it’s in East LA.” So I thought of naming it the East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts, because I wanted them to know it was fine arts, it wasn’t graphic arts. It had to be fine arts. Fine arts is public art. I wanted everybody to know, this is public art. We’re working in public art. So the abbreviation [acronym] was TELASOMAFA.

So I said—so now I have something that I could offer, I could be able to discuss with, negotiate with. So now, I had my proposal, my drawings [of their building with my mural and of First Street buildings with murals], and I had TELASOMAFA. So we went to Maldonado, his name was Lupe Maldonado, and he was a bail bondsman. So we went to his office, and Lupe Maldonado actually used to be the mailman there on First Street. And then he became bail bondsman, and he bought some land, and because the land—all of a sudden, I remember something about the land that he bought. They were going to build something major, so [I’ll tell you] real fast, he was able to sell it and make a big profit on it. But anyway, Lupe Maldonado had already bought a lot of real estate in the next two blocks in the area, which meant he owned a lot of the real estate there.

So I started talking to him about it, and he started saying, “Well, you know, you’ve had the building so long already, and there hasn’t been any signs of anything being done.” And he says, “I’m getting calls from the community saying, you know, when are you going to clean it up, do something with it?” So anyway, he wasn’t too happy with the situation. And so the more I talked and showed him the drawings and said, “Look, this is what I want to do,” and this and that. And he started thinking and responding positive. And he says, “Well . . .” He says, “I like your idea,” he says. “My wife and my daughter actually own the building,” he said, “so if they agree on what you’re talking about, we’ll—you can have the building back.” And so, and he says, “Why don’t you come down to our house tonight and talk to my wife and my daughter?” And he lived in Whittier, California.

So that night Joe and I went, and we met his wife and daughter. His daughter’s [name is] Lydia. But anyway, Lydia was about our age, maybe my age or maybe a little younger, she was a teacher at St. Alphonsus at that time, if I remember correctly. So we talked to them that night, and finally, after maybe a couple of hours of talking, we walked out of that house with a check for—a three-thousand-dollar check, all the past rent forgiven, and, I don’t know, a few months. I don’t know how many months, I don’t remember, a few months of free rent, while we worked on the building to beautify it. And what I was giving in return is I promised them, “I will be there tomorrow morning cleaning up the front.” I said, “So if you drive by, you will see me there.” And so I promised that I would be there. And so David [was with me], and [later] Joe was also there. So the next day—and so I promised that, and the other thing is that I gave them 15 percent of TELASOMAFA [which I set up as a partnership].

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: So they were now 15 percent owners. So now, we had our first business, which was TELASOMAFA, The East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts. I was [founder,] president, and largest shareholder, Joe was vice-president, second-largest shareholder, and David was secretary or treasurer, third-largest shareholder, and then the Maldonados were last on the—fourth on the list. So now we had a three-thousand-dollar check, and we had a few months to work on the building. So we had money to be able to work on the building. And most of that money was basically to beautify [restore] the building [and execute my mural while setting up the school]. And so the first thing I did is, you know, I found out we had to have a fictitious name, and so I went to Kovner and told him, “We’re going to get started. I want to have the fictitious name.” He got excited. He says, “Well, my contribution is you can file it free, I won’t charge you for the fictitious name.” At that time, it was twenty-five dollars, I think. So anyway, we filed the fictitious name—

IN: Was Kovner excited, what was happening?

JG: Oh, yeah. He was real excited. Oh, Kovner was so supportive, so supportive. He's really a great guy. Really great guy.

IN: He was actually active with the CSO when [Edward] Roybal was running for LA City Council.

JG: Yeah, actually, Roybal, yeah, I found out later that he was a key figure that was really supportive, in regards to the Jewish community. So anyway, we now had the fictitious name [The East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts, TELASOMAF], and we went to the Pan-American Bank, deposited the three thousand dollars, and started working on the building [in July 1970, before the moratorium]. David, Joe, and I, and Dan—we called him Danny-boy, Danny-boy was Joe's younger little brother-in-law, who actually found the building. And Danny was a great, great worker. As small as he was, he was strong. He was real stocky, and he was tough. He was a very, very good worker. Oh, you can't imagine how good of a worker. I mean, Danny would come in, and we'd say, "We have to tear things down." He'd have it all torn down. [laughter] And in regards to painting, you know, he was messy. He'd paint like crazy, but what he painted was really good, painting the walls or whatever, he'd do a beautiful job. He'd be all painted too, but [laughs] the wall was . . . He was a very, very good worker.

So we all got started working on the building, so the challenge now was, "How in the heck are we going to be able to get this thing done so inexpensive?" And we're talking about a mural too, and then we—here, we're talking about a mosaic, still talking about a mosaic mural.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: Still insisting—in my mind, I'm still—didn't occur to have a painted mural. It doesn't make sense, have a painted mural and then it's going to fade? So we kept on thinking, a mosaic mural. And how are we going to do all this with three thousand dollars? So we got started inside—we cleaned up the outside, we cleaned it up real well. But we started working inside, and the cement was all uneven and lumpy, and real awkward. But it had large squares, the squares were maybe three feet by three feet on the entrance, and so Joe said we could paint the floor with urethane, special paint for the floor. So what we did is we just followed each square, white and black, white and black. So when we finished—of course, the floor was last, actually.

But the first thing was the walls. They were collapsing walls, so Joe said we could use—and it was into concrete blocks that we had to work with. So instead of tearing down and replastering and all that, we needed to be able to hang up paintings. So we thought we could use pegboard to hang up the paintings, but we had to put up the pegboard some way, so Joe said we could use one by twos, and nail them in with concrete nails into the walls. So we first started using the one by twos, and we started nailing them all, and boy, when we missed that nail, they shot out like bullets. Because those are concrete nails, and when they busted or something, man, they shot off like bullets, so it was pretty dangerous, nailing.

So anyway, we got all those in, then we started nailing the—putting up the Masonite all over. And so the top area—and we covered the Masonite with burlap, which meant that we could stick in the little hooks in through the burlap, and when you take it out, you can't even tell. So the burlap was like a brownish color, but the bottom part, which was maybe about three feet or four feet—three and a half feet or so—from the bottom, Joe had said that we could get imitation Travertine, which was Masonite that looked like travertine, white travertine. And then he said we could paint it, antique it in gold and yellow. And, boy, it came out beautifully, it looked like marble, but beautiful, beautiful.

And then we tore down a divider, and a concrete wall was left there, which had the top part exposed. So we were thinking, you know, "How do we fix that up? And I kept [thinking] of Spain. I said, "Moorish arches, we could put some Moorish arches out there." So, okay. Then how do we do the Moorish arches? Maybe we could find some pillars, some little pillars that at the areas where they sell plaster stuff and things like that." So we found little pillars, and Joe says, "We could varnish them, paint them, and then put high-gloss varnish. Paint them with brown and black to look like marble." So we painted them. And so we had that bottom part, and we said, "So how do we do the arches?" So we're thinking, and my sister Licha was there also at that time, and since she had been working with recreation and parks. And she had been

putting festivals together and doing all kinds of different things with recreation and parks. She thought, you know, butcher paper, papier-mâché.

KD: Right.

JG: Papier-mâché. And I'm not sure that—Joe had also done some of that. But anyway, we started working on creating stone—papier-mâché. And then we started painting it to look like stone. And by the time we finished, it looked like beautiful arches. The top part looked like stone, and the bottom part looked like marble. So we did that. And then we went to the back room, and the back room—we didn't do all the gold stuff in the back room, but we started putting the pegboard and the Masonite.

And then—oh, so part of the front, where the window was, the lower part is—that's where the stucco was falling, and the concrete blocks were exposed. So what I did is I actually got the backside of the hammer, and I started chiseling to expose the blocks even more, so it looked rustic. So the bricks look exposed, but it looked nice, because the other area was very elegant. If the whole thing looked like that, then it looked like the whole thing was [falling apart]. But the fact that it was contrary, it was from beautiful marble and all this to this exposed block, it made it look almost a castle type of a feeling. So anyway, then inside what we did is we thought, "These refrigerators, walk-in freezer, we could use the big one to be our office." So—

IN: Because it was all wood paneling, right?

JG: It was all wood paneling. And I don't even want to say paneling, because normally what people think of when you buy panels—these were actually beams of wood.

IN: Thick wood.

JG: Thick wood. So we just got the varnish, and we just varnished and brought out the color, beautiful, really nice. So now—

IN: So how was the office designed?

JG: Well, at this time, it was just beautiful paneling. And we just went in there, we didn't have any desks or anything yet, we didn't have any furniture. We didn't have anything yet. But what—one of the things that we started doing in there is we started setting up all our drawings of our plans.

KD: Your plans?

JG: Yeah.

KD: Yeah.

JG: So right now, we were still just working on it. And then it had two little tiny, tiny windows, and the windows were windows that went . . . If you're in the store and you're going to get something from the refrigerator, you open it a little [door] and you get the stuff out. So they were to get the stuff out. But for us, we were able to look out into the showroom area. So now we had it all varnished and everything, and then in the back—

IN: Well, I think now would be a good time to say how the office evolved, even though it happened later.

JG: Okay. Well, okay. So what happened is the fact that the people in Tijuana were willing to give us furniture on consignment. Later, when they brought all this furniture, they gave us office desks on consignment, and these ancient chairs on consignment—

IN: All hand-carved.

JG: Everything, all hand-carved. And then we commissioned them to do two hand-carved doors. So we took out those glass doors, and I wanted—I told them, I wanted a hand-carved Cuauhtemoc on one door, and then [Spaniard] on the other door. So we had a carving of the Indian, so it related to the top of [*The Birth of Our Art* mural, above. Now the building was about 90 percent finished].

IN: So then the office, you brought in the furniture—

JG: Yeah, so we brought in the furniture. And once we had some of that furniture, then—

IN: And then you had tapestries, too, from Spain?

JG: Well, no, tapestries weren't yet. So now we had this beautiful furniture in this rustic looking inside of the refrigerator. And then Joe's wife, Blanca, did some really beautiful drapes, curtains, that went along the



top of the little windows, and another one that separated, sort of like a back room where we had the files and stuff. So if you went in, in the office, you wouldn't see anything that related to business. It was just . . . I mean, everybody wanted to go and see the office, it became a major showplace. And then on top of that, once artists started coming in, they started bringing woodcarvings and stuff like that. And then some brought some beautiful stuff that we put up there, there was—

IN: So you always describe the office as looking like—

JG: It looked like the captain's quarters of a Spanish galleon. It was really beautiful. And the way it was lit with some of the artwork that some of the artists brought, it was really, really nice. One of the artists, Richard Jimenez, did some—two skulls, beautiful skulls, in his ceramic class, and he just brought them and just left them there. So with these two skulls, and all the sculpture pieces, it really looked beautiful.

IN: So now you're describing the back room?

JG: And I hadn't gone to Spain yet, [for my second trip, which was later, around November 5, 1971, for one to two months, to purchase all the imported items]. So the back room, we cleaned it up, but we didn't have good lighting yet, because the three thousand dollars wasn't going to cover all of this and we had to have regulation lighting. The whole thing had to be fixed. And on top of that, we're still thinking of a mosaic mural. So we're still thinking of a mosaic mural, and still thinking of looking for a mosaic artist. So we went to a ceramic company, went to a ceramic company, I think it was El Monte Tile, something like that. But I remember it was in that area. So we went over there, and we asked, "Do you know of any artists that do mosaics?" And in my mind, we're still thinking, even though José—José Reyes Meza said that he didn't do the mosaic. I thought, "Well, maybe we could find one here that really is a master mosaic artist." So we went to a tile company and we asked, "Do you know anybody who does mosaics?" So they said there's an artist—there's a tile setter by the name of Eddie Martinez.

IN: So now there are two different Eddie Martinez—

JG: Yeah. This is a different Eddie—

IN: One was the artist that went to East LA College with Joe—

JG: With Joe.

IN: And now this is a tile setter.

JG: This is another, yeah. So he says "His name is Eddie Martinez, and he does mosaics. I know that he does mosaics because I've seen them." So we got excited. We called him up, we went to him. [He was a] *vet-erano*, older guy, [and] he was married to a white woman. So that meant that he even got more excited about it, because it was something about his culture. Sometimes when you're married to a different culture, it makes it a little harder to relate, because they don't understand that. And if you're real excited about something, they're saying, "What are you getting so excited about it?" [laughter] So anyway, he was very excited about it. So we spent time talking to him, and then he started showing us—he says, "Well, you know, my specialty is doing the tiles, but I do mosaics." So then he showed us some mosaics that he did, and then he said, "And this is the way I do it." And it turns out that he bought the mosaic pattern, and he just mounted it. So it had like paper in the back. So it was like, he doesn't really design them or put the mosaic together.

KD: No.

JG: He puts the big pieces together—

KD: He does the technical work.

JG: Yeah. So then we thought, it looks like—and to be able to find somebody, it's obviously going to be very, very expensive to do it in mosaic. So we had started thinking, "I think we're just going to have to paint it. But how do we paint it to be durable?"

IN: Well, in the meantime, Danny-boy—

JG: Yeah. So anyway, and we thought—but we developed a good relationship with Eddie. Eddie we kept seeing all the time. As a matter of fact, Eddie Martinez then took Danny-boy under his wing to be his apprentice.

IN: Joe's younger brother-in-law.

- JG: Danny, yeah. And so Danny started working with him, and then Danny became a master, and Danny started doing real well. And then Danny took Artie, Joe's youngest brother—
- IN: Youngest son.
- JG: Youngest son, youngest son, as an apprentice to him.
- IN: This was years later.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: Over a period of years.
- JG: And now Artie is a master setter of marble and tile, and even mosaic. He sets everything. He's an award-winner, he's won a lot of awards in that. So anyway, it's just—it's interesting, that apprenticeship method that I had thought about worked in that area of it.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: So anyway, we thought, "We're going to have to paint it, but how do we paint it outdoors?" There was no painted murals outdoors. "How do we paint it to be durable?"
- KD: Now, when you met Manuel Cruz, is he the same Manuel Cruz that worked at Mechicano, and—
- JG: It's—possibly. He might have gotten involved with him later. I'm not sure. I don't know all the artists. I know there were—a lot of the more avant-garde, more Chicano—that's one of the things that's sort of—a certain . . . I don't know if it was a rivalry, but anyway, we had thought a little different. And in other words—
- KD: Each gallery had their own emphasis.
- JG: Well, the two.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: Mechicano wasn't around yet.
- KD: No.
- JG: Mechicano wasn't around yet.
- IN: When you first started [the school TELASOMAFA and] Goez [Imports and Fine Arts].
- JG: Oh, yeah. No, Mechicano came in about six months after we started, six, eight months, I don't know.
- IN: So it was actually—
- JG: But all these things, the six months weren't up, you know.
- IN: So it was actually The East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAFA] and Goez [Imports and Fine Arts] that were in the same building.
- JG: Yeah. Yeah, so the idea was that—so we're going to have—the back of the building was going to be the school. And where—all the studio was going to be the school, and the front of the building was going to be the gallery. But right now, we just had money to fix up the building, as far as Maldonado, and as far as the Maldonados were concerned, it was the school that we were focusing on.
- KD: Right.
- JG: So we weren't—Goez [Import and Fine Arts] wasn't being talked about or anything right now.
- KD: Oh, okay.
- JG: All that was being talked about was the school.
- KD: Was the school.
- JG: We had in mind to import the furniture and all these other things, to still be able to have Goez [Import and Fine Arts], but right now, it was the school.
- IN: The East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAFA].
- KD: Okay.
- JG: That we had the money for. So anyway, we then started saying, "We're going to have to—we're going to have to paint it." [My *The Birth of Our Art* mural.] So within this time that we were working on this, I was still talking to Father Norm at St. Isabel's, and one of the times that I talked to him, Father Norm said—I don't know if he called me and I went down there—because he says, you know, "I've got to talk to you about something." But anyway, I was talking to him, and he says, you know, "There's—I've got to let you

know that there's going to be a very—probably the largest protest, community protest, Chicano protest.” Now, he was an activist, a young activist priest, and he was very involved in the community. So he said, “There's going to be probably one of the largest protests on the Vietnam War, and the disproportionate amount of Latinos that are getting killed over there.” He said, “And,” he said, “they—the policeman are also organizing,” he said. “So there's great possibilities. They're expecting that there could be some major problems coming up that could just destroy your tourist attraction.”

KD: So he was talking about the moratorium?

JG: Yeah, the moratorium. He said, “Hundreds of police are going to be organizing.” And he said, “So I think it's important that you let some of the organizers know about it, about what you're doing, because if something happens, you know, all your ideas will go down the drain. It's going to take years for anything of those things to happen.” So anyway, I said, “I've got to stop it. I've got to stop it. I've got to stop it.” I just said, “I have to stop this,” and he says—

IN: You mentioned—

JG: I didn't know a lot of the community, or especially the more activist community, part of the community.

IN: What did it mean to you when he said hundreds of cops would be organizing?

JG: Yeah. So anyway, when he said that, you know, right away, we all knew—anybody in the community knew that if—oh, he said—because hundreds of cops are going to be organizing in order to prevent any problems. And we all knew that if hundreds of cops were going to be organizing, it wasn't to prevent problems, it was to create problems. And that's why he was concerned about it. And of course, at that time there was a lot of problems with the policemen. The majority of the policemen were white in an all-Chicano community, so there were problems. Always complaints, and things going on in regards to that. So I thought, “What I have to do is I have to get in touch with anybody who's got some influence.” And he says, “Well, maybe try and get in touch with the Brown Berets.” He says, “I don't know exactly who you can talk to in regards to the Brown Berets,” he says, “but maybe you could get information through the Pinto program.” And the Pinto program were the ex-cons, the program to be able to help them rehabilitate, find jobs, things like that. So he says, “There's the office on Whittier [Boulevard] and Atlantic, that you could go over there and talk to somebody over there.” So I was traumatized. I said, “Everything's going so well. Everything's working out so well. I've scored 100 percent on everything, and all of a sudden, to have this thing just collapse.”

So I went to the Pinto program, and as I walk into the Pinto program, there's this guy sitting in the back of this desk that when I saw him, I got scared. I didn't want to go in there anymore. *[laughter]* I mean, boy, his face looked like he was ready to kill me. So I said, “Well, you know.” I knew they were ex-cons and all that, so I said, “Oh, I've got to go talk to him. I've got to go talk to him.” So I started talking to him. He introduced himself, he says, “Hi, my name is Moe Aguirre.”

IN: Moe Aguirre?

JG: Moe Aguirre. So he started talking, and as he started talking, I was so surprised. I was—because his face looked beaten and—I don't know if it had a scar. But anyway, he started talking, and this guy sounded like a PhD. Man, he was articulate. Man. I mean, he was quite a speaker. This was very—

*[break in audio]*

KD: This is Karen Davalos, we're on side B with tape 7 with Johnny Gonzalez, Irma Núñez, and myself. And you were talking about meeting Moe Aguirre, and how his conversation was more impressive than other folks you had met.

JG: Yeah. I mean, I tell you, he really impressed—it was quite a contrast from his looks and the way he spoke. But anyway, he says, you know, “This is needed, this is not going to stop, we have to protest, we have to . . .” So anyway, then I thought, “Well, if you can't beat them, join them.”

KD: Mm-hmm.

JG: So then I got together with David. I said, “David, we’ve got to go down there and see what this is all about,” and everything. And so David Botello, Roberta [David’s sister]—we called Bertie, who was pregnant at that time, and my sister Alicia [Licha], and I’m not sure who else went. But I think it may have been the four of us. We went down to, what was called? The—what was it called at that time?—Laguna Park.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Laguna Park. And we were sitting out on the lawn after . . . We didn’t go on the march. We just went to the park, we sat on the lawn in front of the stage, waiting for César Chávez to come on, and he was going to speak. So as we’re waiting, all of a sudden, I started hearing a little bit of commotion in the background, and I didn’t pay much attention. Then I heard more, and it started getting louder, and all of a sudden, I turn around and I see this tidal wave of people coming at me. And I said, “Oh, my gosh. What in the heck is going on?” And as I stood up and I saw over their shoulders, I see hundreds of—it looked like hundreds of policemen pushing the crowd with their masks, their helmets. They had their batons, and they had even, I think, some rifles and . . . But anyway, I never saw anything that looked so scary. And I said, “Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh, it happened, it’s happening, it’s happening.” And I just thought, “If only we don’t fight back. If only—we’re going to give them an excuse. If only we don’t fight back.” And all of a sudden, I see a can flying over my head into the policemen, and I said, “That’s the end. That’s the end.”

And before you know it, they were shooting tear gas, they were beating up on people, these old ladies were falling. I mean, Bertie was pregnant, and she couldn’t even walk, she was collapsing, and everybody was just running and panicking. And I said, “Oh, my God.” So I ran in between the policemen and the people, and I started waving to the people just saying, “Don’t throw! Don’t throw, don’t throw!” I just started yelling loud, “Don’t throw, don’t throw!” And that’s all I was focusing on, you know, “Please, don’t throw, don’t aggravate,” but it was too late. It was too late. Everybody—

IN: You saw like a tidal wave of people coming towards you?

JG: Yeah. It was very traumatic. Very traumatic. All of a sudden, all of these people are falling, and they’re just running away into different directions. And the cops are following them, beating up on people. And here Bertie was pregnant, and it turned out that my sister, Alicia [Licha], managed to knock on a door and make them open the door to get Bertie in there. So we finally got into some house. And the thing just started growing and growing, traveling down Whittier Boulevard, and then . . . So my sister Licha just concentrated on trying to get Bertie into a safe area, so she took her down to my mom’s house which was the opposite direction from where we were at.

And all of a sudden, it just started growing, buildings started going on fire. I said, “Oh, my gosh, oh, my gosh. That’s it.” I was totally devastated. All my work, down the drain. All my work down the drain, you know. We’ll never get people in here now. As it is, they’re scared. And now all of a sudden with this, it’s never going to happen. And I said—and the media is going to have a party with this. They don’t cover anything that’s positive in East LA, but when it comes to negatives, boy, they don’t miss those stories. They don’t miss those stories. And I said, “That’s it. That’s it.” I was totally devastated. And before you know it, all of Whittier [Boulevard] was in flames. And so we went back home, and we’re looking at television. And then all of a sudden, I hear that a reporter was killed, and I hear the name. And I said, “That’s the name—that’s the person that I talked to. That’s the person that I talked to on the telephone.”

IN: From where?

JG: When I called up to see if they wanted to do a story on murals?

IN: You called KMEX?

JG: KMEX.

IN: That was Ruben Salazar.

JG: That was Ruben Salazar. And I felt—I mean, the first thing is to say, you know, “I just talked to that person, and now he’s gone.” And, the other thing, I was thinking the whole place was on fire. One of the reasons there was major protest also with a lot of the businesses is because they were saying that a lot of businesses were ripping off the community, which meant they were charging more here in East LA. So if you

went outside of East LA, you could get a better deal. And then on top of that, they [East LA business owners] all lived out of the community. Not all of them, but many of them lived outside of the community. So that's why a lot of the businesses—a lot of them were saying, you know, "We're Mexican. We're Mexican." They wanted to put signs to make sure that people knew. So anyway—

IN: Oh, so in other words, the business people who were Mexican American put signs up to say, "I'm on your side."

JG: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly. To try and prevent their place from getting—

KD: From vandalism and looting.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, it was terrible. But you know what? The next day, there were tons of tourists, all coming to see the fire, to see what was devastated. So people came to see how terrible it was. And so the media brought them all in. I mean, I can't call them tourists, but they were looky-loos who wanted to see so that. But anyway, so I thought, "This is terrible." But anyway, I couldn't do it, but I said, "I'm not giving up. I'm still—there's too much support, we've still got our studio, we've got all this support coming up." And so a little after that—

IN: Well, I think this is a good place to take a break.

KD: Take a break.

JG: Okay.

IN: I think the important thing, when we do our cultural arts education program, when you tell this part of the story, you say, "In spite of the devastation . . ."

JG: Yeah.

IN: How do you say that?

JG: That was cutting it short.

IN: Yeah. But just to transition—

JG: In spite of it, everything succeeded. Everything happened.

IN: Yeah. But in spite of it, you were still determined to make this happen.

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: Okay.

JG: Let's take a break.

[*break in audio*]

KD: Okay. And we're back from lunch. We're just going to pick up where we left off. You had talked about the horrific experience of the moratorium, and then the next day after, people coming in to look.

JG: Yeah. So I had already designed [the first version of] my mural [*The Birth of Our Art*], so I started working on the Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] logo. [This was five months before the moratorium, after I designed El Monumento de la Raza and created the "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project.] So as I was working on the Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] logo, I went down to my sister's, and Chito was a graphic—Ignacio, we call him Chito, Ignacio Gomez [my brother-in-law].

KD: Ignacio Gomez. Uh-huh.

JG: He was a graphic designer, doing very well in regards to graphic illustration. So I used to go down there and just sit down, and do designing and work on certain artwork projects that I had. I think also because he had a "Lucy" machine, which I was able to use.

IN: What's a Lucy machine?

JG: A Lucy's like a projector that we were able to blow up and be able to draw. [Lucigraph, a projector for enlarging images; sometimes called a "Lazy Lucy"—ed.] But anyway, I'd just go down there and just enjoy—we used to just be able to enjoy each other's company while drawing. So I started working on the Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] logo. And as I was working on the logo—

IN: What was your concept for the logo?

JG: The concept, of course, again, is the Spanish and the Indians. I was really, really tied up into the two cultures.

IN: The Aztec and the Indian—

JG: Yeah, the Aztec and the Indian. And of course, the idea is to make it as simple as possible. So I wanted the Aztec and the Indian, but I wanted them to have something that represented Joe and I. So the—I think it's the *J*, it was Goez in the center, and *J* was, I think, the first part of it, and the *G* was the second part. And so the *J* was like—designed like the eagle warrior, with the headdress of the eagle warrior. And the *G* was designed like a Spaniard's headdress. So it had those two faces on the side, and in the center is "Goez." So anyway, I was working on that. And I also took my design that I had already done for my mural, *The Birth of Our Art*, because as an artist, any artist would know, they're never finished. [laughter] You keep on seeing things, and you want to say . . . And the fact that I had done it so fast. So is that . . . [looking at logo]

KD: Yeah. I was trying to—I didn't realize that was a *J*.

JG: So that's the Indian, and that's like a *J*, and the Spaniard is a *G*. It's like the headdress of—

IN: And that's actually the original. Juan/Johnny later did as a woodcarving.

KD: Wow.

JG: Yeah. And I'll mention that later. So as I was working on that, I also was working on my drawing [my final concept-design sketches of the *Birth of Our Art* mural], because I wanted to add more elements into it. And since I had done the other ones so fast, it was preliminary in the sense [my first concept/design], but it looked finished, because it was a color illustration, it had the building, how it was designed and everything, but as an artist, you always want to better whatever you're doing. So I wanted to add more elements, and so as I was working on it, and adding certain things, [and] my brother-in-law, who we call Chito, he was looking at it. And he says, "You know, what would be nice is that instead of having the Cortez and La Malinche laying down on the window," [and people seeing us again like lazy Mexicans], he says, "you should have them raised, almost as if they're floating or flying." And I said—well, it sounded like a good idea. And I was excited, because now I had another artist that was excited about working on my mural, which to me [meant my mural could motivate artists to start working on] any mural.

So anyway, he did a sketch on it, and I said, "Great," you know. "Great." To me, I just wanted to get artists excited about working on it, getting involved in this project. And I said, "Great." So I took the sketch. And later on I got busy and never really incorporated it in there, [not right away]. But I still had the idea of incorporating [floating figures] and adding new elements to it, [to my final concept design sketches]. So anyway, I was working on the new design and adding that in. And I also worked on a design for the First Street Store, an architectural design for the First Street Store. Because I was always trying to think of anything that I could do to excite people. There was another building, it was SER, and I don't remember what it represented. But it was SER. I think it was helping create jobs and look for jobs. [Their building was] on First Street. [I think it's Service, Employment, Redevelopment—Jobs for Progress National, Inc.]

KD: *S-E-R*, or—

JG: *S-E-R*. The director was Phil Soto, who was married to Nell Soto, who is on the [state] senate, [from] Pomona. [We were told Nell sadly passed away in 2009.] But anyway, Phil Soto. So I approached him, and I said, "Gee, it's a perfect place to have a mural." It's one of those walls that has a frame on it and everything. It was a perfect place, and so and so. So anyway, he got real excited, and . . .

But what happened, even before, is that when—once I had the logo designed, then I started working on a business card, to be able to have a business card. And the business card was all handwritten, all the type and everything, because I wanted it to look rustic. In other words, this is old Spanish now that we're talking about, so everything's supposed to look old and rustic. So I wanted the [card] to look old and rustic. So I hand-lettered the entire business card, and it was like a little book form, where you opened it up and you're able to read everything, what we do and everything. And I wanted to have a nice old letter design, and it was on paper that was sort of a parchment type of a paper. So when I finished the business card, then I started thinking, "Gee." I used to really try and make it more—look antique. Joe and I even worked



on maybe trying to burn the sides. And then he said, “Why don’t we put gold leaf on the ends?” So we did the gold sides, and we started adding the gold leaf on it. And so if you saw the ends, when it’s all together, it looks like an old book. But once you take it apart—but if you look at it careful, you could see we actually had actual gold leaf on it. So when I went to talk to Phil Soto, and I gave him my card, I remember very specifically, he just got so excited about the card. He said, “Wow, this is great! I’ve never seen anything like this.” And then he says, “Yeah, it would be great to have [a mural].” So anyway, I started working on a mural. I designed a mural for him, and I was just so excited about anything to better East LA—specifically now, First Street.

So then I started working on designing a whole new building for the First Street Store. All Spanish architecture, more or less colonial, with a little fountain in the front and everything. So I did the whole illustration of the First Street Store, and I had big arches in the top. In other words, the arches were—I don’t know. But anyway, there were wider arches than the Pan-American Bank, because it’s so long, I figured, you know, [the owner is] not going to want to put a lot of little tiny [murals]. So anyway, I went to him, [the owner]—Bob Kemp was his name—and I gave him the design, and he flipped, you know. He says, “Oh, beautiful,” and all that. He says, “But you know, I don’t want to do anything right now. I don’t want to do anything.” [This was] after the riots. And then the sixteenth of September was coming up, the sixteenth of September parade that goes in front of the First Street Store. Now, this was going to be the first time that the Chicanos—the community, the Latino community—was going to be coming together in large amounts, since—

KD: Since the moratorium.

JG: The riots, since the moratorium. So the business community was scared. And Bob Kemp was very scared, him being Jewish, and here it was, they were all going to be coming right in front. And it was going right in front of our building too. So everybody was worried that something was going to be happening. So anyway, he says, “It’s really nice,” he says, “but I don’t want to do anything right now.” He says, “I don’t want to do anything.” So he took the design, and he just kept it. I didn’t want it. If he kept it, that means it was motivating him. You know, someday, something, at least he’d keep an eye on it, looking at it. So anyway, I designed that, and so then next, the parade was coming up. So now the parade was coming up, and everybody was concerned, and meanwhile, we were still working on the building, but it was quite a bit well done now, and so people were already beginning to come in, because by now, they had shipped the furniture [from Tijuana, Mexico], so we had all this furniture. [Actually, we didn’t get the furnisher or visitors until early November, after David and I got back from Mexico.]

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: And then Joe had met an artist by the name of Cervantes. Joe, being at Fusek’s studio, and Fusek’s studio focused on religious art, the art that they had was quality. It was quality, because they were imported from Italy and different parts of the world, and if they couldn’t import it, they had artists that would come in, and a lot of those artists were Mexicanos that would be there doing sculpting and things like that. So that’s how Joe started learning about all the different things, because there were some really very, very good artists.

And so there was this one artist by the name of Cervantes, who was a wood sculptor. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons he came, was to do Danny Thomas’s home. He did a lot of the woodcarvings, pillars and stuff, in Danny Thomas’s home. But he would bring a lot of artwork that he did, and I guess he had a shop over there where they did mass production wood [sculpting]. So they’d do so many with the dye, you know, and then they’d refine it by hand. So anyway, he [Cervantes] brought a lot of stuff to do shows here, and in one of the shows, I guess, he met Joe. And he says—and Joe started telling him what he wanted to do [with imports, furniture and art]. And this is even before we opened the building. I think before he even got the building. So he managed to—the guy says, “Well, look at . . . Instead of me taking it all back to Mexico, I’ll just leave it here with you.” So he left all of his little wood sculpting figures with Joe, and so Joe had them at his house originally.

So now that we opened up the place, Joe brought them all. So we had all kinds of little tiny wood sculpting. And he brought some paintings, but the paintings weren't really what we were . . . More mass-produced type of paintings, and we didn't want to have those type. So we didn't use the paintings. So [later], when we opened the doors, actually, we had all of this furniture, beautiful furniture [from Tijuana, Mexico,] and all of these wood sculpting figurines. A lot of Don Quixotes, you know. He just happened to carve a lot of them. And the walls were empty, the walls were totally empty. *[laughter]*

And so Joe and I brought artwork. So we opened up the place, me with my St. Luke or whatever, one of the four evangelists that I did at Salesian, and Joe with a painting that he did of—many years before that—of Hollenbeck Park. *[laughter]* So we had two paintings, and the rest of it was all furniture. But little by little, the word started getting out. Then after that, Robert—oh, David. David had been putting off surgery on his legs.

IN: David Botello?

JG: David Botello had been putting off surgery on his legs because he wanted to finish working on the building. So finally, after [the renovation and our Mexico trip,] about this time, David says, "I'm finally going to get my surgery." So he scheduled his surgery. And he says, [after seeing my revised sketches that I did at Chito's house,] you know, "While I'm in bed," he says, you know, "I could make [your] additions to [your final design of your] mural." And I said, "Great, great. Take it. Do everything you could." So he started working on it in bed, and refining all the details.

Meanwhile, I'm continuously thinking of things, and, well, one day, I'm driving and I see papers on the sidewalk. And I say, "Ay"—you know, I'm always thinking, "If East LA was beautiful, if East LA was beautiful." I constantly kept on thinking of that. And I thought, "Man, why don't they throw them in the trash can?" And then I'm saying, "Where are the trash cans? No wonder they're throwing them there." And I started thinking, "Gee, why don't we have more trash cans? We should have artistic trash cans." I said, "Wow, we should have trash cans with indigenous culture," you know. So I'm saying, "A trash can with the Tula warrior." So then I started thinking of the trash cans, one with Olmec, one with the Tula. The head of the Tula warrior, and the other one of the eagle warrior. So the next time I went to see David, I said, "David, why don't you do some sketches of these figures like trash cans?" So he had all the time in the world to sit down and sketch.

Meanwhile, I'm running around and trying to organize different things and think of different ideas. And also Joe was working on trying to bring more artists, stuff like that. Meanwhile, also, I said, "We need a sign [for Goetz Imports and Fine Arts, since the mural represents TELASOMAFIA]." And I didn't want to do anything just like that, so I said, "We need a sign." So I had the logo all done already. And I said, "Gee," you know, "maybe I could carve out a sign," because Joe had all his tools, chisels, and I used to drool over the chisels, but I never carved anything. So I said, "Gee," you know. I wanted everything, no matter what you saw in the gallery, to be really just awesome. So I thought, "I'll carve the sign."

So I started. I told Joe about it, and he says, "Well, what we should do is, we've got to go get some wood." And then he says, "The best wood to carve on would be jelutong." I had never even heard of that wood." He said, "It's soft, but yet it's hard enough to be durable, and it's good to carve on." So we went to some store that specialized in different exotic woods, and we bought some planks of jelutong. So we put it together, glued it, and I designed it. I started doing the [baroque] scroll [framing the logo]. Spain again. [I] started doing the scroll. So I got the wood, and I started working on it, and Joe told me, you know, "Just make sure you're going with the grain, don't go against it, because you'll chip." And he says, "And use this chisel to do this type of thing, this chisel to do that." So I started working on it, and started sculpting out the Goetz lettering first, the head of the Indian and the head of the Spaniard, and then I started working on the scroll. Then I chiseled out all the inside area, and I started working on the scroll. And when I started on the top over here, I started working, and I'm refining, working my way over there, and by the time I met this end, the part that I started on, compared to the part I finished, looked terrible. I mean, like if an amateur had done it. *[laughter]*

- KD: Yeah, so you improved. *[laughter]*
- JG: So I started doing it again, and again I said, "Wow." So I practically went like three times around.
- IN: So how big was that wood carving?
- JG: It was probably about three feet by four feet.
- KD: Wow.
- JG: And it was heavy. It was a heavy piece.
- IN: It became a showpiece at the gallery.
- JG: Yeah, because the wood was maybe two inches thick. So—and it turned out to be so beautiful. I said, "We're not going to put this outside." So we hung it inside. So that was inside. And then David did a banner. Originally, we had a sign, it was, like, a nice paper, and David had done it too. And what he did was "TELASOMAF," because originally—the first sign that we had on the window was "TELASOMAF." And then David did some heads, so like Quetzalcoatl, on the ends. [Like book holders on each end of the name TELASOMAF, a takeoff of my Goetz logo design.] So by now we wanted to put a banner outside, so we had some wrought iron built, so that it looked like a nice flagpole, in a sense. And then we did a banner with red, white, and green, and then we did some decorative cutout in the bottom. And then we put the Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts] logo on there. So that was our sign originally. And then when we started thinking "We've got to put a bigger sign out there on the front," [describing what we had inside], and we started working on it. And we started thinking, you know, "What do we say, because nobody likes . . ." We can't say "Chicano Art," we can't say "Mexican American," we can't say "American of Mexican descent." Somebody's going to protest. So I said, "Well, let's [use] 'Barrio Art.'" So we just put "Barrio Artwork" up there, and then—
- IN: So you started bringing in your art, and Joe and David—
- JG: Yeah. [In January 1971 we filed the fictitious name for Goetz Imports and Fine Arts, and David became a partner.]
- IN: What were you using to fill the gallery at that time?
- JG: Oh, it was all the furniture [that Joe got on consignment from Tijuana, Mexico]. As far as artwork, there was no artwork, except for Joe's and mine [and the little wooden manufactured figurines].
- IN: And so people were starting to come in?
- JG: Yeah, people were already beginning to come in. Also, we still didn't have a lot of artwork. Joe had seen a young kid painting on velvet in Tijuana, because in Tijuana, there was tons of artists painting, and the things that they would paint were *charros*, *banditos* with their cigarettes and smoke coming out, and Joe said, you know, "There's this young kid painting over here, let's go see him." And he had beautiful *bandidos* with smoke coming out and everything, and you could really see the difference of the quality, even though they were on velvet. And then he showed us—and I'm not sure, but I think he had—it was paintings of Pinky and Blue Boy on velvet. And we looked, and, wow, they were beautiful. Beautiful, beautiful. So we bought them from him, and we brought them to the gallery, and we hung them up. And, boom, they flew.
- KD: Really?
- JG: They sold—I don't know if we even had them up two days. And not a lot of people were coming in.
- KD: And who bought them?
- JG: I don't know. I don't remember who bought those.
- KD: Do you remember if it was a Mexican—
- JG: Oh, yeah. It was just the community right now. Yeah, the community—people on the outside didn't know anything about it. There was no publicity, nothing had happened yet. So anyway, we sold them fast, and then we went back, we went back and said, "Wow, we've got to commission him to do some more." So we went back, and we commissioned him to do Master Lombard, one of the classics. And we told him, "We want you to do it on canvas." So—and this was a bigger painting. The ones of Pinky and Blue Boy were maybe—maybe they were, oh, maybe one foot . . . It's almost like it was a nice little pair. They were maybe

about . . . An awkward size. Maybe they were like one foot, one and a half feet, by maybe twenty inches. And they were both real nice, very nice. They weren't real big.

KD: And that was your first sale at the gallery.

JG: That was the first sale.

IN: And who do you think bought it?

JG: Actually, there's a couple [Almendariz] that always came in, or used to come in a lot. And [they] said, "We were the first sale." They bought a little sculpture piece, a wooden sculpture piece. But this was a big sale. It wasn't really big, you know. I don't remember how much it was. I mean, we didn't sell [them] for a lot of money. But anyway, they flew. So we went back, and now on canvas . . . So he painted. Now, this one was bigger, this one was maybe twenty-four by thirty-six. And we brought it back. And I think it was David's uncle [and aunt]—

IN: Botello?

JG: That came. Yeah, he was coming to see . . . David was now, I think, out of bed, and he was now hanging around at the gallery again, and doing a lot of different things. And I think the uncle came in to see what David was doing. The word was getting out. And he came in, and I think he bought it. And [for] pretty good money, I think. I think it might have been—now at that time, I think it could have been like six hundred dollars [or three hundred dollars]. And that was at that time.

KD: Wow.

JG: It was pretty good money.

KD: That's pretty amazing. Yeah.

JG: Yeah. I mean, it was beautiful. This guy was good, [and he was only about fifteen years old]. So, boy, we went back, and we couldn't find him anymore. We couldn't find him.

KD: And you don't have the name now.

JG: Years later, years later, he was in LA. He was in LA, and he was involved with Nosotros. [He] was involved in music [and acting]. He was actually dating the daughter of a friend of mine, who was a guitar player, who actually was in our movie. But later on, he started saying, you know, "What am I doing here?" And he went back to his paintings.

IN: So when you lost touch with him, it was because he went back—

JG: He went because his mother was sick. He went back into the little town where he lived in, away from Tijuana, in the—

KD: Interior?

JG: Yeah, interior of Mexico somewhere. But what happened, eventually he came back. And he said that there was this one man that saw his paintings, and this guy fixed up all his papers to come to the United States and represented him for years. But he said he felt like a prisoner because he couldn't do anything unless this guy approved it. And eventually, he was able to get away from the contract. And so he just started—he was painting. And then eventually he came to LA, and then went back to San Diego and that area, I think, [and] started painting again. And now, Alfredo's—his name is Alfredo Rodriguez. I mean, his paintings—what was one of the last, thirty-some thousand dollars? He focuses on Southwest art. Alfredo—

IN: Oh, primarily Navajo Indians.

KD: Oh, that Alfredo Rodriguez. [*laughter*] Okay. I know who you're talking about.

IN: So you know the name.

KD: Yeah. That's weird.

IN: And so he's like one of the top—

KD: Yeah.

IN: Southwest artists in the nation.

JG: Oh, he's been in magazines like crazy.

IN: I mean, his work is highly respected.

- JG: So Irma and I then started—
- IN: Later.
- JG: Later, yeah.
- IN: Years later, we represented him.
- JG: Yeah. In regards to his prints, we're—
- IN: Now didn't—
- JG: So we were carrying his prints and also distributing—
- IN: Well, that'll be part of—come later.
- JG: Yeah. [But by now David started doing a painting of an old Mexican man to hang up and sell. That I believe was the first actual Chicano painting we sold in the gallery.]
- IN: But at this time, did Howard Morseburg have something to do with Alfredo Rodriguez?
- JG: No, not Howard. No, not Howard, but I'm glad you brought Howard Morseburg in, because—Art Chayra, who was a contractor for the Mercado, was [I think] partners with his brother, Dr. [Ben] Chayra. Dr. Chayra [knew, but was not partners with,] Howard Morseburg, who had a gallery in Beverly Hills. Actually, the gallery was on Wilshire and Vermont, right by where I. Magnin was. [My old job.] And Howard carried some Mexican artists, artists from Mexico. But Howard started reproducing Esperanza [Martinez] prints. So [he] reproduced a set of four prints—
- IN: Esperanza Martinez.
- JG: By Esperanza Martinez. And Esperanza Martinez was from Mexico. She studied at the Academia de San Carlos and came to LA years later. But about that time, they started they reproduced as set of four prints. So I guess through Dr. Chayra, he told Howard Morseburg about us, and Howard came over. And he was struggling to try and sell the prints. They're all beautiful Mexican [prints].
- IN: Where was his gallery?
- JG: I said it, in Beverly Hills. So he was struggling to sell them, because where do you sell these prints, you know? For a Mexicano, the only thing they ever hung up at that time were the calendars. That's the most beautiful thing. So that presented a certain problem to us, because they weren't exposed to those things. And when we opened up—
- IN: The community wasn't exposed to that kind of art.
- JG: Yeah. So Howard Morseburg came down to the gallery and showed us the prints. So we became good friends. Howard then started loaning us artwork from his gallery on consignment, so that we could be able to sell it at the gallery. So we started having some really nice quality from a gallery in Beverly Hills. And then—
- KD: And what kind of work was that?
- JG: A lot of—it wasn't—nothing surrealistic. He was basically into classic [art]. But there was an artist by the name of Navarro, who had maybe in the sense of—in the style of—a little bit of Tamayo, but not that abstract. A combination of Tamayo and maybe Orozco. But he was pretty well known, because on the trip to Mexico with David Lopez . . . He [Navarro] had an exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts in Mexico, and I said, "Wow, we have his artwork in our gallery."
- IN: So was it primarily Mexican or Latino artists that he would show their work?
- JG: Oh, yeah.
- IN: Including Esperanza Martinez?
- JG: Yeah, including Esperanza. So then we—
- IN: And what were the themes that she painted? Is it the same—
- JG: Oh, all the themes that she painted were all Mexican people, from Mexico. So she had people working in marketplaces and stuff. They were all traditional Mexican people. Her colors were brilliant, really brilliant. Beautiful paintings. So then we started carrying some of those. And little by little, artists were beginning to come in. And then—

- IN: So after you and Joe and David had sold your work, then Howard Morseburg brought in the artists' [works], and then community artists started coming in?
- JG: Well, then—no, well, then it was Alfredo's. And then—oh, then Robert Arenivar, whom actually hung around with our neighbors in City Terrace. Our neighbor in City Terrace, Albert, on Hicks Street, was actually *compadres* [best friends] to Robert Arenivar. And at that time, when I was about thirteen or fourteen, the people that used to get together there were called the East Side gang. There was the Little East Side and the Big East Side, and I think they were called the Big East Side. Anyway, they were supposed to be a gang, but to me they were a bunch of nice guys, you know, really nice guys. And Robert hung around with them. So, you know, if Robert hung around with them, and Robert was—
- IN: So kind of like the East Side kids and the—
- JG: Yeah, I always related it to them. Gee, what a coincidence, you know, I live with the East Side kids. So Robert came into the gallery. And Robert [I think] was working at the California Can Company at that time, and Robert was a veteran of the Korean War. When he came out of the service, he applied to go to art school. Chouinard I believe. So he tried to go into Chouinard, and they—he didn't pass. They said he didn't have any talent. So anyway, Joe hooked up with him again at East LA College, when he was taking art classes at East LA College with Eddie Martinez, the artist. Not Eddie Martinez, the tile [setter]. Eddie Martinez, the artist. So that's where he met Eddie Martinez. So it was Robert and Eddie Martinez. And Joe always talked about the teachers saying that Robert had more talent in one finger than the entire class put together. Robert was, he was unbelievable. Robert was unbelievable. He was humble, nice, insecure about being around people. He was shy. He was a big guy, he was a little on the heavy side. I wouldn't say he was fat, he was a little on the heavy side. Husky, he was maybe—
- IN: Tall?
- JG: Yeah, he was tall, maybe six feet. But really sweet, sweet guy. Sweet, sweet, sweet guy. Really, really nice guy. Nice, nice guy. And he's like—wanted to expound, just wanted to expound about art and knowledge. And he just read and read and read. He never went to school after—you know, he went to East LA College to study art, but I think he could have taught everybody there at East LA College. He read and read and read, and then for entertainment, he'd sit down and do calculus. Or else he'd be writing music. And he was self-taught on everything. He got—what do you call it, a little flute—the player?
- KD: The recorder?
- JG: The recorder. He got a real nice little recorder, and he'd sit down and be working on his music. But his real passion—well, the two passions were reading and drawing. But, always drawing. But Robert was, he was a slob. [laughter] He'd sit down, and no matter how much junk was there, he'd just sort of move it to the side so he could draw. And so what we did—and he smoked like a train. His ashtrays would be piled up. And so what we did is, we built a real nice desk for him so that he could just sit down and draw, just have a ball and draw and draw.
- IN: What type of drawings did he do?
- JG: Well, when he started—so when he first came in, all he did was Greek mythology.
- KD: Really?
- JG: Greek and Roman mythology.
- KD: Wow.
- JG: So that's all he did. Beautiful Greek [and Roman] warriors, just spectacular. Anything you wanted. And the first ones that he started selling were to the little kids in the neighborhood. They would all come in, and he'd do maybe little five by seven drawings of warriors. But they were spectacular warriors. It's like what you'd see in the movies right now, all these exotic helmets and everything. Really, really nice. And so the kids would come in, and he'd give them away for five cents, you know. [laughter]
- KD: He was just doing pencil, or charcoal, or ink, or—
- JG: He'd do pencil, ink, charcoal. Anything. He wouldn't paint, he wasn't painting. They were all just drawings. And so anyway, he would be drawing on small papers, and he just drew and drew and drew. And we were



all in awe over every drawing he did. And so he just left them everywhere. David and I eventually just started putting a whole box together and making sure—we'd go around picking them up. *[laughter]*

IN: Off the floor?

JG: Yeah, everywhere. He just left drawings all over. He just like drew and just left it there, and then he drew something else and just left it there. And we're in awe over these beautiful drawings that he was doing. So finally, we set up a nice desk for him so that he could draw, and we'd clean it up so that he could sit down and draw. And they were just beautiful drawings.

And then—it was very interesting. I had worked in the advertising business, so I knew people in advertising at the Broadway. And one Sunday, one Sunday when—because the fact that Joe was married, he wasn't there, and I don't know if David was there much on Sundays either. But I know Robert and I, we were single, so we just stayed there on Sundays. At first, I'd be in the back of the studio working, and the little buzzer would ring, and I'd have to come all the way up and make sure that people weren't taking anything. But just invite—welcome people in, and explain a few things that were happening.

And eventually I got tired of going—coming to [the front door], because it was a way back room, and there was no window to look through. Eventually I cut a little peephole through the concrete so I could at least look to see who walked in, because we had a little buzzer. [Later, I came up with the concept to cut out a window, paint the floor with black and white scrolls going up the wall in perspective, and finish with a mural of a male nude male holding up the actual window.] And finally, I got tired [of walking back and fourth]. I said, "Forget it." So I just got my guitar. I sat next to the desk in the front—beautiful hand-carved desk that we had gotten from Mexico—and I'd just sit there and work—be working on my guitar. And when somebody walked in, I'd just put it to the side. And I just accepted the fact that I couldn't be working at the studio. But Robert would be in the back drawing.

So this one Sunday, these two women, Anglos, walked in, very elegant, attractive. And actually, I recognized one of them. One of the ladies was from Broadway. She was an artist from [the] Broadway, [the store's advertising department]. So she was coming down to see what I had done, or—there was another artist that we had later, Gil [Gilbert Hernandez], who also worked there. So anyway, she walked in, and she walked in with another lady from the museum.

IN: LA County Museum?

JG: I don't know what museum, but she was working at a museum. So they walk in, and they're looking at all of this artwork, and Robert's in the back drawing. And Robert would be drawing, and when he was drawing with an ink pen—

IN: Quill pen?

JG: A quill pen. He would be drawing, and in order to clean the pen from too much ink, he'd do another drawing. So instead of just rubbing it to clean it, he'd draw something else. So this one day, he was drawing a guy on a horse—and Robert used to really get involved with chiaroscuro, you know, strong contrast of light and dark, and sometimes he'd go on and on and on and on, and before you know it, it just got totally black. *[laughter]* But he was always experimenting with chiaroscuro, you know, he loved chiaroscuro. So anyway, he'd be drawing. And so anyway, he was drawing this, and on the paper that he was cleaning his pen on, he was drawing a chariot race. A horse and chariots. It was one—it wasn't a race. It was one guy on a chariot—it's like Ben Hur. So he's drawing that one, so the one he's focusing on is the one that's getting covered up with chiaroscuro. And these two ladies came in, and I'm telling you, Robert was something to look at when you saw him draw. I mean, to see—where in the heck was this stuff coming from? Because he drew details, he drew details on it. He could draw anything.

IN: And he didn't sketch.

KD: Oh, wow.

JG: No, Robert never sketches.

KD: In pen, directly on the page.

- JG: That's what was so interesting about Robert, he never sketched. Robert never sketched. When you saw him draw, not only did he not sketch, but he could do an entire figure without lifting the pencil up. And you think, you know, you look. "Is he tracing?" It would look like he's tracing it. He'd draw a perfect figure without even lifting the pencil up. So anyway, he's drawing. He's doing this drawing, and these two ladies come over, and they're staring at him. They're leaning on the table looking at him drawing. And Robert's shy, Robert was real shy. And he's getting nervous. I could see perspiration coming down. *[laughter]* It's like, I'm sure he wanted to say, "Could you please get out of here? I want to entertain myself and draw." So he's drawing this drawing here, and where he's cleaning the pen, which is that chariot racer, they're looking, and one of the ladies says, "How much is this?" Now, figure, he was selling them for five cents. He was selling—this is a long time ago—he was selling them for five cents.
- IN: To kids in the neighborhood.
- JG: Yeah. And I remember when I used to say, you know, "A dollar." Robert used to perspire, because Robert was afraid that somebody was going to say, "For that? I'm not going to pay that much money for that." So anyway, it was a little tiny scrap paper that he was drawing on, so the lady says, "So how much is that one?" And I said—
- IN: Which one?
- JG: The one that he was cleaning his pen on.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: She said, "How much is that one?" I said, "That's twenty dollars," and I could see Robert just froze. I mean, he never heard me quote so much money. I knew the value of it, and I knew that they knew, because they were sophisticated people, they were in the art world. And I said, "Twenty dollars." And she says, "I'll take it." And Robert was shocked. Robert was shocked. And then they started walking through the gallery, through the studio, and the other lady stopped, picked up a paper, and she's all— *[laughter]*
- IN: She picked it up off the floor?
- JG: Picked it off the floor. *[laughter]* And she says, "Wow. How much is this?"
- IN: What was it of?
- JG: I don't remember what it was. [I think a guy riding a horse.] She says, "How much is this?" I said, "Seventeen dollars." *[laughter]* She says, "I'll take it."
- IN: Now, there was somebody there witnessing this—
- JG: No, no, no.
- IN: From Robert's family.
- JG: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Robert's brother-in-law was there, Robert's brother-in-law was there. And, yeah, he came because he wanted to invite Robert to go have dinner, because this was Sunday. And so he just stayed there talking to Robert, and Robert just kept on drawing.
- IN: And what did Robert's family think of his art?
- JG: They didn't pay attention to his art. They just stored it away, or it's like—
- IN: They didn't have very much respect for him as an artist [because he was poor].
- JG: And after that, they—
- IN: So he witnessed that.
- JG: The brother-in-law witnessed it, and he went and he told everybody. After that, they wanted us to frame everything that Robert was drawing. *[laughter]*
- KD: Everything. *[laughter]*
- IN: So then what happened with Robert's artwork after that?
- JG: So after that, I told Robert, "Robert, you . . ." I said, "You've got to draw on nice paper." He'd draw on anything that he'd pick up. I said, "You've got to draw on nice paper." So I went out and I bought some nice paper. So anyway, we'd clear up, and I said, "And you can't dirty the paper, as you're drawing, you can't dirty it." *[laughter]* So I said, "And do it with pen. Do it with a pen. No pencil or charcoal. You've got to do

them.” Because he had tons of them with charcoal, and they’d smear, and . . . So I said, “You’ve got to do them with a pen.”

So he started doing with pen and ink. And also he started doing some on black paper, on black paper with white ink, beautiful drawings. And then he started doing scratchboard also. And I remember this one artist, he was a great painter, very . . . I never knew him, his name was Jack Jones. He’s an Anglo guy who lived where the river meets, where it’s all concrete. Somewhere—I don’t know where it is, but it’s out towards Venice, or something like that. [He invited us over one day to see all his paintings.] And he started coming in, and he started buying everything. All of Robert’s drawings, all these beautiful [drawings]. He bought one of Robert’s drawings that I remember. You know, there’s works of art that we sold that I have so much regret that I didn’t keep it or buy it myself. But I was just so excited that people were buying it. And this one [in] particular—

IN: And how much were they selling for now, once—

JG: Well, now they were selling—I was selling it for three hundred dollars, his drawing.

KD: You’re kidding me.

JG: Yeah, yeah. His drawings, I felt confident now.

IN: On nice quality paper, framed.

JG: Yeah. [On nice paper, but they weren’t even framed.]

KD: Wow.

JG: So this one drawing that this one guy bought—I mean, he bought all the time a lot of different ones, but I’ll remember this one. It was a warrior flying on Pegasus, a flying horse with the wings flying. And it’s a view from the bottom. You’re looking at the horse from the bottom, with the bottom of the wings, and he’s holding the head of the Medusa in his hand, with all the snakes, you know. A beautiful drawing, beautiful drawing. [Robert was only drawing Greek and Roman mythology until I told him the community wants to see and buy art with Mexican themes.]

KD: So you’re able to pay the bills on the sale of art?

JG: Well, I might have gotten a little bit ahead of myself.

IN: Yeah. Well, because the thing is, is that you were—all these artists were starting to come to the gallery. And you and Joe were giving them free rent, buying all of the art materials, and giving it to them for free.

JG: Yeah. We bought—because we had a wholesale number. So we said, “Wow, we could get things half price,” and we thought we could sell them, but all the artists would say, “I don’t have any money right now.” So we started giving space—I mean, anybody could come in and work. I mean, the place was full, started getting full of artists. The place was just swamped with artists doing different things, all kinds of different medias.

IN: And when they sold something, what percentage did you keep in the beginning?

JG: Well, we started, 10 percent, because we didn’t want to take too much from the artist. And one of the artists that was actually—one of the artists who was—his name was Jaramillo. He was actually the art teacher at Salesian. And he’s the one that did the mural—this was later on—he did the mural that is across the street, that used to be on Sunset, what used to be La Via Tasco, right where Sunset and Hollywood meet. It was Vermont—I think it was Vermont. It was Sunset—yeah, Sunset and Vermont. Well, anyway, he did a beautiful [mural], and it’s still up there, and it’s very nice.

So anyway, Jaramillo, he brought a painting of Christ, really nice painting of Christ. One of those paintings that wherever you’re looking at, he’s looking at you. A really nice job. He was from Mexico, but he spoke good English because he was teaching here at Salesian. And so he said, “I want you guys to take one-third.” He says, “I want you guys to take one-third, because this way, you guys will push my artwork more.” So when he said that, that’s when we started thinking, “Oh, gee,” you know. I mean, we didn’t want to rip off the artists, because that’s all you heard before, “Oh, they’re ripping us off, they’re ripping us off, they’re ripping us off.” So we said, “No, we’ll take 10 percent.”

KD: Even though galleries normally take 50 percent or more.

- JG: Oh, yeah, they'll take 50 percent or more. So anyway, we started with 10 percent, and then it was—key artists who had already had some knowledge about galleries had said—
- IN: But in the meantime, this is when you started working on actually doing the mural, *The Birth of Our Art*.
- JG: Yeah, we started—
- IN: Before all these people started coming in.
- JG: So now that David was out [of bed and in the studio about late November], and brought the finished drawing also, then we decided, "Okay, now we've got to paint it outside, and how are we going to make it so it's durable?" And Joe said, "Well, instead of painting it on the wall, and the wall chips, and stuff like that, let's do it on treated wood, plywood." He said, "We'll do it on treated plywood, and—"
- IN: With what kind of paints?
- JG: And then we said, "Well, what could be the most durable paint that we could use?" So [Joe said], "Enamels." We used enamels.
- KD: Whoa.
- JG: And so anyway, we started—and you know, it was a challenge to do it in enamels. But anyway, we started painting in enamels. [So, David Botello was my primary assistant on the design and painting of my mural.] And so now, [myself and] David. And now we were all projecting [and tracing] it. So now Robert and David [Joe] and even Danny-boy [were getting involved]. [My brother-in-law, Chito (Ignacio Gomez), had only assisted with the figure design.]
- IN: Projecting it onto the plywood?
- JG: Projecting that onto the plywood in the back [room].
- IN: And that was inside the studio?
- JG: Yeah, inside the studio. So now I was excited, because all of the artists—a lot of people were getting involved in it. So we started working on it, and painting on it. And you mentioned Gustavo Casillas.
- KD: Yes.
- JG: Gustavo came in about that time, and his cousin, [Raul] Polo, was representing him. So Gustavo was a great classic artist. Beautiful—I mean, his florals, I don't know if anybody could beat his florals. He just had beautiful, beautiful [work]. That was his specialty, florals. Yeah. [He was probably still in his early twenties.] Beautiful florals. And so he started working on them. He was so good as such a nice, classic artist. We paid him—[Gustavo as my assistant]—to start doing some of the painting on it [my mural]. So he started working on it. And so the place was getting packed with artists working in all medias. [My other assistants include David Lopez, Richard Rueda, David Ramirez, Richard Rodriguez, Richard Haro, Richard Jimenez, and Manuel Venegas.]
- IN: And so it was just word of mouth that the artists would hear—
- JG: And just the word of mouth, oh, yeah. There was one—
- KD: There wasn't any decision-making. You would say no to this person and yes to that, you would just—
- JG: No, not at that time. No, not at that time.
- KD: Oh, wow.
- JG: Nah. Nah, not at that time.
- IN: He just left everybody come in.
- JG: We just—yeah, and fortunately, they were all good. Everybody was very good. And so Gustavo came in, and then David Lopez came in, [possibly before Gustavo]. Real shy. This young kid came in—he was older than me, but anyway, he was probably thirty years old or something. And he comes in. Really, real shy. And he comes in with his drawings. And then we'd see his drawings and we'd go, "Wow, man, this guy's good, this guy's good." So anyway, we let him start working at the gallery, too. So he started working there.
- IN: And then years later, what did you find out?
- JG: And then years later, cousins from Pio Pico, who we grew up with—who we were living with, in Pio Pico—came into the gallery, and they saw me and Joe. And we looked at them and said, "What are you doing here?" They said, "What are you doing here?" They asked us, "What are you doing?" And we said, "Well,

we own the place.” [laughter] And we said, “So what brought you here?” “We came to see our cousin, David.” They said, “We just came to see our cousin.” “Your cousin? Who’s your cousin?” They said, “David Lopez.” “David Lopez is your cousin?” [laughter] So actually, we grew up with David when we were kids.

KD: Wow.

IN: And so he’s actually a cousin of yours?

JG: Yeah, so David’s aunt, David’s mother’s sister is married to my mother’s cousin, from the Duarte side. So anyway, I said, “Wow!” [laughter]

KD: Pretty small world. [laughter]

IN: So in the meantime, as you’re working on your mural in the back studio, and all of these artists are getting excited. And we want to talk about the Home Show and the media and their role in this process—

JG: Okay. But—

IN: What was happening with Maldonado and—

JG: Okay. Well, right now—now that everything was beginning to—I mean, the word of mouth was really getting out there. There was this one artist by the name of Richard Haro, who used to travel doing shows. And so he made a living [supporting a family doing that]. He was—

[break in audio]

JG: We’re all getting [out] the word, and they all started coming in. So our place started getting full with artists. And then a person by the name of Pete Rodriguez walked in, and Pete—

IN: Now, what was happening in regards to Maldonado? Okay.

JG: So Pete came in. And when I saw Pete, I was a little confused because—Pete looked like an older guy with a big moustache, but everything about him seemed young. He was dressed in a sports coat, a nice, contemporary sports coat. In other words, he was dressed like a young guy, even with a big moustache, like a Chicano moustache, but he looked like an older man. And I was very confused. I just said, “Gee, is he young or is he old? Is he a young guy that looks older?”

IN: So he looked hip.

JG: Yeah, he looked real hip. Real hip.

KD: Oh, okay. Thanks, that helps. [laughter]

JG: Yeah. You described him as real hip. A good-looking guy. And it seemed like he had a lot of connections. It seemed like he was very well connected throughout the community, because then he brought in Ray Andrade. Ray Andrade was the president of Justicia. And Justicia was a organization put together to try and get negative images of the Mexicano off the air. And they succeeded in removing the Frito Bandito off the air. So then Paul Macias was vice-president of Justicia, and Joe Hernandez, who they called Cheo, was also . . . So these four guys were key people. There were other people who were involved within the media, but I don’t know if they were that much involved into it, like these four guys. [Isaac Ruiz was also part of that group.]

IN: Now, later on, Joe Hernandez became a key person with MAGA, the Mexican American Grocers’ Association.

JG: Yeah. But Joe, at that time, he was putting together Cheo Productions, which was to try and send entertainment to—I know that they wanted me to audition for Johnny Grant and the Bob Hope Show to travel with the soldiers and stuff like that. But I’ll talk about Richard [later]. So anyway, Pete Rodriguez then started really coming into the gallery quite a bit, and we were still on the three thousand dollars. We were still on the three thousand dollars.

KD: You’re kidding.

JG: Oh, yeah. This is only within, you know, four or five months, so all of these things were happening. Every day, something was happening. But we were worried because we weren’t paying the rent now, and we had finished most of the building now. The mural wasn’t up yet, it was still—we were painting it, and that was going to be the finishing touches. But we wanted to put lighting on it, and we wanted good lighting,

and we still didn't have good lighting on there. So, anyway, we were concerned about it. And so Pete Rodriguez—we heard about the Chicanos de la Raza—Católicos para la Raza, which at that time, there was a lot of publicity. They went in and sort of caused a big—

IN: Controversy?

JG: A big controversy at St. Basil's Church. These guys were protesting the fact that St. Basil's was built in Wilshire with so many millions of dollars. And the Catholic Church, there weren't enough bishops and cardinals—there weren't enough Latinos being put in higher positions in the church. Latinos were giving money to the church, and the church wasn't giving back to the Latinos. So anyway, that was a controversy at that time.

IN: And did you give him your proposal?

JG: Yeah, we'll talk about that. So anyway, now, what the church did is they put together the [Catholic] Campaign for Human Development to give money back to the community, to help the community. So they were now seeking out community programs that they could be able to help. So we heard about it, and I guess Pete also maybe mentioned that. Some way or another, we found out about it. And, so we knew nothing about putting proposals for grants or anything like that, and even putting the proposal together for the business was challenging. So now we were considering putting a proposal for the Campaign for Human Development. And Pete said, "Look, I'll help."

So he brought a guy by the name of Victor, I remember his name—I don't remember his last name—but Victor had done proposals. So they helped put a proposal together, and the proposal was for the school, The East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAFa]. So anyway, [they] put the proposal together, and we submitted it. And shortly after we submitted it, we were still struggling to pay the rent. Then we got an eviction notice. We were being thrown out of the building. And all of these things were—I mean, all these artists—I mean, it was booming with artists and art. And it was just . . . [We were already giving life drawing classes and painting.] It was an awesome experience to have all of this—five thousand square feet full of artists and art. So we were devastated. What are we going to do?

So Pete got on the phone, and he called Connie King at KTLA. Connie King was African American, and she was community affairs director at that time. So he called Connie King. Connie King came down to see what Pete was talking about. Connie King looked at the place and just—she just loved it, she was just overwhelmed. She then—I don't know if—I can't remember if it was right from the gallery, or if she went back. But some way or another she got in touch with everybody in the media, and it seemed like within minutes, within minutes, every television station in Los Angeles was at the Goez [Imports and Fine Arts and TELASOMAFa school]. Every television station, all the news were there. Everybody. I mean, everybody was there. I mean, that place was—with trucks and everything. Everything. Everybody was there.

KD: So CBS, ABC—

JG: All of them.

KD: Wow.

JG: [All seven.] There were seven. Yeah. CBS, Channel 2, Channel 4, Channel 5, Channel 7, Channel 9, Channel 11, Channel 13, and KMEX. All those stations. That's all that existed at that time. They were all there, everybody was there. [Everybody was there.] They were all—that's why I was saying, "If we could get [footage and] find some of the [tapes]." Everybody. And they were all photographing everything, just the work, and they were all shooting the mural.

KD: Were they doing the positive story, that you guys had the gallery, or doing the tragedy that you were being evicted?

JG: Yeah.

IN: Both.

KD: Oh, really? Wow.

JG: It was both. The story was basically, look at this place in East LA that's going to have to close down. That was basically the story. And they're shooting the mural. It's like all of them shot the mural, so the mural



was being shot, the mural got recognition throughout the city before it was even finished, it was still sitting on the floor [leaning against the wall] as we were painting it. And so the question that they had is, what are you doing opening up a gallery in East LA? That was unheard of. People don't open up galleries in the barrio, that was unheard of. So they said, "Well, what are you doing? What business do you have opening a gallery?" They said, "Nobody's going to buy—they don't have money here." The objective for them [galleries] is just to sell. And we told them, we're opening here because we're going to beautify, educate, and develop the community economically by putting up murals and bringing in tourists. So we started describing some of that. And that became a big story.

**KD:** So were these interviews conducted one at a time, or did you have three microphones in your face at that same time?

**JG:** It could have been more than one. Possibly one at a time, because—I mean, it was probably Joe, David, and I, so they were probably talking [to] individuals, but I know that's what I [was] saying, that's what they were asking me. So the story just got out all over the place, it was a major thing.

**IN:** And what did Stan Chambers do? What channel was he with?

**JG:** Oh, so Stan Chambers was—is still with KTLA. And Stan Chambers, what he did is, he started putting a little pressure by saying—and they are waiting for their loan, their business loan from the SBA and the Pan-American Bank.

**KD:** Oh, clever.

**JG:** He says, "So that's what's holding things up right now, in a sense."

**IN:** And the SBA loan was actually being processed through TELACU, but it was an SBA loan.

**JG:** Yeah. But it was also—so Pan-American was the bank, and TELACU was the agency that was helping to put the proposal together. So anyway, and he followed up on that. He was calling them. So he was pushing them.

**IN:** And what about Clete Roberts?

**JG:** Clete Roberts. Clete Roberts was a very respected, prestigious reporter at that time. He had been a reporter in the time of the war, and a reporter in the war, so he had—as far as I remember, he had national recognition. But I'll never forget the words Clete Roberts said: "In the past, La Cienega was always considered the heart of the art in Los Angeles in galleries." He says, "Now, there's a new one in East LA: the Goez Gallery." And I mean, if I could get those words . . . I remember that real clear. And Clete Roberts saying that, it was just awesome. [The name "Goez" was now being used to describe everything in the building, including the school, since it was simple to say and easy to remember because of its powerful logo, compared to the East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts. And only a few of us were saying "TELASOMAF" or just "the school."]

But anyway, we started—all these different things started happening. KWKW, they came down and they did a whole story on us. KWKW, Spanish-speaking radio. They did a whole story on us. And then on top of that, they did a beautiful one-minute spot on [our] philosophy of art and [on] us and what we're doing, and this narrator was just [wonderful]. It was like a one-minute story on what we were all about. And that came out a number of times a day for almost two months, and just every day, every day, every day. And then when they were ready to stop it, if I remember correctly—his name was Howard Kalmenson, he was the owner of KWKW. And he was a young guy, he must have been—at that time, he was probably about maybe forty years old [or younger]. Somewhere around there. [And tall and good looking.] And he came in, and he just said, "It's beautiful." He just got so excited. He says, "So," he says, "would you like us to run those spots some more?" We said, "Sure!" [laughter] They ran it more. But on top of that, he says, "I'd like you guys to do a mural for KWKW, for inside." So he contracted us to do a mural. But actually. . .

Yeah, the very first mural, I think, that we were contracted to do was actually the inside to the First Street Store. That was the very first mural that we did. And there was an artist by the name of Richard Jimenez that was hanging out at the gallery that lived in Pico Rivera. Actually, we then had Richard do the mural for the First Street Store. Richard, then—Jaramillo, when Jaramillo . . . Now, Richard was hanging out

at the gallery, he was another . . . David [Botello] worked the day most of the time, so a lot of the times, he wasn't there during the day when certain things were happening. Richard Jimenez then started hanging out at the gallery.

And it was so funny, it was a funny experience, you know. I was just so excited about Spain and my slides. I took tons of slides with a camera that I bought in Italy. I took tons of slides, so I just wanted to show my slides to everybody. So I went into the office, because it was really dark, and I set up—I don't know if I had a screen, or maybe just a curtain, whatever. So I had Richard, I took Richard Jimenez inside the office to show him my slide show, and I'm going, "And this is what happened here, and this is what happened here, and this was happening here, and this . . ." I'm hearing at first, "Oh, wow, that's great, that's great," and then I don't hear it. *[laughter]* I don't hear anything. Then I turn around and he's snoring. *[laughter]* My only audience and he fell asleep on me.

IN: *[laughs]* Now, before we continue with the—

JG: Let me finish with Richard—

IN: Okay. Okay.

JG: Because I don't want to forget about the . . . So anyway, Richard then did the mural inside the First Street Store around the clock, and you enter the—and it was Spaniards and the Indians, from my theme. He just picked up from my concept. So he'd carry it on there. Then when Jaramillo, the artist who did Christ and was a teacher at Salesian . . . He had an accident, he had a car accident.

IN: What was his first name?

JG: I forgot his first name.

KD: You mentioned it the first time.

JG: Oh, did I? Okay. But anyway—

KD: You didn't call him Father—

JG: I think Eduardo—Eduardo Jaramillo. [His brother, another one of our artists, was Marino Jaramillo.] So anyway, he had an accident, and I remember he started doing yoga stuff and all these different things to—because he was having terrible headaches as a result of his accident. So he couldn't teach anymore. So Richard Jimenez then started teaching at Salesian.

So since Richard was hanging out at the gallery. Richard would stay there real late at night, because I'd stay there for—I wasn't married, so I'd stay there forever at night. Eventually I even started sleeping there. So I'd be painting. And Richard, one night we were both painting, and I was working on glazing, doing a glazing, where I started with just sepia and then building up the color. So I was working on a classic painting doing glazing, and Richard was there doing his paintings too. And so at night we said goodbye. He went his way and I went my way. And the next day, about—it must have been three o'clock, or—it was in the evening. The mother called and said, "Is Richard there?" I said, "No, he's not." She said, "Oh, he's not?" She said, "Well, he never came home." And I called his girlfriend, and she hasn't seen him either. So the mother hadn't checked because the mother thought, "Well, he went and stayed over there with the girlfriend," and the girlfriend thought, "Well, he went home." So they both figured he was somewhere else. So this was evening, already, or late, and nobody knew where Richard was.

So they finally looked and looked, and it turns out that he fell asleep going over the bridge of the San Gabriel River, right around where [I used to think] the Zoot Suit incident happened—around Rosemead and that area. He fell asleep and he went over the bridge into the river. And they found him much later, I think, because I think they found him in the hospital, eventually. So Richard was in a coma for quite awhile, and—gee, I think a few weeks. So—and he was in the general hospital. So I went, and I'd be visiting him, until finally he started coming to. And it turns out that Richard's nurse was Cannibal. Cannibal was now working at the hospital [and didn't want me to tell anyone. I believe he got tired of fame and wanted his privacy]. And so anyway, eventually, Richard started coming to, and he was still—his brain wasn't all together yet, you know. He still couldn't think straight. And I remember one time, he says—he says, "You

know, Johnny, I've got a real good idea I thought of, maybe we could bring in a Spanish galleon to First Street." [laughter]

IN: So the—

JG: Shows how much influence I was having on him, because he was coming up with these ideas. So eventually, he started coming to. He was limping for quite awhile, and . . . But it was interesting, though, that the two Salesian artists that taught art at Salesian both had accidents that really affected their minds. But eventually, Richard went off doing his thing. I don't know where he went.

IN: Was he able to paint again?

JG: Yeah, he was able to paint and draw again, so he started doing pretty good.

IN: Just to sort of go along with your notes, to make sure you haven't skipped anything, you had a note about Gil Avila—

JG: Yeah. Oh, so then—yeah, we started putting together—we put together a board of directors—

IN: And this was for Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts], or for the—

JG: No, for the school.

IN: For the East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAF].

JG: Yeah. And it's in there. I don't remember the specific thing—

IN: I don't know if you want me to flip through the portfolio as he's talking, or if you want to wait until the whole thing is over.

KD: Yeah, I might want to ask questions, so I don't know if—well, I know I want to ask questions.

IN: Okay. Well, this kind of comes later, this—we could talk about this later. But you saw the letter from Dr. Bravo—

KD: Bravo.

IN: Okay. And then this is the before and after picture of the old abandoned meat market, how they transformed it, the outside and then the interior. And so you can see—

KD: Are these sculptures by—

JG: Those were—I forget his name. I think his name—

IN: Not Rudy Vargas, because Rudy Vargas did more traditional—

JG: No, Rudy Vargas did classic.

KD: Oh, okay.

IN: Classic, uh-huh. These are more modernistic.

JG: Ruford Reyes, I think it was. Ruford Reyes.

IN: So these here are the Virgen and the Aztec warrior, those are [nail] reliefs by—

JG: Charlie Felix.

IN: Charlie Felix. And they used to call him Clavos, because they're actually roofing nails.

JG: Yeah, and I'll tell you how we met up with him.

IN: And this was the—actually the grand opening of the gallery.

JG: Yeah.

IN: They were bringing in a piano, because they had a classical pianist.

JG: And an opera singer.

IN: And then this is the original brochure and map—

JG: Yeah.

IN: That shows—at that time, they were how many murals, Juan/Johnny?

JG: Four.

IN: Four murals. And so you can see—so it has the whole story of the concept of what they wanted to do with the gallery. And then this is a blowup of the mural, and then you could see . . . How did this sketch come about that David Botello did of the gallery?

JG: Yeah. Well, there was another artist by the name of Frank Hernández, who came in with all-ink drawings of East LA. And he was another one that was very shy, and—but did beautiful drawings. They were naïve

drawings, but they were really, really nice. And he did a drawing of the gallery. But anyway, this was the board [for the East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts, TELASOMAF] that we put together. So it was myself, Joe, David—

IN: David Botello.

JG: And then William Valencia [administrator, LA city schools] was the accountant, and then [superior court] judge [Carlos] Velarde was on the board. Richard Rocha was an attorney. Pete Rodriguez—

IN: Who later became community affairs director—

JG: Affairs director for Channel 7. And Gilbert Vasquez, who's really involved in community stuff.

IN: He ended up being involved with the Olympic committee.

JG: And he was also [Edward] Roybal's—the foundation's accountant. And Jack Samuels was a lieutenant [in the Los Angeles county marshal's office]. And Joe Coria, who's at the White Memorial Hospital now [in public relations]. Ray Andrade was the—

IN: Justicia?

JG: President of Justicia. Paul Macias [was the vice president of Justicia]. Gilbert Avila, [president of Nosotros], was the person working in the film industry who was working—originally working on putting a movie together with Ricardo Montalban and [John Gavin,] the actor who was the—he was the Mexican—the Mexican consulate, or—I think for Reagan. The actor, what's his—

IN: Oh, ambassador?

JG: Yeah, he was ambassador, yeah.

KD: And then the advisory board?

JG: Was Alex, yeah. So he was—

IN: Miramon.

JG: Miramon. He was a businessman in the community. And then in regards to the arts it was Eddie Martinez, David Negrón, and David Ramirez. So these were our teachers at the school. Eddie was the one ongoing teacher. David Negrón was an instructor at [the] Art Center and worked in the motion picture industry. And David Ramirez was the art teacher at Garfield [High School]. But he was—

IN: So you had—

JG: A great, great artist. Beautiful anatomy. I mean, just wonderful. He sold very well. Beautiful paintings. So we had some of his paintings there, too.

IN: So through the East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAF], you had art teachers who were working with the prestigious art center—

JG: Oh, the students, yeah. Oh, yeah.

IN: And with Paramount Studios.

JG: Oh, we had great, great teachers. I mean, the three of those were very, very good teachers.

IN: And then this is the business card that you designed, and this was all hand-lettered? You hand-lettered and hand—

JG: This one was hand-lettered. This was the first one that I did hand-lettered.

IN: And all of the décor was all hand-done?

JG: Yeah, all of this was hand-done. And then this was typeset afterwards, after we added it in.

IN: And then did you design the stationery?

JG: Yeah.

IN: Okay, so all of this was hand—

JG: Yeah. Everything was supposed to be elegant and old and ancient type of thing.

IN: Now, what is this list here?

JG: That's the partial list of when we first—the first big show that we did.

KD: Oh, really?

JG: Yeah.

KD: [There are] seventy-six people on this list. [laughter]

JG: But there were more. There were a lot more.

KD: And it says you had—this was the inaugural exhibition, with a singer accompanied by the pianist, and—

JG: Yeah, that's the piano that they were bringing in that we showed—

KD: And what date is this?

JG: I don't know. I don't—

IN: Was there a date here?

KD: No, there's no date. So the first show was in 1970, I'm imagining?

JG: [No, this one was actually in 1971.]

KD: Okay.

IN: And then this was one of—this is what Juan/Johnny looked like in those days, with a beard and a moustache. *[laughter]* And so this was one of the interior murals that you decorated the gallery with, right?

JG: Yeah.

IN: What is this mural of?

JG: Oh yeah.

IN: What is that mural of?

JG: Blind Justice.

IN: So—and what is the theme? What is the Aztec warrior doing?

JG: He's bringing blind justice down into the community.

KD: Hold on, I just wanted to look to see a few of the names, because I'd seen this list before.

JG: See, there are the two Jaramillos. They were actually two brothers. Charlie Almaraz.

KD: Frank Romero's the one I was—yeah. Yeah, Charles Almaraz, Frank Romero.

JG: He was there, but you know, I've seen stuff where he never said anything about having a show here.

KD: And Robert de la Rocha.

IN: And Gil Lujan is in here also.

KD: And Charles Bojórquez, yeah. They all must have been really young though.

IN: So as far as you know—

JG: Is Willie in there? Willie Herrón?

KD: Yes. Willie Herrón I'd seen on another one of your lists, but not this one.

JG: Okay. Yeah.

IN: And as far as you know, was this the first major Chicano art exhibit in the—

JG: To my knowledge, you know, to my knowledge. I had never known about any.

IN: So as far as you know, this was the first opportunity that all these artists had a chance to exhibit—

JG: Yeah, to my knowledge. I had never—when we put out this list, artists kept on coming in.

KD: They wanted to join?

JG: Oh, yeah. And we accepted everybody. We let them all participate. This was a major deal that we were putting together here. But we made—and what do you call it—an additional list that went into this . . . An addendum, is that what you call it? Addendum?

KD: Mm-hmm.

JG: And altogether, it was over one hundred.

KD: Yeah. That's the list I've seen.

JG: More than twenty-five more that were added onto the list. Because we had photographers and artists.

KD: Oh.

IN: Oh, so it was the first Chicano art exhibit and photography exhibition.

JG: Yeah. Well, it was a combination of both, so—I don't know if it was—

IN: Well, as far as you know.

JG: As far as—to my knowledge. I had never heard of—it [a previous exhibit].

IN: Now, at this particular show, was that when you also had films, Chicano films?

JG: No, it was afterwards. Afterwards.

IN: Oh, okay. Because you did have a Chicano film exhibit.

JG: The owner of this car, I've got to tell you, he was another artist—it's a very interesting story.

KD: Okay.

[*break in audio*]

IN: I won't flip [the tape] until we go to the next section.

KD: Okay.

JG: David Ramirez, a teacher at Garfield, who was a teacher also at our school [TELASOMAFIA]. As a matter of fact, David Ramirez, when he started coming in, he . . . And [when] we started talking about what we wanted to do and all that, he said that his father, Zeferino Ramirez, who was the owner of Zeferino Ramirez mortuary in East LA, was the one that put up the monument to the veterans. He was the key person that—

IN: At Five Points.

JG: Yeah, at Five Points. So he said that it was his father who put it up. So David Ramirez . . . Okay, let me talk about right now the [other story from my notes]. So the fact that David Ramirez was a teacher at Garfield, one of the teachers brought this young kid by the name of . . . I'll think of his name, it just split my mind. Do I have his name down?

IN: I don't know, it might be over here.

JG: Jerry Fierro. His name was Jerry Fierro. So he brought this young kid, the teacher brought Jerry Fierro to David Ramirez's class, because he said Jerry Fierro was having problems in learning. And he was just having problems learning all kinds of things.

IN: Academically.

JG: Yeah. And Jerry Fierro was this nice, nice guy. He'd laugh at himself if they said, "Can't you do that?" "Ah-ha-ha. No, I can't do it." But he was a really, really, very nice guy. Nice, nice guy. But anyway, he had trouble learning academically, and so they took him to David Ramirez. They said, "Well, maybe he can accomplish something with the art. Maybe the art teacher will be able to . . ." So David Ramirez was trying to get him to draw. And he wasn't much into it. He couldn't draw, either. So I think David Ramirez gave him a chisel or something to start carving. It seemed like he was doing a pretty nice job, and so David Ramirez brought him to the gallery and said, "See if you guys could get him—it seems like he likes to carve." So anyway, we had the chisels there, and we gave him some wood.

And then there was another artist by the name of Robert Rodriguez who was carving gigantic Mayan plaques, beautiful Mayan plaques. And he just loved the Mayans and all the details, so he carved—so then he then started coaching Jerry Fierro. And we had some other great sculptors there, really some nice—I forget all their names. [One was Manuel and the other was Raul.] [Manuel Venegas and Raul Felen were associated with Goetz—ed.] But anyway, we had some really nice sculptors. So they started working with Jerry, and so Jerry started really doing some nice stuff in regards to wood sculpting.

And then the word was getting out to the media, out to the media, [about our school gallery and studio]. We started getting calls from all over the place. There were offers to do things and go places. And I think after the media, that's when—right after that is when Bob Kemp commissioned us to do the mural inside. And then we got also another call from Roger Johnson—no, I want to finish with Jerry. So we started getting a lot of calls. And so Disneyland, Universal Studios, of course the Home Show—I can't remember all of them. But we were getting calls from all over to do shows, to go exhibit. And so anyway, we went to Disneyland, and we took different artists to do different things.

IN: What section were you—

JG: It was around where they had the Mexican village area.

KD: Oh, okay. Yeah.

JG: Mexican restaurant, something like that. I don't know if it's there anymore.

KD: No.



- JG: But anyway, we were all there, and a lot of the artists were doing work. And Jerry Fierro, this young kid who couldn't do anything, is now being featured in Disneyland as a wood sculptor. So then when we came back, I think they did some stories in the local paper, and the word went out throughout Garfield about it, and Jerry became a celebrity. And then he started working on some bulldogs for Garfield.
- IN: Which was their mascot.
- JG: And those bulldogs then went in front of the gym, so he became like a superstar at Garfield. This kid who couldn't do anything all of a sudden became a star. *[laughter]*
- IN: So your apprenticeship program was working.
- JG: Yeah. It was wonderful. Wonderful.
- KD: Now, when you said it was a school, the artists that are coming in that are using the studio, those are the ones who are getting training?
- JG: Yeah. I'll explain. [Some of these artists were students and many weren't.] Well, now—mind you, we set it up as a school, but we still only had three thousand dollars.
- KD: Yeah. That's what I was trying to figure out.
- JG: And we were getting evicted. So all of these things were going on—
- IN: Well, since you brought that up, just very briefly, since Pete Rodriguez was the key to bringing the media—and I want to go back to that, just mention who his brother was.
- JG: Oh, Pete Rodriguez—and Pete always talked about it. Pete Rodriguez's brother was Eddie Rodriguez, who produced *Fandango Rheingold* when I was a little kid, seeing it on television. And I was just, "Wow." It was—and I always wanted to be able to do something to feature him, because it seemed like he was sensitive to that.
- IN: So after Pete called Connie King, and all this media came to your support, and they were shooting the mural in the back studio. Then what happened with the mural and the home show when—in regards to—
- JG: Oh, okay, what happened is there was this businessman whose name was [Jorge] Ramirez. He owned Acme Patio [Center], and his wife owned the shop of artifacts and stuff in Olvera Street. And Ramirez's patios—his specialty was doing Mexican patios, and the patios were . . . He did fountains, he did beautiful fountains with like, moss was growing around them. Fantastic, beautiful stuff. So anyway, Ramirez one day walked in with his wife and started wanting to commission us to start doing some doors, beat-up doors, and do paintings on them. Because she was selling them at her store.
- IN: So antiquing them.
- JG: Yeah. Beat them up and burn them with a torch and just make them look old, and then do paintings. So we had David take care of that. That was David's project.
- IN: David Botello?
- JG: David Botello, yeah. David Botello. Mind you, this still isn't a lot of money, because the artists were keeping so much of it, and we just got a small percentage of it. So anyway, we started doing those doors, and then he [Ramirez] came back one day. He walked in with his European American, Anglo, whatever you want to say, businessman. And he introduced us to him, and he said, "This is Werner Buck, the producer of the LA Home Show at the Convention Center. And the Home Show's coming in about a month or so." And so anyway, so he told Werner to discuss things with us. So he said, Werner Buck said that he wanted to give us a space. Maybe the size of six standard spaces that he sold to businesses, and each spot was like a table. I don't know. But anyway, they sold for—this is the LA Home Show at the Convention Center. And he's willing to give us a spot that's as big as ten different spaces. And he said, "I'd like to give you the spot, because I feel that you could be an attraction, an asset, and I'll give it to you free." He says, "I want you to exhibit and be able to have some of the artists that are working also." So—and Ramirez—and he [Buck] said, "The only people I ever give free spots to is Ramirez." And I think he said the gas company, because they set up a major exhibit. They build stuff in there. And Ramirez actually builds the patio inside the Home Show. So anyway, we said, "Sure, sure," you know. That was a wonderful, wonderful thing to be

able to do. So there was something else, there was another thing that was going on at the same time too. So anyway, we decided that we—

IN: Which artists went with you to the Home Show?

JG: Oh, tons of them. Tons of them. Oh, oh, yeah, I was going to—yeah. What happened just before that, East LA was putting some type of a *folklórico* show and art show and different things at—in the auditorium.

IN: East LA College.

JG: East LA College. So they wanted us to go over there and put on an art exhibit. So we went out—so the art exhibit was in the lounge of the auditorium—

IN: The lobby.

JG: The lobby. The lobby, yeah. And the *folklórico* show and everything else was going on inside. So we put on our exhibit. And while we were exhibiting, there was this one artist who was nailing nails into a piece of plywood. And we looked at it, and we said, “What the heck is that? It looks like scales of a fish.” And it turned out that they were roofing nails nailed into a one-piece. I don’t know if it was a three-quarter, but anyway, maybe a three-quarter-inch piece of plywood. And the nails were in relief. And he was creating Zeus and Greek mythology things, and they were gigantic. They were maybe—the average were maybe three by three, three by four, something like that. And then after, he’d burnish it down with a burnishing machine, and then he’d have glazes, different colored glazes, and he’d color it. And we thought, “Wow, this is beautiful. Beautiful.” So his name was Charlie Felix, and so—

IN: And what was his nickname?

JG: We used to call him—well, after that we started calling him Clavos and [also] Felix the Cat. Gato.

KD: Yeah.

JG: So then he came to the—we invited him to come down to the studio. So now we had another person. [I also encouraged him to do Mexican themes instead of European.]

KD: This exhibit that you did at East LA Community College, about what year was that?

JG: [I’m pretty sure it was 1971.]

KD: Okay.

IN: And so, in the meantime, you were doing the Home Show also.

JG: Yeah. Let me bring somebody else in. There was another—this guy was funny. A lot of personality. He was a retired colonel in the service, Chicano. And he wore—had a toupee. [And he would take it off to entertain us.] And he expounded—I mean, he was—real personality. Real personality. Very, very entertaining. And he did copper reliefs. You know, it’s a sheet of copper you press down. And he just did the whole thing fast, and he’d be entertaining. [*sings melody*] And just really, really expounding. And just—boom-boom, before you know it, beautiful reliefs that he did on copper. So anyway, he started coming down and he started doing the copper reliefs. So he was doing copper reliefs, and then Charlie was doing the nail reliefs, and then we had Garcia—I forgot his first name. [Paul] Garcia was doing metal sculpting and some collages, too. And then Richard Haro. We took the entire mural to the Home Show.

IN: Which mural?

JG: My mural, *The Birth of Our Art*. We took the entire mural, and we mounted it on top, [as the back part of our booth]. I don’t know how we mounted it, but anyway, we managed to mount it. So it was like the tallest thing in the entire hall, so you could see it from all over the place. You could see the top part, and the top part came—

KD: Right.

JG: So then while we were working out there, Richard Haro was now working on it. So there’s like twelve artists, I don’t know how many artists now who have been involved in my mural. And I’m saying, “Gee, you know, this is starting a renaissance in itself, my one mural.” So anyway, he was working on it, and we were a major hit, you know. We had tons . . . First of all, we had maybe three artists doing paintings, and on top of that, Charlie Felix is doing the nails, and then Corrales is doing the copper, and then doing the . . . So we just had tons of artists.

So anyway, we were a major hit, and really—and they televised it, it came out also on TV, and we were the ones that got featured, because we were so entertaining. The other people were showing regular home stuff, but we were the only art exhibit there [at the Home Show]. And then also—oh, okay. So then, then all this time, all these things are happening, but we're still worried, because we're supposed to [pay the rent]. I mean, things were happening fast. So I may be saying a lot of things that may sound like years, but they were like one day after another. And we're still worried about the rent and all that.

KD: Getting evicted. *[laughter]*

JG: Yeah. So all of a sudden, we get word from the [Catholic] Campaign for Human Development. [It seemed they liked our proposal] and they say, you know, "We'd like to meet with you guys." And the fact that Joe was so involved with the church through Fusek's, he got to meet a lot of priests and all that. So anyway, I said, "You go make the presentation," you know. I think he knew somebody there already. So anyway, he went, made the presentation, came back. He says, you know, "It seemed like they liked it," and everything. But anyway, they then called us and said, "You've got your grant. Ten thousand dollars."

KD: Whoa.

JG: So we got the ten thousand dollar grant. Now, this was specifically for the school, [the East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts, TELASOMAFa], so we had money for the school. So we finished putting—lighting up the mural. Now we have the mural up, [and] we finished lighting. We did all the lighting—

IN: So this was in the front façade of the gallery.

JG: Yeah. We had real nice lighting on the gallery. And then we started setting up the whole light system throughout the whole building, spotlights and everything. And Brother Rudy from Salesian was the very first Salesian that I met, that gave my brother a ride home [when we were kids]. He was now at Salesian High School in the wood shop. And he was there when I was there, but he was still at Salesian. So Brother Rudy gave us—he constructed for us about thirty art benches [for the students]. Where you sit down and you draw. So he constructed all the art benches for us. And then Father Charles [Farina], who was my religion teacher at Salesian, was now the pastor of St. Mary's Church, on—right next to Hollenbeck Park. And he had just put all new [light] fixtures in the school, so he had this beautiful—this size. They were like one and a half feet by—possibly even longer—one and a half feet by, maybe, four feet long fluorescent light fixtures [that were replaced with the new ones]. They were boxes like that, and really nice. So he gave us maybe thirty of them. So we just set up all the lighting throughout the entire place. And with one of those, I even did a light box. I turned it upside down and put legs on it with wrought iron, and then I had the glass frosted, and I had a light box. I made a light box out of that so we could draw. And then Eddie Martinez says, "Could I have one?" Then he built one also. *[laughter]*

IN: So now—

JG: So now we had all the lighting, So the place was really, really beautiful now.

KD: And you paid the rent?

JG: Oh, yeah. We paid the rent, yeah, we paid the rent. *[laughter]* So things were looking good now. [We were saved from getting evicted.]

IN: So this was for TELASOMAFa? Is that how you pronounce it?

JG: TELASOMAFa?

IN: TELASOMAFa. The East LA School of Mexican American Art.

JG: Yeah. So what we did is, the fact that we got the money for the school, we couldn't wait to get a commission to do a mural and then set up the apprenticeship. We had to really show them that we were having classes. So we actually set up the back room as a classroom. It was a studio during the day, but at night, I think about six o'clock or seven o'clock, we had evening classes. So Eddie Martinez became the regular teacher, and David Negrón and David Ramirez were our guest teachers.

KD: And what kind of students?

JG: They were actually advanced—

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: Not real advanced, but they were older artists, they—

IN: So more adults?

JG: Yeah, they were more adults.

IN: So why did you focus on adults rather than children?

JG: They were more adult artists, and the reason we focused on adult artists was because the music and art school was just a few blocks away.

IN: Los Angeles Music and Art—

JG: Yeah, Los Angeles Music and Art School was just a few blocks away, and they focused on children. They focused on kids. And we got together with [Robert] Webb, and we discussed this. He was the director at that time. And we discussed it and said we'd work with each other in any way we possibly could. And so we said, "The minute you have somebody that's graduating from there, and feel that is already advanced, you could send them down to our place." And there was a young kid named David Abeyta—boy, to remember his name!—his name was David Abeyta. He was a young kid, fourteen years old, who got media coverage because he was such a good artist at the [Los Angeles] Music and Art School. And he was about fourteen, and he started coming to our classes. But most of our students were people who want to become artists. They were adults. But the other way that we gave classes is that schools started bringing kids into the gallery. And they would bring a class in, and we'd do little workshops with the kids. And as a matter of fact, Irma started bringing in her class. What happened is that my nephew [Joey] was going to school at Belvedere, where Irma was teaching.

IN: Well, what it was, is that I had a five-year scholarship at Cal State LA in Project Maestro, which was the first bilingual bicultural Chicano teacher-training program. And so only myself and Olivia—I think her last name was Sanchez, I'm not sure—we were the only artists out of—all the other students were more history, English. They were all working towards, to be regular elementary school teachers or middle school-high school teachers. But we were the only artists. And so I was doing my student teaching at Belvedere Middle School. And so I had developed an art project where I was having the students divide into groups—family, community, religion, education, different groups—and I would use the art as a discussion to talk about community issues and family issues. And then I had them do mock fresco murals on butcher paper describing the environment that this particular group would be in, and then had them do a three-dimensional [*masa*] sculptures of the figures of the people who would live in that community.

And so, as a result, I was hired as a graphic artist to work at the school. And they gave me a classroom to set up a little art studio. And this young student kept coming in, and he was like my right-hand man, or boy, and he started telling me, you know, "My uncle and my father have an art gallery in East LA." [*laughter*] And it turns out that it was Juan/Johnny's nephew, Joey Gonzalez. Joe's youngest son—

JG: Oldest.

IN: Oldest, I'm sorry, oldest son. And I couldn't believe it. I said, "A gallery in East LA?" So I took my students over there. And so I, like everyone else, was just blown away by the beauty of the gallery. And immediately Juan/Johnny and Joe were there making us feel welcome, educating us about the culture. and they had demonstrations so that the students could actually have hands-on experience doing rubbings on copper reliefs that one of the artists was doing. So I actually have slides of me and my students there at the gallery.

JG: But we'd also give them drawing classes, and Robert would give the drawing class. It was very interesting. So they would get a paper—they had no idea what they were going to draw. But all they did was follow one line at a time with Robert, and—because I think they didn't know, they weren't seeing the whole thing, they followed that one line. And before you know it, all these little lines turned out to be a real nice picture. They were surprised at how nice their pictures would come out. So anyway, we had workshops like that, with the schools coming in. So now the school was going pretty well. And just about that time—I think that's when, more or less, when the loan started.

IN: Oh, so, yes, then you heard about the SBA loan?

JG: Yeah. So then we got word—that Stan Chambers had been working on it. So we got word that the loan was going through. And we were all excited. “Wow,” you know. So things are happening with the school, and now things are going to be happening with Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts]. So anyway, Joe says, you know, “It looks like things are going to be happening. In order to get a head start, why don’t you go to Spain right now and start purchasing everything that you saw?” And then Pete Rodriguez says, you know, “I could get you a deal. Round trip for a little over four hundred dollars, from LA to Spain, round trip.” [So I said,] “Wow, great, great.” So anyway, I got ready, ready to go back to Spain. So I went back to Spain, and this time, it was—not first class, but it was a lot better than before. And of all the . . .

You know, something that happened before that is that when all the different artists were coming in, and Gilbert Luján came in. He was one of the artists. There were groups of artists that were coming in. So Gilbert had said, you know, “I want to get some of the artists to have a meeting here.” So we had a meeting at—and that could have been one of the firsts that you were talking about—

KD: The Chicano Art Symposium? Yeah.

JG: And maybe it was a small one, whatever. But there were maybe fifteen artists there. There were quite a few of them. Probably Gilbert and Charlie Almaraz and Frank and Robert—

KD: De la Rocha?

JG: De la Rocha. And then Robert Arenivar, Joe, and myself—

IN: David Botello.

JG: David Botello. Jose Luis Ruiz was there. He was an artist. He used to do paintings before he started [working on film]. Well, I don’t know. It was possibly at the same time that he was doing [film]. But anyway, I remember he exhibited—I think he’s on the list—he exhibited a big painting that he did. I remember his wife carrying it in. [And also Jesús Treviño, a film producer, and I think Shifra Goldman, the art historian, were there]. And Bill Meléndez [producer of the] *Peanuts* [films] was also there. So anyway, and I remember they got into some—a little controversy there, attacking Bill Meléndez because he wasn’t hiring enough Chicanos. And he says, “Well, I hire them because they have to have the experience,” and all this stuff. But anyway, I met Bill Meléndez there. And it was interesting enough, when I was flying to Europe, I’m walking in the plane and there’s Bill Meléndez. [laughter] So we were both flying to Europe, except he was in first class and I was in—

KD: Business, or—

JG: Storage. [laughter] Cargo area.

IN: [laughs] Not quite.

JG: But anyway, so we were both there together in the plane, and—

IN: So did you get to talk to him?

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. We sat down and talked. And he was actually going to England because—he flies back and forth—he had a studio in England, and his son was supposed to be taking care of the studio in England. So anyway, we both flew together.

I guess I arrived in England first, and from England I went—flew into Madrid. And it was such a wonderful experience. I think some way or another I had already coordinated or something. But anyway, this man picked me up. And I think he was from the people that were [from an exporting company], because we were coordinating, trying to work out the whole system of importing, exporting, and all of that. So we found a shipper, I guess—whoever’s in charge of cargo and stuff like that. Or the bank, I don’t know. But anyway, he was a key person that was involved, wanted to get our account for shipping. So anyway, he picked me up and he drove me to this palace. We went into a palace—beautiful gigantic palace with tons of rooms—and he starts walking me through. And it’s an unbelievable experience. That palace was set up by Franco in order to produce artworks—all of the *artesanías* of Spain—in order to be able to export them. And I saw artists producing everything you could possibly think of in that palace.

And one of the things that they were working on were tapestries that were two stories high. Gigantic tapestries, and they were being woven with gold and silver threads, and regular, you know . . . In other words—I mean, just beautiful, beautiful. And these tapestries at that time, they said they were selling for a quarter of a million dollars. This was thirty-some years ago, and they said they were selling throughout different parts of the world. They were beautiful. I mean, it was a beautiful, beautiful experience. A beautiful experience. It's not the place where I bought stuff. I had already arranged in different areas [with different people]. But anyway, I guess he was just trying to show me all of the different *artesanías* that are in Spain.

So anyway, when I got to Spain, I went—one of the first places I think I drove to was the house—back to see the family of seventeen kids of brothers and sisters. So I went over there, and it turns out that Cesar and Mila were back home. And I surprised them, and I think I stayed there a few days. So my thing was to go—now I knew that Valencia—I guess I just started traveling. I went to Valencia, and that's where they had all of this beautiful furniture at. And I think the loan hadn't quite come through, but it was already . . . There were papers already set up in LA, so I was able to start purchasing this stuff, but I don't have to pay them. We don't pay until it arrives into the United States. In other words, there's something where you have some type of—you leave some type of confirmation here in the bank. You're dealing with the bank, and if we don't get it, we don't have to pay. And we can't get it until—I don't even remember—

IN: So the bank holds the money?

JG: Yeah. But it was interesting, I just yesterday I saw a slip—

IN: Oh, a bill of lading?

JG: From Banco de Viscaya in Spain. So I still have it there. So anyway, I was able to go out and start selecting everything that I wanted. So I went to Valencia, and now I was able to fly to the different places. But I did rent a car. I still did rent a car because I enjoyed driving. So I went to Valencia and I bought a lot of this furniture, and I went into an art studio in Valencia where they reproduce anything. Anything. And there I bought a batch—tons, a lot of paintings. Beautiful, beautiful scenes of towns. And you know, it's like mass production, but it's not like the ones that you see here with landscapes. I mean, these were beautiful, these were—palette, with a palette, and a combination brush and the knife—

[break in audio]

KD: We're on side B, and Johnny was talking about the paintings you saw at this place that mass produces art.

JG: So some of the small ones, I think I bought them for four dollars, and we were able to sell them here for like a hundred dollars.

KD: Wow.

JG: They were beautiful, they were really nice paintings. And so we had different-sized ones. But I'll never forget, they took me in to see some of the more expensive ones. And they were—they had reproduced—they were doing it on the spot—a reproduction of Peter Paul Rubens's *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, something like that?

KD: Mm-hmm.

JG: And, wow, it was awesome. Beautiful works. Beautiful works. Well, anyway, I had my mind on that. But I bought quite—I purchased quite a few paintings from them, because—I mean, God, the price was unbelievable, and the fact that . . . You know, I saw them and I said, "Well, I know we could sell them for over a hundred dollars."

IN: So when you went to Spain the second time, did you still have the same impression of the Spanish people?

JG: Oh, no, no. It was totally different. I knew about me now. [laughter]

KD: Oh, I see.

JG: Oh, I went—no, no, I was more, now, [proud of my Mexican culture]. I was excited about them. And there, you know, they get a little arrogant about the [Spanish] culture. They're very confident—

KD: And what kinds of things were you strategizing to bring back? You said paintings—



JG: Yeah, paintings and armor suits and jewelry. All the jewelry from Toledo, which is beautiful with gold and inlay. And I just—

IN: Coat of arms?

JG: Tons of stuff, beautiful. Yeah, and I found—I think it was in Madrid where I found this manufacturer that did—they were pins, but they were sculpted, and they were of all different professions. So we had—in other words, had something out of every profession.

IN: Like an emblem or a design that represented the profession?

JG: No, it was like sculpted, almost like a wire sculpture, but it was sculpted. It was fine detail. And then they had some all in silver, and some with gold and silver, and it had different professions. So it had—not a symbol, but it had the actual element. In other words, if you're a guitarist, there's a guitar. If you're an artist, you have a paintbrush. But they were beautiful, beautiful.

IN: And what about the tapestries that I saw in the gallery?

JG: Well, I went to one place, and they had tapestries . . . And so another thing, when I went to Madrid, I started looking up for the coat of arms. I went to the library in Madrid, and they just had everything about all the different coat of arms. So anyway, this one place was doing tapestries of all—the coat of arms of every name in Spanish. So I purchased about, I don't know, twenty-five, fifty of them. And he gave me the Gonzalez tapestry. So anyway, I bought mine—I think I bought two Gonzalez also. So I bought tapestries. and I bought cuckoo clocks, but they're ancient Spanish-style clocks that were run by the weight of rocks. They had rocks tied to it, and it spun around and did something. I don't know, I forgot. So I bought—I think I bought two or three of those.

And then I went to Toledo, to Del Valle, the one who did the armor suits. And I bought two armor suits. And one of them was a little more simple, but one of them was very elaborate. I mean, embossed all over the place. Beautiful, beautiful armor suit. I mean, the second one was nice, it had a lot of it, but not like the first one. The first one just . . . So I bought Spanish helmets, warrior helmets. I bought—like the Tizona del Cid, a few swords of El Cid. I bought tons of letter openers that were miniature swords. I bought a lot of letter openers that were swords. I bought old guns, old Spanish-style guns.

KD: I'm curious, the Chicano movement is going on, and it's a little bit anti-Spanish—

JG: Yeah, well. *[laughter]*

KD: And you come back and you bring—does it sell?

JG: Oh, yeah, it was selling.

KD: It does?

JG: Oh, yeah. But there were plenty of people that were—not plenty of them. I could say that there were some that came out real strong saying, you know, "Why didn't you build a pyramid instead of this?"

KD: Yeah.

IN: But your mural represented the Aztec, Mayan, and the Spanish fusion.

JG: Yeah. So the Spanish was still—

IN: And then you imported all the furniture and art from Mexico—

JG: From Mexico.

IN: From Tijuana. But it had a strong Spanish feeling still.

JG: Yeah. And now I'm coming with armor suits and swords and crossbows—crossbows, a lot of leatherwork.

KD: So all the things you've mentioned so far, those things sell when you get back?

JG: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They started moving fast.

IN: Who would you say—

JG: The leatherwork was beautiful. As a matter of fact, the leatherwork that they had, they had the head of a warrior on—I don't know what it was. But there were desk sets with pencils, holders, and everything. All the beautiful leather, embossed leather. Really, really . . . It was raised from the bottom, so it was embossed coming up, as opposed to—a lot of them were from Mexico, engraved.

KD: Engraved, right.

JG: So anyway—

IN: So you had both those. The Mexican and the Spanish in the gallery.

JG: Yeah. But we didn't have a lot of Mexican leatherwork.

IN: You had more the Mexican woodwork?

JG: Yeah. Well, the sculpture pieces that . . . But of all things, Cervantes [from Mexico, that left Joe all the woodcarvings] had Don Quixotes also. But I bought a lot of Don Quixotes, a lot of woodwork, little tiny figurines, woodwork from Spain. I bought a really beautiful chess set that was all Spanish warriors fighting each other [or the Moors]. It was a table chess set. All kinds of furniture, but the ones that I brought were all color, they were all polychromed. And I bought chests, really nice chests. I still have one that we put our albums, it's perfectly fit for albums.

But anyway, all these—so I bought all of this stuff. And I had purchased everything. And I think I had to coordinate it with the guy in Madrid, and so I was waiting for the money. And Joe's waiting for it [his loan] over there, so I'm stuck in Madrid. I don't mind at all, being stuck in Madrid, because I had a ball. And at lunchtime, well, I'd go to the—there's a lake in the park in Madrid, and the park is like an outdoor museum. It's got sculpture pieces all over the place, and there's a beautiful building with stairs that go right into the lake. I don't know why. But anyway—it's just designed that way. But anyway, I was having a ball just hanging out there.

And then the funny thing that happened, they had this beautiful fountain, beautiful fountain in the center, I think where the library is. But anyway, it's a circle where the traffic goes around. It's a beautiful, beautiful fountain. Over there, they eat real late, so I was staying in some particular hotel there, and at night I used to like to walk around and look at the fountains and everything. So all of a sudden, I'm looking at the fountain, and the guy comes and turns it off. I said, "How come you're turning it off?" He says, "I've got to go see the fight. Tengo que ir a ver la pelea." "What fight?" He says, "It's [Pedro] Carrasco with . . ." Armando [Mando] Ramos? It was a Chicano fighter. So it was a Spaniard fighting a Chicano, a Chicano, you know? Not a Mexican, it was a Chicano. And everybody—it was a big, big fight. I mean, everybody was going to . . . [This was November 5, 1971.]

KD: Boxing.

JG: Yeah, boxing. So I went to my hotel, and in the lobby, they were all there. And here I am with a room full of Spaniards. *[laughter]*

KD: And you're the only Chicano.

JG: And I'm the only one rooting for the Chicano. *[laughter]* And I forgot who won, you know, so. [Carrasco won and probably saved my life. Later Ramos won two rematches, winning back his world championship from Carrasco.]

IN: But you also mentioned to me that when you got into discussions with the Spaniards the second time, now that you had read . . . Talk about [how] now that you had read about the Aztecs and the Mayans and—

JG: Yeah, because they'd brag about—in other words, they'd talk to me as if we were lucky as Mexicans that they went over there, because they civilized us. That's basically what they were communicating. But now I went over there, and when I told them, you know, besides a lot of other different things, I said, "So where's your monuments to Cortez?" So they were embarrassed because they don't have any monuments to Cortez over there [is what they told me. I guess they weren't proud of the atrocities Cortez and other Spaniards committed for greed].

IN: And you knew about the architecture of the Aztecs and the Mayans, and their science, their—

JG: Oh yeah, I was—so the first time I went, I go, "Oh, oh, well." All they're talking about is the great [things] Spain did for us. And now I'm going over there, and I'm setting them straight. *[laughter]*

IN: So when you came back you had all this art from Spain, and then Mexico, but your mural focused on Quetzalcoatl. And also you influenced artists like Robert Arenivar and Clavos—Charlie Felix.

- JG: Yeah, well, they were—everybody, everybody was doing European art. And Charlie Felix was—I mean, they were all into—I mean, everybody was doing it. Everybody.
- KD: And what do you mean by “European”? In a modern style, or abstract, or—
- IN: Greek mythology.
- KD: Oh.
- JG: Yeah, a lot of them were doing realistic stuff, not too many were doing abstract.
- IN: Well, you said Clavos was doing what type of work?
- JG: Greek mythology.
- IN: Greek mythology.
- JG: He had Zeus, and he had—I mean, they were all doing—
- IN: And Robert Arenivar was doing also Greek and Roman.
- JG: Oh, yeah. That’s all he was doing. And then—
- IN: And after they were exposed to your mural and your concept—
- JG: Well, I started telling Robert, “You’ve got to start doing something that’s Mexican, something that’s Mexican.” And all he could think of was the *charros*. So he started doing some beautiful bar room scenes, but a whole scene, you know. And then he liked to—he says, “I’m going to go Picasso style.” And he’d do all of this abstract stuff. Just—Robert could do anything. Robert—
- IN: But Clavos, he started doing what type of pieces after you—
- JG: Well, he started doing all the Indian pieces, indigenous, Aztec and all that.
- IN: So he has like a beautiful—like what’s in the portfolio—
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: Of the huge Aztec nail relief.
- JG: One of the first ones that he did was an Aztec warrior. And then he did a Mayan. And then he started—so he started doing . . . So different artists that came all started doing [Mexican indigenous and mestizo images].
- IN: And then he also did a nail relief of the Virgen de Guadalupe?
- JG: Yeah. And Cervantes did the carving for the face, when he—one of the times that he came back.
- IN: And also, if I recall, in the gallery—
- JG: Before I forget, let me just—
- IN: Okay.
- JG: When I got back, Joe was saying, “God, Johnny, I’m so glad you’re back.” He says, “I don’t have time to do anything.” He had tons of students and reporters and everybody. He says, “I spend my whole time just telling my story, our story.” He says, “I don’t have time for anything.”
- KD: About how long had you been gone? Like months, a month?
- JG: Yeah, maybe a couple of months.
- KD: Wow. And so more press again.
- JG: Yeah. Yeah, well, it just kept on going. It just kept on going. We did “Our Latin Amigos.” One of the first radio shows we did was called “Our Latin Amigos.” That went out to all of the servicemen throughout the world. And it was Inez—Ana Pedroza, who was the host of the show. And I forgot the guy’s name, but Ana Pedroza was . . . I think I mentioned her before. She was the mother of Inez Pedroza, who’s a reporter for Channel [7]. [Inez Pedroza’s mother was Alma Pedroza, who wrote a column titled “Our Latin Amigos” for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* and hosted “Brotherhood through Music” on KABC, which was broadcast on the Armed Forces Radio Service—ed.] So anyway, he was saying, “Guy, I’m so glad you’re back.” And so all of these kids . . . All of a sudden, Chicano studies and all the—I mean, they were coming in droves. Man, we couldn’t do anything, we couldn’t . . . It was very nice at the beginning, you know, it’s very flattering. And it’s always nice, but it starts getting tiring when you’re repeating the story over and over and over again. It starts getting tiring. So I started thinking, you know, “We’ve got to—we’ve got to make money with this. We’ve got to make money with this, and we have to not have it take up all our time.”

KD: Right.

JG: By talking—so I thought of publishing a booklet. First—well, this just kept on. What happened later is that—oh, the shipment was coming in, after—I don't know how long it took. But anyway, the shipment was coming in to the LA harbor, and it turns out that there was a shore workers strike.

KD: Oh, no. [Longshoremen.]

JG: [Longshoremen's] strike.

IN: Because it went to Mexico first?

JG: And the boat couldn't come here, so it had to go to Tijuana. And then they brought it back by truck or whatever, over here to LA. So anyway, they finally brought it back and we unloaded it, and wow, we unloaded all of this beautiful . . . And then we started decorating. All of these tapestries, we lined up the entire top of the ceiling. Oh, and then we had these chandeliers—the chandeliers we bought in Mexico. We did buy those, they were wrought iron chandeliers. We had two gigantic wrought iron chandeliers hanging in the front room.

KD: Yeah, we talked about this.

JG: They were beautiful. And so now we had all of these tapestries, and we had these beautiful armor suits just standing there on the side. And then there was a priest friend of Joe's who gave him this old, ancient looking chair, Spanish-style chair. It was really old. And then he gave him an old altar, which is all carved, hand-carved. It had grapes and stuff like that. But it was really beautiful, so we used that as a counter for our sales. So everything was just really elaborate and beautiful.

IN: And I remember, where the counter was you also had a sculpture piece coming off the wall?

JG: Yeah, well, that. So anyway—

IN: That was the head of Quetzalcoatl?

JG: Yeah. So anyway, all of this time, you know, I always kept on thinking of ideas. And so I thought, "Gee, you know, it'd be nice . . ." I came up with an idea of doing a fountainhead of Quetzalcoatl. So then there was this artist by the name of Carlos Venegas, who came from Mexico, who used to live in Yucatan and used to do reproductions that—reproductions of Mayan artifacts. And they looked exactly . . . And so, as a matter of fact, I think he came over here because they were selling some of them as originals.

KD: Oh. [laughter]

JG: But he did beautiful, beautiful work. And I think the person that bought it [his Mayan relief plaque] was Ernesto Cervera, if I remember his name. Ernesto Cervera had an agency, a Latino—Hispanic at that time, an advertising agency. And I think he also had a TV show, or was a narrator for the TV show. The name just hit me right now, because the plaque—it was a plaque that we had down there in the bottom by the head. It was a beautiful Mayan plaque. So Carlos was a great sculptor, and that was his specialty, the Mayans. So Carlos and Robert Rodriguez, who did those wood plaques, became real close, because they both loves the Mayan. And Carlos would do these beautiful works sculpted in plasteline, you know, of the Mayans, And he'd do these Mayan figures, little tiny figures like this, with the beautiful little fingers just holding the—you know, the way the Mayans have—and every little detail. I mean, he was a really good sculpture, a good sculpture. A real comedian, though. A real comedian. Real character, real character. So Carlos started doing . . . And they were always looking for us to give them a contract.

IN: Now, years later, what did Carlos Venegas do for the Bowers [Museum]?

JG: Yeah, so anyway, he did the sculpture piece for—he did the head of Quetzalcoatl, the concept that I had of a fountain. So he did a beautiful head of Quetzalcoatl—

IN: For the fountain.

JG: For the fountain. So we were selling them as fountain heads. And Joe had—because of Fusek's, he had a lot of contacts already with people who did different things. So there was a studio, Silvestri Studio, who did casting. So we took the original plaster [sculpture], and he did the mold, and then he casted it in fiberglass. And the fiberglass looked like porous stone. I mean, you couldn't even tell it was fiberglass. It was beautiful stone. Because we actually—later on, we did the heads of the Aztec warriors for the [East Los

Angeles Doctors Hospital]. Actually, we changed it from trash receptacles—[my idea to keep the streets clean]. People thought it was an insult, so we used them as large planters. And the Doctors Hospital bought a whole batch of them, so we had all these Aztec warriors at the Doctors Hospital, right next to where Mechicano was at.

IN: So they were huge planters to plant trees, right?

JG: Yeah. Not big trees, but they were small trees. So anyway, we did the head of Quetzalcoatl with that. And Carlos, later on—Joe came up with—because Carlos . . . The artists began to live there, everybody was living there, and nobody was making money. I mean, they didn't make any money, so they were all counting on us for something. So anyway, Joe said to Carlos, "Why don't you . . ." Doing the Mayans. He says, "We could get copper wire, do the drawing of the Mayan figure, all the glyphs and stuff, and then outline it with copper wire, and then do like a glaze inside each wire." So in other words, the wire was holding the paint for slipping into another area, and if there was colors intermixed with each other, which looked like a marble type of thing. But anyway, there were beautiful. So Carlos started doing that, and they were coming out beautiful, and he started making money with that.

And so what Irma was saying, that the kids would come in because it was a relief. We'd get a paper and the kids would rub like a pastel or charcoal on it, and it would make the figure. So it would be beautiful drawings, and the kids would be able to take them with them. [We called them rubbings.] So Carlos started doing real well with that. And then Siqueiros . . . I had already talked about—I don't know if I ever mentioned it. They wanted us because of the Siqueiros mural that Olvera Street had been . . . The fact that now we were, like, the only place that was really Mexicano artwork. The LA City Council was putting pressure on Olvera Street to sell quality Mexican products, because Olvera Street was producing—they were . . . You went to Olvera Street way back at that time, and you picked up stuff and it would say "Made in Japan."

KD: Made in Japan. Mm-hmm.

JG: And so they were putting pressure to have Olvera Street to have more authentic Mexican works. So they came over, and I think Mario Valadez was the director of Olvera Street at that time. But they came over and they invited us to go see a building, see if we were interested in having our gallery in Olvera Street. So they took us upstairs. This gigantic building was completely empty, and you could just see the beams, but it was totally empty. And then they opened the door, and we walked out to something like a patio, and then we looked back, and there's this gigantic mural by Siqueiros.

IN: *América Tropical*.

JG: A gigantic mural by Siqueiros, and—

KD: So by then, the whitewash had faded—

JG: It was fading, yeah.

KD: And you could see the mural.

JG: The painting was coming out. And they were working on trying to figure out how to restore it. So anyway, they wanted to give us this whole building. They said, "You can have it free for so many years," they said, "but you have to fix it." "Another building?" [laughter]

KD: Yeah, you just did that. [laughter]

JG: Another building, fix another building? We just finished this other one, and I said, "No, no." So we just—we turned it down, we turned it down. So anyway, they were seeking out ways of restoring it. And they had—

KD: The Siqueiros *América Tropical*?

JG: Yeah. So they had someone they had sent for, two restorers from Mexico, Josefina and—

IN: Josefina Quezada.

JG: Yeah, Josefina Quezada, and—Miguel? I forget what the other guy's name was. [Quezada's colleague was Jaime Mejía—ed.] But anyway, they sent them down to restore it. And all this time, I'm thinking, "God, you know, Joe—Joe's a master restorer." And I said, "These guys must be really, really great." So anyway,

Josefina came to the gallery and said, you know, “I was brought here in order to be able to restore it,” and all that. And it turns out that they were thinking, “Oh, if it’s restored, it’s not going to be an original Siqueiros,” you know. The only one that could restore this would be Siqueiros. So anyway, because of the fact that they weren’t going to do it after all, Josefina was going to have to go back. And she didn’t want to go back, she was now hanging out at the gallery.

KD: Oh, I didn’t know that.

JG: And so anyway, she asked if we could help her out, and we gave her a letter of employment, stuff like that. So anyway, Josefina was able to stay. So now Josefina was working out of the gallery, and she was doing her paintings and stuff. So now a lot of—I remember a lot of the feminists, women at that time who were—I don’t know if they would say “feminists”—but anyway, they were into the true women’s movement. Now they felt more comfortable coming into the gallery, because we were criticized that we didn’t have enough women in the gallery. And they thought it’s because we were—we didn’t want them there. I mean, anybody who came in and had some nice artwork, they were welcome to come there. Josefina was now living there with us, practically. So Josefina and Carlos hit it off. So then they—I think they started living together. But they started doing—now Josefina was doing the same process that Joe showed Carlos. So now they were doing the whole thing.

IN: The copper relief—

JG: The copper [wire] relief.

IN: With the enamel paint.

JG: Yeah. Uh-huh. And Josefina started going to town with that. And if you go to East LA College, I think in the library, they have a lot of Josefina’s [work] there. So then she started taking over that area. And Carlos was doing them still. But anyway—

IN: So now you started getting commissions to do murals?

JG: Eventually. We were saying—before I forget about Carlos.

IN: Okay.

JG: So Carlos eventually did the plaque. I think it’s a plaque that they found in El Zócalo in Mexico City when they were digging? Yeah, I think he did—the reproduction is right there at City Terrace, on City Terrace Drive.

KD: Oh, you mean, Coyolxauhqui.

JG: Yeah.

KD: Yeah.

JG: And then he was later commissioned to do the tomb from Palenque, at the Bowers Museum.

KD: Oh, in Santa Ana.

JG: Yeah. So we went one day—well, it’s later on, when we started working with them [the Bowers Museum]. And we go in there [and] it’s like, you see Carlos Venegas’s [work], and I said, “Wow, of all things, man.” So anyway, that’s the story about Carlos. It’s just so many adventures about so many different artists.

IN: So now you started getting commissions to do murals.

JG: Yeah. So now we had a commission. Now, this was our first exterior commission that we got. And this white guy, Anglo, came in and says, you know, “I’d like you to do a mural for my building, which is on Gage.” I think, “Gage and Hammel.” And he says, “It’s the bar called Los Compadres.” He says, “You know, kids are beginning to do graffiti,” or something. Graffiti wasn’t really that bad at that time. They were doing small stuff. Graffiti wasn’t—

KD: Just little placas.

JG: Yeah, with a felt pen, maybe.

IN: And just as a sidetrack, when one kid put graffiti on your mural, *The Birth of Our Art*, what did you do?

JG: Yeah, I mean, this took a long—this was much later. But as—a young kid with a felt pen wrote something on there, his name. And Joe and I ran after him, and we caught him, and we said to him, “Come here. We



want to show you what we're doing." We took him into the gallery, showed him everything and all that. Before you know it, the guy was protecting our mural. And we welcomed—

KD: That's exactly how you do it.

JG: But you know, some of these kids really told us some sad stories. I remember some of the ones that used to come in, and their life, you know, the broken home and all these different things. So anyway, Roger—this one guy—walks in. and so we go over there, and—

IN: What was his name?

JG: His name was Roger Johnson. And we're thinking, "Gee," you know—and real, real nice guy, very, very nice guy.

IN: He was an elderly man?

JG: Yeah, elderly man, white hair, little bald. And so we go over there, and we started working. And of course now we knew that whatever we were going to draw, if it took us a day, it would take five minutes for Robert to do it. So we'd come up with concepts, and discuss the concepts and all that, and maybe do a real rough sketch. Or if we described it real well, you know—Robert, he was like a secretary with shorthand. The drawing was done in no time at all. So anyway, we went over there and did our first mural. And the way we did that one, we drew it out. And that one was [done] with an air gun.

KD: Oh, really?

JG: And so Joe had been doing air gun touch-ups for things at the studio, at Fusek's. So anyway, he brought his whole equipment. And so he did the basics with all of the air gun, and then we touched up details with the brushes. And Robert wasn't a lot into paintings. His passion was drawing. So David and I were basically the colorists, and then we'd get into the painting. So anyway, we did our first [outdoor commissioned] mural. And later on, I found out why the guy was so nice: he was [Edward] Roybal's campaign manager.

IN: His first campaign manager.

JG: His first campaign manager. So he was really into the community from way, way back.

KD: Now, was this the first time you'd heard of a mural being done to deter graffiti?

JG: You know, I don't remember if that's why he did it. I don't remember.

IN: Well, you said kids were starting to put graffiti on the buildings.

JG: Yeah, but then I thought about it, and I said, you know, [that] there wasn't a lot of graffiti, I really don't feel. I think he just wanted to make the place look nicer. I really don't feel that it was because of the graffiti. I really remember—because graffiti was not—they weren't using spray cans at that time.

KD: No.

JG: I tell you, this kid did it with a felt pen. It was—I mean, I remember, I—

KD: Yeah, and the big fat felt tip pens hadn't been invented yet.

JG: Yeah, it was a small one. I remember I did graffiti with a pencil. *[laughter]* On concrete.

IN: So now you had the East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts, and adults were coming in to study, but also, artists from your studio were going into the community to paint.

JG: Yeah. Well, what happened was because of the publicity and what we talked about, doing murals and beautifying the area, community groups and schools started coming in and asking if we could help them with their projects. And I remember one of the projects that we did was, Malabar Street School wanted to do a mosaic mural, and a mosaic—a paper mosaic. So we did it there at the studio. And I guess the kids—I don't know if we went over there—but anyways, it was pretty gigantic, because we framed it. And it was all little tiny pieces of paper, so it was like a mosaic mural that we did for Malabar [Street School]. But then different groups started coming in, and they were saying, "Could you do this? Could you do that?" So the different artists then started going out and working. David Lopez. Sammy Zepeda, who's a psychiatrist I think now, working with kids, gang kids, and he came down and asked if we could go help. And so David Lopez went to Casa Maravilla and started working with some gangs, and they asked him . . . He said, "So what are the subjects that you want?" And he was shocked that the gang said, "One of them, we want the

Virgen de Guadalupe, and the other one, we want to honor one of the kids that got killed.” So he did these two murals, and they—

IN: On the side of the building—

JG: On the side of the building.

IN: Of the housing project.

JG: Yeah.

KD: Right, at Maravilla. [Mural title is *Our Lady of Guadalupe*—ed.]

JG: And then when they came down to tear down everything to start remodeling, rebuilding everything new. They actually saved the two walls because the community really protested, and they saved them and they sandwiched them together, with the artwork inside. So after they finished everything, they opened them up, so they’re still up there right now.

IN: So they’re a shrine, they’ve become a shrine.

JG: Yeah, they’re a shrine. And they were written up in *Time* magazine in the article [that we were also in, the first international write-up on the East LA murals]. And also when—

IN: So people go to that mural, right?

JG: Yeah, and they put flowers and everything. And on the procession that goes by there, for the Virgen de Guadalupe—

KD: For the feast day?

JG: Yeah, that there was one of the—a priest, a representative of one year from Rome or something, and he went over there and he blessed it. So anyways, it got some nice coverage.

KD: The artists who are getting jobs to do murals and other public work, are they sending money back into Goetz [Import and Fine Arts] or the school [TELASOMAF], or is it just like a clearinghouse, where to find artists?

JG: Yeah, but you know, the money that they were getting to do the art, at the beginning [was so little].

KD: Yeah, I’ve never heard anybody say they made a dollar off of a mural, doing a mural.

JG: Yeah. At the beginning, it was like they were just happy to find a wall. Everybody was just getting excited. Murals just began to pop out all over the place. And then some people from Estrada courts came down, and then Charlie Felix decided, “Okay, I’ll go over there,” and he started working on the corner one. And before you know it, then it started getting more popular. People at the factories . . . And they had paint. And then the fire [department], they started . . . So everybody started putting—bringing in materials—

IN: So they donated paint, the factories donated paint?

JG: Yeah, yeah. And by this time, Joe had found—I forgot the paint company. What was the paint company?

IN: New—

JG: Nova.

KD: Yeah, Nova Color.

JG: Yeah. So Joe had found Nova. This was right after our first mural, so this was in [1971] that Joe found Nova Color. So from then on, it was Nova Color. And our storage was—we used our storage for the paint, the ovens. We cleaned out the ovens and we put all the paint . . . I mean, we had those ovens—full of gallons of all colors of Nova Color paint. So—

IN: So the original murals that you were doing, a lot of them, you did for free, right? In the beginning?

JG: Yeah. Well, you know, Kemp paid us—

IN: Well, that—we haven’t talked about Kemp yet.

JG: [Yes,] we did. The inside of the mural.

IN: Oh, the inside mural.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Uh-huh.

JG: So actually, we did get—but very little money. Very little money.

IN: So Roger Johnson paid you, Bob Kemp paid you. But other than that, were most of the murals—

- JG: Well, a lot of the artists started going out there and helping—working with the kids. So, but we didn't ask for money from them. I know that they weren't getting much. We were focusing—the money was really now focusing more on what we were trying to sell, the paintings that we were selling inside. And even with the school, you know, that was the problem that we had in regards to why eventually . . . the school went on maybe for three years or so, but the fact that we didn't know how to go out and seek grants, you know. We weren't professionals [in business], we were artists.
- IN: So even though you were actually set up as a private business, you were really operating like a non-profit, serving the community.
- JG: The school wasn't a non-profit organization.
- KD: Oh, it wasn't?
- JG: We never incorporated into a non-profit, what is it, 501, whatever.
- KD: [A 501]C3, uh-huh.
- JG: Yeah. We just called it a business, and it wasn't—
- KD: And the teachers were paid?
- JG: Yeah, the teachers were paid. The teachers were paid. I mean, they did it for very little. But even the students, they'd say, "Gee," you know, "I don't have any money." "Oh, okay, pay us next time." So we were trying to be good guys. And unfortunately—but I'm surprised it went on for quite a while, and I guess the reason it went on for quite a while is because the teachers weren't charging that much.
- IN: You paid the models also?
- JG: Yeah, yeah, we paid the models. So it continued pretty good, but it was—now the word was spreading more. And so we were getting a lot of publicity, a lot of—
- IN: So I think we could look at the portfolio, because that gets into some of the publicity, and the murals. Did you stop the tape?
- KD: We're going to look at the portfolio that you've brought in, so why don't you tell me—
- JG: Okay. So now what we were—now we have this beautiful gallery totally completed, inside and out, the mural lit up beautifully. And we're setting up to really call it the grand opening, in spite of the fact that we've been open for quite awhile. But this—now we had everything. Now we had everything. And now the place was full of artists, and we just had tons of artists. So we decided to now have the grand opening. We were organizing, and we had [the PR directors] Pete Rodriguez from Channel 7 now, Jay Rodriguez from Channel 4, and Joe Montes from Channel 2, that were going to be, like, the bartenders. So they were in charge of serving the wine. And then we had the East LA Jaycees and the East LA Big Brothers involved in helping to park cars. Dr. [Offenburg] across the street, and—I don't even know if it's the First Street—the grammar school across the street.
- IN: Eastmont?
- JG: Eastmont—
- IN: I think.
- JG: So the grammar school across the street gave us permission to be able to have parking throughout their grounds, so we had a lot of help. So we sent out the invitation, and we got the list. We opened up first, now we're getting all the artists to bring their artwork. And we'd try to make everybody feel comfortable. And I don't know how well that worked out for us, because by making everybody feel comfortable, what was happening is that since the front room was the most elegant room, it seemed like everybody wanted to have their works in the front room. And since everybody was helping hang up, it means that I could finish hanging one wall up, and by the time—if I left and came back, it was totally different, because those artists got their artwork and put it out in the front room. But anyway, some way or another, we eventually got it done. The gigantic pieces that were extra-large were in the back rooms, because they were really large, and maybe they weren't framed. Like Willie Herrón had a really, really large one. And by now, I had heard about Willie Herrón, that he had a mural. And I went to see it, and it was in the back of an alley that he had his work.

- IN: And actually, I went to high school with Willie Herrón. I went to Wilson, Woodrow Wilson.
- JG: So anyway, he was one of the artists that was going to have a big piece. And I know that they weren't real happy about having their works in [the back room]. The entire place was full, every single room was full. The photographers, we had the two smaller graphic rooms specifically set up for photographs. And it was George Rodriguez and Rudy Rodriguez, brother photographers, [and a few others,] who were there painting it, and they were excited about fixing it up. And so they . . . We had a few photographers. So we had two rooms set up for photograph displays, and then we had the outside patio, and what was considered the driveway, but it had walls. So—
- KD: Oh, you mean this space here?
- JG: Yeah, exactly.
- KD: Yeah, behind the wrought iron.
- JG: Oh what we did there is we got rid of the chain link fence gate that we had, and we built a wrought iron fence.
- KD: Oh, so this went to the back for parking and—
- JG: Yeah, it went to the back.
- KD: I get it now.
- JG: But we didn't use it for cars. We never had cars going in there. But then we built this beautiful old-style gigantic doors. And then I carved out a face of a lion or something, and Carlos Venegas carved the other one. It was ancient [looking]. Rustic, with big nails and stuff. It looked really beautiful. And so we had it in the distance so that people couldn't get to that.
- And then there was an artist by the name of Marcucci Ramirez. He was an old guy who also worked with Joe at Fusek's, a very experienced sculptor who actually was, I think, from Argentina. And they said to him . . . When he was twenty-some years old, he had built the national monument of Argentina. And that he got married by Pope Pius XII when he was—this guy was an old *veterano*. And he started hanging out at the gallery, and he had a sculpture piece of Kennedy. A gigantic, life-size sculpture of Kennedy that he brought to the gallery. And we had it out there in the driveway. Because of the wrought-iron gate they could see it, but they couldn't get in there. And he was the artist that started helping us with doing the sculpture pieces for the big heads, the planters, because he was so experienced at that. He also did all the sculpture pieces that were—they might still be there, at Aaron Brothers on La Brea—and the outside, there's a whole bunch of sculptured pieces that are against the wall. So anyway, he's supposed to have done all of those, and I think he did them while he was at the gallery. But anyway, we had tons of different artists. And so we had space like crazy, and—
- IN: Was it televised? Was it announced through the media, the grand opening now?
- JG: Well, I think we were always getting coverage in the news. I mean, they were doing weather reports from the gallery, so we were getting tons of coverage, tons of coverage.
- IN: I never knew that.
- JG: Always doing tons of coverage. Yeah, they were doing weather reports from the gallery, they were . . . And then when Ray Gonzalez started being the community affairs director at KTLA, we got a notice that they were—they wanted—KTLA wanted us to meet their new public relations man. So we went to a reception that they had. If I remember correctly, it was almost across the street from Universal Studios, and it was like a real popular place to eat over there. So they had a whole reception for him. So you figure, once Ray came in, we were on the air every week with Ray, every week. Ray would pick up artwork, every week, and [he] had it as a background.
- IN: For which show?
- JG: For *Pacesetters*. And we did *Pacesetters* I don't know how many times.
- IN: That you were interviewed on.
- JG: Yeah. We did Alicia Sandoval a few times—
- IN: *Let's Rap*?

- JG: *Let's Rap*. We did [the] Johnny Grant show, we did Mario Machado's show, we did a show with Diane Munatones and Yolanda Nava. [I think it was the Saturday Show]—I can't remember now. All of these people. But anyway, we were always on television.
- IN: LA Unified [School District] had their own show too, [with Diane Munatones].
- JG: What's the name, [the] Ralph Story [show]? We did Ralph Story, it was a special that they were doing for Cinco de Mayo. They were shooting it at the Dominguez home, and they had us go over there, and they were always interviewing us. But anyway, we were always on television.
- IN: So for this grand opening, how many people do you think attended the event?
- JG: Well, first of all, the artists, when we had all these works already. And that's the reason—these artists were basically the artists that were in the front three galleries and in the studio in the back and the two graphic rooms.
- IN: So there was over a hundred artists, just artists.
- JG: So once we printed this up, more artists kept on coming in, and that's why we had to open up the back, the patio, and the driveway. So we started hanging up all kinds of paintings out there too. So it was just packed with artists. And then Antonio DeMarco—Antonio DeMarco was representing talent, and what he—he donated—I think it was Mariachi Los Gallos—to play there [at our opening]. And then we had Alvarez, who was—
- KD: A pianist—
- JG: A pianist who had just gotten back from a tour in Russia, I think, at that time, or the Orient. I don't know, I thought it was—I could swear it was Russia. And then Victor Suarez was an opera singer, so we had some spectacular stuff going on. And the place was just—I mean, you couldn't even move. You couldn't even move. It was just jammed.
- KD: What kinds of people?
- JG: All kinds of people. I'd say maybe—no, everybody just—I mean, you could see every kind—
- IN: Were they more—were they educators, business people, community people—
- JG: All of them. All of them. There were some very educated, sophisticated people, and then they were real barrio people that were there, too. But it was just—it was just swamped. It was just—
- KD: All ages as well? Or mostly adults?
- JG: No, mostly adults. Yeah, mostly adults. I mean, I think if there were kids, they wouldn't be able to see anything, because it was—
- KD: Too packed? [laughter]
- JG: You couldn't even move around. It was hard to even look at the artwork, because it was so jam-packed. It was a wonderful experience.
- IN: Now, for this event—because I know you said that you had a series of receptions and openings over the years that Goetz [Imports and Fine Arts and TELASOMAFIA] existed, and that, like, Nabisco donated food—did they have food, refreshments for the receptions?
- JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, there were—I think Nabisco had donated all of the food. And then—
- IN: What is his name? Danny—
- JG: Danny Urias would bring all the crackers and stuff, and—I mean, we hardly paid for anything. Everybody would donate something. Yeah, we hardly had to pay for it. Something that was interesting: one time the IRS came in, because they'd charge you tax on everything that you own, and they came in, and I think they heard, you know, "This place has got tons—they're wealthy." So they came in, and they're trying to make a chart of everything that they were going to charge us tax on. And they said, "Okay," you know, "about how many paintings do you have?" And I would say, "Well, we have this and this and this, but we don't own them." "You don't own them?" "No, they're all on consignment." "Oh, okay." So, okay. So the furniture, he'd say, "Well, what do you have?" I said, "But we don't own it." "You don't own it?" I said, "No, it's all on consignment." [laughter] We didn't own anything.
- KD: Smart.

- JG: We didn't own anything. The place was beautiful, beautiful, and we kept it clean. Boy, that floor was always polished, always polished. It was a jewel.
- KD: And who was doing that labor?
- JG: We all did. We all did. And the morning, I watered, Joe would water. It was basically Joe and I, because we'd come in the morning. David would work. David would come in in the afternoon and start doing whatever he could do, but mostly it was—
- KD: And who was keeping the books in the early years?
- JG: My sister.
- KD: Ah.
- IN: Which sister?
- JG: My sister Rebecca.
- KD: Rebecca.
- JG: My sister Rebecca. I paid the bills. I paid the bills, and I tried to keep track of . . . But Rebecca came in on a weekly or even monthly basis, and she'd spend a whole Sunday [or Saturday] there, working on the books and doing the taxes. [At times, when we didn't have money to pay the bills, Rebecca would pay them out of her own pocket.]
- IN: And for years, she's donated her services to the community, doing taxes for people at the church and people in the community. So she was experienced at accounting, and—
- JG: Yeah. Uh-huh. So anyway—
- IN: So in regards to this event, was there anything else that you wanted to say about the grand opening?
- JG: I can't think of it, just that it was—
- IN: Okay. So then—
- JG: It was probably the biggest—one of the biggest events that happened right there in the community. It brought in everybody, and so many people were involved in it.
- KD: Now, were these exhibited to sell?
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: Did you have like a price list, and—
- JG: Oh, yeah, we had a price list.
- KD: And did they sell?
- IN: Did anything sell that day?
- JG: Well, not [much]. We sold a few of them. Not a lot. [For many] people, this was new. This was totally new. I mean, it's like they didn't know about art, they didn't—I mean, they see an original and it's like, "What?" It was totally, totally foreign to them. We started framing . . . One of the things that happened was that we . . . I mean, we weren't making money, because everybody wanted to come and look. It was a museum to them, it wasn't a gallery. I mean, they didn't know about a gallery, they didn't even know about a museum. They'd all come in, and I remember these two girls coming in, teenagers, and they're looking and they're looking all over the place. And then they walk out and they look [up] at it, and they go, "Wow, look at the mural." I go, "They know what a mural is!" I said, "They know what a mural is, man, the word's getting out, people know what murals are."
- IN: Now, you mentioned, because people were just coming, and you guys were getting exhausted telling your story, that you created a booklet.
- JG: Yeah, created a booklet.
- IN: But also, you started having buses of school children. Teachers would bring their schoolchildren to the gallery to use it as an educational field trip, right?
- JG: Oh, as a matter of fact, possibly just before that exhibit, it might have been just before the exhibit, I—I myself, or maybe it was . . . Oh, no, it was just before East LA Mural Day. This was later on. But, because our time was being taken up so much by students coming in and interviewing us, and even certain



reporters from newspapers, that I thought, “East LA Mural Day, we’re going to have a lot of people, so it’s an opportunity for us to make some money on it.” And—

IN: Now, who came up with the idea of East LA Mural Day?

JG: I did. [I thought of the name. But the *Los Angeles Times* Boys’ Club board first thought of the event.]

IN: Well, how did—tell us how that all came about.

JG: Okay. Well, what’s happened is that—well, I don’t know, maybe it might have been a combination. I thought of naming it that. But anyway, the way that happened is that the eastside . . . The *Times* Boys’ Club had their board—of course the *LA Times* was involved in it, and I think it was Carolyn Murray, [editor] from the [*LA Times*] *Home Magazine*, was involved, so there were some key people there. And they thought of—they had to do a fundraiser, so they got together with KTTV, Channel 11, and they started talking about having a fundraiser, and maybe bringing people to come in and see the murals. But they also talked about getting RTD [Rapid Transit District] to set up a special bus route that would take people to see the murals. And—

IN: So by that time—

JG: By that time—

IN: How many murals were up by that time?

JG: Individually, there were like four hundred, something like that.

IN: In what span of time did four hundred murals go up?

JG: Within four years. Within four years. But also, before, just—I think right after we had the big opening, that’s when this young girl came in and said that she was working with a group of kids to do murals on the walls of the Sisters of the Poor. And that was Judy Baca.

So anyway, in regards to East LA Mural Day, they had decided, you know, “Maybe we could go see—” Oh, what I was going to say is that we had already been giving bus tours to schools, because originally they started bringing the kids to see the gallery, and we were giving them workshops and stuff like that. And then they started asking us, “Could you go with us to see the murals?” So we started jumping on the bus and taking them to see the murals. And then it was happening a little too much, so then we thought, “Well, we’re going to have to start charging for that.” So we charged sixty dollars to take a bus to go see, like, a hundred murals. So first, they would come into the gallery, they’d spend time in the gallery, and they might even have a workshop, depending on the size of the [group and] the ages. And then we’d take them to go see something like a hundred fifteen murals throughout East LA.

IN: And did you have the educational booklet at that time also to give them?

JG: No, I hadn’t put it together yet. I hadn’t—

KD: So this April 25, 1976, is East Los Angeles Day, the resolution from the City of Los Angeles. So we’ve skipped a few years, but I just wanted to clarify the year here.

JG: Yeah, we did.

KD: And it does say Goetz Art Studios had the foresight to recommend the endorsement of East Los Angeles Day. So—

JG: What happened is that they came to us. They came to us and they asked us if they could bring the buses in to—they wanted to set up a route for this. They wanted to set a route where it would start at our gallery, and it would end up at East LA College, and East LA College would have a whole festival going over there. And so they wanted to know if we had people that could do the tour. So my sister was one of them, Alicia [Licha], who did the tours. But at that time I thought, “Boy, I’ve got to make the most of this. I’ve really got to make the most of this.” So I got a ninety-day loan.

And all throughout this time, David Negrón, who sold very well—paintings. David Negrón worked with the Disney studios and everything. [He] said, “Why don’t you guys make your own frames?” And we said, “Make our own frames?” And then I learned about custom framing. So I went to a conference in San Francisco and learned all about buying the materials and everything, machineries and all that, to do custom framing. So then we started doing custom framing. And also, there was a young lady by the name of

Mimi who was working with us. And Aaron Brothers at that time—no, no, I’m sorry, Standard Brands—was selling beautiful little frames, all different sizes, but the same, it was the same wood. But very, very inexpensive. So we were buying them from Standard Brands. And we said, “Gee, why don’t we just get them from the manufacturer? We’ll be able to get a better deal.” Mimi herself managed to call Standard Brands, and she got the name of the manufacturer. And it turns out that they were Mexicanos in the City of Commerce, and they had this gigantic factory just producing—it was like the same one molding. But they made tons of money, because they only have one molding. And then next to it, they had another building with a basketball court and all kinds of recreation, so all the workers were able to go there and just have fun. So they had a whole place just for them to have fun.

So anyway, we started buying all these frames, and said, “We’ve got to have something to put in the frames, because we’ve got to sell them.” [For East LA Day I framed prints of Esperanza, an Orozco, and the Aztec calendar.] So then [later] I came up with doing Christmas cards. And Robert started doing scratch-board Christmas cards with scenes of the nativity, all that. Mexicano with *charros* and stuff. So the wise men and all that were converted to *charros* and mariachis and stuff like that.

IN: So—

JG: So in regards to this—

IN: Well, from the grand opening, you started getting all of these teachers, educators, kids, community, prominent people coming into the gallery. And so then you started doing first—before East LA Day, you started doing the bus tours with the schools, before East LA Day?

JG: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah.

IN: So you already had a route, as far as—

JG: Yeah, not only that—

IN: Taking people to see the murals.

JG: Before this even happened, the [Los Angeles] Music Center, the Music . . . But I remember—one of the things that I remember is Alicia Sandoval from *Let’s Rap*, [on Channel 11,] came down to the gallery, and she started asking questions and all kinds of different things. And she says, “Channel 11’s doing a survey, and talking to community leaders.” And I said, “I’m a community leader?” [laughter]

KD: It didn’t occur to you. [laughter]

JG: I go, “Wow, I’m a community leader? Wow.” [laughter]

IN: So I want to show what built up to East LA Day, because East LA Day, as Karen mentioned, was 1976, but the Music Center was 1974.

JG: Yeah. So the Music Center is what started coming up later. Next what happened is that after our exhibit, the Music Center at that time was not having a lot of Latinos going to the Music Center, and some way or another, they were getting some type of pressure that they had to try and make it more appealing to the Latino community to go in there. So the director of public relations, [Bill McClellan, and his assistant Connie Avila], he came down to the gallery—there were a few people—

[break in audio]

IN: What’s that, an hour?

KD: Two hours total.

JG: Having a festival that would be specifically for the Cinco de Mayo.

IN: This was the Music Center?

JG: The Music Center. And they wanted to have it there at the Music Center. And at that time, they had a pond around the sculpture piece, so they were saying, you know, “We want to have a miniature Xochimilco, boats in there. And so we want to have artists and we want to have entertainment, we want craftspeople.” And they said, “Since you already have a big list of artists, would you like to work with us on putting this whole event and bringing in [more artists]. So we will, through your gallery, we will try and get the artists and the craftspeople to register, to participate in this event, and we’ll have a contest. We’ll have a contest

with the corporations that are sponsoring so much money for the best work of art and the best crafts and whatever.” So anyway, they did this whole thing, and they said, “What we’d like to do is on top of that,” because you know, here we were asked all the time to participate in things for free, but now they’re saying, “And what we’d like to do is we’d like to contract you to do three gigantic banners, six feet by thirty feet high, that we will hang off the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, that are representing the Mexican culture.”

IN: So this is the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion here?

KD: Yeah.

JG: And we will pay you so much for that.

KD: Now, they’re done as banners on what? That’s what I could never figure out. Are they on—

JG: Canvas.

KD: On canvas.

JG: Yeah, they were on canvas.

IN: So they were hanging like banners.

JG: Yeah, they were hanging like banners. But we had to paint them sideways, because we didn’t have a building tall enough. So anyway, then they—through the music center and the media, we started getting more publicity, because all of the artists, they started saying, you know, “We’re having, this event’s going to be going on, and if you want to participate, go into the Goez [Art Studios and] Gallery and register there.” So, I mean, everybody was coming. To show you that, there were like three-hundred-some artists and three-hundred-some craftspeople, and they were totally set up all the way around the music center.

IN: So you guys set them up. You set up the whole—you organized how they were going to be exhibiting.

JG: Well, we actually got all of the information to the artists, and explained everything to the artist, and then we worked with the Music Center, because they have their whole team of people that—just like the recreation and parks.

IN: So you coordinated it with the Music Center.

JG: So they set up little stages and different things. And so what they were going to do is they were going to use us as a promotion for the Music Center, so they commissioned us to do six banners, or nine. I don’t know. Six banners.

KD: Yeah, it was six banners.

IN: And then I think the following year, they did three more.

JG: Yeah, they commissioned us for more. And then—I don’t know how many we did altogether. So anyway, they were going to use us as a publicity thing, a story. And so they created a story that we’re inside. I don’t have the picture of it. But anyway—

KD: Yeah, well actually, I actually have this—this is signed “Goez.”

JG: Yeah.

KD: Is that how all the banners were thought of? As a product of Goez?

JG: Yeah. Yeah, because the four of us would work on it.

KD: The four of you, meaning—

JG: Joe, David, Robert, and myself.

KD: Okay. David Botello and Robert—

JG: Yeah. As a matter of fact, we made a pact, you might say, is that no matter what we produced, that the four of us should be credited, because we always worked as a team. And sometimes, one of us had to go take care of other business, and it was unfair for us not to be able to participate in the mural because we were taking care of maybe another, different contract. So that’s why we always signed it [Goez]. Now, this one’s, I think, maybe we just signed Goez. I don’t think we . . . [The East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts, TELASOMAF, and Goez Imports and Fine Arts had now merged as our partnership under the new name, Goez Art Studios and Gallery.]

IN: So now this was a write-up in *California Living*? And what—it was a newspaper?

JG: It was the *Herald-Examiner*, Sunday magazine.

IN: And so the inside story, have you ever seen the actual—

KD: Yeah, I've seen this.

IN: Oh, so you've actual seen the whole inside story, with pictures and everything about it.

KD: Yeah. It's a nice spread.

IN: Oh, okay.

KD: This I haven't seen, actually, but this is '82.

IN: Yeah. Before we get to that, actually it's—I think it's '70, '75.

KD: Oh, '75.

IN: Seventy-five. But before we get to that, let's just show some of the murals that came out of the movement. So this was actually Roger Johnson's mural, at his—what was the name of his nightclub?

JG: That was at Los Compadres.

IN: Los Compadres. So this was actually redone years later. And then where was this mural done?

JG: That was USC [University of Southern California].

IN: And what building was it at?

JG: That was the Chicano studies or something—

IN: The Centro Chicano.

JG: Centro Chicano, yeah.

IN: And then how did this mural come about?

KD: This year—what year was that done?

JG: That was done in . . . Gee, pretty early. I think ['73] or so.

IN: So that's the USC Centro Chicano.

JG: Because, I remember going on a ship or something and coming back. [I lectured on a Chapman College cruise, and after, stopped by to see the USC mural.] And I related to that, so it might have been in early '70s. [About '74, shortly after my Salesian mural.] Well, everything was early '70s, mostly.

IN: And then there were some other murals in the community. You were talking about Maravilla.

JG: Yeah. That's the—

IN: So there are three panels. And where was this mural at?

JG: That was at the Maravilla center, I think it's called. Community center.

IN: And so what is the title of the mural?

JG: It's Don Fulano, the story of Fulano [John Doe]. [Mural is titled *La Vida Breve de Alfonso Fulano/The Short Life of John Doe*—ed.]

IN: And what does it show, the evolution—

JG: It shows the evolution of Maravilla.

IN: And what's the name of the flowers?

JG: So they're sitting there with the flowers, and that's how—they were picking—back in that time.

IN: So in the olden days, that area was filled with the Maravilla flower, and that's how it was called Maravilla. So this shows the beginning of Maravilla, and then this shows how it evolved. And then this is with the procession of the Virgen de Guadalupe. So those murals are still up?

JG: Yeah.

KD: And those are the ones done by—

IN: By Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery].

JG: The four of us.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: Yeah, the four of us did everything.

KD: I thought you said one person went to Maravilla, but I think that was another—

IN: Oh, that was David Lopez, when he did the murals—

JG: Yeah, David Lopez did—

KD: Of the two—yeah.

- IN: Yeah. So his—David Lopez’s murals were actually in the housing project. Where this is on—what is this street? Is that Cesar Chavez?
- JG: Cesar Chavez.
- IN: And it’s on a building that was for community service. And now what mural is this one?
- JG: That’s the Salesian mural.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: Now, the Salesian mural, that came about is—there was this brother, or—I don’t know if he was a priest, or . . . He was Irish, Salesian priest, and he was a real activist, a real supporter of the farm workers and César Chávez. And I think they had said that even the Teatro Campesino had put on a play there and everything. But anyway, he called me and said that the Ramirezes, of Ramirez patios, were putting on a benefit to raise money to be able to do a mural here. And so they got—some way or another, they got the [Mariachi] Camperos to perform. And the Ramirez house was a beautiful old Mexican-style home, with a mountain in the back with a waterfall coming down from . . . It was just . . . And then his fountains were just spectacular. So they had a beautiful, very elegant, classy event at his house, and the Camperos played. And they raised money in order for us to do the mural. To show you how much money we were getting is that this is a three-story mural, and we got paid eight hundred dollars for this. And they wanted—they said, “We want the farm workers’ flag in there, and we want the Virgen de Guadalupe in there. The rest you can do whatever you want.” And remember, I said I wanted nudes. I wanted nudes.
- KD: I was noticing, you’ve got your nudes again.
- JG: And the mustang is their [the Salesians’] mascot. So, I thought, well, I’ll put Don Bosco on the mustang, and he’ll be in the nude, and the Salesian kids are in the nude also. So anyway, we discussed and talked about it, and finally resolved it. We could have Don Bosco leading the kids and breaking the walls of discrimination, and barriers, everything that keeps us from advancing. And he’s cutting through the wall and with a guiding light for them, and they’re following. And this is right in front of Saint Isabel’s Church. So everybody who walked into Saint Isabel’s Church saw Don Bosco in the nude. *[laughter]* But nobody ever—we never had any problems—
- IN: So the nudes, the nudity was never a controversy.
- JG: No. So Robert and I [worked on the design together and] basically painted this, this I think was because Robert—David was working, or it was maybe—no, I don’t know if it was when David was beginning to start—leave the gallery [leaving our Goetz Art Studio and Gallery team].
- KD: David Botello?
- JG: Yeah, David Botello. But anyway, he came in and helped for a while there. But anyway, it was basically Robert and I and a student of Salesian. We had him as an apprentice there. And we had—it was a three-story scaffold. And I couldn’t reach the top, so I had to put a chair on top of the—the very top of the scaffold. And Robert was scared to death to go to the top. It’s like he was laying down on the floor instead of standing up. So anyway, we finished the whole thing, and the very last night—
- IN: You even varnished it, right?
- JG: Yeah, we even varnished it. What had happened is that the earthquake in ’71 had destroyed the San Fernando Mission.
- IN: Which is here.
- JG: It had destroyed the San Fernando Mission—
- IN: The chapel.
- JG: Yeah. So Monsignor [Benjamin] Hawkes was the director in charge of the money, so he contracted—and Joe knew him very well—so right away Monsignor Hawkes hired Joe to restore it. Not restore it, but to redo all of the artwork. They totally rebuilt the whole building over again, and it had nothing in it, it was totally blank. So Joe’s job was to redo the artwork exactly as the Indians had it. And he had just finished restoring some things for St. Joseph’s cathedral, which now burnt down. [The church was destroyed by fire in 1983—ed.] But anyway—

IN: And so you helped him?

JG: Yeah. So we went over there working on it and redoing all of the artwork. So as we were working on it, that's when they called me for the Salesian mural, and they started telling me all these things. And they said, basically, that they were doing it without the permission of Monsignor Hawkes, and Monsignor Hawkes was in charge of all the buildings. But they said, "We want to do it. We want to do it." So that's why they said, "So don't put . . ." Oh, what it was is the church was not supporting the farm workers at that time, so they said, "Don't put the eagle up there."

IN: Until the end.

JG: Yeah. He says, "Until the very, very end." So anyway, finish the entire mural, and it was all varnished and everything. I got the chair, and I started painting the eagle. I finished the eagle, and boom, we tore down the scaffold right away, so it was all done. So then, they [Salesian] were—I think they were having the dedication. But before that, Monsignor Hawkes found out about it, and he says, "I want that mural destroyed," or, "Take out the farm workers' flag." And they [Salesian] expected him [Hawkes] to do that, so they said, "Well, if you want it down, you're going to have to pay to set up the whole scaffold again." And he [Hawkes] refused to do it, you know. He says, "Well, I won't do it." And the *LA Times* created a story out of that. So they wrote up a story on that, that's—I don't know where it's at. But anyway, we had a major event, we had a major, major event. And about this time, Joe was a little tired of doing the murals and not really getting paid well—I mean, this is eight hundred dollars.

IN: So while you were doing the Salesian mural, he was finishing the San Fernando Mission.

JG: So Joe was finishing the San Fernando Mission, but because of this [the farm workers flag controversy], Joe didn't get any more contracts with the church. So anyway, Joe was upset about that. But anyway, they had a major event, reception. They set up a stage here, and they had Cal State LA Folklórico, and Art Torres, and some [other] politicians. And the media was there, and—a big, big event. And so Robert and I were onstage, and Joe was down on the bottom taking pictures.

And then after that is when the USC mural came up. So the USC mural came up, and then Robert and I drove over there to discuss about what we were going to be doing. And when I got to the studio, my car was totally wrecked. I had a Le Mans Pontiac, and some kid ran into it and demolished it completely. But anyway, the money that I got from the insurance, I was able to buy a new car. So Robert and I began to start working on it. And then I had—something else came up that I had to work on, so then Joe came and started working on it with Robert. And Joe was saying, "Boy," you know, because they were staying there late. And he was saying, "Boy, you know, this thing's taking a lot of time and a lot of work." And I said, "Joe, you know, I'll go and I'll do it." And he says, "Nah, it's all right. I'll stay here and do it."

And then after this is when he really got, again, involved. And saying it's a lot of fun, and it's very rewarding to be doing the murals [especially with the attention he and Robert were now getting from the college kids as they painted]. So then he got back into it. It's just the short while that . . . So that's when I think, maybe at this time when we said, "Okay, from now on, anything that's painted, it'll be the four of us that get credit, because we always have to leave for something."

KD: This is very much in the style of Siqueiros's murals.

IN: How did the mufflers, Ajax—

JG: So Ajax, a muffler shop, they just came over and they said, "We want a mural in our place." And my idea was always to have cultural and educational [content]. And [I] always wanted something—I loved the surrealism. I don't want realism, I want surrealism, and a lot of movement. And so anyway, I started—first I started thinking, "Well, we have to have some type of way where we're communicating—assisting the community." I think they had said, you know, "We want to be able to show that we're helping the community." So we'll have some way that they're helping the community. But at the same time, we'll have something that shows cultural. And I always remembered Camarena's mural of the mountain with the eagle. And so, anyway, then I . . . So the chiaroscuro, the reflection of light, strong darks and lights—I just love that. So then David, Robert, and I . . . Of course, Robert started drawing. This is, I would say, totally my



concept, and it was perfect. But Robert, he's so good, he just drew it up in no time at all, and it just came out really beautiful. So David [and I did most of the painting, while Robert was making sure the chiaroscuro was correctly executed.]

IN: So what does it represent?

JG: Basically, it represents—

IN: What do the giants represent?

JG: It's the indigenous culture, to an extent, but they're working and modern, welding our culture, developing our culture, and at the same time, they're helping the community.

IN: Now when were the First Street murals done? Was that before East LA Day or after?

JG: Yeah, it was before East LA Day [in 1974].

IN: Okay. So then we want to go to—

JG: Yeah, East LA Day happened [after], because everything was up already. Now, the way this happened is, I had given the—I had given Bob Kemp the drawing.

IN: This is the before.

KD: Right.

JG: Now, this was years before. This was [about three] years before. I gave Bob Kemp the drawings right before—right after the riots. And that's why he says, you know, "It's going to be a long time before we do it." And I don't know exactly when this happened, but anyway—

KD: And the riots were August 30, 1970, right? August 30?

JG: Yeah. Yeah. But this, I think it was like three years later. Bob Kemp called us, and he says, "I have a Christmas present for you guys." We said, "Oh, what, what?" So we were ready to run down to see what he had for us. And he says, "Open up the newspaper, the community paper, tomorrow, and you'll see what it is." So the next day, we're looking, and we open up the paper, and we see this design, which now has [a lot more arches than my design]. In other words, my murals had like—each three of these were actually one arch [of my design].

KD: Yeah.

JG: And the reason I thought of this, he'd never be willing to put up [so many]. It'd be too expensive to put too many of them. And so we opened up the newspaper, [and] right in the front page is the architectural drawing, this drawing, of the First Street Store. And we're reading it, and it says, "And Goetz Art [Studios and] Gallery, Johnny Gonzalez and Joe, are being commissioned to do murals for it." And I go, "Wow!"

IN: Which newspaper was it?

JG: The *Belvedere Citizen*. The *Belvedere Citizen* was just across the street. So anyway, when he told us, "Now there's eighteen panels," and [we said] said, "Wow. What could we possibly do in all of those panels that relate to each other?" And I started looking back in all my [reading on our Mexican] history, and thinking of why we hadn't advanced [like we should have]. I said, "What is holding us up? Why is it always . . ." And I started thinking, I remember when I started reading about—first there was the Spaniards, and then it was the French, and then it was the United States, and I said, "Oh, man, there's always obstacles. There's always obstacles that are preventing us from moving ahead." And I said, "Gee, maybe what we could do is call it *The Story of Our Struggle*, and all the panels will be the history of our struggle." So that's how the concept came up. So we just started working on it, and it started from the beginning of the indigenous—

IN: Developments.

JG: Development, saying that the cultivation of maize was what allowed us to be able to establish ourselves in one place and start a civilization there. And then it was the development of the culture, being able now—being able to actually work on culture and science. And so then down there is . . . After reading the history that Cortez thought that—I mean, Montezuma thought that Cortez was a god coming, and Cuauhtemoc said, "No, don't believe that." [laughter] So anyway, we designed it so Cortez is coming down like a god, and Cuauhtemoc is trying to kill him, and Montezuma is trying to hold him back from killing him.

And then the next one is the religion, the way it was holding down the culture. And then they thought that the Spaniards riding on horses were half man and half horse. And then the last one represents the conquest. So they finally conquered us. And then of course the next one is the *batalla* with Hidalgo, and then the Cinco de Mayo. And then the next is when the United States—the revolution. Yeah, that part represents the revolution. And then Los Niños Héroes, the rise of the phoenix, and then the Treaty of [Guadalupe] Hidalgo. And then when the United States just started taking all of our culture away, just grabbing everything. And then the next one is the Chicano movement, with the farm workers.

IN: And what do they doing there? They're cutting the chains?

JG: They're cutting the chains, freeing the Chicano from all of this slavery that we've had, to a certain extent. And the other one's trying to balance the culture with financial—the financial part is what's been crushing us. And the next one is the key to the book of knowledge, so our culture's handing them the key, trying to break down here. Easy way to start getting an education. And the next one is the future—

IN: Well, this one's the struggle against technology?

JG: Yeah. Uh-huh. We're struggling to try and balance ourselves with technology. And this one is looking into the future that we really don't know what is coming, but being prepared in different ways.

IN: And all these murals are made out of what?

JG: Tile.

KD: Now, I understand you didn't actually get to do the—the ceramics was laid by someone else.

JG: Yeah. It was the architect, already had a ceramic artist in Mexico do it.

KD: So you guys did the design—

JG: Yeah, we did the design, the color renderings and all of that. And then we gave it to the architect, and he went to Mexico. I think Joe was very disappointed. We didn't have a kiln, we weren't doing any ceramics yet. But I think it was Joe's passion, always, and that's what he's doing now. So his passion was always to be able to do them. But when we saw them, we were disappointed, because the designs were changed [a little]. The colors weren't as brilliant. And sad to say, though, the artist who did the tiles, right after he finished putting [them] up, going back to Mexico, he got killed.

IN: Now, you did a map of the murals. Did that come before or after East LA Day?

JG: That came before East LA Day, I think. [Or maybe after.]

IN: So these are some of your murals, and the artists—

JG: You saw the first map, [published after my "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project, [the] thumbnail map sketch,] right?

IN: Yeah.

JG: The very first [published] map that I did?

KD: Yeah.

JG: So there were four murals.

IN: Yeah. This was the original map and the original brochure, and on the inside was the history of how the [school and] gallery evolved. And so these are some of your murals. And then the artists were painting murals, the community was painting murals.

JG: And then remember that monument that I told you that I was real bugged about on Hill Street? Well, this is where I got back. See the corners [of the map] are all saying what we did, what we did, what we did.

IN: So describe each of them.

JG: So anyway, basically—

IN: First the feet.

JG: Basically, it's the fiesta, the festival—the romantic part of our culture.

IN: Well, there was something here—

KD: Yeah, I love this. I've seen the map. I have a copy, actually. "In Europe, all roads lead to Rome. In Southern California, all freeways lead to East Los Angeles."

JG: Yeah, I was bugged—

- IN: Whose concept was that?
- JG: It was mine. I was bugged, because at first, they . . . You know, in other words, they were building all of these freeways coming into East LA, and I told you, I lived right where they all met. And so I said, "Well, I'm going to make the most of this. I'm going to really capitalize on . . ." So I came up with the idea of using it to our benefit.
- IN: And describe the—
- KD: So the Mexicans, panning for gold, right?
- JG: Panning for gold, yeah. And you know that they yell "Plata, plata, plata!" So anyway, they taught the white man, but we're never credited for those things. And then, of course, they—and that monument credits all the white people for all of these things. The lariat—I mean, all of the terms, everything, it's Mexican.
- IN: So this is—the *vaquero* was the first Mexican—the first American cowboy?
- JG: And then cultivating the land. And this monument specifically says all of these different things. I said, "Now, this is where I'm going to get back." So—and then that's . . . The fiesta is romance, enjoying life, being able to enjoy it. So my goal was to create a map, because I said, you know, "People get maps and they throw them away." I said, "I'm going to create a map that is just going to give the community so much pride that nobody's going to want to throw it away."
- KD: And so it had a hundred and seven—a hundred and seven mural illustrations, or a hundred and seven locations?
- JG: Oh, locations, yeah.
- IN: And I think—how many murals?
- JG: I don't know. Maybe two hundred seventy-five?
- KD: It's at the top. So it says, "As of April 1, 1975, Goez recorded more than two hundred seventy-one individual murals and wall decorations on a hundred seven separate locations in East LA."
- IN: So this became a collector's item, this map.
- JG: Oh, yeah. Yeah. So *LA Magazine* wrote up an article on it.
- KD: Yeah.
- IN: So—and so again, it was your team who worked on this?
- JG: Yeah. Robert, David, and I. Yeah, Robert did the illustrations in the corner. It was my concept, and I did the initial [layout] design. And David did the finished design [and illustration]. [My idea was to create what looked like an ancient map decorated with the same style design that I used in my Goez Imports and Fine Arts woodcarving.]
- IN: So this was 1975—1975. And now this was through Goez Publishing Company.
- JG: Yeah. So David and I set up Goez Publishing. So we became partners on that, and we started publishing Christmas cards, [the map,] and different things. And we gave Joe a [large] percentage [of maps] to share it with him. But we basically—[David and I financed the company and did all the labor].
- IN: Now, did Licha and Lupe invest?
- JG: Yeah, my sister, well, [she] invested specifically in the Christmas cards.
- IN: Oh, not in the map.
- JG: [Lupe put a lot of time into the map and possibly some money, but since I got them printed free, it was more the labor that we needed.]
- KD: And I understand those completely sold out.
- JG: Yeah. They—[the Christmas cards]—were totally gone. Now, the map we . . . Well, David and I paid Robert for the illustrations, so David and I own and are partners on this. But I got [Art Lopez of Augustus Art], the printer, to print them free [for us] after we did the Seven-Up [calendar]. No, no, it was before, wasn't it? I don't even remember.
- IN: Seven-Up was 1980.
- JG: Yeah, yeah. [But the map] was way before. That's when we met him [Art Lopez]. So he printed this thing [the map] free for us.

- IN: Oh, wow.
- JG: He printed five thousand of them.
- IN: So later you rewarded him by giving him a commission with Seven-Up. Okay. And so this map shows all of the Mexican cultural elements, but it still has Quetzalcoatl and the Native American, Aztec influence.
- KD: Well, I like the way it says, "East Los Angeles, California, United States of America, Mexico, Aztlán."
- IN: Yes. *[laughter]*
- KD: So your Chicano influence is really coming out.
- JG: Oh, yeah. Afterwards, it's that . . . So after the Music Center, the—I think after the Music Center, right after that—or maybe just before we got the write-up in *Time* magazine—but as the results of the Music Center, I think it was Dewar's profile, they saw it. And they—but you know, originally, *Time* magazine and the article of *Time* magazine. They came down and they took photographs of Joe and I in front of my mural. And they said, "This is a potential cover story." So they had said that if—there was possibilities, because I think they always lined up maybe four different stories, and they said it's a potential cover story. So we were wondering, you know. But it turned out that Cher—
- IN: Cher.
- JG: Cher, whatever her name is—
- KD: The singer.
- JG: She's the one that came out on the cover. So they had—
- KD: *[inaudible]*
- JG: She's the one that got the cover story.
- IN: She took your spot. *[laughter]*
- KD: So they [Dewar's] would do these kind of—it's kind of an ad, but at the same time, it's a—
- JG: Yeah. It's a profile of the people.
- KD: It's a profile story.
- IN: So they were usually artists [and] writers that they would feature?
- JG: Oh, and scientists. Anybody who did anything meaningful, significant. They'd do a whole profile on them.
- IN: It was Leo Burnett advertising who did it for Dewar's.
- JG: Yeah. So it came out in all these magazines. And when I said, "Could you give us a list of papers," they said, "No, there are too many. It's newspapers all over the country. We couldn't possibly give you a list of all the newspapers. There's too many of them." So—
- IN: So they did an article, a regular magazine article about you, in *Time* magazine. And then was it after that that Dewar's did the ad with you?
- JG: Yeah. The regular one. When it came out in the regular article, my cousin was in a submarine in the Orient and was looking at *Playboy*, and all of the sudden, he says, "Wow, that's my cousins!"
- IN: Well, that was when the Dewar's profile came out.
- JG: Yeah, the Dewar's profile.
- IN: But the *Time* magazine article—
- JG: Oh, yeah, that's right.
- IN: The *Time* magazine article came out first, and then was it the same year or afterwards?
- JG: I think so, I think it was the same year.
- IN: Because this was 1975 was when the Dewar's profile was released?
- JG: Yeah. Well, let me just—before I forget something else—is that when we finished our mural, Tierra came to the gallery, and they said they were going to be doing an album.
- IN: Well, don't get into the album yet, let's finish—
- JG: That's before this.
- IN: That was before this?
- JG: That's before this.
- IN: Well, but since we're talking about the Dewar's profile . . .

- JG: Okay, but don't let me forget.
- IN: No, I have it here.
- KD: Oh, so it sounds like it's all at the same time, because I have the *Time* magazine article coming out April 7, 1975. So '75 is a really busy year.
- IN: When everything was being acknowledged.
- JG: Yeah. All the acknowledgement. And, well, I never even finished East LA Mural Day.
- IN: Yeah. Well, this is going to go in East LA Mural Day.
- JG: Don't let me forget.
- IN: And so basically, because Mural Day was in '76, so the *Time* magazine article came out about everything that you and Joe and David were doing
- JG: But you see, the story won't tie in. That's why I want to say about Tierra, is that Tierra came down, and as . . . Actually, I always knew them as Steve and Rudy. So they came down, and they asked if we could do their album cover. They were going to be producing their first album. And they asked if we could do their album, and if we could—if they could use my mural. They specifically wanted my mural in their album. And so I said, "Sure." So we started working on it. I started working on the design of it, how to incorporate it and things, and I thought of the nails. They seemed to like the nails. So I thought, you know, we could superimpose the nails on the map.
- IN: Have Charlie Felix do the nail relief.
- JG: Yeah. So we photographed it [the nail relief] at an angle to be able to fit there, [into my design with the United States map]. And the inside, I wanted to get all kinds of—I just wanted it to be really beautiful [and educational about our history]. We did the whole album. And so with that money that I got from there, I took a trip to Mexico. Another trip, with David Lopez this time. And we went all the way down to the border of—what is it? Belize?
- IN: Belize.
- JG: Yeah. So we went all over Yucatán, all over. Just traveled all of Mexico, and it was really wonderful. I mean, we went to Palenque, all over Palenque.
- KD: Was the goal recreation, or to go see more of the historical—
- JG: Oh, go see more. It was always to go see more, photograph—
- IN: So you went to Cancun—
- JG: And to photograph for paintings and stuff like that.
- IN: You went to Cancun when you were—
- JG: Yeah, we went to Cancun when it wasn't Cancun. It was jungle. They were just beginning to start tearing down [the jungle] to build. So we traveled all of Mexico. David took tons of photographs. And again, we went in a brand-new car. David bought—this was David Lopez now. So we went down there.
- IN: And this was before Tierra approached you?
- JG: No, this was after. With the money that I'd made from the Tierra album, I was able to go to Mexico.
- IN: Oh, okay. But describe the album first. So the whole concept—
- JG: Basically, it's a mural.
- IN: But . . . it's your mural, but how did you tie in to the other one?
- JG: Well, I wanted to make sure their faces were there, so I said, "Well, since [TELASOMAF and now] Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] was going to be the first flower that blossomed, I'll have them as the second flowers that are blossoming out of this."
- KD: That's clever. And it—was it your . . . Did you do the illustration, or . . .
- JG: No. David Lopez did the illustration.
- IN: So you were the art director, you were the designer?
- JG: Yeah, the designer.
- IN: So you came up with the concept and the design.
- JG: Yeah. All the concept and the basic design was mine.

- IN: And you art-directed the—
- JG: And then the illustration was done by David and Robert.
- IN: And then Robert Arenivar did the drawings.
- JG: Yeah, Robert.
- IN: And now, when people see the printed album, how does it differ from this work of art?
- JG: Oh, they eliminate the . . . I don't know, they went ahead, you know, as an art director—
- IN: Who's they?
- JG: The musicians, [or someone involved with the group]. As an art director, I'm supposed to oversee the whole thing. They went on their own. The musicians [or someone] went on their own, [I was told,] to the print shop, and the print shop was showing them what it was going to look like. And the separations have different [overlays indicating] the colors, you know, black, blue, green, [red]. And they lifted up one of the colors—the blue, I think they took out the blue—and they said, “Wow, it looks psychedelic, it looks great!”
- KD: Oh, they wanted that.
- JG: So that's—so they printed the whole album like that. And when we saw it, man, we were traumatized. We was bugged, man.
- IN: So the actual—the printed album looks orange, was orange and yellow. Where as you can see, the original artwork is multicolor, multidimensional.
- JG: A lot of this color is a lot like the original mural. I wanted it—I saw it like a fluorescent color that I had, to stand out.
- IN: So a takeoff of your mural. And so when you did the Tierra album, who did you meet?
- JG: Oh, so then I met Phil [Sonnichsen], who wrote all the copy. Yeah, Phil Sonnichsen is an anthropologist.
- IN: Ethnomusicologist.
- JG: Ethnomusicologist. And I had already gone—right at that time, as a matter of fact, he invited me to go on a cruise, on Chapman College, down to Mexico. So I went on the ship—
- IN: And what were you supposed to do on the cruise?
- JG: Well, I took a whole slideshow and a whole lecture on Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], everything that we were doing. And so anyway, there were different people . . . Richard Yñiguez was there, the actor. And Roxanne [Bonilla, I believe,] was there. [Two other actors and Julio Medina, who were all part of a Chicano/Latino theater group, that performed on the ship.]
- IN: Who were the people on the cruise? It was for the board?
- JG: It was the board, board of trustees. So it was just to give them an education and to entertain them also. And it turns out that on the board of trustees, there—two of the people that I saw there started talking about their nephews, Jeff and Carlos Penichet, who have the Bilingual Educational Services. And they said, “My nephews have to see this. They have to see this. They're doing this and that and that.” But anyway, it turned out that later on, I met them. But anyway—
- IN: So Phil Sonnichsen —
- JG: Yeah, so after that, Phil Sonnichsen said, you know, “Every year we have the folklife festival—”
- IN: Where at?
- JG: Washington, DC. “And I'd like you guys to go over there and paint a mural.” And he said, “Normally, murals—artwork is not included, because it's not folk, it's not the art of the people.”
- KD: Right.
- JG: And he says, “But the murals here in East LA have now become part of the culture, so we consider it folk art in a sense too.” So he says, “So I want you guys to paint a mural.” And he says, “If you know any other craftspeople, or anybody else that does anything . . .” And then he brought up a few things. And certain things that he mentioned—and I said, “Oh, you know, my sister does some of that.” So then I talked to my sister Alicia [Licha], and then she started talking about certain things that—she knew more about the folk culture. And so she says, “You know, my mom does all kinds of things with the tortillas and the *masa* and



all that. Maybe she could go.” And when I told Phil, he said, “Yeah, yeah! Oh, she can do that? That would be great.”

IN: And what was your idea for Licha? What was she going to do?

JG: She was supposed to make some piñatas [and other things], because she had been doing—she worked for LA Recreation and Parks, so she had been doing festivals and different things over here. So she was very much into the folk life already and knew a lot of those things. Like I said, she’s the one that said, [and maybe Joe also,] do it in papier-mâché, [for] the arches. And so she had been . . . And then she also organized—what was it, the Olympics? It was an Olympic festival? What was it?

IN: No, it was in Santa Monica.

JG: No, no. Later on. It was the Olympic at Lincoln Park.

IN: Oh, at Plaza de la Raza. That was years later.

JG: Oh, that was—yeah. So anyway, she had been always involved in that. So anyway, it turned out that almost all of the family went up there. And we went in a gigantic plane full of artists and musicians of all different nationalists. You know, Russians and—

IN: So you introduced your family to Phil Sonnichsen.

JG: Yeah. Well, that’s how we all started getting together. So Phil Sonnichsen arranged all this. And so anyway, the reason I was saying, in regards to the Dewar’s profile, that when we were waiting to get on the plane, we were at the airport—

IN: Getting on the plane for—for the Smithsonian mural?

JG: To go to Washington, DC. I was at the airport. And at this time, they had already given the list of where the magazines were going to come out. So at the airport was the first time I saw the Dewar’s profile in *US News and World Report*. So anyways, it was real exciting. But there was one incident that was very funny. You know, I was always looking, trying to find the magazines. And one time, I was coming back from Alhambra somewhere, and I stopped by like two o’clock in the morning at the 7-11 to see what new magazine was out. [*laughter*] It’s such a thrill to look at a magazine stand, open the cover or look at the back—most of them were the inside cover or the back cover.

KD: Wow.

JG: *Newsweek* was the back cover, *Time* magazine was the inside back cover. You know, most of them were the back cover. *Playboy*, I think, was the only one that was right in the center. But anyway, I walk into 7-11, and it was *Apartment Life* magazine, and I open it up, and I said . . . Actually, the back cover, and—I couldn’t resist, I couldn’t resist. It’s like I wanted to tell people, “You see that? That’s me, that’s me!” So I just couldn’t resist. And I laid it down, and I’m paying for it, and I just couldn’t resist, and I told the guy, “See that guy in there? That’s me.” He says, “Yeah, yeah.” Then he points to my brother, “See that guy there? That’s me.” [*laughter*] So he made a joke of it. He never believed me.

IN: So in regards to the American Folklife Festival and Phil Sonnichsen, who actually commissioned you to do the mural?

JG: It was the Smithsonian, [represented by Phil Sonnichsen].

IN: I don’t think you said that it was the Smithsonian Institute?

JG: What it is, [Phil Sonnichsen, representing] the Smithsonian, asked us if we could do a mural on the spot over there, and if they could keep it. And I said, “Well . . .” They weren’t paying us anything. [*laughter*] I said, “No, we do the mural. We’ll . . .” First of all, to be able to do it, I think it was two weeks. I forgot how much time it was. But to be able to do it there on the spot, you know. [I said,] “We may not be able to finish, and it may be a little boring to just draw it, so we’ll start it here, and then we’ll paint it over there. And this way we’ll have a lot of it finished over there, and then we want it back. We want it back for the community.” And so when we went over there, they built an easel with a platform, so it was raised. And if you saw it from far, it’s like, we were the highest thing in all this flat ground, so you could see the mural [from anywhere between the two monuments].

KD: And where was it located?

- JG: Right in between the Washington and the Lincoln monuments. But a storm came up, a windstorm, and you know, that thing was like a sail. And it broke the two by fours, knocked them down, so they had to build them over again. But we were able to put it together again.
- IN: Who's in the picture at the studio?
- JG: That sure looks like you. *[laughter]*
- IN: It could have been me. I'm not sure if that's me or not.
- JG: Oh, that's Josefina there.
- IN: Who is this? This is Josefina Quezada, who was brought to restore the Siqueiros mural. And who's the elderly man with the white hair?
- JG: Oh, Tim Padilla. Tim Padilla was a real famous artist model. Everybody painted Tim Padilla. He was a Chicano, but I mean, all the *gabachos* there, all the classes, he was just—he was being painted by everybody. And he always hung out there at the gallery.
- IN: And after I took my students, I was there all the time. It was an exciting place. So in DC, they featured you in the front of the *Washington Post*?
- JG: Yeah. Actually, we came out twice. The other one, it wasn't featuring us. It was actually—there was—I think it was the *jarocho* group. What's his name? Fermin [Herrera], from Cal State Northridge.
- IN: From Cal State Northridge.
- JG: Yeah. So they were playing the harp, and they were playing it in a little room at Marymount College, or St. . . . I forgot the university we were at.
- IN: Georgetown?
- JG: Georgetown. And so we were living in the university, and it's like all these different cultures. First we were . . . So they were playing the harp, and Eddie and I were standing there looking at it.
- IN: Eddie who?
- JG: Eddie Martinez and I were standing there looking at it, and so we came out on the newspaper the day before and the day after that, and we got this story.
- IN: So who were the artists that worked on this mural?
- JG: Robert [Arenivar], David Botello, Eddie Martinez, Jacob Gutierrez, Joe, and I.
- KD: *Future of Innocence*?
- IN: *The Future of Innocence*. Now, there's two—
- JG: And that's when I first met—all of a sudden, this guy comes over and starts saying—talking all excited, and it was Raul Yzaguirre. Yzaguirre?
- KD: Yzaguirre.
- IN: Yzaguirre.
- JG: Yeah, Raul Yzaguirre.
- IN: From the National Council of la Raza.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: And so now what are these here, these images?
- JG: "Horizontes America" is a magazine that is—the United States puts it out. [The title is *Horizontes USA*—ed.] The United States puts it out as a PR to the world, so they show things that the Americans are doing. So anyway—
- IN: But this is primarily to Latin America, isn't it?
- JG: Yeah, yeah, Latin America.
- KD: Yeah, in Spanish.
- IN: And then what is this here?
- JG: So that was the cover of—
- IN: Actually, it was a poster.
- JG: Yeah, it was a poster. Actually, the poster was in black and white, but Irma and I made it in color in order to use it in our slide show and make it more exciting. But it was the cover to the Berlin festival, where

the Chicano art exhibit traveled all over. And the other thing I forgot to say is that towards the beginning, [the] real early [years of] the gallery, the World Peace Congress came to the gallery. And the World Peace Congress is an organization that was putting together an art exhibit at the Pushkin museum in Russia of third-world art. So they came to the gallery. And at that time, a lot of the artists weren't doing a lot of Chicano stuff yet. Robert had done the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—

KD: Right.

JG: Esperanza had a Mexican drawing—it was a drawing, a print. And Ray Aragon, he had a drawing of, like, Model T's with tents, living in the top of the Depression and all that. So it looked like Chicanos struggling at that time. And then my brother-in-law Chito, Ignacio Gomez, had a drawing, it looked like a serpent. Now, that one was more Mexican. But we couldn't get any of the other artists that had a Chicano theme. Now, with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, we told them, this is the Mexicans struggling to achieve things in life. And so every one of those four, we made it into a Chicano theme. So those were the four that went to the Pushkin museum in Russia. So those were exhibited there. And the other artists weren't—you know, they lost out because they weren't doing Mexican stuff. It's just like me with—what's his name—Billy Ward.

IN: Right, you weren't singing Mexican songs. So now the *Future of Innocence* mural, did the mural itself travel throughout with the Berlin festival?

JG: Yeah. It traveled for a long time.

IN: For about two years?

JG: Yeah, throughout [Germany]. And then when it came back from—actually, it first came back from—it toured from Washington, cross-country to LA.

IN: And I think it toured the US for two years?

JG: I don't know for how long.

IN: For quite a while?

JG: [Not too long.] So anyway, when it came back, for the unveiling—

KD: From the Smithsonian?

JG: Yeah, the Smithsonian mural. When it came back, the unveiling was at East LA College, in the auditorium. So they had all the mariachis, and all the *folklórico* groups and everything, and as the curtains are opening, you know, the music is starting, and it's just really exciting. And the mural was displayed on top of the stage—

IN: Behind the curtains.

JG: Behind the curtains. So all of a sudden, the music starts, and the curtains start opening. And if you can just imagine—you know, this thing was the size of the stage.

IN: Was thirty feet by ten feet.

JG: And all of a sudden, you see the curtain open like this, and it's opening, and the music is going, and I'll tell you, that was quite an experience. It reminded me so much of King Kong, when the curtain opens up, and you say, "Wow, that was a really wonderful experience."

IN: So it was actually a Chicano exhibit that traveled throughout Germany, and your [Smithsonian] mural was included and featured for the publicity with the program and the poster, [a few years after the Smithsonian mural was exhibited at East LA College].

JG: Yeah. Uh-huh.

IN: And so after all of this, that's when East LA Day came from.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Going back to East LA Day. And so you said, first they started approaching you wanting to do it as a fundraiser for the Boys and Girls Club?

JG: Yeah. That's what it was originally, it was a fundraiser for them. So anyway, that's when I decided, you know, got to try and—first of all, it was my dream. The tours are coming in, I mean, Carolyn Murray, who was the editor of [the *Los Angeles Times*] *Home Magazine*, was down at the gallery quite a bit, we were

planning it out. So we walked down—and she was so nice—and we walked down First and she says how beautiful this is and this is. And she’s saying, you know, “I don’t understand why people are so afraid of coming down here,” and all that. So anyway, we started organizing it, and I started thinking, “I’ve got to make the most of this.” So I got a three-month—a thirty-day—

IN: You said [a] ninety-day loan.

JG: Ninety-day loan, yeah, [for three hundred dollars], to be able to set up a framing area, to publish a booklet that talked about our murals. I wouldn’t dare do anything on any other murals, because I had learned that the artists always felt that they were getting ripped off. You know, if you mentioned their name, they’re getting ripped off. So I’m not about to use anybody’s mural, or anything about anybody else. [For the same reason, in 1975, I turned down an offer to collaborate on what would have been the first Chicano mural book, by Elaine Partnow, writer of *The Quotable Women*, written up in *People* magazine, and Turner Browne, a published photographer who both worked with me on our movie, *Only Once in a Lifetime*.]

IN: Now, when you came out in *Time* magazine, what happened? You got a—

JG: Oh, our lives were threatened. We were the first ones that were—to my knowledge, we were the first artists that got international recognition.

KD: And so people were unhappy with that? [laughter]

JG: Well, some—

IN: So [some] artists were unhappy with that.

JG: No, we were threatened. Our lives were threatened. Someone said, “There’s this person that has a gun saying he’s going to kill you guys.” Wow, jeez. But anyway, you know, it’s . . . Later on, some way or another, we found out. And I don’t know what happened, but it turns out that he left LA.

IN: And then once all the other artists started getting recognition?

JG: Yeah, then everything was okay. [laughter] I mean, you figure, first it was *Time* magazine, and then the Dewar’s profile that came out, and then—what’s his name, Jesús Treviño did—

KD: He did the documentary on *América Tropical*?

JG: Yeah. But, he did all—he had a TV show.

KD: Oh, right, the TV show that he had on Channel 28.

IN: And he featured you and your mural, right?

JG: Well, there was a whole show on us. I forgot the name of it. Impacto? [Actually, it was *Accion Chicano*.]

KD: Yeah. I think it’s Impacto? [It’s *Accion Chicano*.]

JG: And so first it came out in LA, and then I think it came out nationally. So we were getting [a lot of media]—and then we were on the *Today Show*, I came out on the *Today Show*. So we were getting some very good coverage. So you know, at the beginning it was pretty touchy, but then everybody started getting coverage, and now we relaxed.

IN: And so people were actually coming from Europe and Canada and Latin America—

JG: Oh, yeah. We were getting bused—there was this one Anglo woman who had a bus tour [company], and she started regularly setting up tours. Now, we charged her more [than the schools], because she had European people and everybody, that we’d take throughout East LA to see the [mural] tours. And I started also getting together with restaurants, because I wanted to start lining up [the bus tours] with them to be able to go into restaurants. I was trying to think how to really make the most of it.

KD: Right. How to get the dollar in the community, yeah.

JG: Yeah. We had sales and all of these different type of things. But then, after the Dewar’s profile and the magazine article, then Alex came to me, and I was going to mention something else, but I forget. But anyway, Alex—

IN: You were going to talk about the movie? Alex Grattan—oh, why don’t you get into East LA Day first?

JG: Oh, oh, yeah. Okay.

KD: Well, is there much more? I’m worried about time.

IN: No, we’re almost done. We’re almost done.

- JG: Yeah, in East LA Day, so I was thinking, you know, how to make the [the most of it]. So I got that loan, and I set up the framing department, and I printed the little booklet [titled *Freedom of Expression*, explaining the meaning of all our murals]. And started framing all of the little Christmas cards and things, so—how to make some fast money on it. But the other thing is, I wanted to make sure that my dream was going to be announced [officially—East LA being a tourist attraction]. You know, my dream was [the] “East LA to Tourist Attraction” [project]. And I wanted everybody to recognize it. So I went to the mayor. I went to—it was a deputy mayor . . . Davis—
- IN: Grace Montañez Davis.
- JG: Yes, Davis. And we had a great relationship. And I told her, “I would like to be able to have the mayor declare East LA Mural Day, and I would like to be able to have him give certificates [honoring] all the artists who have done five or more murals in East LA.”
- KD: Wow.
- JG: So I went to her, then I went to Gloria Molina, which was—she was [Assemblyman] Art Torres’s [chief of staff]. So I went to Gloria, talked to her about it, and she says, “Look, what I’ll do is I’ll get one that both Art Torres and [Assemblyman] Richard Alatorre will sign.” And then I went to—her name at that time, it was Gil [Gerakos], and it was Lorraine Alvarez, who were [Supervisor Ed] Edelman’s—
- IN: Field reps?
- KD: Field reps.
- JG: And we developed a nice relationship, because Edelman was running just about that time, so he was coming in [to the studio], you know, campaigning. So anyway, I went to all of them and I said, “I want to be able to honor all of the artists who did five or more murals.” Because I couldn’t say “all of them,” because there were so many of them that I couldn’t—it would take me forever to find out. And if the artists were doing five or more, most of them I already knew. And I knew for sure that these were doing the . . . So I gave them a list of all of the artists. And I didn’t know they were going to do this, but—
- KD: Oh, I see.
- JG: Sort of like a proclamation and all that. But besides this, I got certificates from all of them. And then I went also to Ed Avila, with Congressman [Edward] Roybal, and I said, you know, “I want certificates.” And he says, “Well, we’re not—we don’t usually give certificates. But what we do is we submit them to the . . .” What do you call it?
- IN: The Congressional Record?
- JG: “The Congressional Record. So we could be able to put that in there.” So East LA Mural Day, I was loaded down with all of these certificates. Grace Montañez Davis came to the gallery and handed out the certificates to everybody who was there, and I was on a high. This was my glorious day. This was the day I was walking out and floating in [a] cloud all day, saying, “I did it, I did it. I did it.” I was so excited.
- IN: So it was Metro Media [Channel 11], RTD, the Goodyear blimp—
- JG: Yeah. They said—the Goodyear blimp, Metro Media Television. RTD had a special bus route. The *Los Angeles Times* did this whole article. And it was awesome. Tons of people just coming in, coming in, and they charged everybody. We didn’t charge. They charged, so they raised money for the Boys’ Club.
- IN: And so there’s just a little bit more to conclude. So—
- JG: Oh, Vidal Sassoon, yeah.
- IN: Yeah. So a lot of celebrities besides the community educators, the media, prominent people, and celebrities started coming in. Ray Andrade, with Justicia [a group focusing on eliminating Latino stereotypes in the media], he got you to do a mural for *Chico and the Man*.
- JG: Yeah, so what happened there is that *Chico and the Man* was a show that they were working on putting on the air. And I didn’t know too much about it then, but one day we were at the gallery, and this whole troop of people come in. And they were—and Ray’s bringing them in. Ray brought in Ricardo Montalbán, Henry Darrow. He brought presidents of television stations, you know. Between Ray and Pete—but Ray was pretty powerful. So anyway, and he was always dressed real casual, you know. He was a militant, so he

wasn't dressed in the suit. And any party that you went with the Justicia, they always had TVs lined up, and somebody was always monitoring the images, to find out what were the Latino images [being aired].

KD: Yeah.

JG: So it was very interesting. So all of a sudden, all of these people come into the gallery, and who in the heck are they? So he starts introducing us, and he says, "This is Jimmy Komack, the producer of this show that we're working on, going to be *Chico and the Man*. And this is Freddie Prinze, he's going to be the star of the show, and this is . . ." He says, "This is Jack Albertson, he's going to be the star of the show, and this is his wife." And so anyway, all of these different people, he was introducing me to all of these people. I don't know who they—

[break in audio]

KD: The second side of tape 9, November 18, 2007, with Johnny Gonzalez. Go ahead.

JG: So I don't know who they are. And as I'm carving—actually, I was carving a wood sign for Casa Maravilla at that time—and I was working on it, and Jack Albertson is standing there. I had no idea who he was. He looked familiar, but I had no idea who he was. Yeah. Great suit, a really—not a suit, it was a sports coat, beautiful sports coat. So anyway, they're all in there, and Jack Albertson says—he's looking at me carving, and I tell him, "You look familiar." And he says, "Did you see the Poseidon Adventure?" "Oh-h." [laughter] And then Jimmy Komack, the producer of the show . . . David's in the graphic room, and we had like a little door, because people always wanted to go in there and look at the artist at work, but they would take up our time. So we had a little door so they wouldn't go into the graphic room, because we had more private stuff, projects that were coming up. And Jimmy Komack was ready to walk in, and David says, "I'm sorry, you can't come in here." [laughter]

IN: So Ray Andrade hooked you up with NBC Studios?

JG: Yeah, so Ray Andrade said, "I want Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] to do the elephant doors." If you switch the doors, they're like this, if you went like this on both sides, it would be *Sanford and Son*. So anyway, he says, "I want them to do it." And they put up a big protest. They said, "No, it's the scenic artist union," and all this other stuff, all this other stuff. "They're going to rally."

KD: Oh, right, right.

JG: So anyway, he pushed on it, and they gave us a waiver. So we went over there, Robert and I, and we did the doors.

IN: So that's Robert Arenivar, Johnny Gonzalez, and Ray Andrade.

KD: And then Vidal Sassoon has a show there as well, to announce a cut, a new hairstyle? [laughter]

JG: Yeah. One day, this guy comes in and is looking at the gallery and all of that, and he says, you know, "I represent the hairstylist Vidal Sassoon." "So who's he?" [laughter] And he says, "He got—he's known for having cut the Beatles' hair, and also for Mia Farrow." And I said, "Oh, oh. That's interesting." And [he] said, "He's interested in doing something with you guys." I said, "Oh, that's nice." So he says, you know, he's world-known and all of this other—got these products. And I said, "Oh, nice." I said, "Well, it's an opportunity to get some more promotion. So anyway, we talked about it and said, "Okay, what he—oh, he saw it in the news." He saw it in one of the news—and on the news, one of the news [stations], they showed the monument that we were going to be doing for TELACU [Casa Maravilla], for some fountain and all that. So between Robert, Eddie, and all of us, we were all working on it. It was a Plasticine statue of a lot of bodies on top of a pyramid. It was very interesting. So when they did . . . One of the times that they were doing—I think they were doing the weather—they shot it, and then they showed that. And he said, "He saw your monument, and he's interested in coming." And I think he came and he saw it, and he said, "Whoa." Then he decided, "I'm going to create a new hairstyle due to your inspiration." So he created the pyramid cut, called it the pyramid cut. He said, "So what I'd like to do is I'd like to introduce it here at the gallery." And so they wanted to set up a whole production, so, they had all kinds of models dressed in some type of a gown, and they had feathers and all kinds of things—



IN: To look like Aztec princesses.

JG: Yeah. And then they had a platform, and they were all carrying the platform with the statue on top of it. And then they had the model coming out. But anyway, they had a major production. So it came out, and all of the media was there. All the media was there, and it came out all over the world. Came out all over the world, in the fashion world.

KD: And did it actually bring in money to Goez, or was it just—

JG: Well, it brought more prominence.

KD: Prominence, yeah.

JG: Prominent people were beginning to come in, yeah. Prominent people were beginning to come in. So anyway, it got all kinds of publicity. And then Vidal Sassoon says, “Well, as the results of this, I’d like to give you five scholarships.” I think he said, “Five scholarships, you can give them to anybody, to go to my school.” So I said, “Gee, just to give them to . . .” I said, “I’d rather have a hairstyling contest, so that—you know, I don’t want to just give them away, I want to make the most of it.”

IN: So your sister [Mela—Imelda] was a beautician, so you could have given it to her and her friends.

JG: Yeah, so my sister was a beautician, and she was—I don’t know how much she was doing anymore. But anyway, I wanted to make the most of it.

IN: You wanted to motivate the community.

JG: Yeah. So anyway, I thought we could have a hairstyling contest, and Vidal Sassoon will be the judge and he’ll come back again. So anyway, I told him about it, and they said, “Sure.” So anyway, we rounded up—we sent up notices, press releases, whatever, to a lot of beauticians to come down. [Vidal Sassoon and I were interviewed by Fernando Del Rio on his KHJ Channel 9 television talk show.] And it was interesting, you know, some of the ones right down the street wouldn’t come down, and I had to go over to them, say, “How come you’re not coming?” They were a little intimidated by it. But they were some of them who were very confident, like Yolanda Aguilar, who had her salon in the Arco Plaza, the Arco Towers. So anyway, she came down. There were a few of them that came down. And one of the contestants was Patssi Valdez, because she was working with her mom at her salon. So Patssi got that, and she got involved through hair instead of through the art. So anyway, they had the competition, and Fernando Romero was from Mexico, and he was Vidal Sassoon’s artistic director, and his brother was Vidal Sassoon’s architect. So he had two Mexicanos that were working with him. So anyway, we had the contest, and again, all kinds of media and all that. And it turned out that Yolanda won first place. And Patssi could have won first place, but because she used hairspray, she didn’t win first place.

IN: Because Vidal Sassoon was into the natural look.

JG: Yeah, wanted the natural look. So anyway, we got tons of publicity. [That show inspired me to then create a cost-effective advertising campaign, the Girl of the Month Beauty Contest, to market and showcase East LA fashion professionals, businesses, models, and sponsors.] But then we did also some shows with KCET, and that brought in some key people.

I remember after doing—we [and some of the artists] donated for Christmas some art. And right after that, I remember this beautiful Mercedes coming in, [parking in front,] and this elderly man and woman coming out. And they walk in and they said—the first thing they said is, “Where’s your pen and ink artist?” That’s the first thing they said. And we said, “Well, he’s working back there.” So anyway, they went back, and as they’re going by, they’re saying, “I want that one, I want that one, I want that one, I want that one, that one, that one, that one.” And they were all Robert’s drawings, except for one guy who did a cubistic—his name was Gonzalez [I think, Robert], and he did some type of cubistic [surrealistic painting]. So they took one painting and tons of Robert’s. And then they said, “We’re going to leave it here. Could you frame them for us, and could you deliver them?” And he lived in Palm Springs.

KD: My goodness.

JG: And so he says, “When you deliver them, if you and Robert come over to the house, you know, I want to show you my collection, and treat you to dinner, lunch, whatever.” So anyway, we framed them, and

Robert and I went and dropped them off, and went into his house. And, God, it was wall to wall—all these famous artists that he had. Just wall-to-wall artwork. And then you walk to his yard, and he has gigantic [bronze] sculpture pieces all out in the yard. And then he says, “Some of these, I’ll probably take to . . .” His house in England, his summer home in England, or winter home in England, whatever it was. But he had a home in England, and then his home in Palm Springs. [laughter]

IN: And so besides all of these prominent people—

JG: Oh, I wanted to mention—there was a guy by the name of George Stembra, who was the librarian for St. Vincent’s Hospital. He came in and he saw Robert’s artwork, and probably for years, he supported Robert. He would come in, buy Robert’s artwork, and says, “Next week, I’ll come and pick it up framed.” So we’d frame it, and after the next week, he’d come in, pick it up, and select another one. It’s like [almost] every Sunday he was coming in, and then he started bringing people.

IN: And he was paying how much for Robert’s art?

JG: Oh, [as much as] three hundred dollars for [some of] the drawings.

KD: Oh, my God.

IN: So besides all of these prominent people, in 1981 a corporation came to the gallery.

JG: Yeah, in [about 1976]. One of the other things is, RJ Reynolds had a collection of Mexican masks. And they came down, and they wanted to do the exhibit there at the gallery. And when they looked around at the whole gallery—they were so excited about doing it there. But when they saw all these open skylights—the security wasn’t very good there—and they said, “Gee, you know, because of that, I don’t think we’ll be able to do it.” So anyway, we didn’t do it there. But anyway, for the—in 1970—

IN: Well, no, actually, this was ’81 when it came out—

JG: Oh, 1980, yeah. Joe had gotten together with Rudy Saenz, who was the advertising—marketing director at Seven-Up—local Seven-Up. And so they started talking about—he started saying, you know, “I’d like to be able to do something with Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], to feature the different artists.” And so anyway, he said, “I’d like to do a calendar and be able to give those away at the markets, and wherever anybody who buys two of the big sodas.” And so anyway, they were working on it, and when I saw it, I said, “Well, let me design it.” So I started designing it, and I put my mural [*The Birth of Our Art*] on top, and then I started designing it to include all the other artists. And so at that time, I think Maria [Contreras-Sweet] had just started there, and I think she was [director of public affairs and later became] vice-president [of government affairs], and that’s when we first met her. So then Art—his name was Art [Lopez], the printer who did the map—so then we gave the job to Art to do the calendars. I thought it would be a great way to repay him for the maps.

IN: The printing.

JG: The printing on this. And so they printed three hundred thousand of them, and they gave them away to . . . And so what happened is that for the dedication, unveiling of this, all of the executives came down from back east. I don’t know, they’re on there. [Roy Breneman, vice president of marketing services of the Seven-Up/RC Bottling Company of Southern California, Inc., and Barton Brodtkin, business unit president and general manager of Westinghouse Beverage Group.]

IN: [inaudible]

JG: And so anyway—

IN: All of the artists.

JG: At this point, at this event, is when Irma walked into the gallery again after I hadn’t seen her in eight years. She went to the post office down the street and walked into the gallery. And we started—

IN: That’s when we got together again. And they always made me, and I know everybody else, just feel like it was our home, that we were welcome no matter what. And I had no idea this event was going on, and they just welcomed me with open arms. And the whole community was there again. And so this was from—now that I see—know the history of Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], it’s like this is when they were

really starting to work with corporate America to use the power of the marketing dollar to continue to promote the Mexican culture.

JG: Well, the 1980 census came out. That's when they saw that—

KD: Yeah, everybody saw the potential.

IN: And is this where you started using the "Don Juan"?

JG: Yeah, it's the first time I ever used "Don Juan."

KD: Yeah, because this says "Don Juan" at the bottom.

JG: Yeah, the first time I ever used "Don Juan."

IN: Yeah. And so then besides working with Seven-Up, you were—these were something else. But this is—these are some things that you designed when you were with the gallery. Not this, but these two things for Domingos Alegres. [TELACU's Domingos Alegres presented free programs of music and dance in Belvedere Park—ed.] You were designing stationery, you were designing business cards for different companies. And then you were also designing—always using the Mexican theme for different restaurants, this was something we did later. But then you could see the Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] brochure, and these were the—your planters.

JG: Yeah.

KD: The planters, yeah.

IN: The Aztec heads, designs.

JG: So there's the before and the after. That's David.

IN: And then here's Robert working on the drawings of the First Street Store. And so again, these were some of the things that he did. And I was just very fortunate. You know, I studied at Otis Art Institute, but no way would I compare myself to any of these artists. I mean, I was—

JG: Well, one thing, I forgot about the film festival that we had.

IN: Oh, okay. I was just going to say, since we're here, is that I was primarily an educator, using art to motivate kids to be proud of their history and culture. And so Cal State LA had the Feria de la Raza, and Juan/Johnny, did Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] participate in the Feria de la Raza?

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah.

IN: So what did you guys do at the Feria de la Raza?

JG: Well, we put on shows, art shows.

IN: And so I had an exhibit of all my students' art that I had talked to you about—the panoramic mock fresco murals and the *masa* sculptures. And so this company, Con Sabor Latino, Yukio—I forget his last name [Yukio Iwamasa], he was Japanese American, but he was partnered with Robert Martinez, and they formed a greeting card company, Con Sabor Latino. And so he asked me to be one of the artists. This one . . . I designed a greeting card with my *masa* sculpture, and I was included with all of these prominent artists. It was quite an exciting experience. But these were all—

JG: So these were all our artists, David Negrón—

IN: These were all artists from Juan/Johnny's gallery.

JG: Esperanza, Eddie Martinez, [*inaudible*].

IN: So Yukio—Yukio had approached you, right, Juan/Johnny?

JG: Carlos Venegas—

IN: Juan/Johnny, Yukio had approached you.

JG: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

IN: And what did he ask you?

JG: He asked if I could give him artists to be able to do the Christmas cards.

IN: So you just gave him the names of all your artists.

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: Did you get any payment in return?

JG: No, we didn't.

- IN: So you were just excited about sharing the artists with even other business.
- JG: Oh, yeah. We just wanted to make things happen.
- IN: And so they featured all of these artists—
- JG: You see, this is Carlos's wire. That's one that he did with wires.
- IN: Oh, that's the copper wire relief with the enamel paint. And so you have Eddie Martinez and David Negrón and Ray Aragon and Esperanza Martinez. Josefina Quezada. All of these different artists that were featured. And I was just very honored to be part of it. But as an educator, I always believed in the importance of promoting our history and culture, so I became the top salesperson for Con Sabor Latino, helping them to really promote and distribute the greeting cards. And then you were doing the greeting cards yourself out of Goez [Publishing], right?
- JG: Yeah that's when we started publishing our own. That's when we put Goez Publishing together, David and I.
- IN: And so then you were going to talk about the film festival.
- JG: Yeah, we had a—that was pretty early on, pretty early too, is that we—there were so many people in the media, so many Chicanos, real Chicanos that were coming into the gallery, who were doing some type of documentaries, or—they worked in the media, they were photographers and producers. So we were getting so much coverage that also, I had met Bill Meléndez, I met Johnny Alonzo, the cinematographer for *Chinatown*.
- IN: [inaudible]
- JG: Tony Calderon. So a lot of people in film were now beginning to come in. So I started thinking, "Wow," you know, "we should have some type of film festival here." So I started coordinating it. So in the back room, we'll be showing films, and in the front room, the gallery space will be all photographs of Chicanos in the film industry. So there was one, Moises Medina, I think his name was, who shot the photograph for the invitation. It was a little girl from South America, beautiful little girl. But anyway, it became so popular, somebody broke into our office to get all of them, they took all of the invitations. Some way or another, we lost them all. But anyway, we were able to send it out to everybody, so everybody saw them. And Moises later worked in our movie also, *Only Once in a Lifetime*. But anyway, that first exhibit, nobody had movies yet. There was no movies, [no Chicano motion pictures yet, that we knew of].
- IN: They were all documentaries?
- JG: They were all documentaries. So Jesús Treviño was working on *Accion Chicano* and others, and Mocte was working on documentaries.
- IN: Moctesuma Esparza?
- JG: Yeah, Moctesuma Esparza. And Johnny Alonzo was a cinematographer, but he wasn't a producer. And Tony Calderon actually—Tony Calderon was a producer, but I don't know if he had done it yet, and I don't know if I really had met him at that time. So I'm not sure. [Yes, Tony Calderon was part of the film exhibition.] But I know that, I think, Johnny also let us use his name, to be able to put it on the invite. And then Bill Meléndez also, with *Peanuts*, and Moctesuma Esparza, Jesús Treviño, David Sandoval, Rudy Vargas. [And also Jose Luis Ruiz, Nettie Peña, Tony Rodriguez, Oscar Castillo, David Ochoa and Ray Gonzales, David Lopez, Greg Moran, Lynda Rivera, Charles Calderon, Luis Garza, Oscar Castillo, George Rodriguez, Rudy Rodriguez, Jose Luis Sedano, Art Lopez, Alvaro Lopez, Carlos Quintero, Ray Belis, Frank Gutierrez, and Manuel Barrera Jr.] I think the [Penichets] also. [Actually, they weren't.]

So anyway, they all got involved. And everybody was showing films, and we had a whole photography exhibit on all the different artists. And Esperanza, Mocte's wife [now, but not then], Moctesuma Esparza's wife, her photograph was the one that sold the most. She was real popular. She was a cinematographer, a very talented woman. So anyway, that was a nice event. And not much longer after that is when we started all working on being able to do films.

IN: So to kind of conclude with Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], as a—with all of this original work, prominent people were coming into the community, but the majority of people who lived in the community—you mentioned they couldn't afford the artwork, right?

JG: Yeah.

IN: And so was that what gave you the idea to start publishing posters? Because there was—what happened that got you into the idea of doing posters? Because some non-profit organization came to you—

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah. It was Ray—I forget his name. Ray Torres came—this was pretty early in the game. Ray—his first name was Ray. He came, and he said, “We have a . . .” He was from a youth center [or program. It might have been called “Si Se Puede.”] And he says, “I have a printer that’s willing to do a poster free of charge for us. Color, all color.” And he says, “So, but we don’t have money to hire an artist.” So he says, “Do you have some young artist, or someone who’s trying to get started, that might be interested in doing a poster for us?” And I thought, “They’re going to print it in color.” And I mean, even quality artists would be willing to do this. So then I thought, “Well, we’ve got to get a good artist.” So then I thought of my brother-in-law, because he’s an illustrator, specifically an illustrator. So then I called him up and I told him about it, and he says, “Wow.”

IN: Ignacio Gomez.

JG: Ignacio Gomez. And he says, “Oh, boy, yeah, that would be great,” because it would be an opportunity to get one of his [personal] works published. So anyway, Ray and I went down there to the house and started discussing the concept and all that of—to be able to do this first Chicano poster [that we knew of]. So that was the poster, *Si Se Puede*. I don’t know if you ever saw it. It’s a little boy holding a book.

IN: Yeah.

JG: And then again, the Aztec warrior and the Spaniard, and on the side, the ghosts of the—

IN: And who actually printed it?

JG: I don’t know which printer—

IN: It wasn’t Penichet who printed it?

JG: No, no, it wasn’t Penichet. [He’s not a printer.]

IN: Oh, oh. Okay.

JG: No, it was—he had his printer, so they printed tons of it. So then they shared on—Ray and the organization took out so many, and then Chito got so many.

IN: And then also you had someone from Kenya who came to you.

JG: Oh, yeah, we got a call one time, and they said, “So is this the Gonzalez brothers’ gallery?” “Yes, it is.” They said, “Oh, my gosh, finally, finally I found you guys!” He said, “I’ve been calling newspapers. I’ve been calling everybody for the Gonzalez gallery,” and you know, it’s not the Gonzalez, it’s Goetz. But our Dewar’s profile says “Gonzalez.” It doesn’t say anything about the [Goetz Art Studios and] Gallery. So anyway, this guy had been looking for us, he said, for almost three months, and he happened to be—he was black. He was from Kenya, and he happened to be the president of a Boston bank or something like that [located on a top floor in the Arco Tower].

And so anyway, he came down, and he wanted to buy Mexican art. And he bought—I think he bought a David Negrón. I think it was a painting of Tim Padilla in a *charro* outfit sitting by a fireplace or something. I think that—I’m not too sure. But anyway, he was looking specifically for Mexican art, something that looked like Zapata. And then he invited us down to his house, and his house was all decorated with African art and cultural things from Africa, but it was all African. Beautiful, beautiful. And then they cooked—they had an African dinner. Really, really nice. And he started saying that Zapata was their hero, because after Zapata had the battle, and they had the independence of the revolution and all that. And he said that’s what motivated Kenya to fight for their independence. So that’s what he said. So I never really compared that.

KD: So how—you go from Goetz to doing other work, and that happens in the ’80s?

JG: That happened in the [late] ’70s, actually, when I started, little by little, and going into other areas.

KD: The commercial projects?

JG: It was the movie.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: It was the movie. The Dewar's profile, some guy—

IN: This was the original Dewar's profile.

JG: Some guy—we got a call, and he says, you know, "My name is Alex Grattan—Grattan," he said. And he says, "I want to talk to you. I saw your article in *Time* magazine. I was out in Colombia, South America." And he says, "I want to talk to you about the possibilities of working on putting a movie together with me about an [Chicano] artist in East LA." So right away, I thought, "A movie! This is a great way to promote East LA." That was my intention all the time. I was into marketing the community. I just wanted to market our culture, our community. I wanted to really [showcase East LA], the community, to start having pride. [I saw this movie as another tool, like TELASOMAF and Goez Art Studios and Gallery, to continue my work on my "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project, while continuing to promote Goez.] And so anyway, I said, "That sounds very interesting. Come on down."

And then he came down, and he came down with about three people. And they had a camera and everything, and I don't know what they were shooting. But anyway, he started talking to me. He says, "I've got a script about an [Chicano] artist in East LA that . . . And I'd like to see, would you be interested in working with me in putting this film together?" And I said, "Sure, sure." So anyway, he gave me the script. I started reading it, and the script was about an artist who . . . Now, Alex was originally from Texas. His mother was Mexican and his father was Irish. And he moved to LA. He was originally married to some rich woman in Texas, but he wanted to be an artist, and they weren't agreeing on things, so he came to LA. And he was basically working in Hollywood. He wasn't in touch with the Chicano community at all. And so anyway, I said, "Okay, I'll start working." I read the script, and the script talked about this artist who was—things weren't going good for him. And then—

IN: Who was the hero? Who was going to rescue him?

JG: Yeah, well, basically, what was in the script that I didn't like is he had an Anglo girlfriend and an Irish priest that were going to save him [the artist]. So after I read it, I told him, "Alex, if I'm going to work with you on this, we can't have white people saving the Mexican. So we've got to get rid of them." And at that time, he happened to start dating a Chicana—and just right about the same time, he met her. And that happened to be Maria Casillas, who is now with [the] Families and Schools [program]. So Maria Casillas—

IN: She was also—

JG: She was a principal at that time.

IN: And she was assistant superintendent for LA Unified—

JG: Later on, yeah. So anyway, she then also pushed on getting—making the woman a Chicana, and an educator.

IN: Bilingual educator.

JG: Yeah. And so we got rid of the Irish priest, and we made the white woman a Chicana, bilingual educator. So then I said, "Okay," you know. So we started working on . . . First of all, I started introducing him to the community. And I took him first to Bobby Morones, called him Blackie Morones, and Bobby was working at Universal at that time [as a casting director]. And Bobby first said he was concerned. "Do you know this guy?" and all this other stuff. "You've got to be careful." And I said, "No, he seems to be cool and all that, but I'll be cautious no matter what." [Once Bobby got to know Alex he felt more comfortable. Actually before I started putting any time into this.] And then I took him to see—I think, David Garcia, who is . . . Frank Cruz, the reporter at the time, his cousin, who was a producer at Universal. And was producing movies at that time. So I took him to David, and David says, "Well, in order to be able to get the movie done, it's—there's no way you could do it under one million dollars, to get the movie done." So anyway, we just started putting our corporation together. Alex always liked the *Treasure of [the] Sierra Madre*. He was a



Humphrey Bogart fan. So we called our movie company Sierra Madre Motion Picture Company, [with Alex as president and myself as vice president].

IN: And you designed the logo, and—

JG: Yeah, so then I designed the logo.

IN: And just quickly, briefly, what is the symbolism of the logo?

JG: The logo is, of course, the Mexican eagle devouring the serpent. The serpent is represented by the reel, the film reel. So then we started putting a board together. So I brought Percy in as the attorney, Percy Duran as the attorney, and I brought—

IN: Who later became commissioner of public works [and who I went to Assumption School with].

JG: Yeah. And then I brought in [John Avila] from Capitol Records, that I went to [Salesian] school with. He was now an accountant, as the accountant for . . . And so Maria was secretary. And then—

IN: What was her name, last [name]?

JG: Maria Casillas. Maria Casillas.

IN: Oh, Maria Casillas. Okay.

JG: Yeah. And then there was a—I wanted to start getting together with maybe some of the business community. So I went to—I think the name was [Hank] Hernandez. He had a security firm. And then he said also, “You’ve got to check up, check him up.” So anyway, and I said, “Well, don’t worry about it, it’s not, [he’s cool].” But anyway, he was in security, and so we were putting a package together, in regards to give us credibility and have support, so [that] this corporation could go out and be able to solicit for money.

At that time, Universal Studios was putting out a program called Universal New Ventures, and they were going to be funding minority projects. [MCA New Ventures was an investment company focusing on minority-owned small businesses—ed.] And they had this gigantic meeting at Universal Studios, one of the offices over there. Big auditorium, whatever it was. And the room was full of minorities, and full of . . . And I remember the reporter from Channel 5, the one that passed away, I forget his name. He had an Irish name, [but was black]. So he was there. And I remember this star, this guy that’s become—well, anyway, an actor who’s become a big star now. They were there. And they were saying, “This is a way to be able to get funded for your program.” It was programs for the entertainment industry, and they were saying, “Right now, we already have a company that’s doing popcorn for films.” I said, “Big deal,” you know.

So anyway, we submitted our proposal and everything, and they said that we had been selected as one of the programs that [they were] going to fund. So we’re waiting, and they’re giving us the run-around, and it’s taking forever, and nothing ever happened. So then we went to TELACU, to talk to David, but movies was something to new for them.

IN: David Lizárraga.

JG: David Lizárraga. But we kept on working on developing it more and more. And then it turns out that Alex’s brother Tommy, Tommy Grattan, had some business partners from back east. They were a couple of brothers who were grandsons of somebody that owned a lot of things on the boardwalk out in Atlanta. And so anyway, they came in, and they started putting in the initial money. So now we had—so actually, yeah, so they were coming in for that. But we still needed more money, and we still needed ways of being able to get the movie done. So as we’re looking around, I’m thinking, well, I’m thinking, “Maybe Mocte, Mocte-suma Esparza, who was part of our film festival . . .”

And at that time, and even later, we later found out that Mocte’s father was actually—Esparza, from my grandmother’s side, Esparza. And Mocte’s mom [Ester] was actually raised, when they were little girls, with my mom [in a little town in Mexico called Villa Hidalgo. where they all lived. So actually my mom knew Mocte’s mother better than she even knew her distant cousin, Mocte’s dad. But anyway, she had a relationship with both of his parents as a child. When we found out, Mocte came over to our house with his Dad and aunt], and we spent Christmas with the family. So my mom, his aunt, and his dad were just really able to reminisce about all the old times.

What it is, is that Mocte's mom and my mom were living in Villa Hidalgo when they were kids, and when the Battle of Los Cristeros happened, it was a traumatic thing that happened there, because it was a little town [and] a major battle happened. So my mom and my grandmother got away as quick as possible, and they left to Aguascalientes. So from then on, she didn't see her [Mocte's mom] anymore. But then, years later, my grandfather was working [delivering milk] for some convent that took care of old people. And it was like a school, also, for girls, a combination, and they had nuns there. So when she—my mom—went there, it turns out that Mocte's mom was there [also]. So they saw again each other when they were teenagers. But then when that split up, then Mocte's mom left again. And then when my mom tried to get in touch with her, she [was told that she got married and] she went to the United States with Pancho, [my mom's] cousin, *el hijo de Jesus Esparza*—the son of Jesus Esparza, Mocte's grandfather. Who my grandmother [would] point out as her cousin to my mom the many times he sat on a chair by his doorway. After that, she never saw her, and Mocte's mom died when Mocte was a little kid, very young. So anyway, that's the way the whole thing happened.

IN: I'm concerned about running out of tape, so . . .

JG: So anyway, we went to Mocte's and got together with Mocte, and told him the whole film that we were working on. And Mocte says, "Well, look at—what I could do is I had credit with a lab, and you have the house here, I have certain machines and stuff that we could use to be able to edit."

IN: At that point, Sierra Madre Motion Pictures Company was using what address?

JG: We were at Goez [Art Studios and Gallery].

IN: Okay. So about how long were you at Goez [Art Studios and Gallery]?

JG: I don't remember how long. I don't remember how long. Months.

IN: I think you had mentioned . . . So, just months?

JG: I don't know. I'm—

IN: I thought it was a few years.

JG: Yeah, well, maybe—yeah, maybe it was.

IN: I thought you had always told me three years.

JG: Yeah, maybe it was. It was like about two and a half years after, something like that. That [before] we got together with Mocte, we had been working on this for quite a while. And then when we got together with Mocte, then he says, "You can use the house," this and this. He offered that, and then he says, "And I've got part of my crew, John Meza, who could be doing this." He offered a few things, and he said, "In return, what I want is to be co-producer of the film." So that's how we started working on the film. And meanwhile, while I was—because of Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], I had already a relationship with different locations and Olvera Street. So we wanted to shoot at Olvera Street, so I was able to get that free. And then all the inside scenes were shot inside the gallery, and Eddie Martinez and Jacob [Gutierrez], being scenic artists, they came in and they changed the back room to look like the inside of his house. So and all the paintings, all the artists . . . One of the artists—actually, his name was Ocadis, and he's an architect. We use one of his paintings. And one of the stars that was in the movie, the little—we had like a little—a young, arrogant artist in there. And that little kid was in the movie with Gary Cooper. What's it called? I mean, with—not Gary Cooper, with—

IN: Gregory Peck?

JG: Gregory Peck.

IN: *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

JG: *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

IN: It was one of the children.

JG: One of the children. So he was one of the actors that came up.

IN: And then Emigdio—

JG: So Emigdio Vasquez was the artist whose artwork we featured. Emigdio's from Santa Ana. So it was art that—the name of the person, the character, was Dominguez, Francisco Dominguez. And actually, Francisco Dominguez is actually the name of Alex's uncle, so he used that name. So anyway, we started

working on putting . . . So we got waivers from the unions. We got waivers from the unions, and that's the reason we were able to do it for such little money. So everybody was getting paid very little. Everybody got paid very little, except Mocte, Alex, and myself were the only ones that didn't get paid—

IN: At all.

JG: At all. We didn't get paid anything at all. So we worked on it for quite awhile.

IN: Now, while [all of] you were actually working on setting up the structure and the film, what [else] was Mocte doing? He provided—

JG: Yeah, no, right away, to my knowledge—this is what I recall, only because I was talking to him for a while one time. And so—I mean, Alex— Mocte's smart. The minute that we started talking about a motion picture, he started coming to school here, studying motion picture.

IN: At UCLA.

JG: At UCLA. So he was learning all about it while we were shooting. So he learned that, well, a good businessman, he really knows how to negotiate. So anyway, it took about three and a half years [from the time Alex and I started], something like that, to really finally get the movie done. And we premiered it at the Kennedy, at Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

IN: And now, the Kennedy Center event—the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC—was a fundraiser for what organization?

JG: For the National Council [of] la Raza.

IN: And how much money did you raise?

JG: I think fifty-some thousand dollars.

IN: And how did you hook up with the National Council [of] la Raza? Do you recall?

JG: Well, Mocte had a relationship with them already. But we know them also through the mural.

IN: When you did the Smithsonian mural.

JG: Yeah, the Smithsonian mural.

IN: And then it was the US entry to—

JG: Yeah, so there was a US entry to the Duval film festival in France, in Miami, in—

IN: San Antonio.

JG: San Antonio.

IN: You had screenings?

JG: Screenings, yeah.

IN: And then what about the—in LA. What events took place there?

JG: It was the Goldwyn Theatre, the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre.

IN: And where was that? In Beverly Hills?

JG: In Beverly Hills. And it was the fundraising from CABE and for AMAE.

IN: Which was the Association—

JG: Of Mexican American Educators, and for the—

IN: California Association of Bilingual Educators.

KD: California Association of Bilingual Educators, yeah.

IN: And how much money did you raise there?

JG: Twenty-eight thousand dollars, I think, something like that. So anyway, then Alex had—we put a partnership together. And so Alex had said that he had other scripts. And he says, you know, "With these scripts, the other scripts, you could be a partner on them when they get done, when they start working on them."

IN: Now this film, what was it called?

JG: *Only Once in a Lifetime*.

IN: So to your knowledge, have any feature films ever been done in East LA, in LA, before this film?

JG: Not in East LA. Not as far as I know. And put together and financed wholly by the Chicano community. As far as I know, it hadn't been done.

IN: So this is possibly the first—

JG: Possibly, yeah.

IN: And so what kind of distribution did it get, as far as screening in theatres?

JG: Well, that was the problem they had, is that nobody knew about how to distribute a Chicano film at that time. And the other thing is that the car says “Chicano” on it, in the bottom of it, and by being out in New Mexico, that hurt it.

IN: That was the very first screening?

JG: So you know, there’s a lot of things there that prevented it. And then Claudio Brooks, who became famous in Mexico, I think, with Don Quixote, playing Don Quixote. And he also played Frida Kahlo’s father in a film of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. And he was the artist. And we shot [some of] it at Howard Morseburg’s gallery on Wilshire Boulevard.

IN: And so even though you didn’t sell it in the US, didn’t you sell it in Europe?

JG: Yeah, I think in some of the other countries, Bulgaria or some other where we were able to sell.

IN: And then later, it did get—

JG: Its video rights were sold years later to Harmony Gold. But they had done a miniseries on something about Africa, and so they bought the rights to distribute it on video. And I don’t know how good it came out.

IN: So now as a result of this film, something happened with—the National Council [of] la Raza had some kind of program to produce other films.

JG: Yeah, they were—they were going to do, I think, three other ones. And Alex was going to be doing one of them, and it was “A Home for Salazar,” about a soldier that comes home after the war, and all that, and the other one was going to be “Gregorio Cortez.” But I think they ran out of money, and Alex didn’t get his done, and “Gregorio Cortez” did get done. But eventually Alex went to Mexico and became a writer, and already has, like, eight novels published. But what he did is, he combined two scripts that he originally showed me. One of them was about the farm workers—that was “A Rendezvous for Eagles”—and the other one was “A Home for Salazar,” which was about soldiers, Chicano soldiers going out to war. And he combined them both into a novel. And so the novel talks about a family coming to Mexico, splitting, where one of them goes to Texas and goes to war, and the other ones going—struggling with the farm workers.

IN: And what’s the name of the novel? *The Dark Side of the Dream*?

JG: Yes.

KD: Can we take a pause for a minute? I need to go to the restroom?

IN: Sure.

[break in audio]

KD: We’re back from a quick bathroom break. So—

IN: Well, in regards to the film, *Only Once in a Lifetime*. So that was a co-production between your company and Alex’s company, Sierra Madre Motion Pictures, and Esparza Productions. And so, from—what was really heartwarming to me was, years later, when Alex started emailing us from Ajijic, which is—

JG: In Guadalajara.

IN: In Guadalajara—near Guadalajara.

JG: In Chapala.

IN: In Chapala. That he actually sent an email—and we have the full email documentation, I still saved it—where he said on a number of emails and letters that he’s written you, that if it wasn’t for you, this film would have never been created. [He also, later, wrote a novel version of the movie and again gave you and his brother Tommy Grattan that credit in the beginning of the book.]

JG: Yeah. I was very flattered by that.

IN: Yeah. So that was very heartwarming for him to acknowledge that. Did you have any questions about the movie, or—

KD: Well, I guess what I was fascinated by is the changes in the early script, the way you were able to get Alex to think about—I mean, he’s a very strong, kind of Chicano sensibility.

- JG: Oh, it was an interesting story. I forgot—while we were trying to get the movie done, we actually came across an attorney who was involved with motion pictures. And he wanted to produce a movie. He actually bought option rights to the scripts to produce it. He was very excited. An attorney in Beverly Hills, *gabacho*, Anglo. And he was so excited that a director of—*Bonanza*?—yeah, that show *Bonanza*—came down. He was supposed to be directing it. And he came down to East LA with Alex and I, and we went sightseeing, you know. He had his little scope to be able to see—
- IN: Scouting locations?
- JG: Yeah, just looking, and getting acquainted with East LA. The murals and everything. And when he went back, this attorney says—he says, “I’m so excited about making this movie.” He says, “I want to make this movie so that East LA looks like an exotic country. I want to include—I want to really play up the murals.” And I was so excited about it, you know, this guy was really—and Alex was excited that it was going to get done. He was sad that he wasn’t going to direct it. Alex wanted to direct it, so he was sad that it wasn’t going to get—that he wasn’t going to be able to direct it. But anyway, it turned out that this attorney got a divorce, and all kinds of problems started happening, so he lost the option. So Alex got the script back.
- IN: Now, your concept was to really play up the murals.
- JG: Yeah. As a matter of fact, the idea was to play up the murals more. And actually, the first shooting of the film, the first cut that we had of the film, had a mural in it. And what we did is we got Willie Herrón—we told him exactly what we wanted, and we told him to paint a mural that showed something about—her name was Consuelo. No . . . But about Francisco Dominguez—yeah, because the story was about Francisco Dominguez and his first wife. She’s supposed to have died. So it’s supposed to show them hand in hand, walking through some area. And it’s supposed to be a mural that Francisco did in remembrance of his wife. But later, they cut it up. And so a lot of stuff was cut out. It was—tons of footage was originally shot. We had a scene inside the bar that was . . . [Julio Medina, who I hear is now a very successful actor in South America . . .] No, his name was Medina—I forgot. He’s an actor. He did with—he did some stuff with—I forgot. Well, anyway, but this show that they had on KCET where they used to relive famous people, and they’d be talking. And the piano player, the comedian—
- IN: Oh, Steve Allen?
- JG: Steve Allen, yeah.
- IN: Uh-huh, when he’d reenact the lives of famous people. [The program was *Meeting of Minds*—ed.]
- JG: So Medina was in that. And Medina was [on] the ship with Chapman [College] also. So we put Medina into a scene, and it was a bar scene where there was supposed to be hand wrestling and different things like that. And that was cut out, too. A lot of the movie was cut out.
- IN: So even though he talked—he was supposed to be a [Chicano] artist and a muralist, the murals ended up being downplayed.
- JG: Yeah. [I was disappointed that] the murals were never seen. [But the movie was a perfect tool to promote the positive image of our community, as the next phase of my “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project.]
- KD: So this—after *Sierra Madre*, you go on to do the Don Juan Productions, which is educational organizations?
- JG: Yeah. But what happened is actually—
- KD: Just a quick sketch. I was trying to figure out the—
- JG: It was actually the Olympics, after *Sierra Madre*. Then—yeah, all this time, I was going to start getting more into film and stuff like that. But then, about a certain point, it was more the Olympics came up, and Irma and I were beginning to put stuff together. We’re going to be doing things with the artists. I think we were going to start working on the publishing company or something. But anyway, the Olympics came up, and there were groups of artists that were complaining that the Olympics were not including—Chicano artists were complaining that the Olympics were not including them.
- IN: Because they were going to have the 1984 Olympics, but then they were having the Olympic festival, which were events that were going out throughout Los Angeles City.

- JG: So they were saying they wanted to be included. So then some of the artists came, including David [Botello], was—it was afterwards—
- IN: Actually, it was actually my girlfriend, Naomi Quinones, who's a PhD—
- JG: A writer.
- IN: I'm not sure what she specializes in, if it's—
- KD: Literature.
- IN: Women's studies or literature. And she's at UC Irvine, I think, or Fullerton?
- KD: She was at Fullerton.
- IN: I'm not sure where she's at now. But anyway, I went to high school with her, Woodrow Wilson High School. And so she was up at San Jose, in San Jose for many years, and she was back in LA. And so I ran into her, and we started hanging out again. And she was the first one who came to us, because she had made friends with David Botello and Wayne Healy. And they and other artists were talking about the fact that Chicano artists were being excluded. And so she came to Juan/Johnny, hearing what he had done with Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], and knowing all about Goetz [Art Studio and Gallery's] work, saying, you know, "Is there some idea that you could come up with?"
- JG: She said, "We have a meeting pending with the Olympic organizing committee, and we've been excluded from all of these events, and we want to be able to be a part of it." She says, "Do you have an idea? Do you have something that you could—some concept that you could put together that we could present at this meeting with the Olympic committee?" So I started working on something.
- IN: And so Juan/Johnny came up with a concept of—it was like individual artists were saying they wanted to be included. But Juan/Johnny's idea was always how to include everybody. So he came up with a concept to have an—and I think the name is on here?
- KD: Hispanic Cultural Arts Tour Guidebook.
- IN: So it was the Hispanic Cultural Arts Tour Guidebook. This was before we hear the controversy of the term *Hispanic*.
- JG: You can see it still back into the tourist stuff. [laughter] I never left that concept [from my "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project proposal].
- IN: So his idea was to create a beautiful guidebook that would include all of the different [Chicano/Hispanic] cultural centers, all of the different studios, all of the different galleries [and murals].
- JG: In three languages.
- IN: It would be in three languages, and it would guide people to where all the different locations where the artists were at. And it would have a map, so that people who came to the Olympics could actually go into the Chicano community and find any studio gallery artists that they were looking for. And so because of Juan/Johnny's relationship with all of the political leaders in the community, he got immediately letters of support. Let's see, Congressman [Edward] Roybal. Esteban Torres, congressman. Mayor [Tom] Bradley. Art Torres, who was senator. Gloria Molina, who was assemblywoman. Richard Alatorre, assembly. Art Snyder, councilmember. Art Avila, who was the president of East LA College. Edmundo Rodriguez from Plaza de la Raza.
- JG: That's because those sites were Olympic sites.
- KD: Right.
- JG: So anyway, they actually went and took the idea to them over there—to the Olympic Organizing Committee representative—and they said that the Olympic [committee] said, "Okay, we'll support it, but we don't have any money." So it's like, what good is it going to do? So anyway, it seemed like nothing was going to happen with them. So we were talking to UNO [United Neighborhoods Organization]. Lydia Lopez was the president of UNO at that time, and we were working with her. We did a whole tree-planting program in East LA.
- IN: Yeah.
- JG: We planted trees throughout East LA. And we got UNO to work with us on it.
- IN: Yeah, we were already working on different projects. And Juan/Johnny was actually staying with his sister Imelda and Ignacio Gomez. And so a friend of theirs [Miguel Reyes (or Michael Rey)] was talking to Juan/



Johnny and I, and hearing about everything Juan/Johnny had done. But he said that Tree People, an organization that plants trees throughout, did a survey that East LA had the most cement and least trees in LA County. And they got twenty-eight thousand trees donated, and they—but they didn't have any connection to the community. And so they asked Juan/Johnny to organize this whole project to get volunteers to help prune and bag twenty-eight thousand trees. I think we did ten thousand.

JG: Ten thousand, yeah.

IN: And then this is a reduced version. We actually did a gigantic instruction sheet in Spanish and English, saying "Juan/Johnny thanks you for adopting a tree and giving it a home, and collecting the fruits of your labor." And so Ignacio started working on it, and everybody in the family started working on the project. And I think the printing was donated.

JG: Yeah.

IN: And so this is how we got hooked up with UNO—with Lydia Lopez—because we started distributing the trees through the CSO. And then UNO . . . The firehouse was an organization in Lincoln Heights that Dennis Weaver had a program called Food for Life. [The program Weaver co-founded was Love is Feeding Everyone (LIFE); it was housed in a former firehouse in East Los Angeles—ed.] And they would get food from markets and restaurants that was still fresh food, but they [the restaurants and markets] would throw it away. And so they would collect the food, and store it, and then distribute it to the community, for people who were in need. And so they were able to distribute the trees through UNO. And that's how we hooked up with her. And so then what happened?

JG: So then Lydia Lopez—we showed her our proposal, and Lydia Lopez loved our proposal. So when the organizing committee went to David Lizárraga, who was in the organizing committee, and told him, you know, "We need to get more of the [Hispanic] community together," [to be more involved.] They went to Lydia and UNO and asked, you know, "If you know anything . . ." "Oh, would you like to get involved in this?" And she says, "Well, that's not our thing. UNO doesn't get involved in this type of thing. But I do know a program that you should definitely make a part of the organizing committee's [projects]—of the Olympics." And [she] said, "That's the Don Juan proposal [for] the [Hispanic Cultural Arts Tour Guidebook]." And so then David called us, David Lizárraga called us—

KD: And at that point, you had formed Don Juan Productions.

JG: Yeah.

IN: Using the name of your father, [which represents the renewed Mexican pride inspired when you were in Spain and they started calling you Don Juan, out of respect]. We became partners, we're equal partners of the company.

JG: And then David called us, and said, you know, "Lydia said this and that about your proposal." He says, "Could you come down and show it? And then I'll present it to the whole committee." So we went down there, and the fact that the organizing committee wasn't really going to fund it . . . He said, "This is great." So he says, "We could work together on this project, and also we could help each other. I need certain things, help on certain things, and I could start hooking you up with a lot of different corporations." [David Botello had invited me to join Streetscapers when I worked on the movie and, again, when I formed Don Juan Productions. But, I turned it down to continue exploring different vehicles to implement my ongoing "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project.]

IN: But before we get into Don Juan Productions, and maybe we should use this to end the session—

KD: Yeah.

IN: Is, you mentioned Carmen Zapata, that you wanted to say something about Carmen Zapata?

JG: Oh, yeah—

KD: Well, actually, we're going to run out of tape. We've got like only four minutes left. So we'll just have to stop for tonight.

IN: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Because this is—this is very—

KD: Thanks.

## DECEMBER 17, 2007

IN: But don't leave anything.

JG: No.

IN: Don't skip, don't leave anything out.

KD: This is Karen Davalos on December 17, 2007. This is the [CSRC Oral Histories Series], with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. And today, this is our tenth tape and session 5. And Johnny was just going to talk a little bit about—or some about the things that he feels we missed from the last time. We were rushing. So why don't you go ahead and start with what you have on your list.

JG: Okay. One of the other persons from the East LA Jaycees that was probably present at my meeting, my presentation that I made there, was Gil Vasquez, the accountant. He's a certified public accountant who is now doing books for the—the last time was for the [Edward R.] Roybal—

IN: Foundation?

JG: Yeah, Foundation. And I was going to say that the—when we first started with the gallery, within two, three months, the gallery was full of artists and their works. And this was all by word of mouth. This is before even the publicity came out. And the thing is, we never charged. So the gallery and the studio was totally full of artists, and we never charged the artists any rent. What it was, the agreement was that anything created in the gallery would have to be sold through the gallery. But one of the drawbacks about that was that a lot of the artists developed a relationship with their clients, and then they started going direct, which means that we lost on all our commissions. But there were a lot more that were very ethical, and they just continued working with us and grew with us. And because of the professional quality of their work, we felt it would be a good investment, because—eventually, we felt we'd get our returns on that. So—but once the media came in, then the place was even swarming that much more with artists.

Now, I mentioned that all the—every station in LA was coming down and doing something on us, and *La Opinión* did a very nice story on us, also. But one of the stations that did exceptional service for us was KWKW. And they did a beautiful—which might have been a whole-minute profile on us and on the station, which was beautiful produced—almost like poetry, with music going on—which aired for—possibly weeks, if not even, possibly even more than—a couple of months or so. But what's interesting is, the owner, Howard Kalmenson, if I remember his name correctly—[yes it's correct]—he came down to the studio after the spots had been running for quite awhile. He mentioned, you know, "What do you think about the spots?" And I said, "Well, they're wonderful." And he says, "So would you like them to run some more?" I said, "Sure, sure." So he ran them more. And on top of that, he says, "You know, I'd like you to come down to the station and measure a wall, so you can be able to do a mural for us." And I believe possibly that might have been the first commission that we had to do a mural. Now, this was an indoor mural. The other—

IN: Because, what was—your first outdoor mural commission was Roger Johnson?

JG: Yeah. I don't even know if Roger Johnson's mural commission was before this, because this was indoor.

IN: So KWKW might have been first.

JG: Yeah. And then Bob Kemp, from the First Street Store, also commissioned us to do an indoor mural. And what we did with that is that Richard Jimenez, one of our artists that was there at the gallery quite a bit, we just gave him the commission. So some of the commissions at the beginning, we were just giving them to the artists. There was another one, the Doctors Hospital . . . Alberto Guerrero was actually an illustrator for novellas in Mexico, or comic books. He was really a very, very nice artist, being a professional illustrator. And so we gave him that commission, which is inside the Doctors Hospital in East LA. He did—there's one painting that—there's so many paintings that went through the studio and the gallery that I often felt sad about losing, you know. I was happy seeing them there, and all of the sudden, people bought them. It was a combination of mixed emotions, being unhappy because I was losing it, and then being happy because we were making a commission. But I think I was more unhappy losing it, because I got so much joy out of seeing it. But there was a beautiful painting that he did of—

IN: Who did?

JG: Alberto Guerrero, that he did of Cortez lying by the tree crying, “Noche triste.” When Cortez cried after the Aztecs had beat them.

KD: Cuauhtémoc.

JG: Yeah, after Cuauhtémoc had beaten him. And it was a beautiful illustration, with a horse standing right there on the side, and La Malinche comforting him. It was more or less the scene that we put in the Tierra album also, in the back cover of the Tierra album.

KD: Oh, right.

IN: And now, in regards to Richard Jimenez, you talked a little bit about his influence—he was influenced—

JG: Yeah, also—oh, the fact that—the mural that he did for the inside of the First Street Store was a takeoff of my mural, because he had the Spaniard and he had the Indians. And then there was another one. Richard Rueda was also another artist who did another mural, and he also had the Spaniard and the Indian, and he had a big vine growing through there also, so my influence was there also. Now, Richard Rueda is a very interesting story. Richard Rueda had lived in his dad’s shoe repair shop, which was right next to the Pan-American Bank. So this little shoe shop. And Richard Rueda had gone to—he was in Vietnam, and he was with this whole company going through the jungle. And all of a sudden he felt sick in the stomach, so he had to move to the side and go into the bushes on the side. And when he came back, his entire company had been killed. Entire.

KD: Wow.

JG: And so this affected him somewhat in regards to his hair, you know, the shock. But anyway, when he got back, Richard was such an artist that he—like I said, he lived in his dad’s shoe shop, and he did some beautiful paintings. He did—he walked into the gallery one day with another large guy, his name was Marcelino Lopez, I believe. And they walked in, in buckskin, almost like mountain men. But they had some great paintings, really nice paintings. And Richard walked in with two big, gigantic paintings, and they were both influenced by Rembrandt’s colors, so he used all of Rembrandt’s colors. But his paintings look like El Greco’s elongated—but at the same time, they were surrealistic. He had, like, a surrealistic bullfight, which was really, really nice. But Richard was very uneducated in regards to art. And it was interesting, because he painted so well, but I don’t know if he even paid attention to colors. Because we said, “So are you using burnt umber on that?” I remember, he said, “No, no, I’m using oils.” [laughter]

And he also—when he walked in, he looked at the guitar sitting there, my guitar, and he says, “So who plays the guitar.” And I said, “I do.” He says, “Gee, I play the congas.” So he brought the congas, and before you know it, him and I started jamming and really getting a nice sound out of it, because he played the congas very unique. He used to slap them in a very nice, different type of a sound. It wasn’t the boom-boom, it was a ta-ta-ta-ta-ta. And it was a really, really nice sound. So anyway, I started doing some of my flamenco music, and he’d do that sound to it, almost like the shoes—*taconazos*—of the flamenco [dancers]. So he’d sort of substitute that. So anyway, we developed a real nice sound. And Richard started getting the guitar, and he was left handed. So he’d get my guitar, and then he started strumming some stuff, and I showed him a few chords, and he started strumming them. And before you know it, he started composing some really nice songs.

KD: And he was playing it upside down.

JG: Upside down. And started composing—so it was interesting. So at night, when everybody was gone, Richard would come down. Him and I would be jamming there, and across the street was Sergio Corona at the Baptist church, and Sergio Corona was studying classical music. So they allowed him to stay at the church, and sleep there and study with his piano there. So here—so First Street was totally dead at night, but because Sergio would be studying his music, classical music, across the street, Richard would be in the shoe shop down the street, and I’d be working on my music. [laughter] So sometimes Richard and I would be playing, and Sergio would call us and say, “Would you guys shut up? I can’t work on my music.” [laughter]

So anyway, we worked on our music, and we wanted to be able—I still have in my mind the fact that Spain wanted a Mexican trio. So I thought, “Well, Richard’s playing the congas,” and we harmonized well, too. So maybe, you know. [But] we’ve got to find somebody else. And before you know it, I got a phone call, and it turned out that it was Tony from Spain, the guy that was living across the hall from me, had come to the United States. And actually, the reason he was able to do that is because—I think his mother was originally born in Florida, or something like that, so he was actually a citizen because of his mother. I think it was by citizenship. So he had come to the United States, and the girl that he was dating, the English girl that he was dating, they got married and they came over, both of them. So we started getting together, and we had a nice sound. But personality clashes didn’t seem to work out. And there were other people that I had. I think Cervantes Ties, his son also came down, and we jammed—he was also a guitar player—and we jammed. So the sound that I was trying to create was a combination of flamenco, Mexican, and pop—pop music.

KD: Right, right.

JG: So I was trying to combine those sounds. And there was another one that came down and worked out with us, who we saw later on—Irma, Irma and I—when we were doing our traveling gallery. We went to drop off some artwork, and he was now a principal of a school. And he commented, he says, “You know, when I hear the Gypsy Kings, I always remember way back in those days when you had the idea of combining all of this music.” So anyway, Richard. Then I got together with Hector, the piano player from our band.

IN: From the Leggeriors.

JG: From the Leggeriors. And I thought, you know, maybe the piano player and a piano might sound nice, to be able to combine that trio. And Hector was very educated in music. He had been studying music at LA City College, and he was also studying accounting, and he was also a teacher. So he was pretty well educated. So he was also writing music. And when he heard some of the songs that Richard had written on the guitar, he says, “Why don’t we work on doing an album together?” So he got—and Hector was going to pay for the works. So we thought, “Well, we should get a singer.” And so then they called a singer that Hector had worked with, her name was Susan Miramontes. And Susan turned out to be a beautiful singer, really great music. She used to do some Barbra Streisand and some Linda Ronstadt songs. “Blue Bayou.” I heard it from her before I even heard it from Linda Ronstadt. She sang really beautiful. So anyway, Richard and Susan got married.

And Richard—it was interesting, you know. Artists, man. Richard was missing a tooth in the front, and of course he had medical, because of the veterans. And the fact that he lived at the shoe shop, Richard smelled like leather. And he had one shirt, one pair of pants. I remember inviting him to a party. We went to the Laundromat, threw the pants in there, he stayed in the bathroom until they got washed, and then I gave them to him. [laughter] And he was a very, very good mechanic. He used to put cars together and we’d drive in the cars that he would put together. So anyway, he started—

IN: Once they married?

JG: Huh?

IN: Once he married Susan, what happened?

JG: Well, once he married Susan, Susan told him, “You’ve got to go to school, you’ve got to.” So he started going to school and started studying music. But he got impatient with school, and within six months, he dropped out and he got a private tutor. And within a year and a half after that, Richard was writing music for the Osmonds, for Diana Ross. He did a song for Diana Ross, and the lady that did the lyrics for—I think the movie *Mahogany*, or something like that?

IN: That was Diana Ross. She was the star of *Mahogany*.

JG: Yeah, but the one who did the lyrics for the song—worked with Richard on that song. So—

IN: And then Neil Diamond?

JG: Yeah, and I think he did something for Neil Diamond, and another of . . . Sergio Frankie, who was a pop opera singer, and another big western singer. But anyway, Richard suddenly . . . Boy, he was beautiful,

beautiful. Cellos and violins. And then he put a whole recording with his wife of his own songs, with the cellos and the—and beautiful stuff.

IN: And how did she transform him?

JG: Well, now he had his tooth fixed, and now he was dressing—now he had three shirts. *[laughter]* Oh, and he studied bartending at the same time. As a matter of fact, he studied bartending [before his success in the music], and I got him a job at Señor Pico's in Century City. And there was another flamenco guitarist by the name of Daniel Contreras that I met playing at the park, he was practicing his flamenco at the park. And he was actually from Aguascalientes, from Mexico. And he had come to the United States on a tour or something like that, and he stayed here. And [I got him a job there also], so both of them were working at Señor Pico's. And that's where Richard met a guy by the name of Star, and this guy started getting—worked for Richard. But anyway, Richard started doing real well. And at this point I don't know where he's at. I haven't seen him for quite a while. But it was—I think it's an interesting story, the transformation that Richard went through.

IN: And Pete Rodriguez was [there] when you were jamming with Richard and—

JG: Yeah. Actually, Pete Rodriguez—

IN: Channel 7, the PR guy from Channel 7—

JG: Channel 7. And he was also involved with Justicia, and Joe Hernandez, who they called Cheo. And they put a business, a promotional business together, called Cheo Productions. And what they were doing is they were looking for talent to book—to go on tour with Bob Hope, [for] the servicemen. And this was being done through Johnny Grant. So they wanted Richard and I to audition for them. So as we started auditioning, I felt I wasn't ready, because I wasn't working on my music all the time. And Richard was really excited about doing it, because that's what he was counting on. So I felt real bad telling Pete, you know, that I just didn't feel that I was ready, and that's why I hooked up Richard also with Hector, which had worked out real good in the long run [for him, by meeting Susan and studying music].

IN: Now, in regards to Justicia, did he explain what Justicia was?

KD: I was just going to ask.

JG: Yeah. Justicia was justice for Chicanos in the media and television.

KD: Oh, okay.

JG: And what their focus was, was to take out the stereotypes out of television. And if you ever went to a party with people in Justicia, they always had TVs on, monitoring the TV shows. So they got rid—they were the ones who got rid of the Frito Bandito.

KD: Frito Bandito, that's what I thought.

JG: So they were always working. And Justicia was made up of—Pete Rodriguez was in it, Ray Andrade was the president, Paul Macias, I think, was vice-president. Joe Hernandez was in it, [Isaac Ruiz,] Bobby Morones was part of it, and I think Alicia Sandoval was part of it. Alicia Sandoval had the show *Let's Rap* on Channel 11, and I think she had accomplished something very exceptional for a young Latina, to have a daily show in prime time morning hours at eleven o'clock. So it was every day, which we did quite a few times.

IN: You were interviewed on her show.

JG: Yeah.

IN: And now Ray Andrade, he did a number of things with you at Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery].

JG: Yeah. Now, Ray Andrade was on our board—

IN: For which?

JG: For the school.

IN: The East LA School—

JG: East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAFa]. And so it was Paul Macias, and so it was Pete Rodriguez. So they became very involved. As a matter of fact, they were responsible for bringing the media and celebrities, they brought—

IN: To Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery].

- JG: To Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery]. They brought Ricardo Montalban, they brought Henry Darrell, they brought the presidents of the television stations, or general managers. Ray Andrade was the associate producer for *Chico and the Man*, and he brought all the people when—
- IN: All the cast.
- JG: When they were putting it together. They brought the entire cast and the producer to the gallery. So he gave them a tour of East LA so they could get acquainted, because it's supposed to be a young kid and an old white guy in a gas station, or something like that. So anyway—
- IN: And what happened with Jack Albertson?
- JG: Yeah, well, Jack Albertson—I don't know if I mentioned this, that when they came in, I didn't recognize anybody. I mean, Freddie Prinze had not been on the air. Maybe he did some comedy shows, but he wasn't—I didn't know who he was. He wasn't recognizable.
- IN: So *Chico and the Man* hadn't aired yet.
- JG: No, they were putting *Chico and the Man* together. And so Jack Albertson was one of the persons that came in. And as we were carving out a sign—I think it was for Casa Maravilla—
- KD: Yeah, you did mention this.
- JG: Oh, okay. So when I said that he looked familiar, he says, "Did you see *The Poseidon Adventure*?" I said, "Oh, oh, yeah. Yeah, okay."
- KD: Yeah, okay.
- JG: So anyway, let's see here.
- IN: So now, you ended up right here. One thing that you had mentioned was that in regards to the artists, that at first, the Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] was packed with artists just from word of mouth. But then once the media came, that that's when the studio was swarming with artists, right?
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: Okay. You mentioned that.
- JG: Okay. On the—one of the things that I missed, on the second trip to Spain, I was able to stay at that same *pensión* where they took care of me. And it turned out that there was a very popular band performing. There were actually a lot of performers staying there, and one of the bands was called Maribel y los Chingalos. Now, I don't know what the word *chingalos* is, but anyway, being here, it sounds a little strange. And Maribel was actually the star. And there were four musicians, and the bass player was her boyfriend. But the mother went around as a chaperone, the mother of the girl over there. And she was a beautiful singer, really, really good singer. And there was another little girl who must have been ten, eleven years old, who played the accordion at the same nightclub. I had mentioned that it was a beautiful nightclub called The Drugstore. And it was actually like a mall with a balcony, and the nightclub was down in the bottom. And the bottom, they had like a pond with fountains of water shooting up. And this little girl would play "Lady of Spain," the song "Lady of Spain," and she would get everybody there just really going. I mean, it was really, really exceptional, the way she did it. Years later, when I was back home in LA, I always used to enjoy seeing *Siempre [en] Domingo*, with Raul Vazquez—Velasco?
- IN: Yeah, Raul Velasco.
- JG: And so this was from Mexico. And all of a sudden I hear "Lady of Spain" being played, and she made it internationally, this little girl. She was probably about fourteen years old afterwards—like three, four years later. But anyway, she obviously did very, very well.
- IN: Now, there was something about the earthquake, when you had your grand opening at Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery]?
- JG: Oh, yeah, just shortly [before] the grand opening at Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] was the Sylmar earthquake, [February 7, 1971,] which knocked down one of our statues. And all the artwork was—fortunately, they didn't fall. But it was right around that particular time. And of course that earthquake destroyed the San Fernando Mission, which we later worked on to restore it.
- KD: Yeah, to restore.



- JG: And I think I mentioned [that] as we were restoring it I left so I could start working on the Salesian mural—
- KD: Yeah, you talked about that.
- JG: All right.
- IN: And—
- JG: I'm not sure whether I mentioned that we had artists working in various different medias. They were working on stone, sculpting stone, wood—
- IN: Alabaster.
- JG: Alabaster. With stone. They were doing copper relief, metal sculpting. And then we had a variety of different styles of painting: surrealistic, impressionistic, avant-garde, all these different . . . So there was—it was just an exciting environment.
- KD: Was there a preference for the collectors that would come in, the people that were buying art? Were they focusing on one style over another, or painting over sculpture? Do you remember—
- JG: No, no.
- KD: A concern like, "Oh, that thing is not moving, this is selling but this isn't."
- JG: Yeah. What wasn't very familiar then was avant-garde. Avant-garde. Because I know that when Gilbert Luján came in with his artwork, it seemed a little strange for some of the people, because they weren't accustomed to that, and they were innovators in that area. But there were two works of art that Gilbert Luján had, and one was a *menudo* bone. It was just a plain *menudo* bone with a base, with a dowel stuck into the middle of the bone and into the base. And then there was another one called "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," and there were four tortillas dried together. So this was new to people. But eventually, this avant-garde work really started taking off.
- IN: But you also, besides doing—
- JG: And also the mural, the first mural that they did, it was—I think the four of them got together on it. Charlie Almaraz, Gilbert Luján, Frank Romero, and—de la Rocha?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: Yeah. And it was all spray—it looked like, maybe they used a spray can. And that one was on—right across the street, I think, from . . . It was by the Resurrection Church, right by Lorena.
- IN: So you also had plaster sculptures and reliefs, but also sand paintings.
- JG: Yeah, we also had a sand painter.
- IN: So what would you say were the most popular pieces that sold?
- JG: Well, I don't know if there was one particular style that was popular.
- IN: The nail reliefs [and] Robert Arenivar?
- JG: Of course, Charlie's [Charles Felix, Clavos] nail reliefs were very popular, were very expensive. But that's what caught everybody's attention. But you know, the—it was such a novelty at that time, a very new experience to the community, to have original works of art for sale, you know? I mean, our place was like a museum, we had a lot of people coming in, but people weren't buying, because they saw it as a museum. And they—[the art] was very expensive. For them it was something totally new, to have original works for art.
- IN: And what impressed me was that not only did you have the Chicano avant-garde artists, and community artists, but then you had established artists that—Chicano artists that worked in the television and motion picture industry, and could you talk about some of them?
- JG: Yeah. And, now, they're the ones that really were the teachers in the class. David Negrón, Eddie Martinez, David Ramirez.
- IN: Angel Esparza?
- JG: No, Angel Esparza was an Emmy Award winner, and he was the art director for KTLA. He had won an Emmy Award for a court—what do they call it—a court artist?
- IN: Oh, court illustrator?
- JG: Court illustrator. And eventually, he went to live in Costa Rica.

IN: But he also—

JG: He also won an Emmy, I think, for the Academy Awards, for the *Aladdin*—

IN: Set design.

JG: Set design for the *Aladdin*.

IN: The stage production.

JG: But Angel was not only an artist, he was a very knowledgeable historian. And Angel was older than most of us, so he had learned an awful lot. But he invented—when he came down, he photographed the gallery, he was a great photographer with a camera that he built himself. And he built it so long ago that he had shots of the Mayan ruins before they were restored, a lot of the ruins, before they were restored. What he did is he got—created this camera that he used film—what is it, two and a quarter by two and a quarter, I think? And so he used that film, but it would shoot three of the two and a quarters at one time, so it was like cinemascope.

KD: Right.

JG: And that's how he shot the photographs for our brochure, of the indoors and outdoors. And [for] the one in the outdoors, what he did is he shot it during the day and he left the camera sitting there, without anybody moving it. And at night, when we turned on all the lights, he shot it again, so it was double exposure, which meant that he was able to get a good shot of the outside of the gallery in natural light, and was able to get what the gallery looked at night, with all the lights on.

IN: From the inside, shining out.

JG: Yeah, from the inside.

KD: That's clever.

JG: And he also created a poster, which Irma and I later on carried with our traveling art gallery. It was a Mayan—

IN: The Mayan glyphs.

JG: The Mayan glyphs, it was a calendar.

IN: The Mayan zodiac, he called it the Mayan zodiac.

JG: The Mayan zodiac. It was like a calendar that had all the months of the year, the Mayan calendar. But he knew so much of the history, you know, I remember—

IN: Now, when you say he was older, was he—

JG: He was, Angel was—

IN: Like twenty years [older] than you?

JG: Possibly. Yeah, possibly. Yeah, because Angel was probably about—what, about sixty-five, close to seventy when he left to Costa Rica, when he . . . Well, he had retired already. And this was about—gee, this was about fifteen years ago.

IN: Yeah. And so, through Don Juan Productions, we started representing him and the other artists. So like David Negrón, who worked through Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], he was one of the teachers at [TELASOMAF].

JG: Yeah, I think I said that on the last interview. [No, Angel was not a teacher with TELASOMAF.]

IN: Well, he [David Negrón] was a teacher at Art Center.

JG: Yeah, he [David Negrón] was a teacher at Art Center, and—

IN: But I don't think you mentioned the films that he—

JG: He was a production illustrator for movies, so he—

KD: Yeah, I think he did.

IN: But like, did you mentioned like *Tora—Tora, Tora, Tora*, all of those films?

KD: Yeah.

IN: So these were, like, big artists. Eddie Martinez, who worked—he worked freelance with a lot of studios, but did a lot—he did the Epcot Center—

JG: Yeah, he designed [the Mexico Pavilion at] the Epcot Center.

- IN: And then Ray Aragon, who worked on *Sleeping Beauty*, *101 Dalmatians*. And Ray Aragon was also more of a *veterano*, around the age of Angel Esparza.
- JG: Now, Ray Aragon—his artwork was one of the artworks that was—went to the Pushkin museum in Russia—
- IN: That you sent.
- JG: Yeah, that we sent.
- IN: So the Pushkin museum came to Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery].
- JG: Yeah. There was actually the World Peace Congress was putting together artwork of the third world to put a show together at the Pushkin museum in Russia, so they wanted specifically Chicano artwork. And I think I mentioned that last time.
- KD: Yeah, you did. But I think I had a question.
- JG: Which was Esperanza—
- KD: Esperanza Martinez.
- JG: Esperanza Martinez, Ignacio Lopez—[no,] Ignacio Gomez, Ray Aragon, and Robert Arenivar, were the four artists—
- IN: That you sent.
- JG: That were represented in the gallery.
- KD: And what kind of styles did they have?
- JG: They—well, Esperanza was very realistic. Robert was basically drawings, ink drawing. Ray was a loose, very loose, somewhat realistic. But because he was a set designer, he just—he'd sketch out. So they were basically ink sketches, in a sense.
- IN: But also with color.
- JG: Yeah. And Ignacio's were realistic also, but they were sort of surrealistic, because he had like a snake coming out of someplace, with an eagle or something. I forgot what it was.
- IN: Was Ignacio's airbrush?
- JG: It might have been.
- IN: Were—Esperanza's were more oil paintings?
- JG: Yeah. And did I mention Olvera Street and Siqueiros's mural, that they were giving us the building?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: Oh, okay.
- KD: Now, when you said you represented, as Don Juan Productions, these artists, was that for this particular event, or does that come later?
- JG: This was way later.
- KD: Okay.
- IN: So let's finish all the Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] stuff.
- JG: So when we use the word Don Juan Productions, this was like ten years later, fifteen years later.
- IN: Yeah. Don Juan Productions started with the 1984 Olympics.
- KD: That's right. That's what we talked about.
- JG: Well, one of the things that we were excited about having done is bring back a lot of successful artists into the community. We gave them a reason to come back into the community. And they were very happy to have a reason to come back in. And they were the ones that were actually the teachers for these—for our school. In our school—
- IN: This was the East LA School of Mexican American Fine Art.
- JG: Yes, East LA School of Mexican American Fine Arts [TELASOMAF].
- IN: Right.
- JG: I believe we charged like five dollars, or two dollars maybe, per class. And when they didn't have the money, we just let them go in. We wound up using a lot of our cash from the Campaign for Human Development, because we just couldn't turn down anybody. But anyways, what was happening here at the

gallery, it was turning out to be almost like the Grand Central Station for the artists. It's like everybody was stopping by. It was very exciting to have all the artists. We must have had—well, you figure with what we did with the Music Center, and I think I mentioned the Music Center, right?

KD: Yes, you did.

JG: So what we did with the Music Center, we had about three hundred fifty artists and three hundred craftspeople. So altogether, at one point, we probably were represented, or were able to promote or open up some opportunities for at least six hundred artists. But there were at least a hundred artists who were always in and out, in and out of the gallery.

IN: So that was the 1974 Cinco de Mayo activities at the Music Center.

JG: Yeah.

IN: And now—

JG: Well, one day, not long after we had our grand opening, this older young woman—older woman, white woman, walked in with two Spanish-speaking young men. And it struck me strange that here she was Anglo, and they couldn't speak English. Well, anyway, when she introduced herself, she says her name was Sister Karen. I said, "Wow, a sister." And she came in. She wasn't dressed like a sister, she was dressed like any other woman. And it was just interesting that she had these two artists. One of them was Carlos [Bueno], who we continued a relationship—I believe we even had a show of his there at the gallery, and he exhibited at the gallery. And the other one, I don't remember seeing him too much more after that. But anyway, Sister Karen kept on coming a few days and spending quite a bit of time there, asking us questions of how we put it together and what we did to have all this. And then she mentioned that she wanted to open up a place also. And eventually she—not too far after that, she opened one on Brooklyn, by Brooklyn and State, close to Brooklyn and State. And she probably—they probably . . . And it was a nice place. It was big and it had an auditorium too, like a dance hall. And not long after that, they got this—about maybe three years or something like that later—they got the CYO.

IN: CSO. Wasn't it the CSO? No, CYO, you're right.

KD: CYO [Catholic Youth Organization].

JG: CYO, yeah. Right now, you said the CSO . . . One of the things I forgot to mention is that when—before, when I was in high school, one of the first names that I—was that said "Mexican American" up on a wall was the Mexican American . . . What is it? Mexican American foundation?

IN: MAOF?

JG: MAOF.

IN: Mexican American Opportunities Foundation.

KD: Right.

JG: And that's because they were on Whittier Boulevard originally, right down the street from where we were at, [where I lived]. And later on, the CYO—the CSO, Community Service Organization, and Tony Rios, went there. And that's where I went to talk to Tony Rios.

KD: Right.

JG: But anyway, this was one of the first times I saw "Mexican American" in public.

KD: And that struck you as—

JG: Yeah, well, that's—I got very excited. I got very excited. And I saw their logo, and I said, "Gee . . ." That motivated me. I designed two eagles, the Mexican American—the Mexican eagle and the American eagle, and sharing the serpent, and all this other stuff. I got to a major—like any artist or designer, they get inspired and start doing drawings of different things.

IN: So now, in regards to Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], you had mentioned the First Street Store mural. Who were the designers for that mural, those murals? It was eighteen tile murals?

JG: Yeah. Well, it was a team effort. We would all—

IN: Who?

JG: David, Robert—

IN: David Botello.

JG: David Botello, Robert Arenivar, myself, and Joe. Joe was on this project, was basically working on the business part of it. But what we would do is, the way we normally worked as a team is that we would all brainstorm together and talk about concepts. And then we'd develop the concept together, and maybe we'd do a sketch. David Botello and myself might do a sketch, and then show Robert, more or less. But Robert could do a detailed, finished drawing probably faster than we could do a sketch. So he would do the finished drawing. But he would [do] the cartoon, [or black and white drawings,] and then David and I would always do the color on it. So that was mostly the process of how we worked as a team. So, and like I said, we varied sometimes. Sometimes Joe would work more as a team, and then sometimes I would be doing some of the business things.

KD: On other projects.

JG: On other projects. It's like the USC mural. I took care of all the business. So anyway, it's—we just—but we made an agreement that because we—somebody had to take care of the business, that we would always be credited as a team for doing it.

KD: What I had a question about, I know we talked about it before, but the—and you talked a lot about trying to get the particular artist to help you with the tile process. So someone else actually does the tile fabrication for the murals, right?

IN: For the First Street Store.

KD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, this—

KD: And then, from your point of view, is the design slightly changed, or—

JG: Yeah, oh, yeah. We were—well, like any artist, everybody's disappointed, because the design changes [on some, but we really noticed it]. I mean, you figure—

KD: So the collaboration didn't continue. It's just—

JG: Yeah, well, what it is, is the architect. When I—I doubt I got into the details on this, because I think we were going real fast. But what it is, is I left Bob Kemp the drawing of—my drawing of converting the First Street Store with arches and putting murals. And he said he wouldn't do it, he couldn't do it at that moment because he was concerned about the riots. So it was like three years later that on a Christmas, he called and he says, "I've got a surprise for you guys."

KD: No, yeah, you talked about that, and you had it announced before you even knew—

JG: Yeah, so we saw it, it was in the newspaper and that's how we found out about it.

KD: Right.

JG: So what it is, is the architect that did the Pan-American Bank was the same architect that did the new design for the First Street Store. And instead of putting, which mine might have had, six large arches, he put in eighteen small arches, which meant—which was more exciting for us, because this way we had to come up with more ideas. So when we did the designs, we gave them to the architect. The architect went to Mexico. He already had this guy to do the tiles in Mexico, so he took care of all the tiles in Mexico. So when the guy came back and started putting them up, the designs were changed a little bit. Which like I said, any artist is going to get disappointed, because composition is so important. One little movement changes the composition.

IN: But I think you said that the color also was—

JG: But the color, yeah, it lost a lot of color on it.

IN: It wasn't as vibrant, it was—

JG: No, it wasn't as vibrant as our original. So it lost some color on it. But you know, we—

KD: Do you think it was the media, or those colors just weren't the ones that the fabricator chose?

JG: No, it's having an understanding of how to burn the colors.

KD: Oh, okay.

- JG: Because—and how they change. It’s—you know, you really have to understand that real well in order to get the true color of what you want, because when you’re putting it on there, it’s never the color that you want. It’s like doing a black light mural. You’re painting and you can’t see it until you turn off the lights and put a black light on it that it changes. So it’s very difficult to be able to get those colors.
- IN: Now, after that experience, did Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] do something on your own with tile?
- JG: Yeah. Well, Joe—and it seemed like Joe always wanted to be able to do the tiles. And that’s what he seemed to be able to devote himself to. And that’s still his passion. So he’s gotten into the tiles, totally in.
- IN: And he—when he creates the tiles, they really have brilliant color, so he has—
- JG: So he’s gotten a very good understanding of that. Yeah, that’s his passion, he really enjoys that.
- IN: And I think maybe the fact that you didn’t work directly with the manufacturer who were making the tiles, you weren’t in communication with him.
- KD: Right, that’s what I was trying to figure out.
- IN: That you weren’t able—
- JG: Oh, yeah, yeah.
- IN: In other words, the architect—
- JG: The architect took over, yeah.
- IN: Yeah. Whereas if you were actually talking to the people who were making that—
- JG: Yeah, if we were overseeing the whole thing, we would have been much more fussy, especially with the composition, the design. But, you know, we—I mean, I think it was just a great project, and we were happy to be able—the story was in there. The key thing was to be able to have the story and be able to educate the community about our culture.
- IN: And the fact that they’re in tile, that they’re in perfect condition today, that they’ve never been tagged. And if they were, the tagging could be removed very easily, because of the quality of the medium of tile.
- JG: Yeah. One of the other things that happened about that time is that we heard that there was a bilingual foundation for the arts being put together, and we thought, “Wow, this is great, this is a foundation to give money to bilingual artists.” And later on, we found out that it was a theatre group, and they weren’t going to give us any money. *[laughter]*
- IN: And so what happened—what was your relationship with Carmen Zapata?
- JG: Well, this—after—I talked about it after the Dewar’s profile, because that’s when—
- IN: Oh, okay.
- JG: Okay.
- IN: Well, just a few little notes in regards to Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery]. You were mentioning something about the Berlin festival. The mural that you did for the Smithsonian Institute was called *The Future of Innocence*. And so after it was featured at the Smithsonian Institute—
- JG: Yeah, it traveled throughout Berlin.
- IN: So did you mention the Berlin festival?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: Okay. Because he thought he hadn’t mentioned that. Okay.
- KD: Oh, yeah, he did.
- IN: And in regards to Vidal Sassoon, did you want to mention something about that?
- KD: Yeah, you did.
- JG: Did I mention about him?
- KD: You did the Dewar’s ad campaign, the Vidal—because you had brought your portfolio, and we went through—
- IN: Okay. But you mentioned something about Fernando Del Rio that you didn’t say something about that.
- JG: Oh, yeah. Talking about Fernando Del Rio is, I don’t know if I mentioned how exciting it was, with all of the stations and the relationship that we had with the—



- IN: The television stations.
- JG: All of the television stations. Because Channel 2 had Joe Montes, Channel 4 had Jay Rodriguez, Channel 5 had Ray Gonzalez, Channel 7 had Pete Rodriguez, Channel 9 had Fernando Del Rio, Channel 11 had Alicia Sandoval, and Channel 13 was the only one that never had someone. But it was the station that was the least popular. But it was like we had a great relationship—
- IN: And they were all—
- JG: They were always hanging around, we were doing their shows all the time.
- IN: So they were either talk show hosts, or community affairs directors—
- JG: They were community affairs directors, but they had talk shows. Well, Alicia, and Fernando del Rio, and Ray Gonzalez, they had their shows. But when Vidal Sassoon came down, we did the show—Fernando del Rio's show—on Channel 9. Vidal Sassoon and myself went over there to promote the scholarship program. And the—I had mentioned—I think I mentioned that Patssi [Valdez] was in it, and she—the reason she didn't [win was that] they liked the design, but she had [too much] hairspray on it. *[laughter]*
- KD: Right. *[laughter]* But she won second place.
- JG: So Yolanda Aguilar—I think that was her name—won first place. She had the Arco Plaza salon. And I think I talked about Roger Johnson's mural. Roger Johnson was [Edward] Roybal's campaign manager.
- KD: Mm-hmm.
- JG: Okay. And we also did the Universal Oktoberfest. They were inviting us to do the shows in different areas—
- IN: Universal Studios?
- JG: Yeah, Universal Studios. And we did the Nosotros Hollywood Bowl show. That was when Eddie Cano was a music director, conducting the whole big orchestra, and they wanted us to do—set up an exhibit at the Hollywood Bowl. And that's when Ramona Bañuelos was treasurer of the United States, and she was there. So she bought—she purchased a work of art from us that day. And something funny happened that day. Anthony Quinn was at that show. And he's talking at the very end. He says—he gave a ["Viva Mexico!" And me, expecting all of the audience to respond, I yell with all my might, "Que viva!"
- KD: Que viva! *[laughter]*
- JG: And I turn around, and nobody, *[laughs]* nobody else did it but me, and I did it with all my might.
- KD: What was that audience then?
- JG: Yeah, I know it. *[laughter]*
- KD: Were they—it was probably a mixed crowd, or maybe—
- IN: It must have been a mixed crowd.
- JG: Yeah, or straight out—
- IN: The first time Chicanos were in this big venue, maybe they didn't—
- KD: And where was the exhibition, in—
- JG: It was in the—as your walking up to the hill towards the entrance, when everybody's walking in and it's dividing onto the different entryways. Yeah, that's where we had it at.
- IN: And now, later on, Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] actually designed something for Nosotros?
- JG: Yeah, the other thing was, we were designing everybody's awards. We designed the certificate for . . . Sal Castro came in with . . . I think the president was [Manuel] Villalobos, or something like that, of AMAE—
- IN: The Association of Mexican American Educators.
- JG: The Association of Mexican American Educators. This was way in the beginning, towards the early '70s. He came in and asked us if we could do a certificate for AMAE. And then we did the Eagle Award for Nosotros, and we did the—I think it's the Angel Award for Carmen Zapata and the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts. But anyway, we were designing and producing all kinds of awards for everybody. And we were doing some really, other unusual type of awards, but we were using different types of medias. Something to be different from other people.
- IN: And they were all very culturally designed.
- JG: Oh, everything was cultural.

- IN: Beautiful Aztec, Mayan, you know, Mexican—
- KD: And did you pick a fabricator, or—who did your fabrication?
- JG: Well, we'd get a caster, in other words, but we do the mold—the sculpture first in plaster, or Plasticine, whatever, and then they'd cast it. And they'd do all the reproductions of it.
- KD: Right.
- JG: In regards to the Tierra album, I think I mentioned—I think I went through all the details on it?
- KD: Yeah, that was beautiful.
- JG: Okay. I don't know if I mentioned that Phil Sonnichsen, after that, invited me on a cruise to Mexico, to [go with] Chapman College, and I did a presentation—a slideshow—there?
- KD: Yeah.
- IN: And you met a number of people there.
- JG: Yeah. Which was the Penichets. Their uncle and aunt were on the—
- IN: So—did he already talk about all that?
- KD: Yeah.
- IN: Okay.
- JG: Okay. I talked about—
- IN: And the First Street Store, two trips to Mexico. I think you already talked about that, or—
- JG: Talked about that, yeah.
- IN: And two trips to Mexico, did you already talk about that?
- JG: The second trip, yeah.
- IN: The second trip, okay. So was there something new about the Salesian mural? Because you didn't mention it.
- JG: Yeah, I mentioned that, about the César Chávez. I mean, the—
- KD: Yeah. You did. [*laughter*] Pulling down the scaffolding, and—
- IN: The USC mural, okay. Anthony Quinn and the Pan-American Bank, you got that.
- JG: Oh, yeah. No, no, I never talked about—in about '75 or so, '76, I went to the Pan-American Bank—I went to make a deposit—and all of a sudden Anthony Quinn was there, and Brother Marcus, or . . . He was now Father Marcus, who was from Salesian, who was the one that told me, "You've got to become a citizen to go to Europe." And he had become the director of the Salesian Boys' Club at that time, so he was very involved with the community. So Brother Marcus was there and called me over, and it turns out that Anthony Quinn was trying to get businessmen in the community to put money into creating a motion picture company. But anyway, he was there at the Pan-American Bank, trying to get the community—since he was from East LA, he was coming back to do that.
- Another thing in regards to Anthony Quinn. Once we started getting a lot of publicity, there was some elderly white women—they were much older, they were probably in their late seventies, very sweet older women—started coming to the gallery. And they were actually from Hancock Park. There were some wealthy women, and they were from Hancock Park. So they had seen us in the media, and they were just so excited about what we were doing. And they started inviting us to the Hancock Park art association. And they said, "You've got to come down, you've got to be a member." So anyway, it turns out that they signed us up. They paid for our fees and everything and bought our membership card. And they started saying, you know, "We want to be able to get Robert Wise." And they started talking about all kinds of motion picture people—Robert Wise, the director of *Sound of Music*. And then they said, "You've got to try and get Anthony Quinn to exhibit here," and they gave us his phone number. So we were actually able to call Anthony Quinn and talk to him on the phone, and invite him to exhibit. Now, this was pretty early in the game—
- KD: What do you mean, exhibit? Did he have—
- JG: He was a painter.
- KD: Oh.

JG: He was an artist. He's a sculptor and painter and—

KD: I always thought he was a photographer. I didn't know that.

JG: Yeah, oh, he has a passion for painting and art. That's what he seemed to really retire towards afterwards. But anyway, he said that—at that time, he wasn't exhibiting anywhere—and he said that he didn't feel that he was ready yet. So anyway, he wasn't able to do it. But these older women were just so sweet. They were—one of them was always coming down, she'd come by bus, because she wasn't allowed to drive anymore. And she'd always take the bus, all the way from Hancock Park, from Beverly Hills, into East LA on the bus. *[laughter]*

IN: So they came in because of the Dewar's profile? They saw you in the Dewar's profile?

JG: Yeah, probably, or *Time* magazine. But we had so much LA media that being in LA, it was hard to miss us.

IN: Now, you mention that there was a story in *La Opinión*—

JG: Yeah. Yeah, they had a whole thing that—and we weren't even aware of it. I guess they did an interview—my mom told me, you know, "They got the whole story on you and Joe in there, and everything else."

KD: Yeah, I've seen that.

JG: Yeah, at the Hancock Park.

IN: So what were—did you mention these names? *[referring to list]*

JG: Oh, yeah. In regards to the Music Center, I was trying to remember. Bill McClellan was the PR director for the Music Center, and Connie—I'm surprised I remember these—her name was Connie Avila was his assistant. It was so nice to see a Chicana there at the Music Center. And so they were the ones that came down to the gallery—I believe they came with somebody else—to ask us if we could participate in putting on this show at the Music Center. And one of the second meetings that we had, we had it actually at the Ahmanson's house. And it was quite an honor when we walked in and Mrs. Ahmanson greets us and walks us into the big living room, and she says, "The Monsieurs Gonzalez are here." *[laughter]* It was a beautiful house in—around the Hancock Park area. All brick, Old English. It was really, really nice. So they discussed the idea of being able to put this together. And with their help, we were—of the media, we managed to get, like I said, something like six hundred artists altogether. And this went on for—I think we did it for three years at the Music Center. And then the county took it over right across the street, and we might have done two years after that with the county. But little by little, the county started taking over on it. And—

*[break in audio]*

KD: We're on tape 10. This is side 2 on December 17, with Johnny Gonzalez [and Irma Núñez]. Go ahead. The Music Center—had it for three years—

JG: Yeah, the Music Center might have been the first street festival that LA ever had. And then the street scene continued, and then Broadway Fiesta, and all these other ones continued after that.

IN: You already covered—I think you mentioned that, about the *Time* magazine cover that Cher took over, I think.

KD: [Yes.] Mm-hmm.

IN: Is that basically—

JG: Yeah, it was possible.

IN: Okay. Did you already—you mentioned—

JG: Yeah, I guess I mentioned—

IN: That Lalo Guerrero went to the Smithsonian? Now, you were going to say something about the—your East LA mural map, the beautiful—

KD: We talked about that.

IN: Map. But you were going to say something about—

JG: Did I mention about the slogan, that, "In Europe, all roads lead to Rome. In Southern California, all free-ways lead into East LA."

- IN: Yeah. So always turning the negative into the positive. *[laughter]* And—okay. Okay. Well, also, they started doing documentaries on you worldwide, after the Dewar's profile. That that triggered—
- JG: Yeah, it just went on and on.
- IN: So people were coming from Europe, from Latin America, from Canada, to do—
- JG: From Africa, they came from Africa. French, the French were—the French and the German were really into it. And I forget names of most of the people. But one name I remember, though, because it was so unusual for me, but now I hear it more often, is—his name was Wolfgang. So he was a producer of a documentary, and obviously he was from Germany. But we also did a TV show for—which was—I don't even know, it was like a variety type of show for Mexico. They came down and they interviewed us in front of the First Street Store murals. And this was for a live TV—it wasn't a documentary, this was for a live show that they were having over there, and I don't remember the name of it. But anyway, there were so many different things happening at that time, I couldn't remember the names of everybody.
- IN: So now, I think you already talked about East LA College, when the Smithsonian mural came back and you had the big celebration there. And then that's when you started working with Alex [Grattan-Dominguez], Alejandro, on Sierra Madre Motion Pictures.
- JG: Yeah, I think I was starting to talk about the movie.
- KD: No, we went all the way through the movie.
- IN: We went through the movie, okay.
- JG: Okay. So I covered all—yeah, what I—
- KD: Yeah, you did all the Sierra Madre, that I have actually extensive notes on.
- IN: You might have—are these points that you forgot? *[referring to list]*
- JG: Yeah, what I didn't mention is that one of the experiences that I had when we were working on the movie, putting it together. Actually, we were already beginning—we were already shooting, and . . . Did I mention about—I think I did—Gilbert Roland? That—yeah. So anyway, we were already shooting, and we weren't quite sure exactly about who was going to be doing the music. Alex had talked to a composer by the name of Bob Ragland, who had shown interest in doing it, but it wasn't certain. It wasn't really locked in yet. And one day I was driving down the freeway, and all of a sudden, I see Tony Garcia, the sax player, and—
- IN: And he's the one that was with—which groups?
- JG: And we waved to—
- IN: Tony Garcia—
- JG: Yeah, I mentioned—
- IN: You mentioned all those.
- JG: Tony Garcia was involved with all the groups.
- IN: Well, it's sax, yeah.
- JG: So, yeah, Tony Garcia is sax. So we wave to each other. We got off the freeway, and he says, "So where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to a movie shoot. We're putting a movie together." He goes, "Oh, really?" He says, "Oh, that sounds interesting." So I said, "Where are you going?" He says, "I'm going to a rehearsal for El Discos de Oro at the sports arena," and El Discos de Oro is like the Grammy [Awards] of Mexico. So he was going to be performing for El Discos de Oro. So he said, "You know what? The music director, the conductor, Mario Patron, has done a number of scores for movies in Mexico." He says, "Why don't you come down and I'll introduce you to him?" So I went, followed him, and we went—they were rehearsing at the Hilton, across the street from the sports arena. So they were rehearsing at the Hilton, and he was rehearsing with Alejandro Algara, who is—or was considered at one time the official interpreter of Augustín Lara. So he introduced me to him, and Mario got very excited about what I was talking about.

And, originally, I had got excited about having Eddie Cano do the music for the movie, but Eddie didn't feel comfortable, because he said, "I've never done scores for movies." And I was disappointed, because I really wanted to be able to have him get involved with the project. So when I talked to Mario, he says—and he knew Eddie very well, so he says, "I'll work with Eddie. We'll work as a team, so we could be able to

do it.” So Mario then said, “Why don’t you come down tomorrow to El Discos de Oro?” He says, you know, “Be my guest. You can sit down there with the band.”

So I go the next day, and as I walk in backstage, Mario starts introducing me to all these superstars from Mexico. I mean, Cuco Sánchez, and here I’m talking—all of a sudden, talking to José José, and José José says, you know, “Why don’t you follow me into the dressing room so I can start getting ready?” I was telling [him] that it would be nice if he could sing the theme song to our movie, and he got excited. He says, “It’s time for me to introduce myself to the English-speaking audience over here, the Latinos that speak English.” He says, “Yeah, I’d be more than happy to be able to do it.” So anyway, we walked into the dressing room, and we’re in there talking, and all of a sudden, Jorge Rivero, the superstar from Mexico, walks in. And the three of us are in there just—José José introduced me and told him what we were doing. So we were having a nice conversation. And then as we started walking out, he says—he gives me his home phone number. He says, “This is my house number. Call me when you guys are ready, when you want to start doing something.” He says, “I’ll be more than happy to do it.”

So anyway, after the whole concert was over, Mario says, “We’re all going to go to a restaurant to go eat and have some drinks.” He says, “Why don’t you come down with us?” And I got nervous, because I had invested all my money and everything into the movie. I wasn’t getting paid, so I didn’t have any money. So I [thought], you know, “If I go with them and they treat me, I’m going to have to treat them too.” So I had to turn down that great little party that they were having. But anyway, it was a nice opportunity.

So then I got together with Mario Patron later on, and we talked about—he says, “Look, I have recording studios in Mexico. We could record the score in Mexico, and we could use the Mexican symphony. I’m sure I could get a good price on it.” But anyway, we figured the transportation and all of this would start running into a lot of—we didn’t have any budget for any of this. Mario then introduced me to Val Valentine. Now, Val Valentine was a legend to a lot of us musicians, because he recorded the Animals, “House of the Rising Sun”—what do you call it?

IN: “House of the Rising Sun”?

JG: “House of the Rising Sun.” So anyway, he recorded—there was a record that we [Bobby Hernandez and I] always listened to, a jazz record with Jimmy Smith, a jazz organist that Val Valentine had produced, engineered. So anyway, when I met Val Valentine, I was all excited. And Val Valentine, he was actually Frank Sinatra’s personal engineer for almost seventeen years, and now he was an engineer for Norman Granz, who produced—who had the contract with Ella Fitzgerald, Joe Pass, all of the great jazz musicians. So he gave me a whole set of albums that he engineered with all of the great jazz musicians. And I wasn’t into getting autographs at that time, so I got tons of things with people not being able to sign it.

IN: [laughter] You didn’t think about it.

JG: I didn’t think about it. But anyway, Val Valentine got excited, and it turns out that—I got together with Bob Ragland. Since we weren’t going to be able to go to Mexico and all that—it was just going to be too complicated. And Bob Ragland was excited about being able to do it. So I got together with Bob Ragland, and we met with Val Valentine and talked about different things. But all these other things still went into money. So we finally wound up—Bob Ragland finally wound up doing it. I think he paid for a lot of the stuff himself.

IN: And what was Bob Ragland’s background?

JG: Well, he was a composer. But anyway, he did a beautiful job. He overdubbed—he would record four musicians at one time, then record another part and overdub, and it sounded like a big symphony.

KD: Yeah. Right.

JG: And they—you know, a lot of people were saying, “You’ve got to get it into the theatres so that you could be able to present it to the Academy Awards because the music is so nice.”

KD: And the singer was fantastic.

JG: Yeah, the singer, she was real good.

IN: That was Susan?

JG: No, that wasn't Susan. No, he got the singer and the lyricist, the person that did the lyrics. I don't have his name, I feel bad about it. [It was Sid Wayne.] Really, really nice guy. A comedian like you can't imagine. He was so funny. But he's the one that composed the song "See You in September." It was a real popular song. [sings] "See you in September, have a good time and remember . . ." And he also did the English [lyrics] of "Somos Novios," which is "It's Impossible." So anyway, he wound up . . . But he [Sid] gave me an album that he worked on with Rafael. Rafael, from Spain, tried to do an album in English so that he could be able to promote himself here in English. And he [Sid] worked on—he worked with Rafael in order to be able to pronounce the English right and all that. So he gave me that album, and I didn't get his autograph on that either. [He was also a songwriter for Elvis Presley.]

IN: So just to fill in, before you get to the next story. Now, Judy Baca, did you—did she have contact with Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery]?

JG: Yeah, I think I mentioned that she walked in and—early in the game, she walked in and said that she was going to be doing a mural with kids on the Sisters of the Poor wall.

IN: And she was one of the artists that got the East LA Day awards, when you awarded artists who did five or more murals?

JG: Yeah. I was going to get into that.

IN: Oh, okay. Okay.

KD: But anyway—

IN: Did he already talk about that?

KD: Yeah, he did.

IN: Okay.

JG: After—one of the things that happened, after the Dewar's profile came out, while I was working on the movie, I was still coming in on Sundays. So Sundays would be the day that I'd just relax and greet interesting people that would walk in. One guy that walked in, his name was Tony Calderon. And Tony Calderon had—was working . . . He was a producer, and he was working on a film about a Chicano policeman in Austin that was able to kill a sniper who was shooting down people from the tower of the University of Austin. This was in the news. He [the sniper] killed quite a bit of people [and] he, [the Chicano policeman,] was able to shoot him down. But anyway, he [Tony] was working on the movie, and at that time he was undecided about the name. He had mentioned "Sniper in the Tower," or "The Killer Tower," and I think the movie finally came out to be *The Deadly Tower*, with Richard Yñiguez. And he had mentioned that he had talked to Martinez, and originally wanted to get Martinez, and I don't remember the first name. But he eventually, as he was working on the movie, he [Tony] invited me to go have lunch with him over there at—I think he was working at MGM Studios.

And at that same time, one other Sunday, he—another couple came in, very classy-looking couple, a Chicano and his wife, who was Anglo. And we started talking. It turned out that his name was Johnny Alonzo. And so Johnny Alonzo had just been nominated for an Academy Award for cinematography, for a movie, [*Chinatown*, and was known earlier for a movie called] *Sounder*, which was about blacks. And so he [Johnny Alonzo] bought some of our Christmas cards that we were publishing. And I had named them Frame-A-Cards—I had the title, Frame-A-Cards, in order to encourage people to frame them, because they were so beautiful. It was Robert's artwork. And so he [Johnny Alonzo] bought them, and I think he wanted some framed. And so he asked if I could deliver them to his house, and he was living in Sherman Oaks at that time. And I went on a Sunday to drop them off, and it turns out that we were—we spent quite a while talking. And it—he was talking about the fact that they called him "The Burrito King," because wherever he was shooting, he used to send somebody to come into East LA at the burrito place on First Street, by where the police station is on Chicago—

IN: Hollenbeck Police Station?

JG: Yeah, to pick up a batch of burritos for everybody.

IN: I think it was called [Al and] Bea's Burritos?



- JG: Possibly.
- IN: Everybody went there.
- JG: So anyway, he'd send people to come down and pick up burritos, and so they called [him] "The Burrito King." And he even had a golden chalice—chalice?
- IN: Chalice.
- JG: Chalice. With a golden burrito displaying on the chalice.
- IN: Now, he also did cinematography for *Chinatown*, and what were some of the other movies?
- JG: Oh, as a matter of fact, maybe that's what he was nominated for, for *Chinatown*.
- IN: Oh, okay.
- JG: Yeah, I think he was nominated for—
- IN: And he—
- JG: [inaudible]
- IN: He shot *Mahogany*. He shot—what was the movie where the—
- JG: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.
- IN: And where the big blimp—
- JG: Yeah, the—but anyway—
- IN: The German blimp that blew up?
- KD: Yeah.
- IN: What was it called?
- KD: The—
- IN: *The Hindenburg*?
- KD: *Hindenburg*.
- IN: *The Hindenburg*. So he was a major—
- JG: No, it was when they were going to—they wanted to blow up the Coliseum or something.
- IN: It was—no, it was actually a suspense movie where there was, like, terrorists wanted to blow up with the Coliseum with a balloon, with a big air balloon.
- JG: The blimp. [The movie was *Black Sunday*.]
- IN: The blimp, yeah. So he was like major—
- KD: Now, I'm just a little worried about time. Are—are we going to have time to get into Don Juan Productions? I'm not sure where you are on—
- IN: Well, right now, it's ten thirty, and we're going to break at—
- KD: Right around twelve o'clock.
- IN: Twelve o'clock, okay. So maybe give yourself—
- JG: Let me try and move real fast.
- IN: Yeah, give yourself a half hour to try to speed through all of this stuff, you know.
- JG: Okay, so anyway, because this relates to the movie also. So that same day, he [Johnny Alonzo] . . . So we wound up talking, and he had a guitar. So he says, "Why don't you sing a couple of songs?" So I stayed there for awhile, and then he says, "Okay, we're going to have to leave now," because it was . . . Sylvester Stallone's movie was out, and he says, you know, "I'm really intrigued on the fact that this guy, all of a sudden [made a hit movie]." Everybody's new [in this movie]. And Bill Conte, who did the music, originally came down . . . Before he did the music, he came down to the gallery and to Joe's house. A person from Washington [that we met while doing the Smithsonian mural] had introduced us, Joe, to Bill Conte. And I remember Joe saying, "You know, I met this guy that does music for movies." I said, "Music for movies? That takes a lot." So it was hard to believe that this guy was just casually—and then all of a sudden, he becomes Bill Conte, and Joe builds a wild library for him afterwards at his house.
- IN: Now, Susan Racho, she's like the—maybe like one of the first Chicana film producers?
- JG: Yeah. Well, there was another. [Sylvia Morales.]
- IN: And she was involved with—a little bit with Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], or with your movie, or what?

- JG: No. No, she was just—she was involved with Jose Luis [Ruiz], and Jesús Treviño, and all those . . . [She also came in to shoot Josephina Quezada's artwork.]
- IN: So she kind of came in with those guys.
- JG: Uh-huh. But anyway, Johnny [Alonzo], when . . . So Tony Calderon then said, "Why don't we . . ." When I told Tony Calderon that I got together with Johnny Alonzo, he says, "Why don't we ask him and see if we can have a dinner honoring the fact that he's been nominated for an Academy Award?" So we both went to the house to talk to him, and Johnny Alonzo didn't feel comfortable with that. He says, you know, "I haven't won anything." So anyway, he didn't feel comfortable with that. But when I started talking about the movie—and this is at a different time—I started talking about the movie, and I told him what we were doing. And I said, "Could you recommend some cinematographer?" And he says, "So what's wrong with me?" And I was shocked, you know. *[laughter]* I mean, this guy was tops, and he says, "So what's wrong with me?" And I said, "Well, it'd be great!" He says, "The only thing about it, if I shoot it, we have to do it within my union."
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: And within his union was going to take a lot of money. But anyway, the fact that he was interested in shooting it, I was excited about it. But anyway, it turned out that the schedule after—we took so long before we were able to get the money that it didn't happen. But another thing that—when we first started talking with Alex—[my partner, Alejandro Grattan], I started that since—I told him, "Since we have Anthony Quinn's phone number, and since Anthony Quinn is an artist from East LA, we might be able to catch his emotions to be able to star in this movie." And Alex said, "Well, let's hold off, and let's get the paperwork on the—you know, incorporating everything." And—
- IN: And Anthony Quinn is Chicano Irish, and Alex is Chicano Irish.
- JG: Yeah, and Alex is Chicano Irish. So I went through this whole thing, and I think I shocked him with that name. But anyway, you know, by the time we got the money together and all that, it took awhile still.
- IN: And Bobby Morones had done something.
- JG: Yeah, so Bobby Morones had said that what—when I took Alex, I started introducing him to the Chicano community. And I took him to meet Bobby Morones, and see what Bobby would say about this. And he says—
- IN: And Bobby was casting at Universal Studios.
- JG: Yeah, Bobby was casting at Universal. So he said, "It's very possible that you could afford Gilbert Roland, or maybe even José Ferrer." José Ferrer, at that time, I think he said something for—like for twenty-two hundred dollars. [We know his past agent, who said it was twenty-five hundred dollars.] And Gilbert Roland, I don't know how much. But he says, "And possibly, you could use Vickie Carr as a teacher." And so anyway, it turns out that Vickie Carr seemed not to want to act yet or something. And we interviewed Gilbert Roland, but Alex thought that he was too confident and too macho to be—
- KD: For the part.
- JG: For the part.
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: So anyway, we went through that one.
- IN: And so Percy Duran, who was—
- JG: Yeah, so we put the board together [for the movie]. The initial board that we put together was—Percy Duran was the attorney—
- IN: He was your schoolmate from Assumption?
- JG: Yeah, from Assumption, third-grade schoolmate. John was from Salesian, and he was an accountant at Capitol Records. And then it was Maria Casillas [a prominent educator], myself, and Alex.
- IN: And this was for Sierra Madre [Motion Picture Company].
- JG: This was for Sierra Madre, yeah.
- IN: And Percy Duran later became commissioner of public works.

JG: Yeah. Later on, when we started putting the whole movie together, and we were working on it, actually, Percy was called on to go to Washington, I think, to work for some national position in regards to banks and home, housing, stuff like that. And Joe Avila then came into the picture. And Joe Avila was a corporate attorney, and so this was probably one of the first projects in regards to art that Joe was doing, Joe Avila. And we started talking about all of the things, in regards to the arts, and he was real excited. And he was saying, you know, “I’ve always thought of trying to put something together to be able to help these artists or boxers, especially, that don’t have an education, don’t know how to invest, and all that.” So we talked and talked, and we had quite a few meetings together. And of course, dealing with the movie company, we saw each other quite a bit.

And at one point, I started getting so excited I started writing a musical. I called it “The Sights and Sounds of East LA.” And it was a stage production which would project some historical things, and at the same time it would be the story of a Chicano, and I—a Chicano who was white at heart, and embarrassed about his culture. And [he] started getting excited about his culture—and then a Chicana started educating him and getting him excited about his culture. And at the same time, the history’s being projected, and music of different—different types of music within our culture would be performed live on stage.

IN: Showing the diversity of the Chicano culture. That we’re into all kinds of sounds.

JG: Yeah. And Joe Avila started working on trying to put the whole thing together, in regards to the legal part of it.

IN: What was the name of the—

JG: “The Sights and Sounds of East LA.” So this was a project that I was also developing at the same time.

IN: So Bobby Morones was helping you as far as the film and casting, and then he was supplying you with models for your school. And then you were also working on the script. And then—

JG: So then Bill Landsford’s another one that came in. Bill Landsford was actually writing the script for Tony Calderon, so he was working with Tony Calderon.

IN: Yeah, I think you talked about that.

JG: Yeah. And he’s Chicano also. So then, about that same time, which the Dewar’s was all coming out at that time, Art Snyder called me. He called the gallery, and he offered—he says, “I have a building, which is about the size of a football field, that—which is the Lincoln Heights Jail—that I will give you guys for one dollar a year.” He says, “You can have one whole floor,” he said, “with the condition: that you put together a cultural center there.” And I decided to take him up on that. I said—I got excited about it. And I thought—but he said, “But there’s no money.” He says, “I don’t have any money whatsoever,” he said, “but I’ll help you in any way possible. Anything that you need, I’ll help. But we don’t have any money.” So I started thinking of how we’d put the studio together with very little money at the beginning—no money at all. And I thought, when an artist is—what’s the word, I lose it—

IN: Inspired.

JG: No, no. It’s—

IN: Resourceful.

JG: Resourceful. Artists are very resourceful. When they want something and they need something—you know, we’re always broke, and we always find ways to be able to get that thing done. And I thought, “If I allocate space to a lot of groups that don’t have a home [studio], they’ll have that space, and they’ll do whatever they can do to be able to develop that space. And if we have Art Snyder’s support, we can get things going on that. So I don’t need millions of dollars right now to get this thing going. All I need is to call key people that I know that don’t have a home [studio], but have a group.”

So I was thinking of Florencio [Yescas], who had the [Aztec *folklórico*] dance company, and he didn’t have a place. He was working with Plaza [de la Raza], but he didn’t have the liberty to be able to do his own thing. And so I started thinking also of bringing together different elements that could work with each other and support each other. It’s like creating a publicity department, a graphic department, an advertising department, stage design, stage construction, film and . . . I told Art Snyder, you know, about putting

together a film school, and he says, "What I will do is I will go to all of the movie companies and ask for equipment for the movie school." So in other words, I was trying to combine every element that is needed so that each of [them] could support each other. So if we have a theater group or a dance group or a music group that is putting on a show, the publicity department and all of them work together to try and promote it. So they—and the stage and design and construction will do it for the theater group. And they'll all work within each other. [This would be an expansion of my TELASOMAFa apprenticeship school, as part of my "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project.]

IN: And you're also thinking of Alicia Sandoval—

JG: Yeah, and Alicia Sandoval was working—was teaching publicity at East LA College. And I went and I talked to her and I told her about it. Then I went to the theater teacher at East LA College also, who—I started taking classes in acting, once we got into the movie, so I could understand it that much more.

IN: And Cobos, you talked about—

JG: And then [Henry] Cobos was a music director at the school at that time.

IN: At East LA College.

JG: At East LA College. So I started working on putting all of this together, and I said, "Okay, so what I'll do is I'll start calling key people, and they—let them select. There's a lot of space, let them select whatever space they want." So the first one that I called was Carmen Zapata, and I said, "Carmen, I have space for you to be able to have your theater." Carmen Zapata's theater group was roaming around. They'd go around doing productions wherever they could, whatever stage they could find.

KD: Right.

IN: I remember in high school and college, seeing her group at the Inner City Cultural Center, they used that a lot. [It was in college and when I started teaching.]

KD: Mm-hmm.

JG: Yeah. So they went—but they didn't have a home.

IN: Right.

JG: So when I called her [Carmen Zapata] and I told her, and I said, "Would—do you want this space?" And she goes, "Well, of course. Yeah, yeah, I want it!" I said, "Okay, do me a favor. Call Art Snyder and tell him that I've already selected you as a person that—you know, to give you a space there." So anyway, while I was working on this, all of a sudden, three other people came. a team who had designed a whole floor plan. They had it all drawn out. And these were a combination of an artist . . . And they were influential. One of them was in with a lot of money people. And they had a whole blueprint of how to convert this whole place—

IN: The jail.

JG: Into a cultural center. And they said, you know, "All we need is a half a million dollars to be able to do this." So I said, "Well, you know, they have influence and they have everything they need." I said, "Well, I'm not going to start battling with them." I said, "It looks like they might be able to make it happen faster than me." So I said, "Okay, you guys can take it over." [And yet] nothing happened, though. But Carmen Zapata got in, and she got [the space that she wanted].

IN: So she, [Carmen, has] been there ever since.

JG: So my strategy worked out with Carmen. So if I would have called a few more people, they might have all been in there, too. Because these other people never did what they said they were going to do, which was going to cost—

KD: Now, were they coming from Art Snyder's office as well, or was that, like, a competing bid for the space?

JG: Well, it wasn't—it was never a competing bid. It was just happened to be people who knew about it already.

KD: Oh. Knew about the space.

IN: You had told them—in other words, you had shared this—

- JG: Yeah, I had shared this information. And they felt they had the power to be able to take it from me. And because they were a group of people who had influence, I felt, you know, “If I keep on working, I’m just going to be wasting my time.” But I think if I would have called more of the people, like—look what Carmen did. She got in there and she got a real nice space.
- IN: Right. So now we’re getting close to the end of your notes. So if we can finish this up, and then go to the educational program.
- JG: Okay. Yeah. I talked about Carolyn Murray?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: From the *LA Times*? Okay.
- KD: Yeah. Okay.
- JG: Okay, so we talked—
- IN: And East LA Mural Day—
- KD: Yeah, you did that.
- IN: Okay. The buses—okay. Yeah, East LA Mural Day, you really covered that. Yeah.
- JG: Yeah. What I didn’t say, though, is that that day was one of my two most memorable days of my life. I was on cloud nine. I thought I was just floating in a cloud all day long, because I felt—I just couldn’t believe my dream came true, to make East LA a tourist attraction. That was my dream. It didn’t [know how it was going to happen]. It just snowballed. I had no idea it was going to happen like that, but it was happening. Tourists were coming in from all over LA [and the world]. So that day, and the day that I saw the ship pulling away from the New York harbor, are the two [most important] days of my life. Because those were the two most important things that I wanted the most in my life, was to be able to travel Europe and to be able to make East LA a tourist attraction.
- IN: And when you worked with Mayor Bradley’s office to declare East LA Day, you were talking with his deputy mayor?
- JG: Yeah, Grace Montañez Davis.
- IN: Yeah—
- JG: She got all interested. And then Gloria Molina. And what I didn’t mention was that Lorraine Alvarez was with Edelman’s office. Lorraine Alvarez and Gil [Gerakos]. And so we developed a very nice relationship, because he actually was campaigning at that time, and they brought him into the gallery while he was campaigning all of that. But we had a great relationship with almost everybody.
- IN: And now, you already talked about the framing department, how he—because so many people couldn’t afford original art, and the framing was so expensive, that you were setting up the whole framing department.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: I think—did he talk about that already?
- KD: I think so, actually earlier, not last time.
- JG: A ninety-day loan that I—in other words—
- KD: No, you didn’t—
- JG: Okay. When we were . . . When it was all set up to be able to have the tours coming in, the—I thought, you know, “We’ve got to be able to make some money on this some way or another.” And the fact that there were so many people coming down, getting interviews of our lives, our story, what—and not only that, is tourists for the murals. I thought, “For this big event, if I’m able to publish a booklet—”
- KD: Yes. This is where we ended—go ahead.
- JG: “Publish a booklet that describes all our murals, and also be able to set up a framing department to frame small prints and stuff like that.” To have inexpensive things that we could be able to sell. There was a large—a publisher, a large publisher in New York who actually had a print of Orozco’s. And that was one print—Morseburg, Howard Morseburg had the Esperanza prints, which he published with Dr. Chayra. And I mentioned Howard Morseburg had a lot of Mexican artists. So Howard Morseburg was a believer

of Mexican art from way back, and he helped us a lot. And we always had a lot—all of his Mexican artists, we would have in our gallery. And there was also a Metcalf gallery, who Joe knew, who loaned us, in order to sell it, an original Ribera from Spain, a painting. And that one we kept in the office because it was quite valuable.

IN: Now TELACU gave you and Joe and an award.

JG: Yeah, so right after the Dewar's profile, I believe, TELACU awarded Joe and I "Businessman of the Month." And it said, "for having given East LA international exposure and for making the community aware of their own culture." Which to me was just—that was my dream, to be acknowledged for what I really wanted to do. I value that one very much.

IN: Did you already cover this?

JG: Yeah, in our [gallery] shows we would always try to introduce up-and-coming stars, or celebrities. There was one, Sam Hernandez who was a cliff diver. He was a high diver, and he was trying to raise money to go to the Olympics to dive off the cliffs in Acapulco. So we had him there. Then we had Hank Garcia, who was a up-and-coming comedian who opened—he was an opening act for Vicki Carr at the Music Center. And he also [co-starred] in the movie *Fun with Dick and Jane*, with Jane Fonda and, I forget who the guy actor was. [George Segal.] But anyway, he [Hank] would [co-star] in that movie. [Also in the movie was Isaac Ruiz, who co-starred with Freddie Prinze in *Chico and the Man*.] And Rene Mendez [I'm not sure of spelling], [who] was a very close friend of Alicia Sandoval, [who] was the manager—she was managing Hank Garcia and also Jack Albertson. Ah, so she was doing pretty good for a—

KD: And they were coming into the gallery?

JG: Yeah, yeah.

KD: And talk about the tour book. You didn't finish on that. Did it get off the ground?

JG: Yeah. Well, yeah. We managed to get—Pete Rodriguez was really working with Sam Hernandez. And I think he [Sam] managed to get into a certain point on it—[the Olympics]. But I think there was some type of discrimination problems that was going on with him, something political that was going on. And they were trying to struggle to get him in there. And I think he got in to a certain extent. But eventually he got a job in—what is it? In one of the—Sea World, I think, diving off the high towers. And Hank Garcia. After the movie, I don't know how big he became, but for that while he was doing pretty good. And I don't know if he did any movies after that. He used to imitate John Wayne and a lot of the big stars in Spanish.

IN: So finish off here, real quick, that Vickie Carr was doing something at the Music Center.

JG: Yeah, I said it right now.

IN: Oh. You said it right now. Okay. So now, as far as the booklet, you published it and distributed it during East LA Day—

JG: Yeah, yeah.

IN: And you had the frame shop setup.

JG: Yeah.

IN: So was the frame shop making some money?

JG: Well, I made the money back, and I paid the ninety-day loan right away. So I was able to pay it off right away. It was a [three hundred dollar], ninety-day loan that I got in order to be able to . . . [This is a correction, it was not a three-thousand-dollar loan.]

KD: A small business loan or—

JG: No, no. It was just a personal loan.

KD: Really.

JG: Yeah. So it wasn't—I got the loan pretty quick.

KD: Is that because you were feeling real confident that this would pay off, or . . .

JG: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, I knew that Pete . . . Everybody was coming in asking us questions about our life and about the murals, and they wanted tours and stuff like that. So I knew if we had something that we could just sell. And also, we didn't have small items—inexpensive things—to sell. They were all originals.



So hundreds of people would come into the gallery, and they would walk out with nothing because they weren't art buyers. So actually they wanted it. But it was the community.

KD: Do you still have a copy of the book?

IN: Yes, I think I have one.

JG: Irma might have one.

KD: Oh, I hope so.

IN: Yeah, yeah.

JG: It was a little book. Yeah, we might have it.

IN: So lets go through this real fast. Since time is short, if it's not necessary to mention—

JG: Oh yeah. So, some of the—

IN: Say it real fast.

JG: Certain well-known people used to hang out. Ralfi Pagán was a singer from back east. I think he was Puerto Rican. He was a very famous young kid, singer, who, when he was on tour, he'd stay with a friend in East LA, and he'd come to the gallery and hang out there at the gallery. I heard that he died or got killed or something like that. But he was very, very popular.

IN: Now, someone painted your portrait.

JG: Leo Politi. They have a school named after him. And Leo Politi also did the mural at Olvera Street. But he did the Olvera Street mural way after we started the murals. But Leo Politi used to hang out at the gallery. And [a] nice, nice, nice, nice guy. Really nice, and—and I might of told you that he—I was talking to his son lately. He [Leo Politi] loved Robert [Arenivar's] artwork, and he wanted Robert to continue his work. So we went to go meet his publisher.

IN: Because he was retiring.

JG: Yeah, yeah. Leo Politi was an illustrator and a writer. So he wrote children's books and—I think one was "Juanito in Olvera Street." [Politi's *Juanita* is set on Olvera Street—ed.] Tons of children's books. So he had Robert and myself go to meet his publisher so that Robert could continue doing the work that Leo Politi was doing. And it turns out that Robert was not accustomed to doing things, being dictated to. So he wasn't an illustrator. He just drew what he wanted to do. So that just didn't work out. And then there was a—Tim Padilla was an old guy who had a big beard, Santa Claus beard, and everybody used to draw him. Everybody drew him. He was a very famous model. Any art—all the art schools would hire him, and all the artists . . . So he would model free for us at our art school, [The East Los Angeles School of Mexican American Fine Arts, or TELASOMAF].

And then there was an interesting story. A Sunday, another Sunday, I was at the gallery and, all of a sudden, I walked into the office. And as I walk out I see this young white hippie. Young kid, he must have been eighteen, nineteen years old. And long blond hair all the way down to his waist and white, white, white. I mean really white, and a real hippie. And I'm looking and, all of a sudden, he comes up and starts talking to me in Spanish. And he says—he starts telling me that he's an artist [and his name is Marcos]. And he says, "Would you be interested in me doing some artwork?" And I said, "What do you do? What do you do?" So he pulled out a portfolio, and he had all these beautiful sculpted alabaster—they were lamps. A lot of lamps.

KD: Yeah. I think you told me about it.

JG: They were beautiful, really beautiful.

KD: I think I remember the name.

JG: And then he showed me some of the other stuff. And I said, "Well, if this kid's doing that, I don't know." But you know . . . And then he says—so I say . . . Yeah, what he wanted to do was work out of the studio. He says, "Could I have a space to work here?" And then I said, "Yeah, I think so." So, I called Joe, because I wasn't about to give him space. Because he [Marcos] says, "Oh, okay." He says, "So, if I start working here," he says, "is there a place where I could stay?" I said, "Oh my gosh. This guy wants to live here too." So, and then after he says, "And is it possible for you to get this type of a machine?" A router [*laughter*] and

stuff like that. So he wanted the machine, he wanted the . . . But when I—we—saw his artwork, we said, “Man this guy’s doing some beautiful work.” So we found a place for him on Whittier Boulevard, on top of a pool hall on Whittier Boulevard. And—and I think we might have covered his first month’s rent on that. So we were gambling. And we bought him the machines. And we took him outside, out in the—where the driveway is. And we set up a table. And this guy started sculpting, and, wow, what he created. This guy was a genius.

KD: Do you remember his name?

JG: The first thing that he did, he did an owl. He did an owl who was feeding, I think, a baby owl with a little bird, or something that he caught. But it was beautiful. And then right away we called, we called the, I guess the director of the [East Los Angeles] Doctors Hospital. He was a good customer, and he had the money. He’d take out the cash, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, and just buy anything. Him and Danny Balsz. His name was Balsz, I think. [Yes, it’s Balsz.] I think I mentioned him, he owned the Tikis [restaurant and entertainment center].

KD: Yeah.

JG: And he bought all these great things from us also. So anyway, he came down, and boom. He took out the cash and boom, boom, boom. He brought it just right on the spot. It was like four hundred bucks. And then he [Marcos] started working on another one. And then he worked on, like, an abstract head. Cubist. And we decided to give that to my sister [Rebecca]—

KD: Hold on.

JG: For all the help that she did—she kept on doing—all the time. The bookwork and all that. And then he [Marcos] started working on something. It was a triangular stone, just a triangular stone, almost like a flat pyramid. And he just looked at it, he just started—ta-ka, ta-ka, ta-ka, ta-ka—routing it out. And, wow, what he did. It was just phenomenal! He created a bust of Don Quixote. And you know the way the rivets [ruffles] that they have, the Spaniards—

IN: The collar?

JG: The collar, yeah. And on the shoulder of Don Quixote—no, it was Cervantes, it was Cervantes—and on the shoulder of Cervantes was a little statue of Don Quixote sculpting out Cervantes.

KD: Oh.

JG: And the title of that was, “El Creador Creando.” [No, it was *El Creado Creando al Creador*.]

IN: “The Created Creating the Creator.” But I don’t know how to say it in Spanish.

JG: Yeah, yeah. But anyway it was, it was beautiful, beautiful!

KD: What was his name?

JG: Marcos, Marcos, and I can’t remember his last name. But I mean he was—

IN: And you have pictures of him, too.

JG: Yeah.

KD: And you were able to sell the work that he did?

JG: Oh, sheeeeeeeesh. Fast. The same guy would come in and buy them. He said, “The minute he finishes one, call me.” I don’t know how much that one went for. But he, this guy would just pull out the cash and take it right away. And he [Marcos] eventually said, “I’m going to South America now.” [laughter] And he just took off to South America.

KD: And were you making half the commission on it, since he created it there?

JG: Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah. I don’t know if it was half. But anyway, we were getting a [percentage], yeah, because everything [was made at our studio]. He didn’t know anybody else, you know, [so he couldn’t go direct to our customers]. But he was—this guy was a genius. I can imagine what he’s doing. I mean he, you know, to create this out of stone. No sketch, no nothing. He didn’t do any sketch. He was another Robert [Arenivar], but to do it out of stone.

IN: Now what Juan/Johnny tends not to talk about is, he also is a sculptor. And besides doing the beautiful wood carving of the Goez sign, out of alabaster he did a beautiful face.

- JG: Yeah, well after seeing him [Marcos], I got a piece of stone and I started carving out a head.
- IN: [*laughter*] He tends to talk about everyone else's art instead of his own. And I still have it, [the alabaster face].
- KD: And I was going to ask—
- JG: And I still have it. [*laughter*] In regard to the movie, Alex—
- JG: So later, he [Marcos] later wrote to us from South America. He was out there, somewhere in South America. And then eventually he went back to Spain, and I think he wrote to us.
- IN: Now, I hate to be rushing you—
- JG: What? Okay, okay.
- IN: Because of the time situation. But in regards to the movie, I'm just following your notes. Alex Grattan just sent us another email, and he was saying that if it wasn't for two people, the movie, *Only Once in a Lifetime*, would have never been made. Who was he talking about?
- JG: His brother and myself.
- IN: What was his brother's name?
- JG: His brother, Tommy. Tommy Grattan. Actually, it started when we were trying to—once we got Mocte [Moctesuma Esparza] in, into the movie company, then we started working on trying to raise more money. No, actually, Tommy had already gotten some investors. So we got like seventy-five thousand dollars originally through Tommy. Because he had other friends that were heirs to some, whatever it was. They were all Italians or Anglos that put in the initial money. And then, after we got together with Mocte, then—so [actually] they [the Italians and Anglos] were first investing into Sierra Madre Motion Picture Company [which Alex and I were both founders and owners].
- KD: Right.
- JG: And then they [the Italians and Anglos] started investing into the movie, because the movie in itself—
- KD: Right.
- JG: Was a corporation. So they, [new investors, then] invested into the movie. So the rest of the money that we started bringing in was for the movie. So then we finally started casting all the people in the movie, and we finally got the people that we needed. And it probably took about, after [from the time we started], it took us about three years to put the whole thing together.
- KD: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
- JG: But once we put it together then it started premiering at, in San Antonio—
- IN: Well it premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC.
- KD: Yeah, we talked about it.
- JG: Yeah, we talked—
- IN: And in San Antonio. And then [it was] the US entry to the Deauville film festival in France, all of that. Okay, and then, and you talked about shooting on location at Olvera Street.
- JG: Yeah. While we were shooting [the movie in Olvera Street] . . . I don't know if I mentioned that [the managers of] Olvera Street came back and wanted us to—[they] kept on trying to, for years they kept on trying to get us to go into Olvera Street [to set up a gallery]. So when we started shooting [the movie] at Olvera Street, they kept on saying [to me], "We got the San Antonio Winery [for you to set up a gallery]." Did I say that?
- KD: Yeah.
- JG: So [the managers of Olvera Street said], "Why don't you come in and you could have that whole space." [But long before we shot the movie, I had gone into Olvera Street with a group of artists as a trial, when we found out that their tourist market didn't buy our Chicano art.] [But] eventually we went in there. My brother's the one that got more involved. [This was a while after the movie.] I kept on getting more involved with the movie and doing more of the production and things. So, one of the things that happened is that, when we did the 7-Up calendar, Rudy Saenz was the marketing director there, who came up with the idea to have all the Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] artists in the calendar, [which I art directed and

designed]. So we printed three hundred thousand calendars and they were giving them out free in the markets. And I mentioned that the vice president [of marketing services] of Seven-Up [RC Bottling] Company here in Southern California was Roy Breneman.

IN: Breneman?

JG: Breneman, yeah. And also the [business unit] president [and general manager] of Westinghouse [Beverage Group] from back east came down [to Goetz Art Studios and Gallery].

IN: Barton Brodtkin?

JG: Brodtkin.

IN: So that was when Juan/Johnny and I saw each other again. Because I talked about the fact that his nephew brought me to the gallery. And I brought all my students there. And I, like everyone else, was just overwhelmed by the beauty. I had traveled through Mexico on an anthropological-sociological tour as an independent study through Cal State LA.

KD: Right.

IN: And I was so overwhelmed by Mexico. I was thinking of moving back there. And when I went on my second trip, as a Chicana I said, "No, this isn't for me." Because it's bad enough what feminists have to go through in the United States, let alone struggling again for equality in Mexico, which is a much more traditional country. And so I wanted to stay in the United States, but I hadn't seen anything that was really connecting me to the culture. And all of a sudden, when I came back from Mexico, I go to Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] and I'm just blown away. Where I'm saying, this is where I really saw my Chicana identity being realized [as I, and the community, walked into this inspiring Chicano cultural art environment that introduced us to the beauty and power of the fusion of our Mexican and American cultures]. And, it was the fact that it was so beautiful and so gutsy and powerful and, but yet, it was so inviting. Everybody felt that they were welcomed there. And Joe and Juan/Johnny, what they, what I felt they always did was made everyone feel that, anyone who walked in the door, right away they [Juan/Johnny and Joe] were like evangelists preaching, preaching potential.

KD: Right.

IN: They [Juan/Johnny and Joe] would look at whatever that person brought in, they would say, "You could do it! You can make your dreams come true." The people walked out of there inspired, feeling like whatever they wanted to do they could make it happen. So I hadn't seen Juan/Johnny for eight years. But in the meantime, you were working with Florencio Yescas, [who I believe, in the 1960s, started the Mexican *folklórico* dance movement in Los Angeles].

JG: Yeah, so I had been promoting Florencio and trying to package him and I remember Florencio mentioning, he says, "Yeah, I used to teach the [Edward] Roybal nieces." And then he named Irma and her sister [Stella]. And I said—it's interesting you know, here Irma was coming to the gallery for a year and, you know, she never said anything about it. [At this time, in the '80s, Frank Gutierrez, a Chicano studies professor, I believe coordinated and invited me to attend the East LA College natural indigenous health conference, where Florencio was one of the presenters. This conference helped me heal all of my health issues.] But anyway, when we [Irma and I] got together, we started reminiscing, saying, "So what have you been doing?" and, "What have you been doing?" So Irma started telling me about the fact that she was selected to be in *Zoot Suit*. And she was actually hanging out with—actually her roommate was also Bertha in the play *Zoot Suit* and in the movie *Zoot Suit*, right?

IN: Well actually, I'm not sure. Angela Moya Rodriguez [was in the play, but she only acted the part of Bertha in the movie]. When I was teaching at Loyola Marymount University, I was the director of El Grupo Folklórico and I had a class in Mexican regional dance that I taught there. Also [I taught] with East LA College, *folklórico* and contemporary dance and disco [and] all that. And then, through LA Unified School District, [I was] teaching *folklórico* and multicultural dance: African, Israeli and Polynesian. And this was, this was when there was this whole issue about busing [students across the city to integrate the schools]. And since I lived in the San Fernando Valley, but I was working in East LA and in the Valley, because of my

background in multicultural dance since I was four years old, I always felt that this was a vehicle to bring cultures together, to make young people proud of who they were, [and] at the same time respect people of other cultures.

[This was in the '70s, when bilingual, bicultural education was first incorporated into the curriculum of LAUSD, which encouraged schools to form Mexican *folklórico* dance groups and mariachi musical groups. I never imagined that years later, in the '90s, LAUSD superintendent Bill Anton, assistant superintendent Ruben Zacarias, and adult ed assistant superintendent James Figueroa would become great supporters of our Don Juan and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign.] And so, when I was teaching with—my credential is in adult education, I was teaching at Garfield [Community] Adult School—one of my students told me about Angela Moya [Rodriguez] at East LA College. And she was with a [Mexican *folklórico* dance] group called Floricanto. And so she invited me to become part of that dance company, and I was for a little while. And then she left the company and so did I, but we remained friends. And so while I was teaching at Loyola Marymount University—

KD: And what year was that about?

IN: At Loyola, I was there for two years. So it was about—I got my teaching credential in '75, a life credential in dance, art, drama, body dynamics. So physical fitness, fine, and applied arts. And then I was working as a professional expert through LA Unified [School District]. And then also, at Loyola I started about '78. I was there until '80.

And what was interesting is that one of my students, Edgar Gallardo, [introduced me to the committee for justice for Gordon Castillo Hall. I later met Yvonne Salcedo from CSUN who was on the committee and became a great friend and supporter]. When I was teaching with LA Unified School district—actually when I was a [student], when I was at Cal State LA in Project Maestro, I got a scholarship, a leadership training scholarship, [from] Encampment for Citizenship. And when I was—so when we [the encampment] went to Tucson, Arizona, it was—we were [simulating] developing our own government. And we were involved in learning about people of various cultures.

And I remember [David Sandoval, director of the CSULA EPIC Program, and] Polly Baca [were] there, and she was talking about the land grants in New Mexico and the Southwest, and how the Chicano was trying to get ownership back [of] those land grants. And they [the workshop leaders] were trying to have us do role playing, where we were supposed to pretend like we were a poor third-world Latin American country talking to someone from the United States. And they [the persons role-playing as the US] were going to take over our country, and I kept saying, “No.” And they [the workshop leaders] kept telling me, “You’re not doing it right. A poor third-world country would be submissive.” And I said, “Well, when people have nothing more to lose, eventually they revolt, and they will not allow, you know, people to control them anymore.” And so I was constantly. . . [laughter]

KD: A little more power than they anticipated.

IN: Yes, yes, yes. And so when I was in Tucson, Arizona, and we were traveling, [taking excursions], to all these archeological sites of the Native Americans, and there were workshops and all kinds of exciting things going on. I was only eighteen at the time. We were at a gift shop downtown in Tucson, and the producer and the director of [*The High Chaparral* television series] happened to be in the gift shop. And they saw me, and they asked me if I would be an extra because they were shooting in Tucson. And so I got permission from the director of Encampment for Citizenship, and I was allowed to spend the whole day on set with [*The High Chaparral*].

KD: Oh.

IN: And they had me dressed up as a stereotype Indian with braids and muslin outfit. And it was the most boring experience of my life. [laughter] Because as a professional dancer since I was fourteen years old, and I was performing with dance companies and I was teaching in private studios, and I had a scholarship at UCLA in modern dance [for highly talented secondary students], I was used to always constantly being active—[moving, dancing]. And in television and film, I found out, you’re sitting there waiting and waiting

and waiting. And then, finally, it was the end of the day, and I finally got to run out carrying buckets of water, and I drop the buckets of water because I saw something, and I'm supposed to be surprised. And I thought, "This isn't really for me." And also I didn't like the idea of a stereotype role. I had not seen [*The*] *High Chaparral*, so I didn't know what the content of the TV series was going to be about. And so they [the director and producer] told me, "When you get back to LA, look us up." And, "We want to cast you in [*The*] *High Chaparral*." [I had no idea what type or size role they had in mind.] And as an eighteen-year-old Chicana who was really—

[break in audio]

**KD:** This is tape 11 with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. It's December 17, 2007, and Irma was telling me about the offer she got from the show *High Chaparral*.

**IN:** So the producer and director of *High Chaparral*, I don't know their names, but they were very, very sweet, and very, very encouraging and supportive. They wanted me to come back to LA and look them up at the studio to possibly offer me a part. Not having seen the TV show, but having been a professional performer for so, so many years—and now I had this five-year scholarship at Cal State LA, and the first bilingual/bicultural Chicano teacher training project, and I was this born again Chicana who was into my culture—I felt my education was more important, and I was more focused on being an educator, as opposed to being a—thinking of becoming a star. [Since childhood, my focus was personal and creative expression.] And so I worked with Project Maestro. And that's when I started—I did my student teaching. And then I think I mentioned that instead of doing your four years to get your degree and then your credential work, for five years, we were able to be student teaching in the classroom. So I was able to be very innovative [then and, later, as a credentialed teacher starting 1975], using all of my costumes and props and artifacts and doing multicultural [and] Chicano art, dance, [culture, history]—everything.

And so I started teaching curriculums, [one I created and called] "The Visual and Performing Arts as a Vehicle to Stimulate Academic Learning." And I was doing staff development, training teachers, doing heritage preservation, giving [inspiration and guidance to] young people and educators to start looking into their family tree. Because as I mentioned before, I think I mentioned that my ancestors [on my mother's side] are Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, who is my great-great-great-grandfather, [a leader] of [Northern] California [when it belonged to Mexico], and the Casa Lopez, which is my ancestors as well. And we have all kinds [of family archival materials] in the Huntington Library. So my mother [Hortensia Virginia Beserra Núñez Tencha] was the one who instilled in me the importance of preserving our heritage.

So through the visual and the performing arts, I did that with my students, [other teachers,] and staff, encouraging people to—especially European Americans who were really anti-bilingual, bicultural education. They said, "I don't know why these Mexican Americans are so hung up on wanting to focus on their culture. We're Americans." But when they started researching their heritage, and I'd dig and dig and dig [asking questions], and they'd said, "Well, my grandmother was from France and Germany and whatever," you would see them just light up, and all of a sudden start getting this pride talking about their ancestry. And it helped them to understand why we are so excited about discovering and rediscovering who we are. And so the arts are a very effective way [tool] to teach that message.

And so eventually, when I was at Loyola [Marymount University], where I [was director of El Grupo Folklórico and later taught a class in Mexican regional dance and history]—when I was teaching [in late 1977 or early 1978], Angela [Moya Rodriguez, who recommended me to LMU,] said, "They're going to have auditions for *Zoot Suit*, and I'd like you to audition." And again, because I was so burnt out with being a professional performer, I was really in love with teaching. But I said, "Okay." And I went with her, and one of my [high school] friends, Lydia Zavala Ruiz, also auditioned. And I was actually casted in *Zoot Suit*, in the play [at the Mark Taper Forum]. And I remember Luis Valdez was there, Phil Esparza [community coordinator] was there, Miguel Delgado was assistant choreographer—I can't remember her name now, Phil's ex-wife—Roberta.



JG: Roberta.

IN: Roberta Esparza. She was assistant choreographer. And Pat—I can't remember. She was European American, she had been the choreographer for *Grease*. [Patricia Birch.] And so she was, like, the head choreographer. And Gordon Davis from the music center, Mark Taper, were there. And I remember they were having us do this combination of steps. And sometimes when you really don't want something, you're more gutsy. And they kept doing these steps, and they would change them all the time, and everyone was getting confused. And I finally, said, "Look, you know, I could do it this way or that way." I'd demonstrate each version. [laughter] So I said, "I'll do it either way." So I got casted, and I was casted in the role of Bertha, the one who had the switchblade in her hair and all of that. But at the time, I decided that I didn't want to take the role, number one, because I was a single woman. I had bought my home, they didn't pay much, and so I couldn't afford to quit my job. But also, I was concerned because even though this was a landmark production, a very important play, as a professional performer all my life, I understood the power of typecasting, and I was so concerned having this gutsy Chicana role that I would be typecast as a *pachuca* the rest of my life. And so I turned it down. But I went to see the play, I went to all their casting parties, I really supported them.

And then years later, I don't know, a couple of years later, I don't know how long it was, when I was at Loyola [Marymount University—1979 or early 1980]—one of my students [Edgar Gallardo] came to me and said, "There's the committee for justice for Gordon Castillo Hall," [for] a young boy who was convicted of murder at the age of fifteen. He was serving a life sentence in a maximum security men's prison. And there were all these witnesses who could prove he was innocent, and they were never brought to trial to testify. And his original attorney, who was Anglo, was afraid to interview the witnesses, [I was told], because of the stereotype. And he didn't want to go into the barrio, [thinking he would be harmed by gang members]. And so the cousins, after he was . . . The mother was embarrassed, [I was told]—Bertha. And she didn't tell anyone in the family [that he was on trial]. After he [Gordon] was convicted, then she told the cousins, and they found him an attorney, Richard Cruz, to take the case. And so they had already been working with the committee, I think, for two or three years, and it was a real grassroots community effort.

And John Van de Kamp, who was the LA County district attorney, was coming to Loyola [LMU] to speak. And so the Chicano students wanted to set up a rally to talk over him and to demand that he do something about this case. So they asked me to sit with Bertha while they were meeting [to prepare], and so I talked to her a while about the case, and then they came out. And it was kind of in an open, outdoor area. And they were doing a lot of yelling and protesting, but I didn't see them accomplishing much. And so I very quickly talked to Edgar on the side. I said, "What is your goal, what are you trying to do?" And he says, "Well, we want [Van de Kamp] to meet with the attorney." So I got up, got the mic, and started speaking. And he [Edgar] gave me like a quick rundown of the issues, and I talked about those issues, and I was able to get Van de Kamp to agree to have a meeting [with Gordon's attorney].

So the next week, Richard Cruz, Armando Jimenez, who was the chairperson, came to meet with me, and they asked me to be co-chairperson, and to become a spokesperson for the committee. So I ended up volunteering full time for one year, donating my services for this case. So I wasn't willing to quit [my job] for *Zoot Suit*, but I quit for this. And so I was the spokesperson, speaking at all of the fundraisers. They had Cal State Northridge, Cal State LA, Loyola [LMU], all—it was really—there were always fundraisers in a student's backyard, in someone's home. And so it was a real grassroots effort.

JG: So while she was hanging out with the people that were doing the movie about trying to save Chicanos, she was actually living it. [laughter]

IN: And so Angela, in the meantime, Angela Moya Rodriguez started—they were starting to shoot the film [for *Zoot Suit*], while the Gordon Castillo [Hall] committee was going on. And so they had already gone to New York, and I visited her in New York after the play was over. I wasn't able to see the play, unfortunately, in New York, but I saw it in LA. And so her friend [Darlene]—I can't remember her last name [Darlene Bryan]—she was one of the African Americans who was in the play. They were both my roommates while

they were shooting the film. And so they—[Darlene a couple of times]—so Angela primarily was [a great supporter], going to all my fundraisers and hearing all my speeches.

And so she was saying, “You’ve got to audition for the movie.” And I said, “I really don’t have time, I really don’t want to.” [*laughter*] [Angela, then, referred me to Phil Esparza, now associate producer, who I met with at his Universal Studios office.] And so I did. I did audition, and Roberta Esparza had called me and said, “At the first audition, we hardly had anybody there.” She says, “We really are afraid that when we audition for the film, we’re not going to have enough people.” So I called every dancer I knew. I called Esteban Coronado, Miguel Delgado, Honey Garcia. I called Graciela Tapia and her son. I can’t remember his name—[Alberto de Velasco], Honey Garcia’s boyfriend. And I just called every dancer I could think of. And when I got there, it was packed. [*laughter*] It was packed.

So I was very proud to help promote the fact that there’s so much talent. And I think other performers wouldn’t have done that, because they would have wanted to get the part. But—and Honey Garcia was one of the people chosen, and she gave me flowers, thanking me for telling her about it. And so I passed like the first or second audition, and then I didn’t get it in the end. Which, you know—so I did try for it, but I was kind of relieved, because my focus was really on this case, the Gordon Castillo Hall case. [Much later, Angela called, saying Phil set up a singing audition for me with Daniel Valdez and others. I didn’t get the part, but I was extremely flattered to be considered.

And so what happened is Bobby Paramo, who was one of the original members of the committee, had been talking to Dotti [Dorothy] Hernandez, who was the daughter of Antonio Hernandez, who was the head of Cleland House [of Neighborly Service]. And they were very involved with the Presbyterian Church. And she says they had a legal defense fund, and they wanted Richard Cruz to talk to them because they wanted to help contribute. But knowing the history of Richard Cruz—he was very anti-religion, he was in the [group] Católicos por la Raza, and they had issues with religion. He considered himself an atheist from what he told me [because of the Catholic Church’s lack of Latino representation and services]. And so [Bobby and Dottie] were very frustrated, because they couldn’t get a meeting. So they asked if I would meet with them. And so I met with Dottie Hernandez. And it turned out that her mother was a teacher at Garfield Adult School where I was teaching [around 1975 to 1977 or 1978], so I knew her very well. And it turns out that Dottie and her sister went to Wilson High School, where I went to school, so they knew us. We weren’t close, but we knew of each other. And then her father also knew my family. And so when I was talking to Dottie about all of the issues, because I had all the legal briefs and had read everything, and we [the committee] had meetings discussing it. She set up a meeting with the San Gabriel chapter. Well, her father happened to walk in, and he really took the whole Gordon Castillo Hall project under his wing and worked with his daughter.

And so in the meantime, there was a woman who—I think she was friends of Richard Cruz, Liz Chavez, who was now working with CBS [Channel 2]. And she was associate producer for the [community service] TV show called “Juntos.” And so she was able to get us on to be interviewed. And originally, there were like five of us: myself, Armando Jimenez, and then Teresa Gomez, who was one of my students from Loyola [LMU], and Bertha. And I think there might have been one other person, [maybe Margarita Artavia or Georgina Castillo]. And so Alex Nogales, who was a producer, decided there were too many people, so he wanted to reshoot it, and he just had me and Bertha alone. And so he did two half-hour segments with us, and Eddie Navarro was the host of the show, and became a big supporter.

And so when we had the meeting with the San Gabriel chapter of the Presbyterian Church, they gave us eight hundred dollars. And Eddie Navarro went with me to the meeting, and they knew him, and so that helped give a lot of credibility. Of course, Frank Del Olmo had already written a series of articles in support of the case, he had already met with Gordon in prison. And so we had major support from him and the *LA Times* [since he was the editor]. And so then Eddie Navarro had also later—this went on through a period of a year—he had recommended that I meet with Father [Albert] Vazquez at La Placita [Church in Olvera Street, downtown LA]. And Father Vazquez allowed us—we used to make about five hundred dollars on

each of the fundraisers, average. And they'd be buying cases of beer, and the women would donate all the food, and it would be a big party. And so they'd make eight hundred dollars. But then they'd have to take out expenses, and it took months [or weeks] of planning just for this one party. So at the Placita, Father Vazquez allowed us to go into the plaza area of the Placita, and [after] each Mass were, you know—a hundred people would come out of the church. We had cans with labels saying "Donation," and Bertha and I would make these dramatic emotional speeches, and we collected money. [Different committee members took shifts collecting the money throughout the day.] And I was there [with Bertha] like from ten o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night, and we collected eight hundred dollars in one day.

And so then after that, they [the committee] repeated the process. They saw that that was something that was very effective. But Bertha and I were always together, and so we were the spokespersons, we were the faces of the Gordon Castillo Hall committee, and we traveled all over LA County. But it was still a pretty much grassroots efforts. I did do a fundraiser at—we had a fundraiser in La Cañada—no, not—what is it—Gardena, Gardena. And it was Eddie Navarro's brother-in-law who let us use his restaurant, nightclub, for a fundraiser. And so I asked Angela Moya [Rodriguez] to perform with me, so I could promote it as one of the performers from *Zoot Suit* to get more people to participate, and she was so gracious to do that. And so that gave the committee the idea of hooking up the Gordon Castillo Hall case with the Sleepy Lagoon case. And so then we had a fundraiser at Joe Sanchez's house [he was the first Latino LA fire department commissioner and the founder of MAGA—Mexican American Grocers Association], and of course there are a number of people who were working and organizing all of this. And so Danny Valdez was there now, and so this—I think that was when he was introduced to the case. And I invited Roger Johnson, who was my uncle's [Edward Roybal's] campaign manager [and commissioned TELASOMAF and Goetz's first exterior mural]. And so that kind of, like, launched [the committee and] started to get more of the celebrity support [and involvement by prominent community leaders].

So eventually, it started off as this major grassroots efforts. And I remember Los Lobos were performing at all of our fundraisers for free, you know, in our backyards. So they had not really hit it big yet. And they were just really devoted to the community. So Los Lobos were performing for everybody's events. And so I remember César Chávez coming to an event in Alhambra where Los Lobos was playing in someone's living room. And I was able to meet him and talk to him about the case, and he was actually looking for support for some issues that he was dealing with. And so I have pictures of all of these different events.

And so, basically, working with the committee as co-chairperson with Armando Jimenez, and working with the attorneys. And Richard Cruz had other attorneys that were advising him, his professor, Ullman [I think it's spelled] from Loyola Law School was his mentor and was working very closely on it. Eventually, because of certain differences, I left the committee. But then the Presbyterian Church called me, and they said that they were donating approximately fifty thousand dollars to the committee [for Gordon Castillo Hall]. And so they actually called me to let me know, and—but because I had already left the committee, I just gave them Richard Cruz and Armando Jimenez's phone number, and I let them contact them directly. And as a result of that, the committee shot up, where now they had the event at the Biltmore Hotel. Now they had all this, and they had César Chávez and Dolores Huerta and Alex Garcia and Art Torres and Richard Alatorre and all of these major political leaders attending these events. And they've got AMAE and Eddie Olmos and Danny Valdez, and Rene Enrique and Nosotros, and all of these major supporters. *La Opinión*, the Jaycees, California Attorneys for Criminal Justice. So it was beautiful to see how everybody was able to now see the importance of this case. And because I had left the committee—I had donated my time for a whole year—I had no money left, and I couldn't go to the Biltmore because I couldn't afford the tickets. And so Frank Del Olmo was so gracious that he invited me as his guest, and I was able to attend the Biltmore event with him. And the wonderful thing is that eventually it went to the State Supreme Court and Gordon was found innocent. And then I think there was a lawsuit after that, and I think I heard that they had won the lawsuit.

So I was—so this was something that was a real passion for me. I always see myself—I do so many different things as a visual and performance artist, as an educator. But whatever I do, I consider myself a human rights advocate. Whatever tool I’m using, whatever vehicle I’m using, it’s because there’s a cause that I believe in. And so when all of this was happening with Gordon Castillo Hall, I happened to be going to the post office in East LA. Even though I lived in the [San Fernando] Valley, I was always in East LA visiting my family and working in the community. And I happened to pass by Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], because the post office was right nearby. And I saw all of these lights on, and because I always felt it was my home, like everybody else did, I just walked in the door, and they were having the big Seven-Up event. And there were—that’s when they introduced the calendar [that Juan/Johnny designed]. And so it was packed like sardines, and I look over [all] the heads, and there’s Juan, Johnny Gonzalez—

JG: Maria Contreras was—

IN: Maria Contreras Sweet—

JG: Sweet, was with Seven-Up at that time, that’s the first time that I—

IN: Right, she was VP of Seven-Up.

JG: I think, yeah. [At that time she was director of public affairs.]

IN: And so we—[Juan/Johnny and I] hadn’t seen each other for eight years, and so it was like a great reunion. I saw Joe, I saw all the artists that were always so wonderful and friendly and supportive, and I invited Juan/Johnny to my house for a New Year’s party. And Angela Moya [Rodriguez] was there, Phil Esparza, and other friends from *Zoot Suit*. And so then we didn’t see each other for almost—

JG: We started reminiscing, we started—we asked each other, “So what have you been doing?” And so anyways, she started telling me all the stuff that she was working on, the Gordon Hall—

IN: Case.

JG: Case. And then she asked me—so she didn’t know any of the stuff that I had done. You figure this was 1971, ’72, somewhere around there [since we had seen each other]. So I started telling her, and she started saying, “Wow.” She started writing down notes, she right away wanted to collect stuff and everything. [laughter] And then there was . . . My sister [Alicia (Licha)] graduated from—she was getting her PhD from the university in Austin, [in] anthropology. And so she was moving back to LA. And so I went over there to help her move back, and as I went over there, friends of hers [from LA] introduced me to a guitar player. A guitar player, his name was Luis Davalos [they called him Manolo]. And Luis had—Luis had been playing with the Ballet Folklórico from Mexico, and went to England, and decided to stay in England—he was a young kid—decided to stay in England and study music, study classical guitar. He used to play classical guitar in some club or something, and this rich woman liked his music, and they started living together, and he wore mink [coats] and drove a Rolls Royce, and [lived] very wealthy for years. And eventually he graduated, and they told him, “There’s no more that we can teach you. You have to start going to libraries and doing your own research.” And [he] found out that Austin had one of the biggest libraries in music, classical guitar. So he moved to Austin.

So here he was with Chicanos. [And he was a] Chicano, speaking Spanish like a Mexican and speaking English like an Englishman, wearing a big mink coat. So they thought this guy’s so weird. [laughter] So anyway, she introduced—now he was working as a waiter in a restaurant, and it was owned by the Gonzalez family. And so she [my sister’s friend] introduced me to [Luis]. So Luis then took me to the restaurant and introduced me to the family and the son [Albert Gonzalez]. Oh, so, the girl also was telling him what I did, and how I was known over here, so he went, “Wow.” He liked it. He says, “Why don’t you come over here and let’s start something over here?”

KD: Wow.

JG: He says, “So I’ll pay you. You can just come over here in the restaurant, and you could be just a maître d’, whatever. I’ll pay you for just coming in, and then we can start putting this whole program together over here.” And since my sister was moving, I even wound up with her apartment, a real nice little house which was like the guesthouse to a big three-story Victorian home. It was very nice, right next to the university.

KD: Yeah, in Austin.

JG: So anyway, then I started—we started working on—well, I moved back over there, stayed there for a few months [six months], and it turns out the environment wasn't the same as here, you know. It's—politically, everything's very, very different over there. [The head of a Austin cultural center told me he got a slide of my mural, *The Birth of Our Art*, from Shifra Goldman.] So anyway, I wound up coming back. And Irma [had] called me over there, and she starts talking and talking, and we started talking about everything we were doing. And then when I got back, Irma started saying, "God," you know, "you've got to start telling your story to the kids in the schools," and all these other different things. So that's how it started developing.

IN: Oh, in regards to the Gordon Castillo Hall case, you mentioned that at Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], a nun had come to you.

JG: Oh, yeah, yeah.

KD: You already talked about Sister Karen—

JG: No, no, no, there was another nun. There was a nun that came with a script that she wrote called "The Sleepy Lagoon Case." And so she came in asking, you know, if we might be able to help, or that she was trying to get some money to get this [made into a] movie. It was a script called "The Sleepy Lagoon Case." It was the same thing as *Zoot Suit*, but her focus was the Sleepy Lagoon case, it wasn't on the zoot suit. And this was way before *Zoot Suit* [the play by Luis Valdez].

IN: Now what happened is with Gordon Castillo Hall, that's when I met Rudy Acuña, because—

KD: Right.

IN: Gordon's cousin was a student through Chicano studies. And so Cal State Northridge was really, really active in the case, and they had me be a keynote speaker for a number of their events. At Project Maestro I had met Phil Montez, who was commissioner of the civil rights—I think it was civil rights committee, I'm not exactly sure. [Philip Montez was the western regional director for the US Commission on Civil Rights—ed.] But he was Phil Montez, and so he got—also became a big supporter. And at the—Joe Sanchez, who I mentioned, he was the head of MAGA, which is the Mexican American Grocers' Association.

KD: Oh, okay.

IN: And then also AMAE got involved, Vickie Castro. And so a number of the people that Juan/Johnny has worked with and that I've worked with were also involved in the Gordon Castillo Hall case.

And so when Juan/Johnny came back from Austin, as he said, he just started telling me, here—even though I had known him from Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], and I experienced this, I didn't know all of the details of the history. And so being my family archivist, and being an educator, where my focus is positive role models, that my feeling is the kids need to hear these stories, the community needs to know about these stories, so that not only are they proud of what happened in the community, but also because they can see that this is something that came out of their community. This is something that if someone who struggled the way they struggled could have this success, then, [like] their role models, they could do it also. And I lived in two worlds, because here I was really into the Chicano art world, political world, educational world, but then with certain people in my family, they were into the political world, but not so much the cultural art world. And then other members of my family weren't into the Chicano community at all.

And so I could see how even though me and my close friends were just injected with this pride, because we were seeing all of these exciting things going on every day, that so many Mexican Americans refused to call themselves Chicanos because the media was saying Chicanos are rioting, Chicanos are putting graffiti on the walls. And so they were embarrassed, they were ashamed, saying, "Gee, these Chicanos are making us look bad." Because all of these other success stories weren't being promoted. Even though Juan/Johnny and the [Goetz Art Studios and] Gallery got so much publicity, there was just such a huge segment of our community that wasn't getting the message. And so I said, "We have to tell the story, we have to tell the story." And what's so interesting is, because I've been struggling to get my uncle, Congressman



[Edward] Roybal, to tell his story, and I was struggling to get Juan/Johnny to tell his story, and it's—as you know, as historians, as an archivist, people who make history don't realize what they're doing.

KD: Yeah. And they don't want anyone to stop them. *[laughter]*

IN: Yeah. It's "I don't have time."

KD: I don't have time for that. *[laughter]*

IN: "I don't have time to start writing my story. I've got another project that I've got to do, I've got something else to do." So it was like pulling teeth, trying to get both of them to give me documentation, to give me photographs, to give me pictures, to get this thing going.

And so eventually, what I did is, I put that whole portfolio together that you saw. And I started—I said, "Look, I'm going to show you that this is an important story." So I started meeting with different university professors. And this was in 1991. And I met with Isaac Cardenas—these are all PhDs, [deans, associate deans, and department chairs]—from Cal State University Fullerton. Jorge Garcia and Rudy Acuña, who I already knew from the Gordon Castillo Hall case, at Cal State Northridge. And Gerald Resendez and Carlos Navarro were there. David Hayes Bautista at UCLA. And then I called Dick Kosher, who was a professor at Loyola Marymount University. When I was the director of El Grupo Folklórico, he was one of my students. So even though he was a professor, he was just totally in love with *folklórico*. And so when I left, they couldn't get—they didn't have another instructor, and so he kept the class alive by trying to teach it himself.

And so he said, "We have a new head of Chicano studies"—when I was there it was Francisco Vázquez. He says, "Fernando Guerra." And so I actually—I was going through my calendars, and I actually have—all of my calendars are like journals. *[laughter]* And so I actually have a little note here of when I met with Fernando Guerra, and so I have all of the people that I met with, so this was like November of '91. And so they were just so excited. I said, "This is something that I want to do to promote the history." And so they were really supportive, really excited about the whole project. So then I started meeting with various community leaders, and I started meeting with Linda Wong, and she was [executive director of the Achievement Council].

KD: Do you want to have lunch before we launch into—I think we're—

IN: Into all of this?

KD: Yeah.

IN: I'm okay. My concern is that Chon [Noriega] may come.

KD: Chon is probably there.

IN: Oh, is he there waiting for us?

KD: I can hear his voice. *[laughter]*

IN: Oh, okay. *[laughter]* Then if he's waiting for us—

JG: *[inaudible]* *[laughter]*

IN: Okay. Whatever you say.

KD: Yeah. Then we can—

*[break in audio]*

KD: Okay. We're back from lunch, and Irma's going to finish up.

IN: Okay. Just to add one more thing in regards to my community advocacy experience. Since—[from 1975 through 1980] I was an educator with Loyola Marymount University, East LA College, and LA Unified [School District], and I taught K-12 and adult ed, and older adults [with LAUSD DACE Division of Adult and Career Education at Garfield Adult and Kennedy-San Fernando Community Adult Schools]. So the whole gamut. I had seven hundred students a week, [with] all of my programs and courses. And I would do [special] programs and [community] events combining the different groups together so that they could appreciate one another. But when I was working with older adults, [at Garfield Adult] I brought in guest speakers. And one—I can't remember his first name, but he was a police officer, Guerra, who had a TV talk



show. And it was on Spanish language television. And he was talking about the fact that the community was concerned about increasing gang activity, and that they wanted to have more police in—patrolling the community of City Terrace, which is where I grew up. And so he suggested—[and] I spoke with the City Terrace businessmen’s association, because they were organizing. And when I met with him, it turns out that Pete Rodriguez, who was [PR director] with Channel 7, who worked with Juan/Johnny at Goez [and TELASOMAF], was on this—in this association.

JG: Because he lived in that area.

IN: He lived in City Terrace. And it turns out he knew my family very well. And so they [the association members] were talking about it, but they were setting up a meeting with Supervisor [Ed] Edelman. And they were going to complain about this problem with gangs, and they wanted more police, but they really didn’t have any kind of proposal to present him. And so they had this meeting set up, and they were all going on vacation. [laughter] And I expressed to them that I felt you really need to present a plan. So they said, “Well, that’s a good idea. You do it.” And so I put together a whole proposal. And I did it myself, but I had the principal of Kennedy Elementary [School], where I was teaching, Frank Serrano, sit with me, and it was an older—one of the senior citizens, the president of the senior citizen club, sit with me, so that they could know what I was doing.

And basically, I decided to set up a panel. I started interviewing people in the community, and I started hearing from the youth that adding more police was just going to aggravate the problem. And so I felt it was more important to create a crime prevention program, as opposed to policing after the fact. And so I set up a panel representing the youth, the church, the school, the parents, the business community, and I had representatives from each segment speak. And we invited [Supervisor] Edelman to come to our forum, and then Pete Rodriguez had Channel 7 there to televise the whole event. And so I was the master of ceremonies of the event. And after everyone expressed their concern, I presented my proposal to create a neighborhood youth center, where instead of the police patrolling, that the police actually work with the kids doing fun, positive activities in the community.

And so Edelman called—it is interesting, because the principal of my [adult] school [Jesus Rodriguez] saw me as a dancer, an artist, but not a political person. [laughter] And so one of the teachers who actually taught legal services to older adults expressed to me that he was surprised when Edelman called him, saying he wanted me to attend this meeting to talk about putting this whole center together. And so, [because of personal and professional commitments] I wasn’t able to go to the meeting, but as a result of my presentation, they did create the City Terrace neighborhood youth center. And so I had worked with Pete Rodriguez on that project, and so it’s just to give another example of my organizing skills. And then I applied this to the work that I did [later] with Juan/Johnny.

So to get back to the story of him [Juan/Johnny] telling me his story about the music, the murals, the film, I was telling him we really, really need to document this history. Now, what happened in the meantime, I was working with—he had suggested—I had left teaching, because at that point, I felt I wasn’t growing anymore, and I constantly wanted to learn new things, and I felt as an educator, if all I did was continue to teach the rest of my life, what if I couldn’t teach? What else could I do? And I really wanted to explore different industries, different professions. And I was working with an auto parts warehouse. Then I started working with [Elena Alvarado, who recommended me for a job at] Info Line, which was an information and referral crisis intervention hotline. And so I started working with them. [At the same time, Elena and I performed with Bel Hernandez, Esteban Coronado, and others in a production called “Cuatro Epocas” at the USC Bing Theatre.]

And then after I was working with them [Info Line] for a year, I was sort of in transition, and Juan/Johnny said, you know, “Why don’t you try advertising?” And I said, “Advertising? I don’t want to sell toothpaste.” And he says, “Yeah, yeah, you should try advertising. You know, that’s . . .” He explained how marketing was the basis of his work [to promote our art, history and culture]. So I said, “Well, yeah, it might be interesting,” so I worked with an employment agency, and I got a job at DJMC Advertising as

an executive assistant on the McDonald's account group. And part of my job was to open the mail, and everything was about the Hispanic market. It was 1983, and it was all . . . They had just had the 1980 census—

JG: Census.

IN: And they had just discovered that there was millions of dollars of buying power in the quote-unquote “Hispanic market.”

JG: Latinos buying stuff. [laughter]

IN: That they can make money off of us. And so all these articles were coming out in *Ad Age* magazine, and *Ad Week*, and all of these major publications.

JG: This reminds me of something that has gone on throughout my—I guess almost from the time of my music era. Because I worked in advertising, I was always looking for articles in the newspaper that showed that the world was interested in Latinos, in the English-speaking—you know, Spanish-speaking, they always said it. But it's like, I used to cut out any new article that said something about a Latino, and little by little, the articles starting getting bigger and bigger. And the idea was for me to be able to prove to . . . Especially within the music industry, Chicanos were—musicians were frustrated, because if they spoke Spanish, they [the recording companies and radio stations] wanted to market them [Chicano musicians] in the Spanish media. And they [the musicians] said, you know, “We're not singing in Spanish, we're singing [in English]. We want to be marketed [to the English speaking public].” So people just didn't know how to market [Chicano music]. And that happened with our movie. That was one of the big problems we had, being one of the first Latino movies. The distributors just didn't know how to market a movie that was Latino into the English-speaking world.

IN: Well, because they didn't see us as Americans.

KD: Right.

IN: And so, because they didn't see as Americans, they assume we don't speak English.

KD: Right.

IN: And so they want to just market us through Spanish media, but as Chicanos, as Mexican Americans, we're bilingual, bicultural—and we're really multicultural, because we get into jazz, rock, soul, *ranchera*, *norteño*, flamenco—we get into all of it. And so with—you know, everything in life is really marketing. As an educator, you're trying to market your philosophy, your ideas. And that's one thing that Juan/Johnny taught me, and that I learned being at DJMC Advertising, that I started understanding the humanness of business. I always thought that business and law were something very cold and inhumane, and I started—when I started reading about it and learning about it, and the concepts are very logical, very practical. It's a matter of how you apply it that really makes the difference, whether it's going to be used for good or for evil, or for self-interest, or for the benefit of society.

And so when I was working with Con Sabor Latino here, I was representing—because Juan/Johnny and his brother [Joe] at Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] were so generous to give Con Sabor Latino greeting card company the names of all their artists, without expecting any compensation in return. And so not only was I included as one of the artists, but I was representing . . . This was, like, in the early '70s. So I was like twenty-one—twenty, twenty-one years old, and I was representing Esperanza Martinez, David Negrón, Ray Aragon, Eddie Martinez, through Con Sabor Latino, by promoting and selling their artwork. And it was the educators who were the primarily people who were purchasing these things.

And so here I was, an artist, a promoter, but I was using these marketing strategies, and I was flattered, because Yukio Iwamasa, who was the owner of Con Sabor Latino, and it was his—he's Japanese, but it was his concept to do this, because his wife was Chicana. And so he really fell in love with the culture, and so [he] wrote up a write-up about, which I'm very flattered that he wrote. I'm going to read it really quick. He said, “Irma Núñez, sculptor of bread, she has revived and reintroduced the Indian art of using *masa* for sculptures. She exhibits and promotes this medium with her students and at *ferias* [festivals]. She doesn't just live life. She assaults it. A multifaceted person, painter, singer, actress, dancer, teacher at

Belvedere Junior High, LA, she believes in and practices bilingual education. She calls herself a Chicana.” And so I was really so flattered that he wrote that about me.

And so when I started—when Juan/Johnny started talking about marketing, I started seeing that these corporations have big money that they get from our community, and maybe it’s time to use corporate dollars to start funding the projects that Juan/Johnny was so excited about creating. The big struggle is always money. Where are you going to get the money? And so my strategy was, how do we educate the corporations to understand that it’s to their benefit? Because they’re only going to do it if they feel that there’s a benefit. And so at DJMC Advertising, I was talking to them about all of this, [and they were very nice people] but they didn’t understand it, because there’s a difference between the corporation and the ad agency. The ad agency is supposed to come up with ideas, but traditional ad agencies didn’t have a clue about the Hispanic market, let alone about the Latino culture. And so rather than admit that they didn’t know, they were just rejecting it.

And so my sister actually worked, Sarah Núñez Dekker, she worked with Frank Sanchez at East LA College, when he was the director of community affairs, or community programs—community service programs. He now became an owner of a McDonald’s franchise. And so she said, “Why don’t you talk to Frank Sanchez?” Well, they had their own Hispanic caucus for McDonald’s, their own Hispanic franchise owners’ association. So these Hispanic franchise owners’ association [members], their McDonald’s were usually in the heart of the Latino community.

KD: Right.

IN: And they were usually Latinos, and so they knew the value of creating projects that were relevant to the culture in the community. And because they were Latino, they got proud when they got something of quality that represented the culture. And so we started—I started meeting with them. But while I was at—and so at DJMC, I left DJMC, and then—

JG: And when you were at DJMC, didn’t you say you wanted to do things for the Hispanic market, and they said, “No, we don’t want them”?

IN: Yeah, they weren’t interested at all. [They didn’t understand.] Now, and then in the meantime, Naomi Quiñonez, who is now an instructor at Fullerton, did you say? Or Irvine?

KD: She was at Fullerton.

IN: Fullerton. I don’t know where she is now. I went to high school with her. She—this was during the ’84 Olympics, it was the preparations for the ’84 Olympics, and they were having their big Olympic festivals. And so she was saying that artists that she had met—because she had been away for so long, and she met David Botello and Wayne Healy and other artists. They were saying that for the Olympic festivals, Latinos were not being represented. And so she came to Juan/Johnny, because she knew all about what he had done in Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], and said, “Can you come up with some idea?” And I’m not sure—

JG: Because they had a meeting set up with the Olympic organizers.

IN: Yeah. So she had a meeting set up with the Olympic organizers—

JG: In order to present something.

IN: So they had the meeting [set up], but not—they didn’t have a solution. So while I was struggling at DJMC, Juan/Johnny was thinking of ideas [for her]. And then I was meeting with the McDonald’s people, and they were inviting me and Juan/Johnny to all of these different events. Finally, I left DJMC, and Juan/Johnny says, “Let’s focus on this project.” And so the first project we did together was the—it was the [Don Juan Productions] Hispanic Cultural Arts Tour Guide Book. And using the term *Hispanic*, because that’s what the corporations understood, that was their lingo, that was their language. And so the whole idea of what Juan/Johnny had was, rather than individual artists wanting funding for their studio or their project, Juan/Johnny was always looking at the big picture. And so he came up with the idea of creating a beautiful guidebook that would feature all of these different cultural centers, art studios, [and murals] in one book, and there would be a map included so that during the Olympic festival, artists [and] tourists would be

able—[would come into Latino communities as a continuation of the “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project].

[*break in audio*]

KD: We have to end.

IN: Okay. But we have another day.

[*break in audio*]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. Today is December 17, [2007]. Go ahead, Irma. You were talking about the letters of support.

IN: So Juan/Johnny designed—first of all, he designed this beautiful concept. Together we wrote the copy. I worked on typing out the whole [preliminary] proposal, and we started presenting the proposal. But then he [Juan/Johnny], being an artist, he just got all of these visuals that he gathered from all of the different artists that we were going to be promoting and representing. Basically . . . So this is now 1984—

JG: I even did the design for the spread-out, and I was using the mural that would—our Smithsonian mural.

KD: Right, right.

JG: So I used that for the cover page of that.

IN: And it was going to be in French, English, and Spanish. And so he had everything already designed as a mock-up. Everybody thought it was a finished, published book, and it was actually our proposal. [*laughter*] [Because, while we were working with *Caminos* magazine and Kirk Whisler, its founder, one of his colleagues, a woman, graciously typeset our final guidebook proposal.]

JG: Everybody wanted a souvenir.

IN: Yeah, we would give these proposals to people, and they wouldn't give it back to us, because they thought it was already a book.

JG: It had pictures of all the different artist [works] that were going to be in it.

IN: And so we got letters from Mayor Bradley, from Congressman Esteban Torres, Senator Art Torres, Assemblywoman Gloria Molina, Assemblyman Richard Alatorre, Councilman Art Snyder, the president of East LA College, Art Avila—

JG: Because that was an official Olympic site.

IN: Yeah. And all of these. And also Edmundo Rodriguez—

JG: Because that was an official from Plaza de la Raza. That was an official Olympic site also.

IN: Yeah. East LA College and Plaza de la Raza were both official Olympic sites. And then the most difficult letter that I got was from my uncle. [*laughter*] Congressman Edward Roybal. And as my cousins will tell you, and we've been—now that we talked to Chon, that we've done extensive interviews for the biography that we're working on with my uncle.

JG: They were surprised that Irma got a letter from him. [*laughter*]

IN: Yeah, they were shocked, because my uncle is very straight-laced, he is very much—was [he passed away in 2005]—very much on the up and up. He—he wanted to know that if he supported anything, that it had to be something that was 100 percent going to benefit the community. And if a family member wanted his support, we had to jump through hoops ten times over to get anything—

JG: [*inaudible*]

KD: Makes sense.

IN: And so it was because he wasn't about to have a family member ruin his reputation or do something that was going to hurt [or] jeopardize the community in any way. And so I was able to get a letter of support—I actually got a letter of support from him to Gil Vazquez, who was his accountant, but also became a member of the LA Olympic Organizing Committee. So he wrote a letter to Gil Vazquez, and also to Peter Ueberroth, and also—

JG: Gil Vazquez was our [Goez] original accountant.

- KD: So who would you have needed support to, I guess, is the—
- JG: Well, for the Olympic—
- IN: Well, to the Olympic committee, yeah. So all of the letters, were written to Peter Ueberroth, who was the president of the Olympic—LA Olympic Organizing Committee.
- JG: And the reason this happened was because—and I think I mentioned it last time—was that originally, we were doing the Tree People project first, because we met Lydia. And—Lydia Lopez.
- IN: Oh, she came first?
- JG: Yeah, Lydia Lopez came first, and Lydia Lopez—
- KD: Yeah, you talked about her. That's where we ended last time.
- IN: Yeah, okay. Okay. So, yeah, because actually, it was while we were working on the proposal for the guide-book that we were at your sister and brother-in-law's house, Ignacio and Imelda Gomez—Chito and Mela Gomez. So we were at their house while they were on vacation.
- JG: Yeah, they went somewhere, a trip somewhere.
- IN: Yeah, we were taking care of the house. And a friend of theirs by the name of Miguel Reyes, Michael Ray or Miguel Reyes, he happened to stop by to visit. And so Juan/Johnny was talking about his story, and so he says, you know, "Tree People, the [founder and president], Andy Lipkis, they did an aerial survey that East LA had the most cement and the least trees of all of LA County, and they got twenty thousand donated from Armstrong Nursery, but they didn't know how to distribute them." So we met with him [Andy]—
- KD: I remember you talking about this.
- IN: Okay. And so we talked about that. And so Juan/Johnny did all of the legwork hooking up the youth, the church, the community, and all of that. So we met Lydia Lopez—
- JG: Lopez, president of UNO—
- IN: President of UNO, United Neighborhood Organization, which is part of the Catholic Church, and she was the head of the firehouse where Dennis Weaver was—created a food distribution program for low-income people where they can get free food, and it was called LIFE, Love Is Feeding Everyone. And so we met Dennis Weaver there, and we're talking with Lydia, and she was the one who said, "You should meet with David Lizárraga from TELACU."
- JG: What happened is, David—the committee, the Latino Hispanic section of the organizing committee—
- IN: Of the Olympics.
- JG: Yeah, met—called Lydia and asked her, "Do you have a project for the Olympics? Because the Olympics is looking for something to do with the community." And she says, "No. We don't do that. We don't have a project. But I do—I recommend the Don Juan [Hispanic Cultural Arts] Tour Guidebook for the Olympics projects." And that's when David Lizárraga called us up, and then we got together with him, and then he started looking at it, and he said, "Okay, well, maybe we can work on this together."
- IN: So in the meantime, we had put the proposal together. I had left DJMC advertising, I had already met with Frank Sanchez from McDonald's, the franchise owner. And John López was another key Hispanic franchise owner for McDonald's. And they were just really excited and really supportive of what we were [doing].
- JG: And what was interesting is she [Irma] went back, because they're the owners of the franchises, they went back to DJMC, Irma's old agency—
- IN: With me, to make a presentation. And the—
- JG: And then after that, they opened a whole Hispanic department in the agency.
- IN: And so it's exciting that we can motivate and inspire people, agencies, corporations to do things, but being pioneers and innovators, we usually don't get the benefit economically for it. *[laughter]* But—
- KD: Did you have a sense that the—
- IN: DJMC.
- KD: The DJMC was kicking itself, going, "Why didn't we listen to her?"
- IN: Yes, yes.

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: While I was there, there was one gentleman, Brad Ball, who was very supportive. And he was, like, one of the key people at DJMC, [and who later became president]. But I wasn't in his department. I was in another department. And so the department that I was in, [like I said, they were all very nice, but] it was like pulling teeth, trying to get them to listen. And I was showing them all this portfolio and projects, and I thought maybe if they hear prestigious names like Smithsonian and this and that, it'll ring a bell. And it just did not ring a bell. And they even had one woman, [a really sweet and professional Latina—I think her name was Nicole Andre]—who was starting to do a few Hispanic projects. But it was really traditional advertising, because they were an advertising agency, not a public relations firm. And they were even telling me, one woman was saying, "Maybe you should go to Bob [Thomas and] Associates, because they're the PR firm for McDonald's, they may be the ones that you really . . ." I was sort of like a round peg in a square hole, or vice versa. I wasn't really in the right fit.

And, but yet, after we did what we did, a lot of advertising agencies were now combining PR, because they started seeing the dollar signs that they were losing. And so I tried working with this one Hispanic person there, but she [Nicole] was doing more traditional advertising. And they were into numbers and statistics of "With this TV commercial, how many units did you sell?" They were really into that straight-laced thing. And so when I left, Frank Sanchez, John López had us [Juan/Johnny and I] going to these banquets and events with all the Hispanic franchise owners, and then the big franchise owners. And then all of a sudden, we had a meeting at Plaza de la Raza with Leo Burnett Advertising, who was McDonald's national advertising agency.

JG: Who were the ones that did the Dewar's profile.

IN: They're the ones who did the Dewar's profile. And Brad Ball—Brad Ball from DJMC was sitting in on the meeting, who was the local advertising agency. And then another woman [very sweet], I can't remember her name, she was European American, she was sitting in on a meeting. And Leo Burnett Advertising started saying [when we showed them our portfolio], "The Dewar's profile, that's our campaign! That's our campaign!" We said, "Yeah, we know it." And Brad Ball was just sitting there, dying, because when he went he on—they did a big conference in Hawaii, and I organized the whole trip [for him]—he was saying that everything went perfect, that I was totally organized, that . . . I think he really regretted it. I think he would have been the person who would have been really open to what I was talking about. But—

JG: Because they were interviewing us to handle all of the Hispanic stuff.

IN: So what was—

JG: Casting and everything.

IN: Well, that's the interesting thing, it's like I, [as] human rights activist, was just saying, "We've got to educate—in this advertising world, we've got to educate these people who are. They have to respect us. They have to do things bilingual, not just in Spanish. They have to have positive images that relate to us culturally. And so again, this became another quest, you know? It was another campaign. And so I'm not just creating campaigns to make the Latino community feel good, but I'm trying to educate the industry as to, if you want to reach us, this is how you do it. If you want to make money off of us, do something that's going to benefit us, and then it'll benefit you. And so all of a sudden, it grew into this huge thing. They—Leo Burnett Advertising wanted us to provide [Latina/o] models and actors for all of their TV commercials.

KD: So did they contract with you?

IN: Well, that's the thing, is that what happened is they said—they mandated years earlier that every TV commercial had to have African Americans. So now, McDonald's Corporation was mandating that all their ad agencies had to have Latinos, or they called Hispanics, in their TV commercials.

JG: And they were producing something like three hundred commercials a year, and English-speaking, and no Latinos were included in any of those.

IN: Right. And so what happened is that right away, Juan/Johnny says, "Okay, they want to cast models, they want to cast actors. We've got to take advantage of this opportunity, McDonald's, let's call Bobby



Morones, the casting director from Universal Studios that worked with him on his movie. And so, boom, he called Bobby Morones, and Bobby Morones had done the movie *Latino*—I forget the name of the European American actor, big, big, big huge film. [It was actually *Salvador* with James Woods.] And so he [Bobby] said that he was willing to do it, and then he went out of the country. And so then I called Angela Moya [Rodriguez]. I said, “Angela, do you know a casting [director] that could work with us?” So then she hooked us up with Alma Martinez, and—

JG: No, no, and then went to Dan Guerrero.

IN: Well, Alma Martinez is the one who gave me the name of Dan Guerrero.

JG: Oh. Lalo Guerrero’s son.

IN: And she said, “Call Dan Guerrero, he’s just come to LA from New York. He was a casting director for the Forty-Second Street stage [production]. He’s a choreographer, you know, big name on Broadway.”

JG: But he had just gotten back to LA.

IN: But he had just come back to LA.

JG: So he wasn’t aware of all these things that were going on.

IN: So we contracted him and made a presentation, and we’re thinking, you know, “How can we get some kind of economic benefit out of it?” So we’re saying, “Well, we’ll be your representative.” And Dan Guerrero didn’t understand the idea of us representing a casting director.

JG: Even Bobby Morones didn’t quite understand it, because they’re not in the world where you have representatives.

IN: This was like something completely innovative, where we’re trying to raise the consciousness of the industry, but to hire them because they’re Latinos.

JG: Because we have the ins to all these corporations, we wanted to bring in all of the Chicanos. But we want to be compensated some way, so we thought maybe by being representatives of all of them.

IN: And getting—

JG: But it was something abstract.

IN: Getting an agency percentage, like 15 percent, 10 percent.

KD: Right, right.

IN: And some people freaked out over that, thinking that we were exploiting them, when here we were putting in all of this free time putting these proposals together, getting all of their publicity, their photos. And they thought it was great that we were promoting them, but to want any compensation, it was an outrage. [laughter] And now—

JG: We’re trying to do something new, you know. These things are abstract to people.

IN: And it’s like, most people can’t think out of the box until it happens, and then it becomes industry practice, and then, all of a sudden, it’s accepted. But when you’re trying to create a new genre, it’s a struggle. But we did it anyway. And so we finally did have a contract with Bobby Morones, and we hooked him up with Leo Burnett Advertising. And then also, we ended up hooking up with Castor [Advertising].

JG: What happened is, we did a major campaign with Anheuser-Busch, and—you see, we were working with Anheuser-Busch, and—

IN: Well, in the meantime, with the guidebook proposal—so all of this started happening through the guidebook proposal. What happened is, the Olympic committee finally contacted us and said that all they do is endorse projects, but they don’t fund them. They don’t give grants, they don’t fund them. So in other words, they would give us a letter of endorsement, we could put—

KD: Right, it could say “The official guidebook of the Olympics.”

IN: Yeah, official guidebook, but they—

JG: “Go get your own money.”

IN: But we would have to get the money in order to finance the whole thing. And now, Stan Levy was—okay, Stan Levy I met, because when I was working on the Gordon Castillo Hall committee, Garcia—what was his first name? An attorney, attorney by the name of—

JG: David?

IN: An attorney by the name of—oh, something Garcia. I don't see it here. [Miguel Garcia.] But anyway, he had asked me to start doing research on reapportionment, because he saw all of the work that I had done with the Gordon Castillo Hall committee. And so two attorneys were hiring me to just do some research. And I did all of this research on reapportionment, and I interviewed Stan Levy, because he had done something in regards to some earlier effort in reapportionment, to create equitable boundaries for political offices. So I interviewed Stan Levy and all of these other people.

It turned out that Stan Levy was the attorney for Tierra [whose first album was designed by Juan/Johnny], and I actually met Tierra there at his office when I went for the meeting. And so that—so they [Miguel Garcia's group] ended up being able to work on reapportionment, and as far as I know, the district's boundaries were redesigned, so I contributed a little bit to that. But I contacted Stan Levy way after that, in regards to our project, and he helped us put the budget together, because that's always the struggle for artists, you know? So how do you put a budget together? And so he worked with us on that. But it turned out that—they said that they don't fund it. And since Naomi had come to us pretty late in the game—it wasn't at the beginning of all of these Olympic proposals, but it was towards the end—that there wasn't enough time for us to get corporate sponsorship or any kind of government grant or anything like that. But in the meantime, all of these advertising people were all around us, and David Lizárraga—

JG: When they saw the proposal, and they saw all this beautiful artwork, it's like everybody wanted us to produce posters. [laughter]

IN: Yeah. So it's like we couldn't fight nature. It's like, here we're trying to do this community project for the artists, and they're saying, "We want you to do advertising campaigns." And so—

JG: First it was Coca-Cola.

IN: First it was Coca-Cola.

JG: Hank Armenta. A sweetheart, a really, really nice guy.

IN: Oh, he was a great guy. He was a great guy. So the Coca-Cola poster—I don't know if I have any here—

KD: You showed me a lot—yeah, that's what I was trying to put together. These were things from Don Juan—

IN: Yeah. So we initial—initially, we were going to call the company Don Juan Productions Artistic Services, and Juan/Johnny's idea is, let's—because he's always trying to figure out, how can we get a little bit of money out of promoting all of these artists? So Don Juan Productions Artistic Services, we were going to refer artists to jobs, like an employment agency, and we get a little commission if we give them a contract somewhere. And he says, "Okay, Irma, I'm setting up Don Juan Productions and Artistic Services, but I'm going back to Europe, you can manage it." [laughter] So he was always thinking of going back to Europe. I said, "Well, if you're going to Europe, I'm not going to hang around here and do this by myself." So he stuck around.

So as this started evolving, he says, "Okay, well, let's call this Don Juan Productions and Advertising." And my focus was to promote all of these positive role models, so to me, it was fine that the company was called Don Juan Productions, because all of these connections were Juan/Johnny's connections. All of the credentials and credibility was his credibility. And I wasn't just representing the artists, I was representing him. And—but we've always been fifty-fifty partners, equal partners, equal benefit of whatever little money came in. Equal expense. And so when we started doing Don Juan Productions and advertising, we ...

So David Lizárraga said, "Well, you start—I'm going to set up meetings with these corporations, and I'd like to be there, making these presentations." And so immediately, Coca-Cola was like the first one. Hank Armenta. And he just jumped on this, because this was a local distributor. It was the Coca-Cola distributor [the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Los Angeles]. So when you're dealing with local people, they have more of an understanding on the market. And they sponsor events. So this was the Para Los Niños—Second Annual Para Los Niños 10K Run. So Juan/Johnny's [poster] concept was, since they have a limited

budget, we'll use the same artwork, and we'll just imprint different information for the different events that were going on. So he's always constantly trying to make it cost effective.

KD: Now, whose artwork is that?

IN: His brother-in-law, Ignacio Gomez. Chito. And so because he was into advertising, then we started representing him, because it was a perfect fit. And so right away, I started seeing—you know, these budgets are so small, they're like two thousand dollars, and it's supposed to include the art, the printing, the this, the that—this isn't fair. You know, there I am, it's unjust. *[laughter]* And so in advertising, the artists never get recognition, because you have—it's a team effort, because it's the creative director, art director, and usually the illustrator is just following instructions.

KD: Instructions, yeah, for concept.

IN: Yes, a concept. And so I'm saying, "These artists are positive role models. If you want to really reach the Hispanic market, you should promote their name, so that they [the community] knows it's a Chicano who created that artwork." Plus, I started doing all of this research, and I started finding out that—my focus is always, find out what the industry practice is, and then think of what I think it should be. But then I'm using industry language to change it. And so I said, "Number one, you have to start providing money separately for models, for costumes, for printing, [color] separation, for distribution, for the photographer, for the designer, for the illustrator, to make . . ." Because originally the illustrator has to take it out of their pocket to pay for all of that except for the printing.

KD: Right, right.

IN: And that you're buying usage rights, that usually it's a work-for-hire. And I say, "No, it's not a work-for-hire, because these artists are too important to the community." I said, "What you're going to do is, you're going to pay usage rights." If it's a local campaign, regional, national, and even if it's a national campaign, you're only buying rights for advertising, because we know the potential of this art to be used as a fine arts piece, you know, for collateral material, mugs, plates, greeting cards, whatever. And so that was never done before, and so I did it. And so [we] started first of all with Coca-Cola, and then we started doing this work with Anheuser-Busch. And so we brought in Esperanza Martinez, and I started casting all of the *folklórico* dancers that I worked with—this is Esteban Coronado, and he's . . . And there's Esteban twice in the picture, because he used the same models and they put on different clothes or whatever, brought in all their costumes. We got—this guy's actually a soccer player that we found at the park. *[laughter]*

KD: So was it from a photograph? Somebody shot a photo?

IN: No. We got live models, and we worked with George Rodriguez. I don't know if you talked about George Rodriguez from Goez [Art Studios and Gallery].

JG: I don't know if I have.

IN: Yeah. George Rodriguez is a very successful photographer that Juan/Johnny knew from Goez. And tell a little bit of his background.

JG: George and Rudy, his brother, Rodriguez, are both photographers. And George had been photographing for the studios, and celebrities—I think I mentioned that when we had our exhibit, he already had photographs of stars and kids of stars, and he's got photographs of Michael Jackson and all the family when they were little kids. So he's been into celebrities for quite awhile.

IN: So George Rodriguez has done all of this celebrity photography, but he's also a Chicano activist, where he has tons of photographs of César Chávez, the moratorium, the walkouts, and so he's . . . I don't know what you'd call that, what kind of historical—

KD: Photojournalism, sometimes.

IN: Photojournalist as well as—

KD: Documentary photography.

IN: Commercial work, as well as high fashion kind of model, actors type of stuff.

KD: Yeah, those folks usually don't do only one.

IN: Yeah.

- JG: Yeah.
- IN: But he's very, very successful in the high fashion stuff. So we contracted him, and—to use his studio to shoot the models. And so we had, like—and we would gather all of the research. Juan/Johnny would come up with the concept and the design, and he'd do like a rough sketch of what it was going to be.
- JG: Yeah, because we had to present it—I had to come up with a concept and a design and present it to the corporation. And if they liked it—
- IN: To sell the idea.
- JG: Yeah, to sell the idea. And if they liked it, then we'd just continue it, or else they'd say, "Well, why don't you add a little of this," or whatever.
- IN: So we would shoot the models all at different times in different costumes. We did research of, like, the Olvera Street and balloons, and we'd gather all this different stuff.
- JG: Yeah. The objective was to promote the culture.
- IN: Right.
- JG: That's all we were focusing on, promoting culture.
- IN: Right. The positive image.
- JG: Even though it was a brewery. But we said, "Well, there's an opportunity to give jobs to the artists, an opportunity to have these images seen by the community, and at the same time, it's an opportunity to be able to promote the culture."
- IN: And like with the Gordon Castillo Hall committee, and I'm sure tons of fundraisers, we were buying cases of Budweiser beer, cases of Coca-Cola. And so a lot of the Chicanos who may have been anti-Hispanic marketing, they're the ones that are funding these corporations just buying products. So our philosophy is, we're buying these products anyway, let's use that money to bring it back to the community.
- JG: When we did this campaign here, we did a poster, we did a counter card, and—
- IN: Table tents.
- JG: Table tents.
- KD: Right.
- JG: And one other person that they—they called us, because I think we had our name down there, we pushed on having our name on it. And they were in a restaurant in San Gabriel.
- IN: It was actually Lupe Botello.
- JG: Yeah.
- IN: It was David Botello's wife.
- JG: Yeah, they were at a restaurant, and they said, "When we walked in there, that place was colorful, and we see on every table, it was your artwork, it's Esperanza." And when we left, the place was empty. They took them all. Everybody took them.
- KD: Oh, really?
- IN: And it made them more valuable, because they became collectors' items.
- JG: Little paper table tents. And also Coca-Cola said the same thing. He says, "You know what . . ." Because we did one printing, massive printing, and he called us up. He says, "I have some good news and some bad news for you guys." He says, "The good news is that the campaign's a major hit. Everybody loves the artwork. The bad news is that they all took them home, but we have to print more." [laughter]
- IN: So that's good news.
- JG: That was bad news for them, because they had to put out more, but it was—
- IN: But it was good news for them, because instead of people looking at a poster for Cinco de Mayo and then forgetting about it, they took the poster into their home, and they were seeing it every day. So this—so all of a sudden, the corporations are saying, "My God, these positive images of the culture are—if I sponsor that, if I promote that, then I'm going to be in the home all day long." So it's kind of like the Jesús Helguera calendars. Businesses promote those, but the people see it all the time.
- KD: Can you go back to the other image? I had a question about the—

- IN: Sure, sure.
- KD: The work.
- IN: Yeah.
- KD: So you shoot photographs in a studio—
- JG: Yeah, individually.
- KD: Right, individually, like this—
- IN: Like we just shot these two, then we shot that group, then we shot that group—
- KD: The *folklórico*. And then the illustrator artist comes in and—
- IN: No, he—the designer takes all of those photographs. He first came up—
- JG: Yeah, I first lay out—I first do the sketch of everything.
- IN: He came up with the concept first, before the photographs.
- KD: Right, before the photos.
- IN: And then based on his concept and his sketch, we positioned everybody in the position of the figures that he designed.
- JG: Of my sketches.
- IN: And then once you have the photos, then you can do more detail, more refined—
- KD: Okay. And so who—that was your cousin who did that work?
- IN: No, this is Esperanza Martinez.
- JG: This is Esperanza.
- KD: Oh, this one's Esperanza Martinez.
- IN: This is Esperanza Martinez. So this is Cinco de Mayo 1986.
- KD: And then this space would have been used for—
- IN: To imprint different information—
- JG: To imprint the events or any information.
- IN: The events, like if it's going to be in [a park].
- JG: So we always left some empty space, to be able to promote whatever, [like a special in a supermarket].
- KD: And you're saying, this particular image was seen by—
- JG: Everybody.
- IN: Yes.
- KD: Botello, and—
- IN: Yes, by Lupe Botello—
- JG: They do big posters.
- IN: Yeah. We print it—
- KD: People are taking that home. Okay.
- IN: We printed fifty thousand posters, and not only—
- JG: And these are gigantic.
- IN: Juan/Johnny came up with the concept, the design, and then we—I worked with him as art director, he's creative director. And then we did all of the casting and the modeling and setting up—
- JG: We'd get the models and place them exactly.
- IN: So George just shot the pictures. We set everything up. Then, we go to Esperanza Martinez, we show her the sketch, we give her all the stuff, she does the final illustration. But then we have to do all the production. Where we add the lettering, we add the logo. So we work with the color separator, the printer, the production house. And then we did the packaging and the shipping to—they call it national fulfillment, where we actually shipped it out to all of the Anheuser-Busch distributors throughout the country.
- KD: So tell me a little bit about the image, like why you—I know this is the *kiosko* at Olvera Street, and this, the arches—
- JG: Yeah, that was just added in.

- KD: Okay. Like Spanish architectural elements, the *folklórico*, and then the men in the background with a woman there talking, is that—
- JG: And then the fountain that then didn't exist, so everything was just added on.
- KD: This guy's the one holding the balloon, and that's like another—
- IN: It's a couple sitting around the fountain. So it's kind of like a romantic scene, a gentleman talking to a young woman around the fountain.
- KD: And so I'm imagining, like, the way you've dressed, there's a specific image you're going for. He's wearing—which in the '70s and '80s, a very—
- IN: Yeah. Showing them very contemporary—
- KD: Contemporary jacket. What's that jacket called?
- IN: Showing the fusion—
- KD: Is that called a flight jacket?
- JG: That's my jacket.
- KD: It's your jacket. *[laughter]*
- IN: He got it out of his closet.
- KD: What do we call that jacket? [Member's Only jacket.]
- JG: The shirt's mine, too.
- KD: It was that certain [look].
- IN: I don't know what they were called.
- KD: That was very, very [specific style].
- IN: That was the style in those days.
- KD: Yeah, very popular.
- IN: Yeah. And the whole idea—and that was actually my blouse, now that I think about it.
- KD: So the goal on that end was very . . . And then, but what's on the table is *pan dulce*. This is what, like maybe chips and a *burro* or *burrito*, and you have avocado, and—
- IN: *Avocate* and *queso*, that's—
- KD: Oh, that's *queso*, okay.
- IN: *Queso* and bananas and tropical fruit. And you have the Mexican olla. You see the decoration of the Mexican olla?
- KD: Now I see it, yeah.
- IN: And the whole idea is showing the fusion of the—
- JG: And here's the Mexican cart.
- IN: Showing the fusion of the Mexican contemporary and traditional. That you can be a hip young contemporary Hispanic Latino, but at the same time, be proud of your history, be proud of your culture, be proud of your roots. And so that's the basic message, celebrating our culture and still being part of the American society.
- JG: And then they [Anheuser-Busch]—with this poster, then, they used to have a festival at Lincoln Park. And they used to bring in Eddie Cano, Los Lobos, and all—
- IN: Tierra.
- JG: Jose Feliciano, all the big stars, Chicano stars. And that was a big, big festival they used to have there. And the—now, this was all sponsored by Anheuser-Busch, and they used to sell beer there, and that's the thing that certain people didn't like. But after a new councilman came in, he had more connections with Miller, so Anheuser-Busch was out and Miller came in, and that got worse, and then they discontinued it.
- KD: Did you get—now, you said you printed—
- IN: Fifty thousand.
- KD: Fifty thousand of this one, and you had to redo the—
- IN: Not this one. This one, it was a straight fifty thousand. The Coca-Cola one, I think the Coca-Cola one, it was a local campaign. I think we only did five thousand, and we might have had them printed—



- KD: No, but somebody made the phone call at—good news, bad news—
- IN: That was Hank Armenta at Coca-Cola.
- JG: Yeah, Hank Armenta.
- KD: Okay. So are you getting usage rights? I mean, do you get paid again for—
- IN: Yes. Each [time it's reprinted].
- KD: So that's the good news. There's no bad news at all. *[laughter]*
- IN: Yeah. To us—he was joking when he said there's good news and bad news. And to him, the bad news was good news. And I negotiated the contract so that every time they had to reprint, everybody got an extra bonus from it.
- KD: Because you said usage rights for the artist, so I would imagine that they're getting—
- IN: Yeah. And see, normally advertising agencies represent the corporation. They do not represent the artist. And they try to get artists dirt cheap, and pocket the money themselves as an ad agency, get as much from the corporation as they can and pay as little out. Whereas we—
- JG: This was unusual, because we were representing the artists, but we were doing advertising work, we were working as an agency. But we weren't representing the advertising—
- IN: The corporation.
- JG: The corporation.
- IN: And everybody accepted it because there was a need.
- KD: Yeah, they [the corporations] had no expertise in this area.
- IN: They had no expertise. [So anyway, I was able to negotiate that the designer and illustrator would both sign their work, which was not standard industry practice.] And it was, again, like pulling teeth. He [Juan/Johnny] says, "Yeah, put the artist's name, this and that." I said, "Juan/Johnny, we have to write your name as designer." "No, no, no. You don't have to put my name." I wanted to kill him. And then I said, "And we have to put our name, Don Juan Productions, so that they know we're the ones who did this." "No, no, no. We don't have to do that." "Yes, we do!" *[laughter]* So he's constantly trying to promote everyone, and my focus is to be fair to everybody, including ourselves.
- KD: Yeah. You want the next contract.
- IN: Yes, exactly. Because if we get the next contract, then everybody benefits from it. And so this was all innovative. Now, this was something we did with KMEX Channel 34. Danny Villanueva—
- JG: Yeah, so David took us with—
- IN: Davis Lizárraga from TELACU.
- JG: Yeah, David Lizárraga. So we went with Danny Villanueva, and then right away he wanted a campaign for KMEX.
- KD: Now, I'm going to run out of time for today, but tell me about the copy, because—is that yours or theirs?
- IN: No, they wrote the copy. They wrote the copy.
- KD: Okay. It says, "The American dream is everyone's dream."
- IN: Right. And this was pretty much their concept—we had done actually two images for KMEX, and one was a sort of—
- JG: A family,
- IN: A family that just sort of stood around—
- JG: Because we were talking basically about statistics of Latino families, so we did a—
- IN: So it had the grandmother in the middle, and the husband and the father with the children on each side. And so we had done that particular image, and they decided not to do that, so they came up with the idea of a takeoff of Norman Rockwell.
- KD: Yeah.
- IN: And so Juan/Johnny got his brother-in-law, Ignacio Gomez [Chito] again, to do this artwork.
- JG: And that's my mom and my dad actually.

- IN: And they actually use all of their family members as the models, so this is Don Juan, Juan/Johnny's father, and Doña Lupe, his mother, and there's Chito's wife, Juan/Johnny's sister Mela, and his nephew Greg, and Diana, his niece. And then that's Chito's—
- JG: Elysa, my goddaughter.
- IN: Where's Elysa? Oh, there she is, there's Elysa, his goddaughter. And Dario's [his nephew] hiding back there. So [Chito] used all of his family. And then these are other family members. So the whole idea of the America dream is everyone's dream is, you know, that Hispanics are American.
- KD: It's very clever, because the stuff on the wall is made to look—you know, one is in the service, one's graduating from—
- IN: That's actually Juan/Johnny's sister, Rebecca.
- KD: And it's like a—
- IN: And it's actually a photograph.
- KD: A photograph of her graduation, and then a diploma or something, right, that you can't see it exactly, but it gives you a sense. And then, like, another kind of celebratory image of people gathered together.
- IN: And actually these are color copies. The original printed is much finer, and you could see these a little bit clearer. But they're deliberately made to be subdued.
- KD: Right.
- JG: And this came out—this actually came out nationally, in national magazines.
- IN: In *Ad Week* and *Ad Age*.
- JG: The advertising magazines.
- IN: Those were major, major campaigns.
- JG: Those are the two major advertising magazines. And while we were doing this, we hooked up with an old friend from the music days of mine who used to follow the band around. His name was Manny—
- IN: Montana. Manny Montana.
- JG: Manny Montana. And he was the salesperson for KMEX.
- IN: And for SIN [Spanish International Network], I think.
- JG: Yeah. So what he did is he sold time to agencies. He was trying to get agencies to buy time—
- IN: For TV commercials.
- JG: Yeah. So then he started saying, "Why don't we work together? I got clients that want this stuff, but also, they want television commercials."
- KD: Right.
- JG: So then we started getting into producing television commercials. *[laughter]*
- IN: So that's a whole other segment there.
- JG: Yeah, which we'll have to cover in the next one.
- KD: Okay. We're going to stop for today?
- IN: Okay. Do you want to finish the advertising, or do you want to just stop?
- KD: I can't be late to pick her up, so we'll—
- IN: Okay. We'll continue.
- JG: We stopped on television commercials.
- KD: We're going to continue with the—
- IN: With the sixteenth of September.
- KD: Okay. Thank you.
- IN: Okay.

## DECEMBER 20, 2007

- KD:** This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. Today is December 20, 2007, for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series], and this is tape number 13. We want to just start today with an overview, kind of general sense of the kinds of work that—and the specific successes that you had with Don Juan Productions. The production team was founded in what year?
- IN:** It was actually—
- JG:** Eighty-four? Eighty-two?
- IN:** It was the '84 Olympics. It was for the 1984 Olympics.
- KD:** Right. And it's still in production, I have a sense, now. What would you say the height of its activity was?
- IN:** Well, it's actually transformed and taken on different personas, depending on what the needs [are of the community that we are addressing].
- JG:** The change of the environment. We try and focus—our target market, really, in a sense, you might say, is trying to educate the kids in the schools and the community about our culture, to develop self-esteem and pride. And with that we feel that—only because of our experience, my experience, what it's done to me—I feel it'll make [young people] more productive by feeling good about themselves.
- IN:** I think it's been difficult to describe what kind of artist Juan is. Because artists could say, "Well, I'm primarily a painter or a sculptor or a muralist." And the way I've seen Juan over—it's going to be twenty-six years now that we've been working together, but I actually have known him since the early '70s, add eight years to that—is, I see him as—his focus is—his creation is the transformation of minds, to change attitudes of the community towards themselves, to believe in themselves, to be proud of their culture, their history, and to use the power of the arts and the media [to change the image of who we are and how we are perceived by others]. And so—
- JG:** Visual and performing arts.
- IN:** And so his first powerful concept was murals as public art, but then you also had the first Chicano film festival and photography festival.
- JG:** Yeah, but I was going to ask . . . We never mentioned that we [Goez Art Studios and Gallery] had—before any of the filmmakers had a motion picture, we had a film festival and photo festival. The photo festival was basically all Chicano photographers in the television and motion picture industry, which was Oscar Castillo, George . . . And as a matter of fact—
- IN:** George Rodriguez.
- JG:** Yeah. They just mentioned the other day that they met there [at the Goez film and photo festival]. Oscar and George Rodriguez. Rudy, his brother, who was—
- IN:** Rudy Rodriguez.
- JG:** Who was into photographing a lot of the musicians, rock and roll groups and stuff like that. Esperanza Vazquez, I believe, was her—
- KD:** Maiden name?
- JG:** Name before she got married with Mocte [Moctesuma Esparza], she was also a participant. Moises Medina—I can't even remember other names. But Esperanza's photograph was one of the very popular photographs that sold. We sold a lot of copies of—
- KD:** And this is through Goez that—
- JG:** At Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], yeah. So the whole gallery was all photographs of Chicano photographers. And the back of the studio, we set up the film cameras and all that, the participants with Bill Meléndez of *Peanuts*, Jesús Treviño, Moctesuma Esparza, Jose Luis Ruiz, Bobby Morones, David Sandoval, Rudy Vargas. I believe John Alonzo even loaned us his name to be able to use at that time. And there were some other names that I forgot. There was a woman who was very popular [Nettie Peña], and I remember going to Malibu to go to pick up her films. And I can't remember—you've got to find all that stuff. And I believe probably Tony Rodriguez, who was also a producer of a TV show at that particular time.

IN: Was Tony Calderon at that time—

JG: Maybe *Reflecciones*—maybe Luis Garza was involved also.

IN: Tony Calderon? Did you know him yet, or—

JG: Yes. Tony Calderon was involved at that time. But anyway, they just rolled their films. And the whole photo exhibit. Moises Medina shot the photograph of—I think it was a little girl from South America that was on the cover. And it was such a beautiful little color photograph, that was the cover to our invitation, our— and it was so popular that I think somebody broke into our files and took all kinds of them. *[laughter]* But anyway, it was a beautiful photograph. And Moses was also a photographer for our movie, *Only Once in a Lifetime*.

IN: So the way I see Juan/Johnny is that his medium is public art, and he sees not only murals as public art, but his gallery was a work of art, the way they transformed it. And then when Alex [Grattan-Dominguez] came to him with the script about the Chicano film, it's, like, that's when he said—he said, "Now it's time to use film in order to continue promoting these images." So film was another form of public art.

JG: It's like anything that I'm going to do, I want to be able to focus on making it a beautiful—beautiful quality product or production, in order to be able to have the community feel proud about it. It's like the East LA mural map. You know, when I came up with that, I said, "I want this map to be really spectacular. Really nice." And I looked at all the old maps, the old Spanish and English maps from the old days. They thought they had sea dragons and sea monsters on it and all that. So I really wanted to make it—because I wanted people to see this map as something that they could frame, and something that they could keep with pride, instead of opening it up and seeing, oh, this and that, and then they throw it away. And I feel that we succeeded with that. I feel we created a beautiful, beautiful map. And thanks to—it was Art Lopez [of] Augustus Art, who saw [us] on television, or saw the Dewar's profile, and did some research to try and find us. And he printed all of these maps free of charge for us.

And it turns out that he went to Trade Tech with my brother-in-law, Ignacio Gomez. And so they met up, and because of that—we called him Chito, Ignacio—he [Art] started doing some of his [Chito's] posters also. But the important thing is that, if we do something of true beauty and quality, it will never be thrown away, it will always be safe. And that's what we did with all of our [Irma's and my] advertising campaigns, and to educate—

IN: And that was my point, is that the reason we got into advertising is that I believe Juan/Johnny saw that as another form of public art. [He was now using the mass media as another tool to continue his "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project.] And because—

JG: Of course, it was a way to reach—they had the means, they had the money. The corporations had the money to reach millions of people throughout the country. And we have the concept, we have the knowledge, we have the knowledge of the history, it's a way to be able to educate. The product may be debatable, but it was a means to be able to reach thousands and thousands of people, create opportunities for the artists to get into advertising. Like I said earlier, we went—once we were in with corporations, we were trying to bring in artists of all types. Even things that they couldn't understand, like Bobby Morones as a casting director, Dan Guerrero as a casting director. We went to Jesús Treviño and Jose Luis Ruiz to see if they were willing to get into it.

IN: To shoot commercials.

JG: To shoot commercials. So we were trying to just spread it out. The trick—

KD: And he ends up doing that, right? He shoots—

IN: Not with us. Not with us. And in the beginning—

KD: But he goes into that field.

IN: Eventually, yeah. We approached him first, and at the time he wasn't interested. And then later, he called, saying he changed his mind and he wanted to get into that area.

JG: Jose Luis Ruiz did, yeah.

IN: Jose Luis Ruiz.

- JG: Yeah. They were both together when we went into—they were shooting documentaries at that time, so they were busy with that. And I think that's probably why they weren't interested. But our idea is that if you get into the corporation, which was very difficult—very difficult to get into corporations, because corporations are only thinking of their product. We were very fortunate to start hooking up with a lot of Latinos in major corporations. So they were open. And any Latino, especially Chicanos, that see these images that they've never seen before get excited, and they said, "Let's do it. Let's do it." We showed it to one of the heads of Anheuser-Busch back east. We gave him a little tour of all of the murals and some of the studios, and when he saw the mural map, right away, he wanted to do a map [for] the corporation. So they got the money. And we could have spread it all over the place, but that's where I drew the line, in regards to my map. That's where I felt I didn't want to—for lack of a better word, prostitute my mural map, the beauty of my map.
- IN: Because he just basically wanted to reprint it with—
- KD: With the logo.
- IN: With the logo of a corporation.
- JG: Yeah. And that sacred to me. If it's an image for them, then it's all right. But when it's an image that's already recognized within the community, then that's a different story. So I still respect some of the—the sacred part of the art and the community, to not do that.
- IN: And we were talking—Juan/Johnny was talking with David Botello, and he mentioned that he gave you the mural map.
- KD: Yeah, he gave me the map.
- IN: Now, when we first start—the way this whole thing evolved, it's Don Juan Productions. I think I mentioned that Juan/Johnny had suggested I go into advertising, and I was working with an advertising agency. And when I left, we started working on the Olympic project, which was the guidebook proposal which I showed you. And as we were working on the guidebook proposal, at the same time, Michael Ray, who was a friend of Chito's, approached us about the Tree People. And they had twenty thousand trees donated from Armstrong Nursery, so here's already a corporation investing into the community. And he asked us to help distribute ten thousand to East LA. So Juan/Johnny coordinated—
- JG: They had no way to get the trees into the community.
- IN: Because they didn't have any contact. Their offices were in Coldwater Canyon, in the [San Fernando] Valley, and that was really the community they [knew].
- JG: So Miguel [Michael Ray] told them about what I had done, so he came and asked us if we would be able to get involved in distributing them.
- IN: And Juan/Johnny coordinated that whole project, contacting church groups and community centers. And we distributed trees to the CSO [to Tony Rios], to the firehouse where Lydia Lopez from UNO was working, and that was where Dennis Weaver had founded LIFE, Love Is Feeding Everyone. That was one of his branch sites. And so we actually had to individually bag and prune ten thousand trees. So they had these refrigerator trucks that they brought into some kind of a warehouse area.
- JG: And we got kids, the Boy Scouts, everybody involved. Senior citizens, we got tons of photographs of them. And it was an exciting project, because we got so much participation from the community to be able to get these trees out there.
- IN: Yeah. You could see little old ladies—
- KD: Yeah, you showed me that.
- IN: Yeah, little old ladies pruning the trees, and Boy Scouts. And there I am with my bundle of trees. And so Juan/Johnny came up with the concept of—you know, Juan says, "Adopt a tree and give it a home, and let's reap the fruits of our labor." So Chito, Ignacio Gomez, illustrated this instruction sheet, and I wrote all of the copy for it, and Rebecca translated it.
- JG: So we did it bilingual.

- IN: So it was actually a huge . . . This is a reduction, it was actually a huge piece. And again, we got the printing donated, the typesetting donated, all the paper donated. I think you went to Zellerbach [paper company]. It was a company that a friend of yours [Rosie]—
- JG: Possibly.
- KD: What I'm trying to get a sense of is how . . . Who were some of those early supporters within the corporations that—because it is very hard to break into—
- IN: Okay. Well, the way it started is—
- KD: I mean, the story you told about the Anheuser-Busch—
- IN: Well, it started off with Don Juan Productions artistic services. And Juan/Johnny's idea was first to have, like, a referral service to get jobs for artists, because he was constantly promoting and helping artists. But he thought, "Well, maybe we can get some money by getting a percentage, like an agent." And because all of the promotions—
- JG: And what it is, it was also helping the community to be able to understand what type of an artist they could hire, because a lot of people say, "We need an artist." First of all, an illustrator is a variety of artists. There's tons: very realistic, impressionistic, all these different types. That's just the illustration part of it. So you can't just say, "Give it to that artist" and expect what you're thinking you're going to get out of it. And even before that, there's a designer. You need a designer to be able to come up with a design, and then give it to an illustrator. But before the designer, there's a concept. So somebody has to come up with a concept and talk to the designer. So it's broken up into so many different areas. And then there's so many different types of design. There's very commercial design, as opposed to more illustrative design—
- IN: Graphic design.
- JG: Yeah. So the idea was to be able to have this service, and that's basically what an advertising agency does. You go to an advertising agency, and they know how to get the product produced exactly the way you are thinking about it. So when you go to an advertising agency and the job is finished, you're not surprised. A lot of people will be totally surprised, because they think if they just hand something—and I learned that a lot, in regards to when I wanted two doors carved out in Mexico—
- IN: For the Goetz [Art Studios and] Gallery [and TELASOMAFa].
- JG: For the Goetz [Art Studios and] Gallery [and TELASOMAFa], of Cuauhtémoc on one door and the Spaniard on the other door. I had this image, this picture of exactly what I wanted with a lot of scrolls, and when it came back, I was shocked that it was totally different from what I wanted. So I got the chisel, and I started reworking some of that stuff. And I learned that you can't get something from an artist just by saying, "Give me this." Somebody else has to design it, and you have to oversee the design. So that's this whole process of this advertising world. And since—
- IN: Well, the difference, though, between the way a typical traditional ad agency works and the way we work is that they're representing the corporation and they have suppliers and resources to execute the project. Whereas our focus was to represent the artists and represent the community and to educate the corporations, that not only are we creating images that are relevant to the community that are going to really excite them about whoever supports our culture through these products, but that the artists themselves are part of the image. To know that a Chicano artist created this, a Chicano artist designed it, illustrated it. That that was something so important to our self-esteem.
- JG: And that's why we promoted having their names on there. At the same time, they were getting promotion, and the corporation is benefiting. It's like having Michael Jackson as a spokesperson.
- IN: But before we get to all that detail, because she was asking about how did this evolve, is after we did Tree People, again, Michael Ray told us about some people who were going to create a book on the murals of Los Angeles, called—
- JG: That actually came later.
- IN: No, no, it was—
- JG: The way the advertising developed—



IN: No, no, but that came before we started working with Anheuser-Busch and Coca-Cola.

JG: Oh, it did? Okay.

IN: Yeah. And so—I'm pretty sure. I'm pretty sure. Because once we got into the corporations, we didn't have time to do that anymore.

JG: Okay.

IN: So I believe it was—and so what happened is that Michael . . . We met with—I can't remember the photographer's name or the writer, but we do have it documented. And any names that we've forgotten, we'll make them available for the archive. But—and we have the book at home, we just haven't had a chance to go through all of our boxes and all of our archives—is, it was all going to be about the murals of Venice. Venice and Culver City and the Westside. And the woman [Melba Levick] was from Europe, I think, and the writer [Stanley Young] was Jewish from the US. I think he was from LA. And they didn't know anything about Chicano murals. They were going to do a book about the murals of the Westside. And so because Michael Ray had already talked to Juan/Johnny, and he had already hooked him up to Tree People, he said, "You really need to talk to Juan/Johnny Gonzalez."

And so we met with [Stanley], the writer, and we took him on a tour of all the mural studios. We took him to the Streetscapers' studios, we took him to Plaza de la Raza, we took him on a tour of all the murals throughout East LA. And he was just overwhelmed. And so then he brought in . . . When she [Melba] flew in, we met with her, also, [and educated her about Chicano artists and murals]. And this whole book transformed into a whole book of Chicano art. And it included some of the murals from the Westside, but it was primarily Chicano murals. And Juan/Johnny's brother [Joe] had—because he works closely with TELACU, he had gotten a commission to restore some of the Chicano murals in East LA that had been done, but also to do a mural for the Olympics at Exposition Park. And he did it with Ernie Banks. Ernie Banks. And Robert Arenivar was the designer. And what happened is that through this book, *The Big Picture* [: *The Murals of Los Angeles*], we included his [Joe's] mural with all of the other artists [when we took Stanley on the tour]. And so they did a write-up [on the book] in the *LA Times* magazine. And then—and so all of—and so this whole book was really transformed into a book of Chicano art.

KD: Is that *Toward [a] People's Art* [: *The Contemporary Mural Movement*]? Is that the name of—

IN: No, this came after the Olympics. This came after the '84—this was after the '84 Olympics, because I was at DJMC in '83, and the Tree People project was kind of part of the Olympic projects. And so *The Big Picture* came after that. [*The Big Picture* was published in 1988—ed.] And so, while we were with Tree People, distributing the trees, we met with UNO—Lydia Lopez. And she, as I think Juan/Johnny had mentioned this before, she said you need to talk to David Lizárraga at TELACU, because—

JG: They . . . I think I mentioned, David was actually part of the Latino—representing Latino community. He was part of the Olympic organizing committee, the group representing the Latino community, and he called Lydia Lopez, asking her, "Do you have a project?" Because they were asking them, "We want a Latino project for the Olympics." And they actually called Lydia and asked her, "Do you have a project?" And Lydia says, "We don't do that, but I do highly recommend that you endorse or work with Don Juan, 'New Barrio' . . ." Was it called the "New Barrio"? No, it was called the—

IN: No. It was just "Don—

KD: It was the "Don Juan Hispanic Cultural Arts Tour Guidebook."

JG: Okay. And so they made contact with us, so David called, and we got together with them. And—

IN: Now we—before we met with David, we already had letters of support, which I had showed you, from Gloria Molina and—

JG: Yeah, so we had all the politicians. So our packet had all of these beautiful pictures already. As a matter of fact, it was so beautiful . . . We went to have an attorney help us out, and we went to Dan Moss, who was Vikki Carr's ex-husband. And when he saw it, he just loved it, and he kept it. He kept it because it was—

IN: Well, everyone kept it as a collector's item.

JG: Right. And even Joe, my brother, for years still thought it was a book that was published.

KD: It was done, right.

IN: [It was done as a proposal, but the guidebook was never published.] And so before we went to David Lizárraga, we already had the letters of support from Congressman Esteban Torres and Mayor Bradley and Gloria Molina, Art Torres, Congressman Roybal, Richard Alatorre, Art Snyder—all these people that we had mentioned before. And we had the beautiful colored book. So when he saw all of that and the support that we had, he was excited about working with us. But as we mentioned before the Olympic committee, we met with him, but we also met with—Naomi Quiñonez and David Botello and myself actually met with one of the people who worked for the Olympics. And he was the one who said, “We don’t fund, we only endorse.”

KD: Right, endorse.

IN: And so David [Lizárraga] then started—he started saying, “Let’s work on hooking up with corporations.” And that’s when he introduced us to Hank Armenta from Coca-Cola. Hank Armenta was, like, a huge supporter and was very excited. We had showed you already the Coca-Cola poster. And so that started it. And then we also met Carlos Viramontes, who was the key person from Anheuser-Busch. And so they got very excited about what we were doing. And so our focus was now—

JG: And then Anheuser-Busch was having a whole conference of Latino distributors, and Latinos working within Anheuser-Busch. It was at the airport Hilton, somewhere around there. And we made a presentation, and the vice-president, Jesse Aguirre?

IN: I think so.

JG: Chicano.

KD: Right.

JG: He was there, and all the distributors, and they just went crazy over it.

KD: Now, your presentation was—

JG: Our presentation was a slide show, and all the arts, all the artists that we have, all the art. And they just went gaga over it.

IN: See, the exciting thing about it is that as Chicanos or Mexican Americans or Latinos or Hispanics, whatever we call ourselves, we—because society, the general society really projects so many negative images of who we are, we’re desperate and hungry to see images that we’re proud of. And so this is the universal language of the arts, that it transcends the corporate bottom-line dollar mentality.

KD: Help me understand. What kinds of things did you show them? Was it mostly figurative, expressionistic—

JG: It was basically commercial, in a sense. What you might call commercial. It was realistic. But—

KD: So the photographers got—were showed, or—

IN: Well, we had images of Ed Rivera, who we were starting to work with, who did—he was a designer. He’s not an illustrator. And he did the campaigns—the poster campaigns for *Superman*, for—

JG: *Jaws*. Tons of movies.

IN: Major feature films. But people never knew that it was a Chicano, a Latino, who did it.

JG: He did the poster also for *Zoot Suit*, for the movie, for the movie. So it wasn’t the one for the play, it was for the movie. [Ignacio Gomez designed and illustrated the poster for the play.]

IN: We showed Ignacio’s work, we showed David Negrón, we showed Esperanza Martinez, who is more of a fine artist. So we just basically showed them [everything].

JG: All these artists were professionals, veterans, professionals in the industry, who never had an opportunity to do something for the Chicano community. It’s like Chito—my brother-in-law, Ignacio—he was doing illustrations for magazines left and right, all over. He never did anything for the Chicano community, and it wasn’t until Ray Torres, from one of the nonprofit organizations came to me and asked, you know, “I have a printer who is willing to do a poster,” he says, “so do you have some artist that’s willing to—who’s starting off and might be willing to do something?” I thought, “Not even the professionals have a printer who could do a poster in four colors.” So I said, “Well, I’m going to get you a good one.” So that’s when I thought, “I’ll get Chito—Ignacio—to be able to do this poster.” and that was the “Si Se Puede” poster. And

if you see that, it has the Aztec and it has the Spaniard. It's a takeoff from my mural also. So the Spaniard and the Aztec image started taking off all over the place.

IN: So when we were at this corporate event, the—there was another PR firm who was making a presentation, and all their slides were numbers and statistics and graphs and all this stuff. And then we came on. *[laughter]* And it was show time. We had all of these movie-sized posters on display in the kind of like area where people did their reception area, and then we projected them bigger than life on the screen. And they were just—that room was just—everyone was just so excited, because now—

KD: So you got a contract after that.

IN: Yes. And so we did a lot of work with Anheuser-Busch. And it was a matter of educating the corporations, because they still—

KD: And that's where I have the question. How did you go about this education? Were these one-on-one conversations, and—

IN: Yes. We live in a celebrity-oriented society, and what we focused on is that when . . . And no matter who you are, whether you're a president, vice-president, or custodian, if you get—you're excited about celebrities, and you can reach their heart and their emotions, just like Juan/Johnny did with Anthony Quinn and all of these other people. And so basically, they [the Latino executives] were excited. They wanted to share it at this major conference so that they could get support from the Hispanic distributors, because the distributors put pressure on the corporate headquarters. Because the distributors are—they know the local community.

KD: Right.

IN: And so they're able to say, "Look, I want these kind of images for our marketing campaigns in our community."

JG: And the distributors have the power within the community, because they're the ones that are distributing in the community. So they know how to reach the community. So the distributors, if they're Latinos in a Latino community, they're saying, you know, "You're giving me all of these images that don't relate to our community. We need images that relate to the community." But the corporations don't understand it because they're in New York and it's just generic.

IN: Right. So here [at Anheuser-Busch] we had Carlos Viramontes [area sales manager, Southern California's Hispanic market], Victor Ornelas, who's national [director of Hispanic marketing], Jesse Aguirre, who was I think VP, some VP [vice president of corporate relations]. And so they were supporting this effort. So then we were working directly with Carlos Viramontes on developing these campaigns. Now, originally the budgets were very small, and so we really had to educate them that if you want this quality, you have to put the kind of money in there to pay, because the artists normally, as we mentioned, don't get credit out of their budget. They have to pay for models and props and photo sessions and everything else. Whereas I was able to get a separate budget for all of those entities so that the money that the artist got, they were able to keep.

JG: So we had to come with—and they had done other campaigns with very amateurish art, and they were paying peanuts for that. But when we came with samples of our artwork, and we said, "Compare this to this. If you want this, you're going to have to pay for this," and the budgets went up. And then before you know it—

KD: So can you give me a sense of like how much? Like doubled, tripled, or—

JG: Oh, no.

IN: Maybe ten times more. *[laughter]* Or more.

JG: And what started happening is the Anglo agencies started finding out that they were putting out this much money for Latinos, so they started getting into Latino campaigns also. So they started competing against us.

IN: One of the things that we did is—

KD: Did they have access to the same artists, or—

- IN: Well, that's a whole other issue that we will get into right now, just to say that our philosophy, once we started getting into the—we call this [our company slogan] "A Humanitarian Approach to Marketing, to Enhance the Quality of Life." This was like a whole innovative concept of trying to change the mindset of corporate America to see that you can actually create marketing campaigns that are going to sell your product by doing things that are good for the community. That's enhancing the image of the community, instead of belittling that community, instead of talking down to that community. And so this was our whole theme. And we were very fortunate that some corporations understood it and embraced it, where others, it was like completely foreign to them.
- KD: Could you give me a sense of some of those successes, and then the ones that it was foreign to?
- IN: Well, Anheuser-Busch, Coca-Cola, AT&T. We talked last time about McDonald's, and—
- JG: Yeah, we even went to a McDonald's Hispanic franchise owners—
- KD: Right, you talked about that. Right. So is there an example of the AT&T one? I don't know if I've seen that one.
- IN: Let's see here. Now, most—the Anheuser-Busch posters, we did fifty thousand to a hundred thousand. The AT&T, they printed four and a half million. And so this is the excitement of how we would—
- KD: And this is the artist's signature.
- IN: Yeah, and this is us getting them to allow the artists to sign the artwork. [As business affairs director and art director of production, I negotiated all of the contracts. Juan/Johnny was creative director and designer.]
- KD: David J.—
- IN: Negrón.
- KD: Negrón.
- IN: David Negrón. He is actually a production illustrator for movies like *Hello Dolly*, *Dr. Doolittle*—
- JG: *Planet of the Apes*, *The Great White Hope*.
- IN: Yeah. And I'm sure more contemporary—*Rambo*, he worked on *Rambo*, and all these major feature films. But his passion is fine art, and so we were able to bring him. And most of these—
- KD: Because that looks like a painting.
- JG: Yes. They are paintings. All of them are paintings.
- IN: Yeah. And his passion—he's primarily a French impressionist artist, but he worked for Disney as well, and so he was doing very European Americana work. So he was thrilled—
- JG: So his artwork is at the Disney hotel, and—
- IN: At the Disney gallery.
- KD: Right.
- IN: So he's one of the veterans. And so they're mostly Americana works, but he's very proud of being Mexican American, Chicano. So he was thrilled to have an opportunity to do a commercial work that was promoting a positive image.
- KD: Did you take it from a photograph—did he use a photograph there? Did you get models for this as well?
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: Because there's an older man and woman, like, on the phone.
- IN: Yeah. And always because you can't afford to have a model sitting there copying them—
- KD: No.
- IN: So photography is the most cost-effective way.
- KD: So again, you're bringing in the photographers, or—
- IN: For this one?
- JG: Yeah, for this one I think he just photographed them.
- IN: Yeah, he photographed this one himself.
- JG: We'll show you another one.
- IN: And this was not Juan/Johnny's design. This was, I think, the design of the agency.

- JG: Yeah, that was the agency, we worked with an agency. Now, this particular agency was one of the few Latino agencies, or you might say LA residential agencies owned by a Chicano or Latino from LA. See, a lot of the agencies at that time were being established by people who had agencies in Latin America. So they had the accounts in Latin America, and they moved over here and they started opening their own agencies. But there were very few Chicanos at that time that had agencies.
- IN: And so the creative director was Latino, and all of the staff and the owner was Latino. and so they were very open and very excited about doing this type of thing. Now, this was only in Spanish?
- KD: Yeah.
- IN: And that was one of the battles that we have, is that because it's like being in—
- KD: AT&T didn't think that it should be in Spanish?
- IN: [No.] They didn't think it should be bilingual.
- JG: Bilingual.
- IN: See, that's the—it's like—
- JG: It was either Spanish or English, and that's what we were focusing on, bilingual.
- IN: Yeah. It's common sense to us, but in those days, they couldn't comprehend that if they're trying to reach the Hispanic market, it should be bilingual.
- JG: Yeah. They didn't think Latinos spoke English.
- IN: Yeah. They said, "Well, if we're doing English commercials, it's for the European American and the African American." And I don't even think they thought [of] Asian or Latino. But if [they're] doing, "Now we're going to target the Hispanic market," [then] all they did was Spanish, only Spanish. And we're saying, "How wonderful that they're embracing our language, but they don't have a clue as to who we really are. We're multilingual, multicultural. We are so diverse, we transcend every market that they can think of. And if they're only targeting the [Spanish-speaking] Hispanic market. They're limiting themselves and depriving the community."
- JG: You see, what was going on was, of that problem that was going in all the industries. Like I mentioned earlier, the musicians could—Chicano musicians could not get their music promoted in English stations because they were Latinos, so they thought Chicano musicians only spoke Spanish. When we came out with our record and they promoted it, they said, "The all-Mexican band." And so it spread over throughout the different areas in television. You never saw Latinos in television in those days. So they figured, you know, "We don't [see] nobody—we don't see any Latinos that were speaking English. So what makes you think we're going to reach Latinos by putting something in English?"
- IN: Now, what we're very proud about is because of my work with DJMC, and I mentioned through my sister [Sarah Núñez Dekker], I met Frank Sanchez, and then through DJMC I met John López, who were key, and still are, key franchise owners of McDonald's. [Frank currently owns multiple franchises and John is now a McDonald's meat supplier.]
- JG: But I think, actually, Frank Sanchez walked into DJMC while you were working there?
- IN: No, no. No. Actually, I went to a big conference for DJMC, like somewhere in Redondo Beach or something like that, and that's where I first met John López. At the reception. And he was just so excited to see a Chicana, a Latina, working for this ad agency, because I was the only one, and then later, another one came. And so then, my sister [Sarah], who worked at East LA College [as a] administrative—executive assistant to the president, she knew Frank Sanchez, who was the director of the community services department. And he later became a McDonald's franchise owner. So she referred me to him, and I went to his little McDonald's restaurant in East LA. And he was very excited and supportive, and I told him what I was doing with the ad agency, and that I had met John López, and so they got together. Plus, he knew David Lizárraga from TELACU. So we all got together and made this big presentation up in Silverado [Northern California]. And—with the Hispanic franchise owners.
- JG: TELACU was practically across the street from his [Frank's] first McDonald's. Now he owns like six of them [possibly more].

- IN: Right. And his wife, Julia Sanchez, is very close to my sister. And so what happened is that we met, then, with Leo Burnett advertising, we mentioned, who happened to do the Dewar's profile, who was the national agency for McDonald's. And I had already left DJMC, and we met with some of the key people from DJMC at that meeting. And that's when they said—the McDonald's corporate people said they were mandating that all of their English language commercials start having Hispanics speaking English. That was like a big thing. And they said, "As we did it with the African American community during the civil rights movement, we now want this to happen with the Hispanic community." And so that's when we contacted Bobby Morones and then Dan Guerrero, who—it was Angela Moya [Rodriguez] who referred me [to] Alma Martinez, who referred me to Dan Guerrero. But of course, Juan/Johnny, already knew Bobby Morones. And so through all of these meeting and presentations, from what we know, Bobby Morones started getting a lot of contracts with McDonald's. Dan Guerrero had said that he was really going to—he was new to LA, coming back to LA, but he was going to really make a point of being the Hispanic casting director. And then also, through Anheuser-Busch, Bobby started working with another agency.
- JG: I think it was Castor.
- IN: Castor Advertising.
- JG: So when we got together with them, and we wrote up an agreement. We said, "Once the—any. . ." In other words, "[We're] representing you, we want a certain percentage for any job you're going to get." So—
- IN: I think it was like 15 percent, something.
- JG: Just so you know, that the minute that we hook you up with a particular corporation, that corporation has a hundred agencies, which means that any job that you get with a hundred agencies, we have to get a percentage. And that was hard for him to understand.
- KD: Right, you talked about that.
- IN: Yeah.
- JG: So we were trying to be innovative, because we wanted to share out connections and opportunities.
- IN: And that's the question that you were asking. How could these agencies do Hispanic marketing campaigns if they didn't have the artists, if they didn't have the resources? That's what we had. And so we didn't want to hold back progress. We wanted to make all of our resources available to all of these agencies. And we're trying to figure out, how can we get compensated?
- KD: Did you run into these other agencies in the field, then? The ones that were basically trying to steal your—
- IN: Well, actually, Anheuser-Busch, for example, asked us—
- JG: Yeah, they asked us to work with—
- IN: If we could work with some of their agencies, and we did do a couple of campaigns with them. But we saw that it was—they were saying—they [the agencies] were wanting to do [come up with] the concepts, and they just wanted to use our models, our illustrators, our—
- JG: Our casting agents.
- IN: Our printers. And we were seeing that the campaigns were now becoming very—
- JG: Girly. *[laughter]*
- IN: Very—
- JG: An example, they were doing something for Florida, for the Calle Cinco, or Calle Ocho?
- IN: Calle Ocho.
- JG: Calle Ocho festival.
- IN: Carnival.
- JG: And they [the agency] had the concept, and the concept was a girl dancing. It was somewhat cultural, but it was still a little bit sexy. And that's the only one that we've ever done like that, because we did the artwork, [not] the concept. Not the concept. They wanted [to do] the concept.
- IN: We did the design,
- JG: So we did the design.



- KD: You did the design.
- JG: I did the design. And then we got one of the artists [Ignacio Gomez] to do the illustration. And then we did the casting, also. As a matter of fact, it was Martinez-Herring—
- IN: Oh, Laura Martinez-Harring [Miss USA 1985] was one of the models. But that wasn't for that poster.
- JG: So anyway, that was the only one. And we don't normally show it, because that's not our—
- IN: Our concept.
- JG: Our concept. And not only that—
- KD: That's what I'm trying to get a sense of, because my understanding of this field is that there was a lot of challenges and critiques about marketing. They called it "marketing disease" to Hispanics in a book.
- IN: Yes, well, in your email. That was interesting. "Marketing disease," I'd never heard that term.
- KD: Yeah, that was the phrase. It was in the '90s.
- IN: Yeah. Well, what was interesting, because this was in the '80s. Because the 1980 census came out, that's when corporations were saying, "Oh, we have to reach the Hispanic market." But they didn't know how. And it just happened that in '83, I was at DJMC advertising, and so this is how it all exploded. And it wasn't until the '90s—which I'll lead up to—is the reaction that we started getting from the academic world. Because during this whole period, we were strictly working with corporate America. But we did start doing some stuff using our advertising to still promote murals. So Juan/Johnny designed and [we produced] this for Victor Clothing Company, which was to promote all of the murals that are inside and outside of Victor Clothing. And so using the commercials—
- KD: Oh, this is gorgeous. So these don't exist like this anymore, of course.
- JG: No.
- KD: So this is a John Valadez—these are the John Valadez murals. And I guess they probably say that on the back, that this is the Broadway mural, multiple and detail—
- IN: And this is another version of the same thing. This was a foldout—
- KD: And this is the one that Streetscapers did.
- IN: This is the postcard version, and then this is another version. And so Juan/Johnny designed both of these. And who is the photographer?
- KD: *El Nuevo Fuego* [by East Los Streetscapers]. Oh, Adam Avila.
- JG: Adam Avila.
- KD: It says on the back.
- JG: That was the Kent Twitchell one.
- KD: Yeah, the Kent Twitchell one, [*Bride and Groom*].
- JG: That was the Eloy Torrez.
- KD: Yeah, Eloy Torrez.
- JG: Frank Romero.
- KD: What are the [murals] called? *The Pope of Broadway* [mural of Anthony Quinn by Eloy Torrez]. And [the] Frank Romero [mural] with the horse [*Nino y Caballo*]. And then these are the other interiors. John Valadez [*The Broadway Mural* and *The Top Hat Bridal Shop Mural*], and then *The Aztec Mural* by Juan Garduno. Oh, '77. So you met with—what was his name?
- JG: Ramiro—
- IN: Ramiro. I don't remember his last name [Ramiro Salcedo]. He was—the owner was European American [Paul and Ione Harter], but Ramiro was sort of like really running the whole operation. He was general manager, and was almost like a son to the owner. And so he was the one that we met with, a number of meetings, and just very excited, very enthusiastic. And so again, Juan/Johnny [was the designer]. It's all the artwork [murals] of the different artists. It's kind of [a] take off of—

[break in audio]

- KD: We're on side 2 of tape 13. This is December 20, 2007, with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. We're talking about the murals of the Victor Clothing Company, postcard and brochure that they did.
- IN: So I wrote the copy. And so the role that Juan/Johnny and I played is, we collaborated on everything. We brainstormed about everything. But Juan/Johnny was primarily the creative director, the designer. When he was developing his own concepts, he would do the thumbnail sketches, the comprehensive, finished design, the color comprehensive. And the whole focus is, he said, it had to be artistic, cultural, historical, educational. They had to be beautiful, and they had to be quality.
- KD: And how it's—where you sold and how you sold?
- IN: Well, it was distributed through Victor Clothing Company. So anyone who would go into—
- JG: Actually, he gave them out free for customers.
- KD: Oh, really?
- JG: Yeah.
- KD: Do you know how many?
- JG: Thousands.
- KD: You printed thousands?
- IN: Yeah.
- KD: Oh, here's the year. Eighty-five.
- IN: Eighty-five, okay. And then this one came later.
- KD: Gorgeous.
- IN: So basically, this folded into this, so it was a mailer. But he actually gave them out. And so my role was as artist representative. I was the one who did all of the legal research, wrote up the contracts, negotiated the contracts. And then I was the art director in the production sense, where Juan/Johnny was [creative director]—art director in the concept [and] design sense. And so I oversaw the research, the casting of models, the selection of costumes, the photo sessions, doing the type, the color separations, the printing, the packaging. And like with Anheuser-Busch, after we would do the fifty thousand to a hundred thousand posters, we'd do counter cards, table tents, ad slicks. We would actually package and distribute them to their distributors all over the country, which was called national fulfillment. So we did everything from A to Z. And so we represented—the whole idea, we represented, like Ignacio Gomez, David Negrón, Eddie Martinez, Angel Esparza—
- JG: Esperanza.
- IN: Esperanza Martinez, Simón Silva. And so—but actually, with Simón, it wasn't—
- JG: Simón wasn't yet.
- IN: Wasn't in the commercial, he didn't do the commercial stuff.
- JG: The last one that we did is when he—
- IN: So you can see here, these are the counter cards, poster counter cards, table tents, and then the ad slicks. So these were major national campaigns. And this was—these are the counter cards that Lupe Botello said she saw in the restaurant.
- KD: Right, that were gone by the next—
- JG: Yeah, when they walked out.
- IN: And again, the whole idea is that they're collector items that people take into the home. So telling the corporations . . . Usually when they would do a Cinco de Mayo poster, they'd have the Mexican flag or something, and then they'd throw them away after the event. And we're saying, "You're investing into something that's going to have a lifelong memory in that person's home. By paying for quality, you're going to get a lifetime mileage out of that particular campaign."
- KD: Now, what I'm trying to get a sense of, did you know that going in? That people would want to collect, or was that a surprise that occurred, like you were talking about that phone call?
- JG: That was the intention.
- KD: That was the intention.

- JG: It was like the map. I wasn't going to produce something that people were going to throw away. It's better to invest a little extra money to have something that will just last forever. And the thing about it, they take it to their home [and] that's going to promote the product forever.
- KD: Right. Now, were you able to—you talked about educating the companies, the corporations. Did they believe that part of it, or . . .
- JG: Oh, they were Chicanos. They weren't Anglos. And that was the downfall of all of this, is that they brought in Anglos afterwards.
- IN: When the European Americans saw the dollar signs of these campaigns, then they started bringing in the European American ad agencies. And then they even started moving out the Hispanic executives who were actually running these campaigns and bringing in European Americans to run these campaigns. And they had no clue what we were talking about. They were just seeing the dollar signs, that, gee, they—
- KD: When did that transition take place?
- IN: Well, you'll see when we show you a couple of the other posters. But I wanted to show this first, that we started also with a different concept of, a comprehensive approach to marketing.
- KD: Oh, these are other cards, so later—
- IN: Yeah.
- JG: Only because, you see, the humanitarian approach we started learning, is—the corporation didn't care about the humanitarian approach.
- IN: Some of them did, but the bottom line is, their bosses didn't. And so we said, "Okay, comprehensive marketing campaigns include public relations, promotions, publicity, and special events." So—and we even had—there was a professor, a university professor that was hired by one of these ad agencies. And they thought, "Well, if we hire this PhD, then he'll teach us how to reach the Hispanic market." But as far as I know, he didn't have background in Hispanic marketing. And so when we told him about our comprehensive approach to marketing—he was basically following the traditional—and he says—
- JG: "That's impossible, you can't do it."
- IN: He says—and I'm not going to say . . . *[laughter]* He says, "You cannot have a comprehensive approach to marketing. You're either an ad agency—"
- JG: "You're going to make a fool of yourself."
- IN: He says, "You're going to embarrass us." Because he was Hispanic [and] he wanted to have a professional image. He says, "You're going to embarrass us! You either are an ad agency or a PR firm or you do special [events]. You don't do it all." And Juan/Johnny's saying, "Well, I did it all at Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery]. Why can't I do it all now?" In other words, "I've already done it."
- KD: But weren't you already doing it all at this phase?
- IN: Yes. We were doing it all, all the time. But it was hard for individuals to comprehend. It's like—
- KD: So how was that conflict resolved?
- JG: You see, what it is, is that they didn't see that our visual campaigns were cultural that could excite the community, that could bring good PR—
- KD: Right, exactly what they're doing now.
- JG: What they saw is that an advertising agency creates a typical campaign that is only selling the product. So how are you doing PR with that? You buy the product and there's no PR. Our campaigns were making people feel good, and that's what the PR part was.
- IN: So this was another campaign we did with Anheuser-Busch. It was for the World Cup soccer tournament. And Juan/Johnny again came up with the whole concept and design.
- KD: In 1986.
- JG: The soccer tournament was going to be in Mexico City, and that's why I included all the pyramids.
- KD: Oh, yeah. The copy is really good. "Majestic pyramid of the moon, featured as a backdrop in this poster, can be seen as—at the archaeological site of San Juan Teotihuacán, located only thirty miles northeast of Mexico City, the site of the 1986 World Cup international soccer tournament." Oh, that's excellent.

- IN: Well, I wrote the copy, Rebecca translated—she was always our translator—and Juan/Johnny found these models [who were real soccer players] at the soccer field in Encino, at Balboa Park where we live. And you know, soccer is such a major cultural sport in the Latino community. And so again, having these contemporary soccer players tied in with the culture and the history.
- KD: And again, it's signed by Gomez, who's the—
- IN: The illustrator. Now, this was the thing. Juan/Johnny was so into promoting—
- KD: Oh, here it is. Ignacio Gomez, down here.
- IN: Yeah. Juan/Johnny, is so into promoting the artists, and he forgets to credit himself for the work he does. So it was like fighting tooth and nails to get him credited as the designer. And so to this day, he never—because other artists, like David Lopez and Robert Arenivar, when they would do a collaboration they would both sign the finished illustration. To this day, Juan/Johnny has not signed the illustrations that he designed. And so we allowed Ignacio Gomez to sign it, which corporations never allowed. But I ended up on the bottom.
- KD: Yeah. "Poster designed and produced by Don Juan Productions."
- IN: And he still wouldn't let me put his name. At least I could put Don Juan Productions, but he wouldn't put his name.
- JG: See, and the reason the illustrator is never able to sign it is because the concept is created by the creative director. The designer's design, it's designed by the designer, and so he's only one-third—
- KD: Yeah, he's a fabricator.
- IN: That's why I wanted you to get credit. *[laughter]* And so I was representing all of these artists, but I was trying to represent Juan/Johnny, at the same time.
- KD: Now I want to push you a little bit, because these are the ones in the '80s. Later in the '80s and into the '90s, the images coming out of Anheuser-Busch are not young men kicking soccer balls or families standing around.
- IN: Yes. Well, that's the transition. We'll tell you how that changed. And so here, this was the heyday of us really doing these quality works of art.
- JG: That's because we had a great team of Latinos, Chicanos, in the corporation.
- IN: And Carlos Viramontes was a key person [and a great supporter] that was really pushing for these campaigns. So this was another one that we did in '85 again. And Juan/Johnny has all of the original sketches of his concepts and designs in our archive. And so this was where the sixteenth of [September] . . . And normally they have a picture of Hidalgo and a Mexican flag. That was it.
- KD: Yeah, that was about as far a—
- JG: I don't even know if Anheuser-Busch had that.
- IN: And so Juan/Johnny's idea is, "How do we make it cultural and educational?" And so we used Luis Beltran. Who my friend Angela Moya [Rodriguez] was acting in a play with him at the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts. So that's how we met him, and so we used him as one of our models. Armando [Gaytan] is Juan/Johnny's sister-in-law's brother, and then I got Esteban Coronado and all of his dancers to model. And Juan/Johnny came up with something, a unique concept to focus on. What was your concept?
- JG: El Pípila. In other words, this is the true thing that we're celebrating on the sixteenth of September, is how El Pípila helped break into the granary by burning down the doors and putting the stone on his back [as a shield], so they wouldn't shoot him down.
- IN: So he was one of Father Hidalgo's soldiers. So this was how they won the battle of Guanajuato. So I think I wrote it out—
- KD: The copy is there, yeah.
- IN: "A little known historical fact, brought to you by Budweiser." So giving Budweiser the recognition for bringing the history to the community. And so again, I wrote the copy, and Rebecca translated. And the way I negotiated all of these campaigns is I said, "You're promoting the culture, the history, but also you're

promoting positive role models.” And so not only the images, but also the artist. I got a separate budget for all the components—

JG: So we went to the studio and we got the models, and we photographed them. I did a sketch. And what it is, I do a sketch first of how I lay out the whole thing.

KD: The composition.

JG: And after I do the sketch—

IN: Well, first you do your thumbnail, just the concept.

JG: Well, first I do the thumbnail. It’s always the little thumbnail, just to get the composition and the design. And then once I have that, I do a rough drawing of what it’s going to be by laying it out. And then we get models to pose exactly the way—or I would pose them to get it more precise. I’ll pose certain things and take a picture. Or if it’s a woman, I’ll take a picture. So then we get a more detailed drawing of the design.

IN: This was, like, before we got the budget approved. We would have to model ourselves, so that he could do the finished design.

JG: Yeah. And then once we had that finished design, then they’d approve it. They’d said, “Yeah, that’s great.” And then we’d have the money to get [put together] a photo session. And we’d pose the models exactly like my drawing [design]. So that’s how it’s all followed.

KD: So you didn’t necessarily have these models in mind when you’re doing that.

JG: Oh, no. It’s just a blank face—

KD: So that’s what I want to ask you. How do you get to this particular model?

JG: It’s whoever we see that looks interesting—is the people that we hire and bring them in.

IN: So since, you know, I know all of these actors, Juan—a lot of the actors Juan/Johnny knew because they went into Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery]. [And] because I know all these dancers. We just knew all these people. So we’d say, “Oh, what about this person? What about that person?” For the soccer poster, we didn’t know anyone who played soccer, so we went to the park. But usually these were models, dancers, actors that we personally know, or even family members.

KD: And then I would imagine there had to have been some negotiation with the corporation. So can you give me a sense of what things they changed—

IN: In regards to?

KD: Or wanted differently, or . . .

IN: They didn’t change a thing.

KD: You’re kidding me.

IN: They didn’t change. They were—

JG: They were great.

IN: I said, the only thing—

JG: The only thing they wanted was the product big.

IN: Yeah. The only thing they really pushed on was having the product large and having their logo.

KD: Yeah, the size of beer can is always like a thirty-two ounce, it’s never . . . [laughter]

IN: Now, Ignacio, being a professional illustrator, he was able to illustrate the product himself. And so they were very excited about it. But Esperanza, if you see on her other one . . .

KD: Oh, I see what you’re saying. You had to bring in somebody.

IN: Esperanza, she tried illustrating the product, but it just—

JG: But you see also what happened here. This is where they did change it. In other words, we had it smaller—

IN: So that it was in proportion.

JG: To be in comparable proportion to this. And they said, “Make it bigger. Make it bigger. Make it bigger.” So we made it bigger, and that’s why it looks a little bit bigger there.

KD: Yeah. And that’s the ’86 Cinco de Mayo poster.

JG: Yeah.

- IN: So what we did later, for artists who were not commercial illustrators, we just got a photograph of the product—
- JG: And we superimposed it.
- IN: And superimposed it. Whereas this one, Ignacio did. Now, another thing I negotiated was usage rights. That they—no matter how much they were paying, they were either paying for local, regional, or national advertising. But it was never a work for hire. It was never a buyout. And so—and they had to pay separately if they wanted to keep the original artwork. And Juan/Johnny and the illustrator maintain copyright. So all of these images, we still have copyright, and that we can use them for—we can eliminate the product. Right now we could eliminate the product, and we can create greeting cards, posters, anything we want.
- KD: Now, how long did it take to negotiate that? That sounds phenomenal.
- IN: [The corporate executives were Chicano, so they new the value of our campaigns and services.] I just said, “This is it,” and they did it. They wanted it that bad, because of the way we presented it, because of our passion, our enthusiasm, [and our understanding and respect for the needs of the corporation while promoting positive quality images of Latinos].
- KD: Well, by ’86, you obviously start to have a track record, right?
- IN: Yeah.
- KD: So—
- IN: So here, this is another soccer poster. See, this is with Esperanza, so we did the photo [of the product].
- KD: Yeah, I can see the—
- JG: What it is, is that they were sponsoring a lot of soccer things all over the country.
- IN: Yeah. Now, this was like the culmination of our relationship with Anheuser Busch, and this was completely Juan/Johnny’s concept.
- KD: This is 1988. Oh, and you actually signed it.
- IN: Yay. [laughter] And he actually—
- JG: I signed it? [laughter]
- KD: Well, she got your name on there, the copyright.
- IN: Yeah. Finally.
- KD: Juan D. Gonzalez and David J. Negrón. And—oh, and it says “not for resale.”
- IN: Now, that’s Anheuser-Busch. Now, what Anheuser—they’re saying that the posters they distributed could not be sold. But we have the rights to remove the product, remove the name, and we can do anything we want with it.
- KD: And this is “La Charreada [con] Budweiser.”
- IN: Right. And so they wanted us to do a *charro* poster. And now the European Americans were starting to move in on the Hispanic campaigns. And so they were going back to the original budget, saying we desperately need one but we only have this money. And they were trying to pull at our heartstrings to get us to break down and—
- JG: This was going to be, I think, local, and they were thinking about it because they were sponsoring *la charreada* [in] Pico Rivera.
- IN: Yeah, they [Anheuser-Busch] were sponsoring the Pico Rivera stadium *charreadas*, [which were produced by Ralph Hauser, who later became an international promoter of Mexican and Latino entertainment]. And so Juan/Johnny was willing—was almost on the verge of saying yes. And I’m pulling him back and saying no, and so I’m always the bad guy. [laughter] And so finally, Juan/Johnny and I went in as a team, and we said, “Okay, this is the budget you have.”
- JG: We took—
- IN: But we took a sample of a gorgeous, gorgeous work of art by David Negrón, and it was only a sketch, but it was a gigantic sketch of a *charro* scene. And we said, “You can get what you want, or you can get this.” And they just drooled. And that’s where the universal language of the arts, quality, just says it all. And he got on



the phone and he got the budget, and it became a national campaign. And not only—they didn't just print a certain quantity, they put it in their catalog, so that distributors could order it year after year after year. And so Juan/Johnny, again, did the whole concept and design. And I think the original sketches he and I are modeling, and the whole focus was to feature the traditional *charro* passing on the culture and the tradition to the contemporary Chicana. And we also have the traditional *escaramuza* [Delia Hauser, Ralph's wife], which are the *ranchera* women riding sidesaddle. And so really showing the power of women in our culture, the traditional woman as well as the contemporary woman. And so we actually selected Manuel Escobedo, who was an authentic *charro* from Pico Rivera stadium—

JG: He's a star at Pico Rivera stadium.

IN: So we actually had him be the model.

JG: And then he [Manuel] went out and bought a brand-new saddle and everything for this.

IN: Yeah. So he actually put this whole brand-new saddle together for the photo session. And so these images over here are research, photo research. And so—

JG: So David Negrón was working in the Middle East on *Rambo*, the movie *Rambo*. And when we told him we had this project for him—

IN: We called him.

JG: He flew over in a drop—

IN: He flew over to do it. [laughter]

JG: [His] job was basically done.

KD: And he worked again in paint for this?

IN: Oil paints, yeah.

KD: Oil paints?

IN: Oh, yeah.

KD: Oil paints?

JG: On leather.

KD: Was most of—really?

IN: Oh, his work is primarily oils, from what I understand.

KD: That's a lot of extra work. [laughter]

IN: Oh, yeah.

JG: Yeah, and we mounted it on wood and everything.

IN: Yeah. Now, it was David Negrón's idea. He says, "If we're going to do this . . ." He got so excited that he was doing this Mexicano campaign. He says, "Why not paint it on leather?" And so that was his concept. And so Juan/Johnny and I met with Manuel Escobedo, and he referred us to people who had all kinds of pieces of leather. And so we selected the best piece of leather, and then Juan/Johnny cut it and stained this big gigantic piece of wood. And the actual—the original is gigantic.

KD: It's bigger than this?

IN: Oh, yes. Much. It's probably—

KD: And this is like what? Probably—

IN: This is probably—

JG: Maybe not quite twice—it could be twice the size.

IN: Let's see, this—

KD: Oh, she's got one.

JG: Yeah, it could be.

IN: This one is twenty-three by thirty-two. It's at least twice the size, if not bigger. And again—

KD: And I would imagine that a painting that size is ten thousand dollars.

IN: Oh, more.

KD: More. Okay. So and he was compensated at that market rate?

- IN: For—actually, for that particular piece, because the original painting . . . The original painting was a separate budget, which I’m not at liberty to discuss. *[laughter]*
- KD: Yeah. But I’m just trying to get a ballpark. I know that. Just trying to get a ballpark. So—
- IN: I’d say that these original paintings, at that time, were probably ten thousand dollars to twenty thousand dollars at that time.
- KD: For the ones that you were talking about—that you showed us so far.
- IN: Yeah.
- KD: That’s amazing. Wow. Tell me a little bit about the composition, because I’m curious about—
- IN: No, I would say five thousand dollars, ten thousand dollars, twenty thousand dollars, depending on the artist and everything.
- KD: Right. You had a range of artistic talent and style.
- IN: Right.
- KD: So—
- JG: Well, the idea is to—
- KD: He’s got his hand on her hip, this is the—I guess the beginnings of what you’re saying, this kind of—it’s a little more sexy?
- IN: Well, you know, I didn’t even notice that, and I think it was just—I think his—I don’t think it was intentional. I think his hand was just not—he didn’t want it to just hang there, so I think he was just . . . You know, when you take a picture with someone, you put your arm around their shoulder, around their waist. So I think that was just—
- JG: Because he’s trying to guide her.
- KD: Oh, I see.
- IN: He’s holding her—
- JG: He’s teaching her how to do it.
- IN: He’s actually holding her other hand, showing her how to do the lasso.
- KD: The lasso.
- IN: And so there’s nothing sexual or sensual about it at all.
- KD: It’s an interesting composition, though, because of the multiple planes.
- JG: Well, it’s somewhat surrealistic type, it’s not realistic. It’s—the idea is just to communicate a message and be able to make it—create a lot of activity. But it’s like the key figures are there at the center, but you want to be able to show that there’s a lot of festivity going on also.
- IN: Right, and so—
- JG: And the empty areas, you know, is where they put in all their events or whatever they’re going to put in.
- IN: And actually, just—
- JG: And we superimposed the product again.
- IN: And so, like, just on—
- KD: Yeah, it looks like an eight-ounce bottle now.
- IN: Yeah. And just to see some of—like here. So the first Hispanic marketing campaign Juan/Johnny did was the Seven-Up for Goez [Art Studios and Gallery]. And then you can see this one is actually Juan/Johnny and myself modeling. And look, they used Juan/Johnny like five times, modeling. *[laughter]*
- KD: That’s a Cinco de Mayo ’85, Budweiser.
- IN: Eighty-five, right. And so I had all of these costumes, so I was able to use the costumes for these projects. And then this was a better quality image of the takeoff of Norman Rockwell. So you can see it was deliberately kind of giving the feeling of the ’40s, kind of the Norman Rockwell feeling. And then this was a big ad that they put in one of the major—this was the grocers’ journal of California, September 1984. And so all of a sudden, the corporate industry is being exposed to these quality Hispanic images. And given—they’re given a model of what really works to reach the Hispanic market. But as you mentioned, after this, there were changes in their—

- JG: In the corporation.
- IN: In the corporation—
- JG: In the Hispanic market, when they brought in Anglos.
- IN: And we actually—they asked us to cast a series of posters of beautiful Latinas. and a particular ad agency—it was a particular executive from Anheuser-Busch who had a particular European American ad agency, and they said, you know, could you cast the models for them. And this guy was saying—
- JG: Who did girly posters.
- IN: Yeah. I wouldn't call them girly, because they were—they were—
- JG: They were classy, you know.
- IN: They were classy, sophisticated. But they were still—
- JG: Yeah, none of them had bathing suits or anything. Maybe one of them was—
- KD: That comes later. *[laughter]*
- IN: It was this kind of—it was glamour. I would call them glamour. It was this particular type of image. They were—this was a Laura Martinez-Harring.
- JG: Yeah, it was glamour.
- IN: And so the ad agency was saying, “I want to cast Hispanic models, but there just aren't any that are—”
- JG: Any beautiful—
- IN: “There just aren't any beautiful Latina models.”
- KD: Were they turning down, what, skin color, hair color . . .
- IN: They just didn't know where to find them. They just never looked. And so with Bobby Morones, they wanted us to set up a casting call like that weekend. And we said, “No, if you want it, then it has to be in a reasonable amount of time.” And so we set up this major, major casting call. We wanted to really knock 'em dead. And we had Latinas just coming out of the woodwork. And the guy says, “Well, these aren't Latinas, because they're blonde, redhead, brunettes. They're like every color.” I said, “Well, that's the point, that Latinos are of every color.” We're multiethnic, we're multi—
- KD: Yeah, your ads so far were—yeah. I mean, this is a good one, the AT&T one is a nice example of the older male is darker-skinned than the female.
- IN: Yeah. And so to show that we have every color, because we're multiethnic, multiracial. We're primarily Native American, but we have European American, African, Asian [influences].
- KD: Yeah. This one with the soccer. One guy has lighter hair, one guy has darker hair. It's very nice.
- IN: Exactly. And that was very deliberate and intentional. And so, like here as well, you know, you see the different colorations. So there were no stereotype images. Like here as well.
- KD: Yeah, the one from the people in the park, yeah.
- IN: Yeah. And these—and this, actually, the color that they were, we didn't make it up. This is—one was *güero* [light] and the other was darker. The other . . . So that's who we are. And without even trying, you find that out.
- KD: And they were—but they were asking you for—
- IN: They never said, “We want dark, Indian-looking women.” They just said, “There's no Hispanics.” So we gave them the whole gamut, and they were blown away. And they ended up doing—using, I think, four models. And they did very beautiful, classy glamour posters. But that's when they started getting back into the glamour stuff, as opposed to the cultural stuff. And—
- JG: And they started doing nothing but photography. As a matter of fact, there was one agency that, after we did our—with the *kiosko*, they did a photo ad with nothing but the *kiosko* and some people in the *kiosko*. So they started copying even the locations that we were featuring in our ads.
- IN: But the quality wasn't the same.
- JG: Oh, no. It was horrible. It was all photographs.
- IN: And so then, Manny Montana—tell Karen who Manny Montana was.

- JG: Yeah. So while we were having a meeting with Danny Villanueva, the general manager of KMEX, we saw Manny Montana. And Manny Montana was a person who used to follow our band to dances [in the '60s]. He was very close to the whole band, and I hadn't seen him in quite a while, and there he was. He was a KMEX rep, selling time for the station. So we got to talking, and he saw the portfolio, and he says, "Wow." He says, "I go out and I sell time to small businesses in the community, but we don't have anybody to produce commercials for them." He says, "I could get you guys to become an agency to start producing commercials." So we said, "Well, okay." So he called one of them, which was one of the—a restaurant needed somebody to be able to do the commercials. And it was—
- IN: Casa Escobar was the restaurant in Eagle Rock, and they had a small, sort of—they were opening a fast food taco place in East LA called Tacos Escobar.
- JG: On Whittier and Indiana.
- IN: So we had Casa Escobar and Taco Escobar.
- JG: So they wanted television commercials. So that's when we went to [Jesús Treviño]. Also to [Jose Louis Ruiz].
- KD: Oh, so you're saying he was responsible for selling ad time, but he'd go to people who he would try to get—
- IN: Well, in other words . . . For example, he was trying to get businesses, small businesses, to pay for TV commercials.
- KD: But they didn't have any mechanism to produce a commercial.
- JG: Exactly.
- IN: Because they're a small business, they couldn't afford an ad agency. So he needed a production company to produce low-cost TV commercials or radio commercials for them.
- JG: So then what—we went and discussed with the person, and they had a very small budget. And here he had two restaurants. He was opening a fast food place and he had a nice restaurant. So we told him, "Look, if you put this much more money into it, we could create three or four different commercials for you within this small budget, because we'll do them all at one time." And what it is, is that we could rent the equipment for one day and be able to do everything. We could get studio time for the musicians to do the music, and go in one day and do it for all—in other words, once we shoot, we could shoot everything.
- KD: Right, because you're only talking thirty-second, sixty-second slots. So yeah.
- JG: Yeah. So anyway, the idea of what we did is what I came up with. So then we found—I forget his name, his name was Paco, who did—
- IN: Did Manny find him, or—
- JG: No, no. Or—I don't know.
- IN: I think Manny referred us.
- JG: Maybe he referred us, yeah. So he was a cinematographer and did production and things like that.
- IN: He did the lighting and the camera.
- JG: So our job was to come up with a concept. So what I thought about is, I had remembered the commercial that I saw of Benihana. The flipping up food, they're cutting food, stuff like that. And I thought it would be nice to incorporate something like this. But the thing is that they're trying to [first get known], and Benihana was already know, so they could just do all that. So the idea is first to introduce the business, and then you could get into that. So we started—since we were shooting everything at one time, doing all the music at one time, we had all this in mind. So we got together with Irma's brother, John [Edward] Núñez, who's a classical musician, jazz musician, [and who became the music department director and founder of Mariachi Salesian]. And we got together, and we co-wrote a theme song, which was [*sings*] "Casa Escobar, Tacos Escobar."
- IN: Yeah. [*sings*] "Casa Escobar, Tacos Escobar."
- JG: And as I had mentioned before, that my thing was always combining flamenco, Mexican, and pop together. So now this was the opportunity. So we went to El Cid restaurant that [has] nothing but flamenco [dancers

and musicians]. We got a flamenco guitar player there, and then we got a lot of the musicians that we know and [that] Irma's brother knows.

IN: Yeah, we had my brother as the musical director, [with him, Juan/Johnny and myself as co-composers].

JG: The piano player and trumpet player was David Torres, who was the original piano player for Tierra [and is in Juan/Johnny's album cover design]. And now he's with Poncho Sanchez. And then we had Danilo Lozano, who plays flute [and is now a professor of ethnomusicology at Whittier College, with an MA from UCLA].

IN: Danilo Lozano.

JG: Classical [and Cuban *charanga*] flute. And then we had—what was his name, the guitar player?

IN: Eddie?

JG: Eddie, Eddie Estrada, playing guitar.

IN: And he's—what group is he with now? He's with—they played at the Salesian rock and roll show. Cold Duck.

KD: So your brother did the music for—

IN: Well, Juan/Johnny had the concept [as creative director, producer, and co-composer], as far as wanting to start with the [sings] "Casa Escobar, Tacos Escobar," *bam*. But then even before that, you have the trumpet.

JG: Yeah. My idea was to combine—

IN: It's like a trumpet that comes out for a bullfight.

KD: Right.

JG: And so my idea was to combine all of these different sounds together. So I wanted to make—it's a Mexican restaurant, so my idea was, if people are [walking] away [from the television, because it's a commercial] or whatever, this trumpet is going to tell them, you know, "We're starting." So the trumpet would start, and then—then the drum would hit, and then the guitar player. The flamenco, real flamenco. Nice flamenco guitar player. And then the whole—

IN: No, at first it went [sings] "Casa Escobar, Tacos Escobar," *bam*. Then the melody.

JG: Yeah. So the word of the—the name of the restaurants would come out. And then the melody would come out. So the first commercial was all talking about the beautiful location and what they're going to do and all that, and showing people cooking and stuff like that. And then the second commercial was showing more of the cooking, fixing the foods, cutting up things.

IN: Well, actually what it was—just to finish with the music—is, my brother actually . . . Juan/Johnny and I were giving him the audio, the audio version of what we wanted. And then he [John] wrote the melody, right? He wrote the melody, so we [Juan/Johnny and I] had [the sound concept for] all of the percussion and everything at the beginning [and end]. And he wrote the melody. And then he put it all [Juan/Johnny's musical concepts] in sheet music. So he [John] actually got his master's in music at UCLA here. And he was in a special program at USC in music, and he was an honor student at Cal State LA in music. So he played the bassoon since junior high, and so he hooked it up to an amp and played rock, jazz, avant-garde jazz. But his passion is classical. He toured with James Newton in Europe many times, and James Newton arranged—

JG: He [James Newton] is a jazz musician [and innovative jazz composer and recording artist].

IN: James Newton arranged "Star-Crossed Lovers" for a bassoon solo, so—and the bassoon's a very—it's almost like a sax, a very sexy instrument. And so he [John] has major musical training. So he worked with us on this. And then he got some of his friends—Eddie Estrada from Cold Duck, he's known for many years, and Danilo Lozano, and then the drummer, I can't remember the name [Victor Barrientos. And the singer Linda Estrada Orozco]. And then you [Juan/Johnny] got David Torres and the flamenco guitarists. So then we had the recording session, right? But did we do the visuals first? Did we shoot the—so Juan/Johnny did a storyboard, because of his experience in the movie. Alex [Grattan] didn't want to use a storyboard [at that time], right?

JG: No, not Alex.

- IN: For *Only Once in a Lifetime*?
- JG: Oh, yeah.
- IN: So did he use a storyboard?
- JG: No. We didn't do the storyboard.
- IN: But Juan/Johnny knew about storyboards because of David Negrón. That was his job, to be a production illustrator for film. And so in the commercial, he, Juan/Johnny, did a whole storyboard, and he wanted like really quick shots and cuts. And Paco, the camera guy—
- JG: Who was experienced at this, he says, "That's impossible, we can't shoot that many shots. You can't have that many scenes within that little bit of time."
- IN: Because it was a thirty-second commercial. [*laughter*]
- KD: Right.
- JG: And I said, "Yes, you could."
- IN: And he's saying, "No, you can't. No, you can't." Because he was accustomed to just traditional headshots. And so Juan/Johnny says, "Don't worry, we're going—"
- JG: I said, "Just shoot the food, shoot whatever they're doing."
- IN: "Shoot what we tell you."
- JG: Have a lot of variety and we'll work on this later.
- IN: [On this project, I was producer, art director for production, and co-composer.] So he [Paco] had to set up the lights and just shoot everything we did. So we did—we shot the Casa Escobar restaurant, and then we shot the Tacos Escobar. And Tacos Escobar was very plain, so Lupe Botello made curtains for the window, and then I got all of my baskets and dry food and chiles and we hung it up over the stoves to decorate it, and the dried corn and—
- KD: You had to dress the set. [*laughter*]
- IN: We had to dress the set. And so we decorated the whole place. And so we shot—and we shot at night, I think.
- JG: Well, what it is, is that we only had the camera for one day.
- IN: For twenty-four hours.
- JG: So we shot all day long, day and night.
- IN: I think we shot Tacos Escobar at night, and then the next morning, we were at Casa Escobar, so that we could have it overnight.
- JG: We had to deliver it by a certain time.
- IN: Yeah. And so we had a woman making tortillas, and we had them chopping up all the different foods. We had onion, chile, tomatoes—
- JG: And then we went to the recording studio. We had the photographer shooting all the musicians, too, while they were playing.
- IN: Yeah, so we had the recording session the same day that we had the photo session. So we had to time everything. And so then we had to pay for an engineer, and so he was balancing all the sound and everything. And Danilo helped my brother out in regards to the flamenco guitarist.
- JG: The flamenco guitarists didn't read music and all the others did.
- IN: Yeah. So I think Eddie Estrada kind of helped him out, because he didn't read music, and Danilo also helped in regards to that. And so we had all this stuff shot. And so then it's going into the editing room is where you're really creative. And so Juan/Johnny was—so this guy Paco was saying, "I don't know what you're going to do with all this." So he gave—he had to transfer all the—and this was all in video. so he had to transfer the three-quarter inch, and it had timecode. And so Juan/Johnny and I were there looking at it on our TV, marking all the spots where we wanted to make the exact cuts and edit. I just spent hundreds of hours. And so we ended up with three versions that we're really proud of. And my brother even modeled in it. He was one of [the extras].
- JG: Well, all the musicians played—



- IN: No, but I mean, he was in the restaurant, sitting in the restaurant. So we had to use everybody as actors, extras. And so one was the traditional Casa Escobar, and then the other was the traditional Tacos Escobar. And then—and basically, and we had voiceover, so Paco got the actor to do the voiceover. And I wrote all the dialogue, and probably Rebecca translated. Rebecca's our translator. And so the two—so the first one had [*sings*] "Casa Escobar." And it would go into the whole story with all these different images. And then the second version was [*sings*] "Tacos Escobar." And you'd see . . . And they all started the same, with the trumpet, the flamenco. And the whole idea of Juan/Johnny's was, this way the identity—it was like the identity of [the business].
- KD: What they call "branding" now.
- IN: The branding was the trumpet, the flamenco guitar, and then the "Tacos Escobar," and then boom. And then the theme music was the same in all three. So the very last version, we turned it into a rock video. [*laughter*]
- JG: So the first one was really—the first one, identifying the locations. The second one was identifying the food, making all the music.
- IN: Yeah, so the second one, it was—
- JG: And the third one was a musical—it was a rock video.
- IN: Yeah, it was a rock video. So where you actually saw the performers singing, and singing the song.
- JG: Yeah, all the musicians were featured there.
- IN: And also—did you design the logo? Or—no, they had their own logo, but we actually incorporated the logo into the commercials so you can see. And even—we had the map and the phone number, and the lights were flashing, and . . . [*laughter*] And so the first—
- KD: That was your first venture into—
- JG: Television.
- KD: Television commercials?
- IN: So it was like, all the information, and then the second one was like a Benihana, and the third one was a rock video.
- KD: What—how long did you stay in that kind of business?
- IN: I think those are the only commercials we did.
- JG: Television. Then we did a radio commercial for the California—
- IN: California Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. And so we did the same type of thing, where we used one of the musicians from—
- JG: This actually came later, when we had our educational program.
- IN: Yeah, and I'll get into how we hooked up with them, because we did some major stuff with them. But one—Steve Salas from Tierra—had his own group, Los Rebels, that we worked with, which we'll tell you about. And so one of the musicians had a recording studio. So we used him to do the radio commercials for the Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and it was the same thing. We did one for men, because they had men's recovery homes, women's recovery homes—
- JG: Yeah, but that comes later, so we can talk about—
- IN: Yeah. But basically, because you're talking about the radio commercials, so basically, we did three different versions again. And using background music. And I think we were trying to promote Los Rebels, so we were trying to use music that they had written themselves, so that this way it would be a way of them getting promotion out of it as well. [But, we were having problems trying to fit it in during production, so we used other music.] And so that was, basically, I'd say our commercial ventures.
- JG: Yeah. So what happened is that the Latinos started moving out into other areas, and the Anglos came in to Anheuser-Busch. So there was a European American there who said, "We don't want illustrations anymore." He says, "We're going with photography." And then, so we just—we didn't want to do it. We didn't want to do traditional advertising things.
- IN: We wanted to continue doing cultural, educational—

JG: And beautiful artwork. We don't want just photography. That wasn't our interest.

IN: And so that was when we stopped working with Anheuser-Busch, but we're still very good friends with Carlos Viramontes, [who's the 2011–12 MAOF board chairman].

[break in audio]

KD: This is Karen Davalos with Johnny Gonzalez and Irma Núñez. Today is December 20, 2007. We're on tape [13]. Go ahead, Irma.

IN: And so that was when we went into a transition.

JG: But what was happening at the same time, that was in the late '80s, and I think the late '80s—

IN: Because '88 was our last—the *charro* poster was '88?

KD: Okay.

IN: So that was our last poster.

JG: And I think about '88, around that time, I think possibly was the first Iraq war, something like that? *Nightline* was on real big. We were always seeing *Nightline* with Ted Koppel, and they did—they had a special show on the violence in the schools. And the blacks and whites and Latinos. And so Irma and I were just looking at it, and I told Irma, "You know what, Irma? I think we've got to get into the schools. We've got to take our educational program, and the key thing is that they—what it is, is they're—we feel is that it's lack of pride. Because they've got to fight each other, because they're trying to compete on who's better. And also the fact that they don't have anything better to do. And to feel that—we've got to create more of a family bond with the parents and the kids and all that." So anyway, we just said, "This is where we've got to leave advertising."

KD: So part of the impetus was news [that] was going on in the world and in the communities.

JG: Yeah. It was—I guess it was going on in different parts of the country, but—

IN: But that's what motivated you.

JG: Oh, yeah.

IN: We changed our whole direction.

JG: I said, "We've got to go back into it." I started with that, the idea of trying to get the community proud of who they are. I guess I just believe so much that developing the self-esteem, feeling proud of who you are, feeling proud of the community, giving the community something to work on, giving them hopes and beliefs in bettering themselves. Have something to be able to work on that will make them feel better about themselves.

IN: Well, what happened is, like, during the '70s with Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], it was all the CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] programs that were paying young people to be apprentices to master muralists working with the Goez [Art Studios and] Gallery and other programs that were out in the city in various industries—

JG: All of these community organizations got CETA money, so they got kids for projects, and what's a project [that] was booming then? It was the murals. So they were all calling us, all these organizations. That's how Estrada Courts came in. They were working on a community program, they called us. Charlie Felix volunteered to go over there, and before you know it, it grew. The Casa Maravilla, with—

KD: Oh, really? Charlie was at—part of Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], and that's how the connection was made for Estrada Courts?

JG: Oh, yeah. Charlie was with Estrada Courts, and they had—

IN: Estrada Courts called you.

JG: They came to us. And they came to the gallery and one particular—I forget his name, unfortunately. But he was leading a group of kids. And he came down, and then Felix volunteered to go over there, and he did the first mural, which was the double mural. And then David Botello went over there to do another mural, and Gilbert Hernandez went over there to go another mural, and before you know it, everybody was out there doing murals. And it just snowballed over there. And then Sammy Zepeda was at—working with the

kids in Casa Maravilla, and he wanted to be able to have somebody paint a mural there too, and came to the gallery. David was working at the gallery—

IN: David Lopez.

JG: David Lopez. He went over there. And so different people were calling the gallery, because they had some money for community programs, and everybody was excited about painting murals.

IN: So during the '60s and the '70s, because of the civil rights movement, the federal government, the county, the city, they were all putting monies into education, into the youth programs, into the arts. And so not only through Self Help Graphics [& Art] and Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] and [Mechicano Art Center]—all these other organizations—but [also] through East LA College, through Cal State LA, but also LA Unified School District. I was working in the Area G office, and my mentors were—

KD: Area G?

IN: Area G. LA Unified School District at that time was broken into areas because it's so huge, and so Area G was the East LA branch.

KD: Oh, I hear you.

IN: And so Anna Covarrubias, Dr. Anna Covarrubias, was one of the head people there. Dr. Evangelina Stockwell, Angie Stockwell. And so they were my mentors, and also Dr. Raquel Montenegro from Project Maestro at Cal State LA. So these three women were my mentors. And just an example of one of the projects that were done because of the monies going into the community was, they published [in 1977] the Mexican American Culture and Heritage Kit, three volumes, huge volumes, which I still have, of curriculums and materials for base—broken down into age group, into academic level. It was starting from pre-Columbian history, the colonial period, California history. It had the contemporary history. Juan/Johnny and his brother [Joe] were in there under the arts. I mean, it's just curriculum after curriculum after curriculum that they could hand to the teachers to say, "Here. Here's your lesson for the day," so that the teachers had all of this material to teach in the classroom.

And at the Area G office, they had a resource center where they had maps, they had costumes, they had posters, they had artifacts, they had all kinds of supplemental materials that teachers could check out. They had films. Everything available so that a teacher didn't have to start from scratch trying to figure out, "Okay, I want to teach a lesson about Emiliano Zapata. Where do I go to get that information?" They just contact the Mexican—the Area G office, all the materials are there. But every school had their own set of—their own kit.

KD: Kit, right.

IN: And Bill Anton was the head of the Area G office at that time, and I think it was before he became superintendent of the district. And so these were the kind of programs that were going on that were not just out in the street in the community, but they were institutionalized because of the funding that was coming from the federal government, the county, the city and the state. Then came Reaganomics, and all of these budgets were cut. And then it became—the '80s was the era of the Hispanic market, which we tried to turn into something positive, which we feel very proud of the campaigns that we created. But while a lot of the Latino youth who had opportunities during the '60s and the '70s to get an education, they were now all going towards corporate America, and it was the quote-unquote yuppie era. And it was really more "How do I get ahead professionally?" as far as having this real grassroots effort. And so then it was the '90s that, because of Juan/Johnny's inspiration—this is like his life passion. He said, "Irma, we have to revitalize this movement again." And so we called it the [Renacimiento], the rebirth, because his mural was *The Birth of Our Art*. So we called this the Renacimiento, the rebirth. And it was just all over again. All over again. [laughter]

JG: But this time, it was targeting specifically the kids. We said, "We've got to go into the schools now."

KD: And what age group did you focus on?

JG: All of them.

IN: What we first of all focused on was getting support. And because of the work that Juan/Johnny did with Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery] and with the film and everything, he already had a lot of relationships with key people in the community. But—

JG: First of all, we had to get support within the educators to confirm to politicians or anybody else that doesn't know about education that this would work.

IN: Well, you know, now that we're talking, something's triggering. Before we actually started this educational program, as an educator, I was telling—Juan/Johnny was talking to me about his history, just expounding. And as an educator, and as the family archivist and historian, I was saying, "You have to document this, and you have to tell your story." And he would say, "Oh, nobody wants to hear about my story." [laughter] As we know, people who make history don't realize that they're making history. And so I was there writing all of his history down, taking notes. He didn't—he started talking about the music. I said, "My God, you never told me about the rock and roll era." He says, "Oh, well, we were just kids. That's no big deal." And so I'm saying, "Yes, it is," and I'm writing all of this down. So before we even got into the educational program, I was trying to convince him how this was an important story, and he just couldn't believe it. So I actually put this portfolio together at that time.

JG: She was also saying, "You've got to go out into the schools and the colleges to go talk to the kids."

IN: Yeah. You need to do lecture presentations.

JG: I said, "College? They're smart adults." She says, "No." She says—not that they're not smart—she says, "They're the age of your nephews and nieces." "Oh."

KD: [inaudible] [laughter]

IN: And so I took this portfolio, and I started at the universities. And that's when I went through my calendar to just get an idea—I actually made my first call on September 27 of 1991 to the LA Unified School District [ICAP] program, because they were the ones that contracted artists and people from all over the community to do programs to tour to different schools. And so they were showing me the type of—they sent me material of what they did. And I said, "So see, Juan/Johnny. They do this." And he's going, "Hmm." And so then, I went to—the next person I went to was . . .

Actually, I was on the phone, calling different people, and I contacted Dick Kosher, who was—I think he's Dr. Dick Kosher from Loyola Marymount University, who—I don't know what department he was in, but he was a very loyal *folklórico* student of mine. And when I left Loyola, he was devastated, and so he started teaching the classes on his own. And I told him about what Juan/Johnny had done and what I thought was important. He says, "Well, why don't you meet with Fernando Guerra?" [So that was when I started meeting with university PhDs, deans, associate deans, and department chairs.] And so I actually met with him on October 14 of 1991. And then the next day I met with Isaac Cardenas from Cal State University Fullerton, then the next day Jorge Garcia at Cal State Northridge, and then David Hayes Bautista at UCLA, and then Rudy Acuña, November 1. I had gotten real close to him because of the Gordon Castillo Hall case, and so they were all really, really excited about what I was talking about.

Now, what was interesting is that in the portfolio I have all of the Hispanic marketing posters, and I remember that Rudy was very upset, because that was when the universities were really starting their campaign, or in the middle of their campaign, against the term *Hispanic*. And since we were really working with the corporations, we had to speak their language. And so I know he was upset. And some people who saw our portfolio really didn't understand where we were coming from, whereas others embraced it, and they—

KD: How did you resolve some of those conflicts?

IN: They weren't really conflicts. They were just—it was just communicating the way we're communicating now, just explaining with our sincere heart who we are, what we represent, what we're trying to do. And many people understood it and embraced us, and a few people didn't, but we couldn't worry about that. We had to just continue on our path and do what we had to do.

KD: But—

- JG: And they were things of the past already.
- IN: Yeah, these were projects that had—this was part of our history—
- KD: Using the word *Hispanic* in—
- IN: Oh, well, as far as the terminology, to me they were saying, “Well, *Hispanic* is from Spain, and the reason they’re against it is because it’s European, that we’re going to be Latino.”
- JG: And that the corporations—
- IN: And that the corporations impose this word on us, yeah. And then we’re going to be Latino, and I’m thinking to myself, “Well, *Latino* is not an accurate term either, because *Latino* incorporates the Italians, the Portuguese—”
- JG: The French.
- IN: The French. And so if you really want to narrow and define who we are, *Latino* is even a less accurate term than *Hispanic*. But that was the term that they were embracing, that they understood. So what we decided to do, I said, “Well, *Chicano* is something that defines us, but there’s a lot of people who don’t know *Chicano*.” And so I’m tired of trying to—and then the majority of Latinos, Hispanics, are Mexican. And I’m tired of watering down who we are in order to incorporate everybody. So we started using *Chicano*, *Mexicano*, *Latino*. So we’re Chicano, we’re Mexicano, we’re Latino. And one of the things that we say every time we would do a presentation, “It doesn’t matter what you call yourself, it’s how you feel about yourself that really counts.”
- KD: So this is called the cultural arts educational program?
- IN: It’s actually—it’s the Don Juan and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign, “La Nueva Onda del Barrio.” And so it started off as “The Birth of Our Art,” and then eventually it evolved to be “The Color of America,” because we started incorporating other cultures. And this is our cultural arts educational program. And so we also [again] met with Tony Rios from the CSO to talk to him about what we were doing, and Rose Vazquez, his lifelong assistant. And so he was really excited, because I was showing him the letter of Dr. Francisco Bravo that had his name in it [congratulating Juan/Johnny on his “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project].
- JG: He [Tony] hadn’t seen it.
- IN: And he didn’t even know that Dr. Bravo had written to Juan/Johnny about his [Tony’s] conversation, so he was so emotional, and he asked for a copy so he could put it on his wall.
- JG: This was more than twenty years later.
- IN: And so we started—so we started meeting with educators, and this really took on kind of a snowball effect. I was going to show you the images first, but I’ll start with the letters first, since we’re talking about how it evolved.
- KD: Well, actually, I was hoping to get like a sense of overview, like who were your early supporters, what were some of the successful—
- IN: Well, that’s exactly—I put it in the back thinking you wanted that later, but we’ll start at the front. The very first letter of support was from Angie Stockwell, my mentor. And she knew Juan/Johnny really well from the Goetz Art [Studios and] gallery. So she gave us our very, very [first] letter. And then we had—Chuck Acosta. I had met with Linda Wong, [executive director of] the Achievement Council, and she referred me to Chuck Acosta and Vilma Martinez, who was an attorney who supported the Gordon Castillo Hall case. And so Chuck Acosta—well, Angie Stockwell was now an assistant superintendent of one of the districts with LA Unified [School District], and so she was District 5. Now, instead of calling them Area G, now they had numbers. And so—
- JG: Vilma was actually the [past] president of [MALDEF, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund,] back at that time.
- IN: Oh, at that time? Okay. And so then, Chuck Acosta, he was co-chair of the LA County Bilingual Directors’ Association, but he also worked at the LA County Office of Education. And he was a key person with CAFE,

he was a past president of CABE, California Association of Bilingual Educators. So—you were going to ask a question?

KD: Yeah. Actually, I was more interested in the folks that said yes to the program, as opposed to the support that gives you—

IN: Oh, who actually sponsored the program.

KD: Yeah.

IN: Okay. Then I had it in the right order. Okay. *[laughter]* And so—and I think it is key to mention the supporters later, but we . . . Well, I'll just mention that we started meeting with Linda Wong, from the Achievement Council, also referred me to somebody at UTLA, in order to hook up with, AMAE, the Association of Mexican American Educators, because they were key supporters. And the person they hooked me up with was Antonio Villaraigosa. And I didn't recognize the name, and so I called him—

JG: He was with the union.

IN: He was with UTLA, the United Teachers of LA. I called him, and he says, "Are you Irma Núñez who lives in City Terrace?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And he says, "Well, I'm your neighbor." *[laughter]* It turns out his name was Antonio Villar, that's why I didn't recognize Villaraigosa. And of course, he combined his name and his wife's name. So he knew me—

KD: His former wife.

IN: His former wife. So he knew me from the neighborhood and was very excited about the project, and so he referred me to Teresa Montañó, who was the president of AMAE. And so AMAE really embraced us, and we did a number of presentations for them, which you'll see later. But then—

JG: The first one was a portfolio presentation.

IN: Yeah, it was this portfolio—

JG: It was a whole group of people looking at the portfolio, and then that's when we thought, "Okay, we've got to put it into a slide."

IN: Well, actually, it was Larry Perales, who was with AMAE who said, you know, "I'm also a key member of CTA, California Teachers Association, and I'd like you to make a presentation to our state council so that you can get endorsement from CTA. But I suggest you convert to, maybe to a slide presentation." So he was the one who gave us that idea." And so—

JG: Because the group's too big.

IN: Right, because there's huge groups that we're going to. So other supporters from AMAE were, like, Enrique Franco, Rudy Moreno, who was also with CTA [and CCA, Community College Association], and he was with Rancho Santiago [Community] College, who later contracted us. Larry Perales got us into Cuesta College with Francisco Curiel. Winnie Porter [was a supporter]. Carmen Martinez-Eoff, [she] contracted us to go to Porterville. And so AMAE and CTA became major supporters. And also what happened is that through CTA, we made presentations to various committees, and their equity and human rights committee were the ones that really embraced us. And Dolores Heisinger was the general manager. David Hernandez and Jack Gonzalez were the ones who presented it to the board of directors, where we got their endorsement. And the African American community was very excited. James Greer, Darnell—I can't remember his last name, which I'll be getting for you, the other list of people.

But AMAE really triggered off this major support, and through AMAE, we got endorsements from UTLA as well, with Helen Bernstein. [So, it was Larry Perales, our greatest supporter and strongest advocate, who made it possible for CTA to take us under their wing by endorsing, sponsoring, and promoting our program to diverse school districts statewide. Because of Larry, we were also able to spend an hour meeting privately with César Chávez, reminiscing about the Chicano movement and discussing the benefits of our program to the community.]

JG: Let me just throw in something key that happened within this time, is—

IN: Yes.



JG: We were getting letters of support, and I saw something—I saw something on somewhere saying that the LA key librarian was Elizabeth Martinez Smith. And she was a great customer of ours at the [Goez Art Studios and] Gallery. She bought a beautiful . . . We carved as a team—we carved a coffee table, a gigantic coffee table with a whole—the—what is it, the reproduction of the stone of the tomb in the Palenque. It was beautiful. Then we put glass over it. Well, anyway, she bought it. And the legs were like a pyramid style. It was just awesome. So anyway, she bought that, and she was buying quite a few things. And so anyway, I saw her name and I called her. And we got together and started talking about things that she wanted to do with the Chicano community as a librarian. And then she invited me to the opening of the Malabar library, which had been destroyed with the earthquake.

And as I was there, Percy Duran was there, again, who was involved with the movie, and now he was commissioner of public works. And then he invited us to go make a presentation to some of the commissioners. So then Percy set it up so that we could be able to get a letter from the mayor [LA mayor Tom Bradley] to support the campaign. At the same time, he said Hispanic heritage month was coming up, and he says, “LA doesn’t do anything for Hispanic heritage month. We’re putting a committee together. Would you like to be part of it? It’d be real nice if you guys could be a part of it.” So then we became a part of the first LA Chicano—

IN: It was the Los Angeles Latino—they had it Latino/Hispanic—

JG: Well, just so you know, we spent meeting after meeting trying to figure out whether we’re going to call it Latino or Hispanic. So we called it both.

IN: So it’s Los Angeles Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month celebration.

JG: And some of the people on that first committee were Percy Duran, it was—

IN: I have the names here. Percy Duran, Jackie Zarate, from the LA City [Employees Chicano] Association [LACECA]. Mark Mariscal from LA Rec and Parks, Richard Alarcón, who was working for Bradley at the time, before he ran for office. [He’s currently LA city councilmember.] Rosa Martinez was with Bradley’s office, and Anna Figueroa, who now is Lucille Roybal-Allard’s LA chief of staff. So they were on the original committee. The second year, when [Richard] Riordan was mayor, then Lourdes Zuckerman Saab was also on the committee. And so what happened was, is we were just . . . It’s like we were this—how can say—we were on a roll. It was like this marathon of—

KD: But did you—back up just a bit. What did you present? That’s the part I haven’t gotten. Was it your work, your life’s work so far, or—

IN: It was the concept. So, if you can see on the front, it was the Don Juan [and Doña Irma] New Barrio Life-style, “La Nueva Onda del Barrio”: “La Nueva Onda del Barrio, dedicated to beautification, education, and economic development of the barrios through the visual and performing arts.” And then we included [our slogan], a humanitarian approach to marketing to enhance the quality of life. So we spent three years putting our major master plan together, writing it and editing and rewriting. And so component one of this fifty-page plan, which we still have, was the education. So again, the focus [was] “instilling Hispanic, community and individual, cultural identity, pride, self-esteem, hope, and belief, to generate inspiration, aspiration, and motivation, while creating awareness of disadvantages caused by graffiti, gangs, drugs, dropping out, illiteracy, and pollution.” And so we’re even talking about the environment.

And so with our visual portfolio, and this little packet, the whole concept that we were focusing on—and I’ll just read one paragraph [about the] consequences of social neglect: “In 1970, five years after the Watts Riots, in the predominantly African American community, the East Los Angeles riots erupted in the predominantly Hispanic community. Twenty-two years later, triggered by growing tensions due to our current socioeconomic crisis, the April 29, 1992, Los Angeles Riots exploded. This recent catastrophic event ignited in South Central Los Angeles, once predominantly Afro-American, now approximately 50 percent Latino, shocked and paralyzed our entire nation, while it spread to different parts of the city and country. This demonstrates the growing severity of consequences caused by continued neglect of the needs and concerns of low-income communities, disenfranchised by the world’s wealthiest nation. Many fear history

will repeat itself with riots erupting throughout the barrios. Hence, to alleviate the serious conditions that could spark another explosion, it is imperative that all levels of the country earnestly address effective ways in which the problems of the barrios and other culturally diverse, oppressed communities can be solved.” And so then we go into the history of the positive things that happened, how this could be a vehicle for healing and revitalization. We talk about the humanitarian approach to marketing, and the forming of partnerships.

And so what was interesting is, as we were meeting with all of these people on March 12, 1991, I met with a corporation, a corporate executive. And many people were just so excited and emotional, but when it came to corporate dollars, one person said, “We’re not funding education this year.” And this was 1991, March. And I remember telling her, “Are you going to wait until there’s a riot before you do something about the issues facing our community?” And sadly to say, a little over a year later, it happened. We had had a meeting with a major media outlet, with the original founder and his family member who was an executive, and we had presented the proposal. And they were very excited, very supportive. And we heard that as South Central was burning, that they saw our proposal on their coffee table, saying, “My God, this was something that was foreseen.” And I don’t think we’re any different than a lot of people who saw it coming. It was a matter of the fact that we documented it in a particular way, and we were trying to resolve it in a particular way. And Juan/Johnny always knew that we can’t do it. It takes the whole community, it takes the whole city to do something about it.

And so it was September of ’92 when we had this first Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month event, and it was with the Latin American Consulates. And so they asked us to—each consulate had an artist represented, a piece of work representing their country—so they asked us to present an artist to represent the Chicano community. And so when we were working on the [Anheuser-Busch] *charro* poster, Juan/Johnny had put a—an advertisement at Art Center [College of Design], saying we wanted a student assistant. And so Simón Silva responded to that, and so he helped us [as Juan/Johnny’s assistant] on the *charro* poster. And so he was basically doing traditional advertising work.

JG: Yeah, that was schoolwork.

IN: Yeah, his school projects, which were basically generic European American-type images. And when he came to our home studio, we exposed him to all the artists and the history and everything that Juan/Johnny had done. And so he came back—so that was in ’88—and so he came back to us around—

JG: Almost two years later or something.

IN: Well, ’88 was the project, and then it was around ’91, ’92—

JG: Yeah, after he graduated.

IN: Right when we were putting this campaign together, he came to us and asked if we would represent him. And he had some original paintings that he had done that were focusing now on the Chicano/Latino culture. And so we selected—we could have picked any of the artists that Juan/Johnny represented, but he [Simón] was a young, up-and-coming artist, so we selected him to be featured at that event.

KD: What was the event?

IN: It was the Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month celebration. We had—they had the rotunda and the hallways of City Hall with works of art representing the different consulates. And so our contribution was representing the Mexican American, the Chicano. And so we were able to introduce him [Simón Silva] into a major venue that young artists normally wouldn’t be able to exhibit at. [We also made a slide presentation for Mayor Bradley at a reception inside, I believe, the Board of Public Works chambers.]

KD: And that was in the spring, though?

IN: This was September.

KD: Oh, I was going to say . . . I thought you said it was—okay.

IN: September ’92. And so then—so we were representing him [Simón] as well as all of our other artists. And as we were making all of these presentations, a friend of mine, Florencio Lopez. I can’t even remember where I first met him. He knew—but he’s a musician, and so he knows a lot of the rock and roll people that

Juan/Johnny knows. And I think I might have met him through the Gordon Castillo Hall committee. But he came to me—he called, and I was telling him about what we were doing. And it turns out he was working for LA County probation.

JG: He was a probation officer.

IN: And he begged us to go to South Central to meet with—

JG: He was working out of South Central.

IN: Yeah. He says, “All this tension between the African American and Latinos, we desperately need your program.” And so it was the Kenyon—it was called the Kenyon . . . Let’s see here. I have it right here. Here it is: Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center, Team Kenyon Youth School. And so we started making presentations, and there were probation officers that were African American and Latino. And we were actually showing the slide presentation and we were amazed at how the African Americans were just totally blown away—

KD: The slide presentations of the—

IN: The whole history. Of the whole history. And so, from beginning to end, everything—

KD: Okay. So Goetz—

IN: [No, it was Juan/Johnny’s life story. How losing and finding cultural pride, traveling to Spain and Mexico, inspired his life’s work. The Leggeriors, Four J’s, “East LA to Tourist Attraction” project, TELASOMAFa, Goetz Art Studios and Gallery, the movie *Only Once in a Lifetime*, the advertising. Just the whole history and now Don Juan Production and his vision for the future.]

JG: And they brought in Bob Saenz from . . . He was the young kid at—

IN: Robert Saenz.

JG: From the main office, from the probation office. So he came over, and he was just totally surprised.

IN: We probably made like five, six, ten presentations, because they kept bringing more people in to see what we were doing. And what was interesting is, the African Americans, we’ve discovered, were really into fine art, because they had already been embraced in the entertainment industry, they had been embraced in politics and other areas. So in fine arts, they already had prominent African American artists that were doing beautiful work. So they were already conditioned to want to buy beautiful works of art and put it into their home. So when they saw what we had, they really identified with it, and because it was people of color—

JG: See, but the key part of the story, there’s the story—was the shame that I had, and how it changed by me being educated.

IN: And they all identified with that.

JG: The key was for them to get educated. And this is what you—could happen to you, and this is what you could accomplish. So that’s where the story . . . But it’s entertaining, because there’s music, and we do everything.

KD: So who did the music? Was it you?

IN: For what?

KD: Yeah, for your—

JG: Yeah, I performed—

IN: Oh, you mean for our production. Well, we’ll get into that right now, because—just to conclude how it all started was that they—they [LA city probation] got together with the Coalition of Brothers and Sisters Unlimited. Because you want to know who got us started, the Coalition of Brothers and Sisters Unlimited, which was a [mostly black] community organization, went into partnership with us to do our inaugural art show and dinner. And so originally it was with the support of all the probation department, the head of probation, everybody with probation. And so we had it scheduled. And it turns out, for some reason, they picked the date of April 29, 1993, because that’s when the Compton Ramada Hotel—

JG: [inaudible]

- IN: I assume that that was the only date the Compton Ramada had available for whatever. But for some reason, they picked that day, and I think it was the anniversary—because it was the anniversary of the LA riots, people were terrified.
- JG: The National Guard were all over there.
- IN: The National Guard were actually housed at that hotel. That—we had to postpone it.
- JG: Because they were afraid of something coming out at the anniversary.
- IN: Right. And so we were actually asked—because we were getting support from everywhere, we were at El Rancho Unified School District, [and] they asked us—Sandra [Macis] invited us to be Principal of the Day.
- JG: We were both Principals of the Day, for [two] particular schools.
- IN: And so we were there looking at the school and how they operate, and all of a sudden, the principal—
- JG: Everybody's looking at television, going, "What's going on?"
- IN: And it turns out that that was when—
- JG: The riots—
- IN: So that was actually April 29, [1992,] because that was the day of the riots. So now, the next—the following year, we had to postpone it. So we ended up having our event July 31, 1993. And so this was the program for the event, and it was a partnership with the African American community. And they selected [Senator Diane Watson and] Congressman [Edward] Roybal to be their honorees, because they said he [Roybal] had done as much for the African American community as the Latino. And so we had a major art show. And so we had a major art show, so we had Christine Devine [from KTTV Channel 11] as our mistress of ceremonies. So the artists we featured—it reminds of the list of artists from Juan/Johnny's first show. So we had Simón Silva, Ernie Barnes, Angel Esparza, [David Botello,] all of these.
- KD: Well, rather than read the document, because the document exists, I'm trying to get a sense of what did it feel like. What was your sense of—
- IN: It was awesome and it was nerve-wracking, because it was—Juan/Johnny and I were doing everything ourselves. And what happened was, I think it was—okay, July. Yeah. It's like at the same time that we were trying to promote this educational program. They were asking us about . . . LACECA, for LA City, was saying, you know, "What can we do right now?" And so artists were telling us that they had all of these posters and prints under their beds, in their closets, that were just collecting dust, that they didn't know how to distribute. And so Juan/Johnny said, "Well, let's start with our Don Juan [and Doña Irma] Traveling Art Gallery." So this way, to have a traveling art gallery, because he says, "At Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], people couldn't afford original art, and only people who came to the gallery were able to see what we had. Let's have a traveling art gallery, so that we can take the work to the communities and really expose the kids."
- So on—it was actually September 24 of 1993 when [Richard] Riordan became mayor that we [curated] the second annual Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month [Chicano art exhibition], and this time it was completely our show. So we got original works of art of all Chicano artists [that we represented]. [Juan/Johnny designed the logo and billboard for the LA city, which were displayed citywide.]
- JG: The entire [LA City Hall] rotunda and hallway was full of original works of art [for sale].
- IN: And so then we had sponsors like the [Southern California] Gas Company, but it was primarily the LA City [Employees Chicano] Association [LACECA], and it was United Latino Fund, and GTE. [The Don Juan and Doña Irma Traveling Art Gallery exhibition had a big reception and was honored before the LA city council, where we and our artists received certificates of recognition.]
- JG: And because Simón was the youngest, we featured him, we wanted to really get him out there.
- IN: So we featured him on the front of all of our invitations, in order to really help give him a jump-start.
- JG: And then because it was television that did some specials with me, so—
- IN: Well, Ray Gonzalez, who knew Juan/Johnny from Goetz [Art Studios and Gallery], we presented him what we were doing, so he had us on the *Pacesetters* show [featuring our work]. But then also, he had Michelle Ruiz—

- JG: So we did this whole thing on *Pacesetters*, all the retrospective of everything.
- IN: Yeah. And then Michelle Ruiz had us on the news. And she shot us in front of the First Street Store murals and interviewed Juan/Johnny and interviewed me. I dance with Benjamin Hernandez [director, Ballet Folklórico Mexicano]. And then at the very end, Juan/Johnny brought Simón as his protégé, to allow him to capitalize on all the media [coverage for our Cultural Art Educational Program].
- JG: And also on Ray's show. So we got him on television like three times—boom, boom, boom.
- IN: Yeah.
- JG: Really fast.
- IN: Oh, and also we made . . . Channel 11?
- JG: Channel 11.
- IN: Yeah. We made a presentation to them. And I told his story about how he [Simón] was a *campesino*, and all the struggles that he had. And so as a result of my presentation, then they asked if they could actually do a feature on him. So we were really excited that we were able to really jumpstart his career with all of that publicity. And so anyway, the list of artists [for our big Compton Ramada Don Juan and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign Inaugural Art Show and Dinner] are familiar artists, but there were also African American artists included. And then also, Steve Salas from Tierra had his group Los Rebels, so they performed live the music to our slide presentation. You were going to ask a question?
- KD: Yeah. [referring to document] Leonora Carrington, the—who had gone to Mexico. So—and Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, were those originals, were those drawings, were—
- IN: No. These were all—well, it says here, “Original paintings and quality fine art reproductions.”
- KD: Oh, okay.
- IN: So when the artists came to us with their prints, then we decided to start scouting to find other prints. So we were [working] with CTA [California Teachers Association]. We were always going up north and down here, so we went to the Mexican [Museum in San Francisco] and started carrying their prints. We—now, one of the things Juan/Johnny said, is that he always wanted to be a wholesale distributor, but he felt he—
- JG: Because I thought it was something new. There were no distributors of Latino artwork.
- IN: And so—but he felt you can't do that because you have to buy hundreds or thousands of prints to be able to get the distributor price.
- JG: To count on just the Chicano artists, it's not enough. They're not dependable enough on it, because you never know when they're going to run out of [prints]. But if we get the museums and all that to allow us to carry and distribute theirs, then we'll have something more stable.
- IN: But he felt we couldn't do it, because we couldn't order the quantity.
- KD: So the Carrington probably came from the Mexican Museum.
- IN: The Mexican Museum. But I contacted, I said . . . He had me, his disciple, and I really believed in everything he was doing, and so I said, “I believe in it, I'm going to make it happen.” So I called the LA County Museum [of Art], I called the Norton Simon Museum, I called the New York Graphic Society [and other publishers], and they all granted us permission to be wholesale distributors, even if we ordered very small quantities. Because they saw this as a new market. As a matter of fact, we were going to poster shops and frame shops showing them our artists' collections. And they said, “Well, we're not—there's no market for Hispanic prints. Nobody wants to buy Hispanic prints.” And so we were pissed off. So we said, “We're going to show them there's a market.” So we started having all of these shows. So the LA city [Don Juan and Doña Irma Traveling Art Gallery exhibition] was all originals. So the [Don Juan and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign] Inaugural Art Show and Dinner was a combination of originals and prints.
- JG: We had originals displayed, but we had our first set of prints.
- IN: Oh, yeah, at LA city, that's right.
- JG: And people were buying the prints like crazy.
- IN: At LA City [Hall], we had—
- JG: They never saw anything like that.

IN: We had tables set up, and so . . . And it was just Juan/Johnny and I. We had to set up, like, boxes—like every print that we had on display, we had them in cardboard and shrink-wrapped. And he [Juan/Johnny] did all the labor. [Ernesto Rodriguez, from Cal Poly Pomona, designed, and his team produced, cardboard easels.] Then we had to have at least five of each poster, in case people wanted to buy them. And so we had . . . three hundred prints times five is how many posters that we had to carry with us? *[laughter]*

JG: And the five is for the ones that sold pretty fair.

IN: And then some of them we had ten each.

JG: The ones that sold very good, like the Aztec calendar—we had a gigantic Aztec calendar that sold like crazy, it was about this big and it sold for twenty dollars, something like that. And that was selling like crazy. And so we'd take at least thirty of those.

IN: So New York—so we ended up—so what happened is the posters just took on a life of its own. Here we're trying to sell our educational program, but everybody—

JG: And everybody wants to buy posters. *[laughter]*

KD: Like you said, it was the wholesale market.

IN: Yeah. And so here, the framers and the poster shops are saying there's no market, and so at this event, it's originals, and—

JG: So people starting buying our posters—

IN: Well, let's finish with this event. So it's Los Rebels performing live, our production, and then we just had all these different sponsors. So this was the Don Juan [and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign] Inaugural Art Show and Dinner. And Maritza Mendizabal from Blue Cross [of California] was like a major supporter. And you can see all of the political people—we'll have all this on hand. Corporate sponsors. So now we were starting to get—see, once the corporations started seeing that the community was interested, then they started supporting the campaign. And so I always remember what my uncle [Ed Roybal] said, because when he ran for lieutenant governor, the Democratic Party didn't want him, [because, at that time, it was unheard of for a Chicano to run for any political office]. And so that was a major battle. And he says, "When you have the community support, you have power." And that's basically what this showed again. Because the community wanted it, because the community was excited about it, the corporations and the political leaders and everybody else felt—

KD: So was it a viable first effort? I mean, you actually sold—

IN: Oh, we sold prints like crazy. But it's like, we were trying to do so many things at once. So we started doing all of these events. And so whenever we were with AMAE and CTA, we were always taking our whole [Don Juan and Doña Irma] Traveling Art Gallery with us. And as a matter of fact, AMAE asked me one year, because they were presenting the César Chávez achievement award. And the César Chávez family were the first to receive it, the second they wanted to present to Congressman [Edward] Roybal. So since I was the family archivist and historian, they asked me to do a whole presentation on him, and we had our whole [Don Juan and Doña Irma] Traveling Art Gallery there at that particular event. But we were doing all of these events to promote the artist, to promote the culture, but also trying to get our educational program going. And so this kind of gives you an idea of how we had our traveling exhibit.

And so this was with the social workers. We did the cultural competence and mental health summit, "Trabajores de la Raza." Latino Social Work Network, Delhi community center [in Santa Ana]. We did it at Disneyland, where they had a major event, Latino Family Alcoholism Council—

*[break in audio]*

KD: Yes, go ahead, Irma.

IN: Okay. So this is where the California Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse really saw how this was something to help heal their clients that were in their recovery facilities. And so they had us decorate recovery homes in Santa Ana, up in northern California, so we did all the—

JG: And in LA.



- IN: And in LA. And so we did all of the framing [and mounting] for [all of their homes and] these events. And then [to LA County]—
- JG: We supplied all the artwork.
- IN: Yeah.
- JG: That place was empty. [The walls were blank in all their locations,] and then all of a sudden, the whole place was full of Chicano artwork.
- IN: Yeah. And we had to select pieces that were relevant to the men versus the women, and so this was . . . What was really wonderful is how they saw the art as a tool for healing. And so, of course, we got all kinds of certificates and awards from various cities. The city of Pomona. The city of LA, Antonio Villaraigosa, when he was assembly [speaker]. And so eventually, we were able to start—well, before we started this production, let me just finish with the prints. This is just—you can flip through this. This is just samples of our [Don Juan and Doña Irma] Traveling Art Gallery. And so what we did is, at the Pomona Fairplex, *Décor* magazine had their international art expo. And Howard Morseburg, who worked with Juan/Johnny at Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], because he had images of Esperanza Martinez, we contacted him again to carry her images, which are these here. And so we ended up actually buying space at this particular event, and that's where New York Graphic Society saw us. And they ended—*Décor* magazine ended up featuring us and Esperanza's work in their magazine. And we started getting—
- JG: International. It was an international magazine.
- IN: International magazine. We started getting calls from Europe—
- JG: Calls and faxes from all over the world wanting Chicano artwork.
- IN: From Singapore, they would say . . . In—what is that place in Florida?
- JG: Palm—
- IN: Palm Beach. They'd say, "We'd like to order some chick-a-no art." [laughter] So they didn't know how to pronounce it, but they were really [excited].
- JG: We were getting faxes at three o'clock in the morning from the Orient.
- IN: And then this particular [major] publisher, they didn't have Hispanic art, and they heard about us and contacted us. And this particular artist Heleodoro Heras, he had done a lot of these images on his own, and he had one piece called—it was called *El Beso*, but they were very *güero* [light complexioned] looking, and so we told him, "You have to make them look a little more *moreno*." And he called it *Mil Besos*, [a new image he painted after we encouraged him to represent Latinos of all colors].
- JG: [Then his publisher], the owner and the son of the owner came down [from up north] and met with us. They took us out to lunch, and they just wanted to find out, "What do we do to be able to get the Hispanics to buy our prints? What are the images?" And we recommended, and they printed every image that we recommended.
- IN: And then also, New York Graphic only had maybe—
- JG: They didn't have any more.
- IN: They had two Diegos, or—
- JG: I don't know if they had any.
- IN: Oh, they didn't have any?
- JG: They didn't have any. [Maybe they had one.]
- IN: So they started publishing [new images because we began ordering so many]. They started getting the rights to Diego Rivera and [I think] Frida Kahlo. [They also wanted us to supply them with the names of Chicano artists, so they could start publishing some of their art.]
- JG: Because they said . . . They were carrying, when I was at Goez [Art Studios and Gallery], they were carrying that one that's in the office right there of Orozco's, and we were selling that one. So I had called to see if we could buy it again, and they said, "We don't carry it anymore. It scared people." [Because it was about the revolution.] So they didn't carry it because of that.

IN: So as a result of our exhibit . . . We were the only—we were, like, the only major Chicano/Latino distributor at this particular event [Décor Art Expo]. And there was one guy, Trujillo, who was representing one artist at that event, but he wasn't a distributor. So all of the dealers, even the African American artists that had all this recognition, they were all coming up to us, because we were a total novelty. And they were excited because they knew the time was ripe. And so what happened, [how this all started,] is, by us becoming an official distributor the Bowers Museum, Rueben Martinez from the Hispanic Bookcase—and his partner, Diana Hernandez, at the time—in Santa Ana, Arlene Saralegui from Los Amigos [a business association], who we presented to, [had] introduced us to him [Rueben]. He hooked us up to the Bowers Museum. And then the Bowers Museum, we became an official distributor right at that time, and they carried all our prints in their gift shop when they had a big show.

JG: Yeah, they had a big show with the Mexican artists.

IN: And it was all originals.

JG: Lewin's collection.

KD: Yeah. [The exhibition, held in 1994, was titled *Seven Decades: Modern Mexican Art from the Bernard Lewin Collection*—ed.]

IN: And so after that, the Bowers [Museum] kept ordering prints from us on an ongoing basis. We did a big show with MAOF [the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation, at the Century Plaza Hotel], the Migrant Education Program from the California Department of Education.

JG: And then Rueben [and Diana] started buying artwork from us.

IN: Yes, so Rueben [and Diana, who knew Juan/Johnny from Goetz,] started buying artwork from us [to sell out of their bookstore-barbershop]. [Now] Marco [Robles] from Pomona [was a big supporter]. He was [a director] with the Hispanic Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse and then became a councilmember [for the city] of Pomona. [Marco] started bringing us to do their [annual] Pomona Founders' Day festival, [exhibiting our Don Juan and Doña Irma Traveling Art Gallery]. [Presenting Juan/Johnny's concept of his "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project to the LA city council and business leaders, we were offered sixteen thousand square feet of free space to renovate into a cultural center. Instead, our purpose was to inspire the city, who did incorporate cultural art into their community redevelopment plan.] Another offer of free space, that we turned down, to open a permanent art gallery was in what, at that time, was the Westin Hotel by the LAX airport.

And so it's just like—so the prints just started taking over, just took over. With LA county probation, it was Robert Saenz, Frederick Banks, Jerry Cook, Florencio Lopez, and all kinds of other people. And Robert Saenz had us make a presentation to—he wanted to see, are the kids really going to respond to this? So we made a presentation to their Team Kenyon Youth School, and he was blown away to see that these hardcore probation kids were just so excited and enthusiastic about wanting to do murals, wanting to get involved in something positive. So he could see that it would work. And so we got all of their support. Did you have questions?

KD: This is amazing. He has an amazing range of—the posters, the humor, the things that you were distributing.

IN: And of the Jesús Helguera [print], there are actually eighty of them that we carry—

JG: Eighty, like eighty-five of them.

IN: But we have a separate catalog, and it's in a box. So I didn't have it here.

KD: Yeah.

IN: And actually, our catalog's in color. So I just threw this in to give you a little idea. But we had a whole separate catalog just for Jesús Helguera . And our focus was to have—

JG: And we were shipping, and all the malls, the big malls now.

IN: And we wanted to have that wide range to show the diversity of the community, because some people are really into the avant-garde art. And there's other people who don't understand it, they want something.

KD: Right, or maybe they want the landscapes of Mexico, you have the whole range there. Figurative images and the—

- IN: Exactly. In regards to—just to give a little bit of an idea of what Juan/Johnny does in regards to the designing, is that Juan/Johnny and Simón Silva, Juan, the—it's the *Communications Arts* magazine Award of Excellence, [for] their *Illustration Annual*. So for institutional, Simón was the illustrator and Juan Silverio Gonzalez, art director, designer—Don Juan Productions design. And this was a piece done for MALDEF, and it's in here, and it's called *Amor Eterno*.
- KD: Oh, I saw that. Yeah.
- IN: So Juan/Johnny designed this and Simón illustrated it.
- KD: Yeah, I actually know that one. I was going to ask about it. [laughter]
- IN: And so we actually did all of the printing of the signed and numbered limited edition prints and the posters. And so we produced that whole project for MALDEF. And then, also, we ended up doing this piece for AMAE, which Pacific Bell sponsored. So the corporations were really jumping into this.
- KD: "El Día de Maestro."
- IN: Yeah, "El Día de Maestro." And so after, so we—so here, everybody was getting excited about the prints, the prints, and we're saying, "Well, we're happy to see it's going." Oh, and then what happened is, people who were buying our prints, like at the migrant ed conference, for example, it was like—it was their migrant education program's statewide conference. People were buying these prints like hotcakes, and then they would take them to the frame shops to get framed, and then the framers would say, "Where did you buy that poster? I didn't sell it to you." All of a sudden, the frame shops and poster shops started calling, because they wanted to now carry the prints.
- JG: At first they didn't want to, because they said, "Nobody buys it." But Chicanos had no reason to go into frame shops. What are you going to buy? Nothing that relates to them. They get the calendars of Jesús Helguera and cut them out and put them up on the wall.
- KD: Exactly.
- IN: So we started distributing to frame shops all over. Primarily California, but all over the country as well. Texas and other places.
- JG: Even Mexico bought some from us.
- IN: Yeah, Mexico. Because I was shocked that they said the quality of their printing wasn't the same, that their Diego Rivera prints fade. So we were getting them from LA County Museum and the New York Graphic Society [and Norton Simon Museum] and then shipping them to Mexico to have—so they can have the quality printing. So that was interesting. So just to give a little quick, quick idea of some of the others is, like, we worked with the East Northeast Networking Council, Latin American Civic Association [with Irene Tovar]. Hispanic [American] Airborne Association—[Bob Archuleta, a Salesian alumni, invited us to exhibit and me as the first women to speak before their chapter]. United Hispanic Scholarship Funds, and then we had, you know, just tons . . . now universities really were the ones. AMAE, CTA, NEA [National Education Association], UTLA, OEA, which was Oakland Education [Association]. [CCA, CFA—California Faculty Association, Student CTA]. Oh, Chicano/Latino Intersegmental Convocation? Who was the head of that, who was the founder of that? Do you remember his—
- KD: [inaudible]
- IN: I don't remember his name offhand. He was a major supporter. And as a matter of fact, that's when we hooked up again with Francisco Vázquez [from Sonoma State University], who used to be the director of Chicano studies [at LMU]. And so we got major support from them. And it ended up that Maria Montes was working with Compton Unified School District, and the state Department of Education had mandated that she was there with other people supervising their district, because they felt that they were not—that the school district—
- KD: The performance, yeah.
- IN: Wasn't really effective in the educational curriculum, but also dealing with the tensions in the community. And so she asked us to bring our production to Compton. So we started with *The Birth of Our Art*, and we started doing our stage performance.

So we would go into these different universities, colleges, schools, hotels, for conferences and major events. But we started doing our—the *Birth of Our Art* multimedia slide stage production. We would bring our [Don Juan and Doña Irma] Traveling Art Gallery, and it would be usually in the lobby or some multipurpose room, where everyone could come through and look at the art and buy the art. And then they would go into the auditorium or some multipurpose venue where we would be onstage, and we would do this one-man, one-woman show, projecting slides, background music, singing, dancing, and doing dramatic storytelling of the whole history of the Chicano-Mexicano-Latino. And then, when we would be in communities with different cultures, then we would incorporate also other cultures and the positive interaction that Chicanos had. Like in the music, working with the famous African American groups.

KD: Exactly.

IN: Talking about César Chávez, Martin Luther King, how they both had the philosophy of Gandhi, of making change with peaceful means. And so this was at Redlands High School with three thousand students, Cuesta College, where they bused in students from all over the community. We have video of all these performances, where it's just kids on the floor, in chairs. We would do, like, three or four performances a day—

JG: And we'd talk about which was the audience. There was times—we'd done it where, at the same time, Head Start kids sitting on the floor and university kids sitting on chairs.

KD: Really?

IN: And the whole gamut in between.

JG: And we had to entertain all those ages at the same time.

IN: So I would do—

JG: It was pretty challenging.

IN: So I would do—in between the performance, Juan/Johnny would sing, play the guitar, but he would tell his story. I would talk and dramatize the story, and then I would do—I would dance. And I'd do African, Israeli, Polynesian, Vietnamese, *folklórico*, flamenco dance, and then I'd get the kids to participate. So I'd have them sing the African welcome song. I'd have them all do the Mexican *grito*. And it was pretty exciting and challenging to get them all to make all this noise, and then to get them to stop. But I was able to do it. [laughter] And very often, the media was there, television cameras were there, so we got copies of video of all this stuff. So this was in Porterville. So you can see how I've changed throughout the years. And so here, this was Carmen Martinez Eoff, who brought us into Porterville.

And so we had the exhibit in a library, versus having it in City Hall. And yet it's the same quality of work. And just—we have interviews of the kids on video, [for example] of this one girl from the Sonoma State University. They bused in kids from Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. We had it at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa. And so they'd bus them in, [the students and teachers.] They'd walk through and see the production. And so in between, we'd be interviewing them, and she [a young student] was crying, and she was saying, "I was ashamed of being Mexican, and my friends were ashamed to be Mexican, and now that I've seen this production, I feel so proud, and I feel we can do whatever we want." And so this was at Porterville College.

JG: What did that little girl say that wrote the letter?

IN: In Compton. Well, Maria Montes got letters from the kids. With Compton Unified, we did it for twelve thousand students. So the first stretch was five thousand kids. We did it over a week period, multiple presentations a day. And then they brought us in a few months later, we did it for another five thousand—

JG: So we'd do the show in the auditorium, and then they'd all walk out and go out to see the [art] exhibit. Meanwhile, another bus was coming in, and we'd do another show, just rotating. But it wasn't [one] bus [at a] time, it was like—

IN: Multiple buses.

JG: Five hundred to one thousand [students] at a time [at Compton].

- IN: Yeah. And then we went back for another two thousand. So this was Pomona, where we did their Founders Day fiesta, and we did that for years after years. This was Cuesta College. Here's Sonoma State University. And here's Compton, where you can see the multicultural art that we incorporated. And so Maria Montes got letters from the kids, and sort of paraphrasing what she said, she says, "Well, thank you Don Juan and Doña Irma. I just want you to know that my mother's Mexican and my father's Mexican. I wasn't a Mexican [before], but I'm a Mexican now."
- JG: Seven years old, I don't know.
- KD: Do you keep all those letters in the archive?
- IN: Yes, yes, yes.
- KD: Okay, good.
- IN: And so it's just like—and then the exciting thing is to have teachers come up to us and say, "I didn't know Mexicans did this. I didn't know Mexicans did that. I'm so proud, and now I have this information to pass on to my students." And that was—you see, in the '60s and the '70s, Area G had that information for educators, and now . . . We met with Dennis Martinez who's—he's retired, but he was a principal at City Terrace Elementary, and he was saying that those Mexican culture and heritage kits were sitting in the corner of his office collecting dust, that nobody used them anymore. So it's like you had—so the materials are there, but it's creating this energy and excitement to try to get people to start using them again.
- KD: Or get rid of the "Leave Every Child Behind Act" and get more room in the classroom curriculum.
- IN: That's such a joke, because it's just testing them to fail.
- KD: Right. And no funds for the test preparation.
- IN: So that is strictly a marketing campaign to blind society, and to really exploit and abuse our youth. Because they're going through torture right now. They cut art, they cut music, they cut sports, and they have this rigorous testing schedule. And the teachers, if those kids don't test high, the teachers are penalized, and so the teachers are under pressure to test, test, test. And so—but if you want kids to read, what are they going to read about? They have to read about something that inspires them and motivates them. If they're going to study math, they have to know, "Why am I studying math? Am I going to have a job, am I going to balance a checkbook? What do I need to know this for?" And everything is strictly, "Get the good grade so that you can just get out of here." And that's why there's such a huge dropout rate. Well, as a result of this production, what happened was, we went to Rio Hondo College, and Lupe Alvarado was a counselor, and it was actually one of the MECHA students who brought us there. Miguel—I can't remember his last name. [Trujillo I think was his last name]. We'll have all the names in the archive. But Lupe Alvarado. David Botello's sister works there. Mary—what's her last name?
- JG: She's Botello.
- IN: She's Botello, whatever her married name is. So he was excited, and we made two presentations at Rio Hondo. Lupe was excited, referred us to Tomás Rivera at the Inland Empire Future Leaders. And that's like a summer camp leadership training program. So we would be the opening act to really get all the kids motivated and exited.
- JG: They had nothing cultural, it was all just leadership type of things.
- IN: So we brought in the art and the culture and the history. And so it was like this real revival camp, and the kids were just so dynamic, and the staff there, and all the volunteers were just so motivating and inspiring. And what was so nice was that they had these orientation presentations for parents, because being a traditional culture, they wouldn't want their daughters to be spending the night to go. So they would really work with the parents so that they would understand the benefit to the young ladies as well as the men. And so Fatima Cristerna was the president of MEChA at Redlands High School. She saw the production and was so excited that she contacted Minerva Saldaña, who was her counselor and MEChA advisor. And they contacted us, and they said, you know, "We'd really like you to come."
- JG: By the way, we did this show in prisons and in juvenile [centers]. All over the place.

- IN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, okay, before we get into Redlands then, if you're bringing that up, just to give an idea, is antigang youth programs. County of LA probation, state Department of Youth Authority, Southern Reception Center in Norwalk, city of LA anti-gang task force. So we were everywhere. And then, El Rancho [School District], Washington Preparatory High School, San Fernando High, [William S.] Hart High, Plaza de la Raza Head Start, LA Unified [School District]. We presented to the [LAUSD] board of education, to the Mexican American Education Commission, all this stuff.
- KD: Did you have a different scale for different kinds of clients?
- IN: We tried, but it ended up just being dirt cheap. *[laughter]*
- KD: It was.
- IN: It was dirt cheap. We got very little.
- JG: Yeah, everybody who wants it doesn't have money.
- IN: It's like so many of the presentations we made were free.
- KD: Really?
- IN: Like these are sponsored events, these are freebies.
- JG: They just want it so bad.
- IN: Now, we sold the prints, and the prints were selling like hotcakes, but we gave 50 percent to the artist, and then we had to buy more prints in order to have them for the next show. Plus we had to buy tubes and do shipping. So we were really making very little profit off of the prints. And each—everything that we were doing could have been a real booming successful business if all we cared about was making money. But our focus was to generate excitement, motivation, get the others in the industry to make it happen. West Covina mall—their frame shop, poster shop—ended up carrying tons of Chicano prints. Montebello mall, Premier Aztlán, they had no Latino art, and then they converted to all Latino art.
- JG: In Redondo Beach, the big mall.
- IN: Oh, Redondo Beach—yeah, I forget the name of the mall in Redondo Beach. They ended up carrying a lot of stuff. So our gratification is, let the people who should be doing it, let them do it so we can go on to the next step. And so—and we didn't have a staff. See, the thing is, if we had the preliminary development funds, then we could have set everything up, have a building, have a warehouse, have a staff, someone to answer phones. But where's the funding? We finance this whole thing ourselves. And so anyway, so we'll give you the list of everywhere we went.
- JG: Let's go back to Rio Hondo [College]. As a result of Rio Hondo, we went to another juvenile center, which Willie—[first] Little Willie G went there [to Rio Hondo] with his son [and wife Francine, to see us perform]. And the son got excited. We got the kids excited all the time. The adults said, "Wow, this is exciting," but they never thought of how it would affect the kids.
- IN: Or to do something—
- JG: And that's why the kids were hiring us. It was the MEChA [students] that were hiring us like crazy, because it showed that they wanted it.
- IN: So we ended up at the Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility in Whittier. We did another presentation there with Thee Midniters and Little Willie G and some other people, [because it was Willie's son who thought of us]. So another donation. So anyway, we went to the Inland Empire Future Leaders, and then they called, and they said, "We really want you to do your production, and we want Juan/Johnny to do a mural." Because everybody was always asking, "So Juan/Johnny, where is your art? Where is your art?" And he'd go, "No, no, no." He's always promoting the other artists. And he was saying, "I don't want to do another mural. It's too much work, there's not enough money, it takes so much time, they're going to end up graffiti-ing it anyway afterwards." But I—
- JG: But also in Redlands, I said, "Look at—get somebody in your community and make it a community program, so it's all concentrated." So anyway, they tried, and a month later, they said, "We can't find anybody. Anybody who's good doesn't know how to make a mural, and the ones that do murals aren't very good. So could you please, could you please . . ." *[laughter]*



- IN: So he says, "Okay, well, I'll do it under one condition: that it's going to be eight by ten."
- JG: And that was actually after the production that they pushed—
- IN: Well, first they ended up organizing the whole community to bring our production, like usually—
- JG: An all-white school.
- IN: And it was—for one hundred years, they had one high school in Redlands, and it was the wealthy kids of the orange growers and the poor kids of the Chicano *campesinos* all going to the same high school. And they were communicating that there was a lot of oppression and discrimination against the Chicanos. And Fatima was saying how teachers would tell her, "Why are you with that militant group? You're so smart, you shouldn't be involved," and they just didn't understand. But Fatima was so confident. High school student, she—what did she have on her backpack? It was a little teddy bear, she had a little teddy bear on her backpack. And here she was, like, this tough *macha*, negotiating with administrators, it was so cute. And—
- JG: So she had her MEChA advisor and a few of the students drive all the way from Redlands to come down to Rio Hondo College—
- IN: To see our production.
- JG: To see our production.
- IN: Because she wanted to get their support for what it was that we were doing. And so that's when they called to say, "We want you to come to Redlands." And so they raised money and they started getting support from the—well, actually, they raised some money. I don't know how they got us there, but we did our production for three thousand students. And one of the teachers who was criticizing her, she said, ended up apologizing, saying that, "I didn't understand, I understand now." And she ended up donating money to help for the mural. And so she ended up getting the Spanish Club, the African American Club, just all these different clubs to contribute. And so what happened is, first we did our production, and then they said, "Please do the mural." So he says, "Okay, it's going to be eight by ten, it's got to be ground level."
- KD: No scaffolding. [laughter]
- IN: "No scaffolding, it's got to be convenient, and this is my price."
- JG: Because they didn't have much money, so—
- IN: Yeah, they didn't have any money. And so they said, "Okay, we'll do it. We'll do it." And so we go over there, and he says, "And I'm going to come up with the concept, I'm going to do the design, nobody's going to change it, because I'm not about to start designing and redesigning."
- JG: I had a whole system.
- KD: Worked for you. [laughter]
- IN: And so anyways, so he goes over there and he shows them the design, and they're all excited. So then they—
- JG: They wanted [me] to see the wall. They wanted to show me the wall.
- IN: And so Minerva brought in Yolanda Contreras, who was the director of categorical programs for the Redlands Unified School District. And she was working with Robert Hodges, the superintendent of schools, so she talked him into it. And so we went to make the—
- JG: So we went down there to see the wall, and I told them, "I'm only going to do it so high, at that height," and all that. So I go over and it turns . . . They walk me to this wall, and it's three stories high, and the bushes start six feet above. And I'm looking at it, and I'm saying, "Well . . ." And then it's got all rivets and it's got grooves on it. And I said, "I don't know. I don't know. It's got to be down here." And they said, "Well, we'll fix it up. We'll fix it up."
- IN: Well, what happened is Jim Drew, who was the maintenance supervisor, was there with us. He says, "Look, I'm going to take all the metal conduits away, all the electrical. I'm going to give you a smooth surface, I'm going to—"
- KD: He was going to prepare the wall.

- IN: "I'm going to prepare the wall. I'm going to take out all the stucco and make it a smooth surface, and I'm going to fill in all of the grooves. And then you come back and you tell me what you think, if it's good enough for you."
- JG: So anyway, [about two weeks later] he calls me up. He says, "Could you come and see if you like the wall?" So [Irma and] I [drove to the school, then] walk over there, [to the wall] and I'm expecting this eight by ten area. And I look at it, and I go, "Wow." The place is this beautiful wall, all smooth. It's like—I'm drooling, just drooling. [laughter] I go, "My gosh, what a beautiful . . ." They took out piping, they did everything. Just a beautiful wall.
- IN: And they cut the bushes down, and—
- JG: Yeah, they cut the bushes down, and—just awesome. I said, "Wow." I said, "Gee, but I can't do a small mural there, but it'll look like a postage stamp just stuck up there." So I said, "Okay, I'll do the whole thing." [laughter]
- IN: So his eight by ten mural turned out twenty-four feet by twenty-four feet, [without adding an extra cent to the price]. [laughter]
- KD: Whoa.
- IN: So, a three-story mural.
- KD: Are you going to show me? Because we're going to run out of time.
- IN: Yes, yes. Here we go, here we go.
- JG: So I told them, "Okay, I don't want to be—I'm not about to change anything, and . . ." So anyway, the contract was—they couldn't change anything, they couldn't dictate. They said, "Okay, just tell me a few things that you would like to be in [it]," because I don't like to be dictated in regards. And they said, "Okay, all we want is a lot of color, we want it multicultural and educational." So I said, "Okay." A lot of color is a rainbow, so I've got to use a rainbow. And educational—so these things started to develop, but the rainbow was the first thing that came to my mind, because there's a lot of color. And all of the other things started going into—
- KD: Oh, wow.
- IN: So it's called *The Color of America* [mural]. And do you want to just start—you could put that on the edge of it, so it does . . . Just lift it up. You could just put that on the edge of it, so it does . . . Just lift it up. Make sure it doesn't wrinkle. So it's called *The Color of America*, and the architecture on the bottom represents the foundation and evolution of America, starting with the Aztec, Maya, the indigenous cultures, the Native American teepees and the pueblo dwellings. And then it has the Spanish Mexican missions and the Spanish cathedrals. And then in Redlands, they have a lot of Victorian homes, so we included that. And then the classic skyscrapers, and ironically, the climax of civilization represented by the Twin Towers.
- KD: Yeah, that is ironic.
- JG: Like six years before that.
- IN: And so then the rainbow represents the past, present, and future of America. And the youth of all color represent the future of America. And so then he included educational symbols for chemistry, sports, biology, astronomy, law, theatre, infinity, folio for books, economics, music, art, mathematics, language, medicine, and dance.
- JG: And in order to make it multicultural, I include the faces of the different cultures.
- IN: So you can see that we did need a scaffolding. [laughter] And so I got—we had many, many sponsors, and a lot of publicity. And so I got four thousand invitations printed—I think it was four thousand posters, six hundred signed and numbered limited edition prints. And so you can see all of the student corporate sponsors. So we had like—
- KD: And your artistic name is now different. So it's now Juan—
- IN: Juan Silverio Gonzalez.
- KD: Silverio.
- IN: Yes, Juan Silverio Gonzalez.

KD: What was the *D*?

JG: It's Duarte.

IN: For his mom.

KD: Oh, okay. Your mom's name.

JG: I always used Duarte, I never used Silverio.

IN: So now, he's Juan/Johnny S., for Silverio, D., for Duarte, Gonzalez. So now he's combining all the names.

So we had Henry Mercado, who was the board of education president emeritus, and then Robert Hodges, superintendent. Robert Denham was the principal. Crown Printers of San Bernardino, Color Service [in] Monterey Park, Image Station in Riverside, Spicers Paper [in] Santa Fe Springs. And then we had Office Depot, the Radisson, the Hilton. So what happened is, they had the budget for our production. They had the budget for the mural. But they didn't have the budget for the supplies, the materials, or for the hotel or the meals that was in our contract. And they said, "Oh, well, we didn't know we had to do that." [laughter] So it was lack of experience.

So I went out into this community that I had never been into before, and I got forty-seven corporate sponsors. So we had a different hotel every week. We were there for like two months, three months? So we had a different hotel every week, different restaurants every week. And then we needed a bucket lift in order to do the original sketching of the mural. So you can see all of the publicity that came out afterwards, and you can see the proportions. So there's Fatima, Minerva, myself. And so what happened is, we needed a bucket lift to do the initial cartoon. Let's see, it's over here. And so I went to—it was called B&G, it was called B&G Equipment Rental, and I said, "I want your best bucket lift." You know, it's like what they use on the telephone poles. And they're all excited. "Oh, she's going to rent . . ." And I said, "I want the best one for this, this, this." I said, "Okay, well, let me tell you our project, and we'd like it donated." They ended up donating, and they let us have it for [a couple of days], something like that, free of charge, maybe longer. And the scaffolding, they [the school district] had paid for the scaffolding for a little short time.

JG: Well, the projection—it was for the projection.

IN: But then they let us keep it for awhile.

JG: And the scaffold people gave a deal.

IN: Yeah, the scaffold people had it for a certain amount of time paid, and then they let us keep it ongoing. And then—so I got Home Depot to donate materials, [Orchard Hardware Supply] to donate materials, and then . . . So it just became a major success. And then the—it was called the City of Redlands Humans Relations Commission awarded the students with their cultural diversity award. And so this was—we were told that this was the first time that Chicano students had gotten this kind of recognition, and tons of media coverage, they were public speaking, they were out in the community.

JG: And most of them were girls.

KD: Yeah, I was going to ask you about the composition, because the face in the middle is a woman, right?

JG: Yeah. There's three.

KD: And then the two on the—yeah. So out of the five faces—

JG: But what I'm saying, all the participants were mostly all little girls, or young girls.

IN: Now, Ernesto Rodriguez, who was [a big supporter and director of] the César [E.] Chávez Center for Higher Education at Cal Poly Pomona, he had hired us to—contracted us to do our exhibit and production there. [The day of our performance and art show, we invited their ballet folklórico group to be part of our production. Inspired by Juan/Johnny's vision,] he came and helped us with the mural. So a lot of the people that were excited about our program wanted to participate, because this was like the next step to realizing the dream. [Willie G's son wanted to help with the mural, but the school district only allowed their students.] And so basically, this was the culmination of our project.

And then SEIU, which is the Service Employees International Union, they asked if they could use Juan/Johnny's mural for their Western Regional Latino conference, and it was to focus on immigration. And they wanted to focus on the fact that immigration is a multicultural issue, not just a Latino issue. And so

we—they had us do a big exhibit at the Pio Pico house in Olvera Street. They roped off where the *kiosko* was and had like a big event, and so that was kind of the culmination. Now, what happened is that we had been traveling all over, our house was falling apart because we were never home, and so Juan/Johnny says, “Let’s spend some time . . .” It was after this mural, he says, “Let’s spend some time renovating our house.”

KD: Let’s not travel for a while.

IN: And so he was pruning. He was going to prune the trees, and he was checking to see if it was safe, like six o’clock in the morning.

KD: Oh, is this the story about how you hurt your back?

JG: On the extension ladder.

IN: And so he climbed the tree with—fortunately it was not plugged in—he had the electric [chain] saw in one hand, and he was climbing the tree with his other hand. Went above the fifteen feet of the extension ladder, and a branch broke, and he fell. [He] shattered—

KD: Yeah, you’re telling me again. It’s very painful to hear it again.

IN: Well, it needs to be documented.

KD: No, you have it on tape. You actually do.

IN: Oh, do we? I didn’t think we did. So he shattered his heel, broke his back. He was in bed for a year. So we got that on tape. And so Compton called us back, [thanks to Christina Duran,] to do our event for two thousand more students. Cal—because we already had a contract. And Cal State Long Beach, we had a contract with. And so I said, “Gee, I don’t know if we can do it.” They said, “You have to, you have to! We’ll carry him up onstage.” And so they literally carried him onstage, and there he was with his guitar—because I know we talked to you about this during lunch, so I’m not sure if it’s on tape.

KD: Yeah, no, we did.

IN: He had the big brace and he was playing the guitar and doing the whole production. We have it all on video. [laughter] And so this guy was a diehard, diehard. [laughter]

JG: These four guys carried me onstage—

KD: Did it cause more damage, or just slow down the recovery?

IN: Actually, I think it speeded up the recovery.

KD: Because of moving the body?

IN: Well, I think because of seeing all the support, and the people who really believed in him, and who really wanted to see this whole thing happen.

KD: Can I ask you about the composition of the mural?

JG: Sure.

KD: I really like the way the rainbow starts on the lower and moves up. It goes out of the horizon of the image, it comes back down to the—what do you call it—the foreground, right? And then moves up. I mean, that movement is just really very clever.

JG: Well, the thing is, you know, you mentioned—they said, “We want a lot of color.” I said—the first thing that came to my mind, a lot of color, is a rainbow. I said, “But a rainbow—”

KD: Boring arc, there’s no movement there.

JG: Yeah, I’m not about to do that. So I got to create a nice movement. So then I worked on that movement, so that the first thing I worked on was creating that movement, the composition, so it goes out and comes back in.

KD: And what really works is the way it comes down, around, and goes up. I mean, that’s—

JG: Exactly. It’s got to go up. It can’t [go] down. The key is to go up. It’s driving these kids up. So that was the first, first thing that I thought about. And then I thought about—I thought about, how do I get a lot of cultures in there? I can’t start doing specific cultures, laying . . . One of the thoughts that came to my mind is having all of these artifacts and things laying on the ground. And I said, “But I can’t have them—I’ve got to have something that’s just a basic thing, and narrow it down to just a few elements.” So then I started

thinking, “Architecture is very general, and yet it’s part of the United States.” So that’s why I started including the architecture. So I thought of everything that’s part of the Americas, and part of our culture, and I try to include so much of our culture, but yet to be able to be a part of other cultures. It’s like they had beautiful Victorian homes over there, and then the skyscraper, and then—and this is for composition’s sake, to try and move it up so it doesn’t look symmetrical.

IN: And what’s exciting is that this was a real partnership with the school district, with the students and the community, and corporations really got in on this. And even our other productions, like we had Kaiser Permanente, Blue Cross, KWIZ Radio, Riverside Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, LA Junior Chamber. So we had all these corporations and local community businesses that were all jumping in, as well as the government and the educational programs. But what was really exciting is the kids. They were just on a high, and when they were being interviewed—

JG: So proud.

IN: By the TV stations, by the—

JG: I mean, they became stars. So you saw all the newspaper ads, they became stars.

IN: Yeah. For the dedication ceremony, they were—the—I called . . . Here, we’re picking up the—I’m getting ready, as a woman you know what it’s like to get ready in the morning to go to our grand opening. I’m on the phone as I’m putting on my makeup calling the radio station, the TV stations, to see if they’re going to come down to televise the event. And plus we had to go pick up the posters because they were hot off the press. And I remember—

JG: And the media’s excited over a snowstorm in summer—

IN: In the San Bernardino Mountains, and nobody wanted to come.

JG: They wanted to cover the snowstorm.

IN: And I was furious. And I was talking to Channel 4, and I said, “If there was a gang warfare here at Redlands High School, every TV station would be there in a second.” I said, “I’m really appalled that you guys would rather televise a snowstorm. This is something positive that the kids are doing in the community.” And you know what? They showed up.

KD: You shamed them into?

IN: Channel 4, Chuck Henry, they had a major feature story, there were over a thousand people there. I mean, it was just like this awesome experience, and certain people—you know, Minerva Saldaña really went through a lot of struggle to try to get the powers that be to support this, and a certain person came up to her and said—you know, because in my speech I said, “It’s easy to support people after they’re a success. But the true visionaries are those who support people while they’re struggling.” And so this [very important] person came up [to] her and said, “You know, I didn’t believe in you in the beginning, and I really am sorry, and I believe in you now.” And it was just so heart-warming, because it was—she had this passion, her and Fatima had this passion. And there was always people who supported us, but then people who were always creating challenges. Nothing is easy. And so it was so wonderful to see them fulfilled, to see that we were all part of this major success.

Now, one of the things that happened as a result of everything that we were doing is Frank Xavier Garcia Berumen, who’s writing the biography of my uncle, Congressman Ed Roybal—he had a book that was published in 1995 called the *Chicano-Hispanic Image in American Film*. [The book was published in 1994—ed.] And we started promoting it. It was the only book that we included with our traveling art exhibit. We never sold it, because we didn’t want to have to start collecting money for books and carrying a million books with us, but we really wanted to promote, help promote him, since he was on the Gordon Castillo Hall committee with me. And so eventually, he asked me to work as the Roybal family collaborator on my uncle’s interviews, [contacting and coordinating with family members,] gathering family historical information, et cetera. And I’ve been working as the family archivist on my uncle’s [and Aunt Lucille Beserra Roybal’s] history. And when he passed away, I was the archivist for all of his memorial services [and curator of the Roybal Beserra Memorial Photography Exhibition].

But in the meantime, after Juan/Johnny had his accident and I was the caregiver for him and for my dad, who had cancer at the time, I was contracted to work [as media consultant] on the flu immunization campaign for the Edward R. Roybal Institute [for Applied Gerontology] at Cal State LA. [It was also sponsored by AARP and The California Endowment.] And so I came up with a campaign [theme concept and strategy] called “Flu is even more of a threat than anthrax,” because all of the media was covering anthrax, and they didn’t want to cover the flu situation. And I heard that CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] said that over twenty thousand people a year died of flu. Only four had died of anthrax [while working with the sponsors and their RICO Partners in Quality, including LA County Department of Health, LA County Area Agency on Aging, and LA City Department of Aging]. So I was able to create this big marketing campaign, and we had all of the media there [after I contacted their news departments]. We brought representatives from CDC, state health, LA county health, different doctors representing different ethnic communities, and it was a big success.

So because of my marketing experience, and the work that Juan/Johnny and I did with this—the [Don Juan and Doña Irma] New Barrio Lifestyle campaign—we’ve been working with LA City Rec and Parks on the Feria de los Niños [youth talent showcase and festival] since 1993, when we did the LA City Hall events. And so we’ve been [sponsors and] the masters of ceremonies for fourteen years. Juan/Johnny and I are judges of the art contest [and Xochimilco boat contest]—you can just flip through that—and then we also write the curriculum for the art contest [which is coordinated through LAUSD and Catholic schools]. And so one year, when Manuel Mollinedo was general manager, they actually hired me as marketing director—I’m sorry, not as marketing director, but as a marketing consultant and education consultant [and spokesperson] for the Feria. So I raised fifty thousand dollars of media time from Telemundo, and also got about twelve thousand dollars cash [from] sponsors and letters of support [and sponsor-honoree certificates] from all sorts of dignitaries [including, at that time, Mayor James Hahn, Councilmembers Ed Reyes, Antonio Villaraigosa and Alex Padilla, Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, Oscar De La Hoya, and, the following years Councilmember José Huizar]. And primarily putting an educational program together focusing on . . . Because Valerie Brisco is a triple Olympic gold medalist, African American, who donates her time for the Feria, [the program featured] “Our Legendary Runners, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” talking about the Aztec, the Maya, the Inca, the Chasquis, and Tarahumara, who are famous runners, and tying it into the curriculum and the whole event [including contemporary Mexican and Black champion runners].

JG: And during those years, an eight-year-old girl got on stage and sang “Cu Cu Ru Cu Cu Paloma,” blowing the audience and me away. I advised her to study at the LA Music and Art School in East LA, which she did while continuing to perform every year at the Feria. [Now, ten years later, young Allison Iraheta has grown up to become a star, traveling and performing throughout the world as a winner of American Idol].

IN: So Juan/Johnny and I had been doing that for fourteen years, and now he’s working on—

JG: Yeah. Well, now that I can’t carry stuff and move around, I’m working on three campaigns. One will be a self-esteem reading campaign for kids in the schools [in low-income communities, to motivate and excite them to study, stay in school, go to college, using East LA as the target pilot area]. The other one is a bigger one. It’ll happen if there’s enough time. It’s really trying to get [different] cultures together. It’s really to create [positive] role models for the kids. It’s through music, it’ll have to do with music. And then there’s another one on beautifying the community, again through the arts, but it’s totally different from murals. So those are three campaigns that I’m working on right now.

IN: And my focus is to continue working as Juan/Johnny’s archivist and the family archivist and historian, because as you can see—

[break in audio]

KD: We’re on tape [14]. This is Irma Núñez and Johnny Gonzalez for the [CSRC Oral Histories Series], and they were finishing up their comments on what they’re doing next. Go ahead.



IN: So as I was saying, my focus is to—because I’m not a traditional archivist or historian, because I’m a visual and performance artist and educator, so I really act through Doña Irma Heritage Art Institute. I act as a clearinghouse to really motivate and inspire people in the community, primarily my family and my partner, to understand the importance of preserving their archive, even little scraps of paper [that], as you know, they want to throw it in the trash. And like with Juan/Johnny, so many of his drawings were on old, dingy tissue paper, and I’m saying, “Use quality tissue paper!” So trying to get them to understand that everything they do is really part of history, to preserve it, protect it, gather it.

And then as an educator, to really try to get that story out into the community. And so it’s wonderful what all of you are doing here at the UCLA Chicano [Studies] Research Center. It’s because you are the ones who are the professionals who are really making it possible for artists to know that their legacy is going to be remembered, and that young people in the community are going to be able to have this material available to them for years to come. Did you want to say some last words, Juan/Johnny, for the archives?

JG: No, basically, I think I’ve said what I’m working on right now. It’ll be awhile, I think. My first one might be, I think, another year, year and a half. I’ve been working on it for about a year already. So the first one is rewarding, a way to reward kids for reading, and giving them information to read that they could relate to and get excited about. But it’s tying in a lot of media elements so they could get recognized and everything in regards to it.

IN: So we want to thank you, Karen, for being such a wonderful interviewer.

KD: Thank you!

IN: You’ve made us very comfortable, very relaxed, and we just feel confident that all of this is going to be really put to good use for scholars, and primarily to get the word out to our youth. They’re the ones that are the hope for the future.

KD: Thank you so much.

JG: Oh, thank you.

[*break in audio*]

KD: Go ahead, Irma.

IN: [So, now, with LAUSD DACE [Division of Adult and Career Education] POA [Programs for Older Adults at] Franklin Adult and Van Nuys [Community] Adult Schools, I’m teaching “The Power of Movement: The Arts and Culture to Heal the Body, Mind, and Spirit while Uniting Diverse Communities.” Our community partners include city council president Eric Garcetti, councilmembers José Huizar and Ed Reyes, Leeza Gibbons of Circle of Care Leeza’s Place (who featured my class on a Larry King CNN Special), and LA City Rec and Parks. I’m also part of a committee lead by Arlene Torluemke, POA; Laura Trejo, LA City Dept of Aging; and June Simmons, Partners in Care Foundation. This partnership was established by Ed Morris, head of LAUSD DACE adult ed, who’s been a supporter and collector of Chicano art for forty years and experienced Juan/Johnny’s work with Goetz Art Studios and Gallery.]

I just wanted to say that LA Unified School District were key believers and key supporters [of the 1970s Chicano Cultural Arts Movement] from the very beginning, [and later] of our Don Juan and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign. Manuel Ponce, who was the director of the LA Unified Mexican American Education Commission, really took us under his wing. Wesley Balbuena, who was the chairperson of the commission [and now assistant principal at Van Nuys Community Adult School], gave us a letter of support. And then, I met with Dr. Ruben Zacarias, and Ruben Zacarias, he is just such a wonderful person. He knew all the work of Juan/Johnny and the Goetz [Art Studios and] Gallery, and he just really believed in everything that we were doing [with the Don Juan and Doña Irma New Barrio Lifestyle Campaign. And because of him, he communicated this message to Bill Anton, who became—who was the superintendent of schools—who gave us major support. And then Maria Casillas, her and Angie Stockwell, who were assistant superintendents. Maria from the movie [*Only Once in a Lifetime*], Angie from our experience. They were all there from the very beginning.

And then eventually, we got support from all of the superintendents and key people from LA Unified School District. And they got the board of education to actually endorse our campaign. [Joe Caldera, who was principal of Gage Middle School and a fellow Salesian alumni, continues to be a great believer and supporter. And Margot Diaz represents the passion of the many LAUSD teachers who supported our work throughout the years.] And so I want to say that LA Unified School District were visionaries, because they really experienced what the whole era of the Chicano cultural arts and educational, political movement of the '60s and '70s. And so they were ready to see this happen again. And because we got swept away with CTA, traveling all over California, we were never able to do a major program with LA Unified School District. And so our focus is to see if we can actually start implementing that now. So that's one of the projects that we're going to be working on. So, I just wanted to make sure that they got acknowledged for their belief from the beginning.

[And, our deepest appreciation and special thanks to the many others that we were not able to mention in this interview, for their belief, passion, support and contribution to helping spread our program statewide.]

JG: [And, I want to end by thanking David Botello for being the first to embrace my dream, "East LA to Tourist Attraction" project, and for continuing to be a lifelong friend and supporter.]

KD: And that's a wonderful way to end, because that's been the—you know, fourteen tapes of you acknowledging other people, and I really appreciate that. I know the archivists and the historians of the future will. Thank you.

JG: That's nice.





## INTERVIEW WITH JOHNNY GONZALEZ AND IRMA NÚÑEZ

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### UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER

The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) was founded in 1969 with a commitment to foster multidisciplinary research efforts as part of the land grant mission of the University of California. That mission states that University of California research must be in the service of the state and maintain a presence in the local community.

The CSRC strives to balance interdisciplinary and applied research in ways that can impact traditional academic departments and disciplines. Through all of these efforts, the CSRC exemplifies UCLA's institutional priorities—academic excellence, civic engagement, and diversity—and remains committed to research that makes a difference.

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